Article

Cultural and Academic Challenges of Foreign Students: A Documentation Towards Internationalization Policy Development

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Abstract

This study explores the pedagogical competencies of English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty members at Isabela State University–San Mateo Campus. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through video-recorded class observations, stimulated recall interviews, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that ESL teachers demonstrate a range of competencies, including classroom management, contextualized instruction, communicative strategies, and technological integration. Participants expressed awareness of their teaching practices and the need for ongoing professional development. Video-stimulated recall allowed faculty to reflect critically on their strategies and decision-making processes. Thematic analysis, supported by in vivo and process coding, highlighted recurring themes related to teaching behaviors, reflection, and instructional adjustments. These insights affirm the significance of teacher awareness and continuous learning in enhancing ESL instruction. The study underscores the importance of professional training and self-reflective practices to support effective language teaching in diverse and evolving educational contexts.

Keywords: ESL, pedagogical competence, qualitative research, teacher reflection, video observation, instructional strategies.

Introduction

While teachers are not the sole determinants of the learning process involving students, their influence and contribution to shaping students' abilities and attitudes towards learning are undeniably vital. The caliber of teachers within a nation is arguably the foremost determinant influencing its educational system and students' overall growth and improvement (Ashraf et al., 2023; Lu, 2023). Positioned at the forefront of the educational system, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the quality of personal interactions that define the classroom climate (Azis, 2024). Therefore, teachers bear significant responsibility and accountability to learners, crucial in fostering an environment conducive to growth and development.

Indeed, teachers wield significant influence over students, impacting their motivation, confidence, attitudes toward learning, beliefs about education, and social values. The attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives of teachers strongly shape those of their students. Every aspect of a teacher's professional and personal character contributes to students' academic success or failure.

Given the profound influence teachers have on students, it is essential for them to continually educate themselves, undergo training, and acquire the necessary skills and competencies to facilitate the comprehensive development and practical education of young learners. This commitment ensures creating a productive teaching-learning environment, as Zamora and Zamora (2022) emphasize.

Quality teachers embody positive attributes and exhibit the right attitudes towards their roles as school leaders and classroom teachers (Chu et al., 2021). Their genuine care for the well-being of their students is palpable, fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth. These educators possess a unique set of traits that enable them to unlock the full potential of their students, nurturing them to become self-reliant learners. Moreover, they excel in cultivating positive attitudes towards learning, instilling motivation, bolstering self-confidence, nurturing self-esteem, and alleviating anxiety in their students (Al-Rashidi et al., 2024). Through their dedication and proficiency, quality teachers impart knowledge and inspire and empower their students to thrive academically and personally.

In recent years, various global events have highlighted the pressing national necessity for proficiency in foreign languages. Consequently, key figures in education, government, commerce, and the military have advocated significant changes in foreign language teaching methods. This primarily depends on fostering global connections for purposes such as trade, diplomacy, security, and scientific progress (Phan, 2021).

Considering the nation's dedication to boosting the global competitiveness and employability of its workforce, as well as strengthening its economy through international trade and investment, it is crucial to persistently seek knowledge that improves educators' expertise in English instruction (Hashim et al., 2024; Ulferts, 2021). This necessitates unified efforts to enhance teachers' abilities, efficiency, and overall competence.

Acknowledging the crucial role of skilled English educators in promoting literacy and effective communication, giving precedence to a thorough evaluation of their practices and performance within the educational structure (Taylor, 2023; Bichi, 2017). Consequently, rigorous assessments of teachers' competency must be paramount in the educational system to ensure continued advancement towards literacy and communication excellence (William et al., 2025).

