

Vol.7 Special Issue No.1 (2024)

Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

ISSN : 2591-801X

Content Available at : <http://journals.sfu.ca/jalt/index.php/jalt/index>

Exploring the effective language teaching components from teachers' point of view: A community of inquiry perspective

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Keywords

Community of inquiry;
effective teaching;
teacher education;
teacher perspective;
thematic analysis.

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Article Info

Received 1 January 2024
Received in revised form 25 February 2024
Accepted 29 February 2024
Available online 13 March 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2024.7.S1.3>

Abstract

Our research article explores teachers' perceptions of components of effective language teaching from a community of inquiry (CoI) perspective. 20 teachers completed a narrative frame, 15 of whom participated in a semi-structured interview in which they discussed the factors contributing to effective teaching. The thematic analysis of the data employing the underpinning theoretical framework of the study revealed nine sub-themes in three CoI themes. The sub-themes in the teaching presence theme were classroom dynamic and discourse, classroom and learning management, and evaluation and assessment. The emergence of meaningful learning, critical thinking, and students' engagement was observed in cognitive presence, and learning environment, sociocultural peculiarities, and positive relationships emerged in social presence. The findings of this study may assist teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers in improving their understanding of effective teaching and its components and planning, designing, and implementing accordingly.

Introduction

Effective teaching, including improving student learning, school effectiveness, teacher evaluation, designing and enhancing teacher education programs, and skill and strategy training (Chen et al., 2012; Doménech Betoret & Gómez Artiga, 2004; Kamali, 2023; Owan et al., 2023; Racey et al., 2024), is crucial for attaining educational outcomes. In other words, effective teaching and teachers' understanding of this concept influence the improvement of students' outcomes (Elton, 1998). Different studies have investigated the components of effective teaching and their impact on students' achievements, concluding that effective teachers need to have good subject knowledge (Walshaw, 2012), design well-structured lessons (Iqbal et al., 2021), ask appropriate questions to engage and challenge learners (Walsh, 2006), conduct assessment effectively (Ko et al., 2013), and navigate between various roles adaptively (Kamali, 2014, 2021, 2023). However, the components of effective teaching in different subjects may differ (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). For example, in the field of second language instruction or English Language Teaching (ELT), the subject of instruction and means of teaching are the same (Brosh, 1996); that is, those characteristics need to be explored separately (Borg, 2006).

In addition, in terms of the mode of instruction, there are distinctions between online teaching and traditional face-to-face instruction because of factors such as the changing roles of teacher and student, flexibility, interaction, and communication (Young, 2006; Zhang et al., 2024). The Community of Inquiry framework (henceforth Col) represents one of the theoretical models originally devised to explore the intricate attributes of effective online teaching (Garrison et al., 2000). However, this study is one of the first attempts to adopt it in in-person education and explore its potential for this mode of instruction.

Therefore, this study attempts to explore the factors impacting teaching effectiveness from teachers' perspectives and examines the contribution of the Col framework to effective teaching in face-to-face classes. The findings of this study will benefit teachers by raising their awareness about the components of effective teaching. It will also be beneficial for teacher educators by encouraging them to include the components of Col, consider the effectiveness of teaching components in their courses and contribute towards the training of language teachers to assist them in conducting high-quality face-to-face classes. Consequently, students benefit from the effective teaching they will receive in their classes. Furthermore, the findings of this study can expand the existing literature on Col by applying this framework for the first time to face-to-face classes.

Literature review

Effective teaching

Effective teaching is a multidimensional concept (Ko et al., 2013). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards of the U.S. introduced factors like commitment to students, extensive knowledge about the subjects taught

and how to teach these subjects, responsibility for managing and monitoring student learning, reflection on practice and learning from teachers' experiences, and membership in learning communities as features of highly accomplished teaching (Serafini, 2002).