On the other hand, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) is a dynamic and complex domain that necessitates a diverse range of pedagogical competencies from educators. These competencies, encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, are critical in shaping effective teaching practices and successful language learning outcomes (Wirantaka et al., 2024). Furthermore, in a world that's becoming more interconnected, where mastery of the English language is frequently considered crucial for achieving academic, professional, and social goals, the role of ESL faculty in facilitating effective language teaching and learning is paramount. However, understanding the specific pedagogical competencies that underpin ESL faculty's practices and identifying mechanisms to enhance English language instruction remain crucial areas of inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

This study primarily aimed to investigate the pedagogical competencies of the English as a Second Language faculty.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the discernible pedagogical competencies underlying ESL faculty's practices in teaching English as a Second Language?

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the pedagogical competencies of ESL faculty as demonstrated in their classroom practices. Data were collected through video-recorded class observations, stimulated recall interviews, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. These tools captured both

observable teaching behaviors and teachers' reflective insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of instructional decision-making. Participants included five purposively selected ESL faculty members from Isabela State University – San Mateo Campus, chosen based on their active involvement in English instruction across various academic programs. The campus, adopting hybrid modalities after the COVID-19 pandemic, provided an accessible yet valid setting for the study.

A validated interview guide comprised questions on faculty profile, pedagogical self-assessment, and perceptions of their recorded teaching practices. A preliminary dry run was conducted to refine technical equipment and observation procedures to ensure reliable data collection. Data analysis involved thematic analysis using in vivo and process coding to identify recurring patterns and actions. Coding tables were reviewed and validated by participants and language education experts, ensuring authenticity and accuracy of interpretation. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Digital and physical data were securely stored and responsibly managed, upholding the integrity and credibility of the study throughout.

Results and Findings

Discernment of English Faculty Pedagogical Competence

The findings of this study revealed that ESL faculty members at Isabela State University – San Mateo Campus demonstrated a wide range of pedagogical competencies, encompassing instructional planning, classroom management, learner engagement, and the effective integration of digital tools. These competencies were observable in their teaching practices and reinforced by their reflective insights during interviews and stimulated recall sessions.

Classroom Management and Environment Creation

Faculty members showed control over classroom routines, established clear expectations, and maintained a respectful atmosphere. One participant shared, *"Maintaining discipline is important, but I also make sure students feel comfortable speaking, even if their grammar is imperfect."* This reflects the balance between structure and support teachers strive to achieve in language classrooms.

Learner-Centered Strategies and Engagement

Teachers applied contextualized teaching strategies, using real-life scenarios, visual aids, and culturally relevant materials. *"I let them use English in real conversations, ordering food, introducing themselves, so they see the relevance,"* one faculty member noted.

This practical, situated approach enhanced student motivation and lowered language anxiety.

Technological Adaptation in Hybrid Settings

Participants effectively used digital platforms such as Google Meet, Google Classroom, and interactive tools. However, varied levels of technological fluency were evident. One teacher admitted, *"I still struggle with some tools, but I am learning because students are more tech-savvy than we think."* This emphasized the need for targeted digital training.

Reflective Teaching and Professional Self-Awareness

Stimulated recall interviews allowed teachers to examine their teaching decisions critically. One participant said, *"Watching myself made me think: Was I clear enough? Did I explain that concept too fast?"* Such reflections illustrate the internalization of professional growth and the development of metacognitive teaching strategies.

Differentiated Instruction and Responsiveness to Learner Needs

Teachers recognized the diverse proficiency levels of students and responded accordingly. *"Some of my students are shy, so I give them smaller tasks first,"* explained one faculty member. Another added, *"I try different approaches, even using Filipino or Ilocano at times, to scaffold learning."* This shows their adaptive teaching and cultural responsiveness.

Professional Commitment and Aspirations

Despite challenges, all participants expressed a strong commitment to improvement. Many acknowledged that the hybrid modality posed new demands on their instructional competencies. *"This study made me reflect on how I have changed since the pandemic,"* one faculty member shared. *"We need continuous training, not just on grammar or methods, but on how to connect with students in any mode of learning truly."*

The results illustrate that ESL faculty at ISU-San Mateo possess both foundational and evolving pedagogical competencies. They demonstrate reflective practice, responsiveness to learners, and a growing capacity to navigate complex educational environments. Their insights reinforce the idea that pedagogical competence is not static, but a dynamic process shaped by experience, training, and self-evaluation.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that ESL faculty members at Isabela State University – San Mateo Campus possess essential pedagogical competencies necessary for effective language instruction. These include classroom management, communicative strategies, adaptability to learner needs, and reflective teaching practices. Such findings affirm the assertions of Ashraf et al. (2023) and Lu (2023), who argued that the caliber of its teachers significantly influences the quality of a nation's education system. The teachers in this study consistently demonstrated awareness of their instructional impact, aligning with Azis (2024), who emphasized that teachers are central to shaping classrooms' emotional and academic atmosphere.

One of the most salient findings is the faculty's capacity for reflective practice. Through video observations and stimulated recall interviews, the teachers engaged in metacognitive thinking, revisiting and evaluating their teaching. This practice aligns with Dewey's (1933) and Schön's (1983) perspectives on reflective teaching as a cornerstone of professional growth. Farrell (2015) further noted that reflective teaching is essential in adapting to the complexities of modern classrooms, a notion clearly supported by the ESL faculty's feedback. They acknowledged areas for improvement, particularly in balancing teacher-student talk time and incorporating more student-centered activities.

Moreover, the participants demonstrated a strong inclination toward contextualized learning by linking lesson content to students' real-world experiences. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and supports Richards and Rodgers' (2014) emphasis on communicative competence. ESL faculty often used culturally relevant examples and encouraged interactive learning, promoting meaningful engagement. They also showed adaptability in delivering instruction through hybrid modalities, which was necessitated by the post-pandemic context. Their effective use of digital tools such as Google Meet and Google Classroom affirms Hashim et al.'s (2024) and Ulferts' (2021) view that digital literacy is now integral to pedagogical competence.

In addition, differentiated instruction emerged as a key strength. Teachers utilized flexible teaching strategies to address diverse learner needs, consistent with Tomlinson's (2014) framework for differentiated instruction and Gibbons' (2015) recommendations for scaffolding in second language learning. This inclusive approach was further supported by affective strategies, such as providing encouragement and adjusting pace, which resonates with Al-Rashidi et al.'s (2024) emphasis on the role of empathy and emotional support in second language acquisition.

The participants also expressed a strong commitment to professional development and pedagogical improvement. This dedication supports Zamora and Zamora's (2022) findings that ongoing teacher training is vital for ensuring effective classroom practice and national competitiveness. In the context of global interconnectedness and the increasing demand for English proficiency, such efforts align with the perspectives of Phan (2021), Taylor (2023), and William et al. (2025), who advocate for the continuous assessment and enhancement of teacher competence.

The ESL faculty's pedagogical competencies are deeply rooted in reflective practice, contextualized instruction, technological adaptability, and differentiated strategies. These competencies align with contemporary research on effective teaching and demonstrate the faculty's readiness to meet the evolving demands of language education in a globalized world.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the pedagogical competencies of ESL faculty at Isabela State University–San Mateo Campus are marked by a dynamic interplay of instructional strategies, classroom management, reflective practice, and adaptive use of technology. The findings highlight that ESL teachers possess a practical understanding of communicative and student-centered approaches, yet continuously refine their methods through critical self-evaluation and experience-based learning. Video observations and stimulated recall interviews revealed that teachers are aware of their pedagogical strengths and responsive to areas needing improvement, such as contextualizing lessons, sustaining student engagement, and navigating technological challenges in hybrid learning environments.

Moreover, the study affirms that pedagogical competence is not static but evolves through reflection, feedback, and professional development. Thus, institutions must support ESL faculty through targeted training and collaborative learning opportunities. Strengthening teachers' pedagogical skills ultimately enhances the quality of language instruction, contributing to better academic outcomes and learner empowerment in multilingual, multicultural classrooms.

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