Different researchers have already studied teachers and teaching effectiveness to identify the characteristics of effective teachers and teaching (e.g., Beishuizen et al., 2001; Chen, 2007; Chen et al., 2012; Çakmak & Gündüz, 2018; Ghafar & Lestari, 2023; Harrison et al., 2022; Tavakoli & Baniasad-Azad, 2016). Chen (2007) conducted a study to explore Chinese school teachers' perspectives regarding excellent teaching and identified four general characteristics of excellent teaching: "(1) caring for students, (2) guiding various aspects of students' development, (3) connecting school knowledge to other areas like real-world settings, and (4) planning structured lessons" (p. 288). Similarly, Beishuizen et al. (2001), in search of understanding the opinions of primary and high school teachers about the characteristics of excellent or effective teachers, found that excellent primary teachers are competent instructors who are able to transmit knowledge and skills, while effective high school teachers are those who can establish teacher-student relationships successfully. Another study by Chen et al. (2012) developed a model for the characteristics of excellent teachers, concluding that an excellent teacher is exam-oriented, develops lifelong learners, is student-focused, engages students, and is a professional learner. Tavakoli and Baniasad-Azad (2016), however, noted that student-centeredness and exam-oriented teaching are the most important features for running effective sessions. Çakmak and Gündüz (2018) also observed that objectiveness, competence, and consistency plus creating a positive learning environment, preparing for lessons, and managing the classroom are the essential characteristics of an effective teacher. Recently, Ghafar and Lestari (2023), in a critical review, concluded that an effective learning environment provides dynamic instruction to meet students' requirements. This climate encourages students' sense of belonging, provides equal opportunities for students to participate in classroom communications, and requires teachers to provide students with constructive feedback. In another review, Harrison et al. (2022) focused on effective teaching in higher education to examine the currently used approaches to evaluate and improve teaching practices in higher education. The findings identified that assessing teaching effectiveness through different methods, such as student feedback about teaching quality, teachers' self-assessment tools, peer review of teaching, and educational portfolios, can enhance teaching quality.

The Col framework, as an influential theoretical and practical framework for online education (Kozan & Caskurlu, 2018), encourages active and creative learners' engagement and focuses on thinking and learning collaboratively (Garrison, 2016). This framework can be used to design and evaluate effective learning environments by adapting the classroom to its three core elements - cognitive presence (CP), social presence (SP), and teaching presence (TP) (Arbaugh, 2013), through developing critical thinking, encouraging collaboration, creating a shared community, designing well-structured lessons, providing appropriate feedback, and

facilitating learning (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

Theoretical framework: Community of Inquiry

The Col framework, originating from the constructivist perspective and being widely used (Bozkurt et al., 2015), consists of three essential elements as indicators of teaching effectiveness in online learning environments: social presence (SP), cognitive presence (CP), and teacher presence (TP). The primary purpose of this framework is to oversee and administer the dynamic educational journey within an online learning setting, aiming to foster critical thinking and collaborative learning (Aspland & Fox, 2022; Garrison & Akyol, 2013). Lipman (2003) states a Col is where students listen to one "another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions" (p. 20).

The first element, CP, is the extent to which participants can construct meaning and knowledge through collaboration. The second element, SP, which has the function of facilitating and supporting the CP, is defined as the participant's ability to see themselves as part of a community where they are their real selves and experience enjoyment and satisfaction while communicating and constructing knowledge. The last element, TP, is done by a teacher who is responsible for designing the course, presenting the course content, assessing the learned materials, providing appropriate instruction, and facilitating the learning process (Garrison et al., 2000).

Four phases - triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution, are needed to operationalize and assess the CP (Garrison et al., 2000). The development of social interaction among learners is called SP and can be measured through three dimensions: open communication, affective expression, and group cohesion (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The last presence, TP, consists of three dimensions: instructional management, building understanding, and direct instruction (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

Despite the extensive literature on the characteristics of effective teaching and teachers, a notable gap exists in understanding the essential elements of effective language teaching from teachers' perspectives. This gap is particularly perceivable in face-to-face classes within the Col framework. Although this framework has attracted much attention (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007) and is considered to be one of the most extensively used frameworks in online teaching and learning (Jan et al., 2019), it has not been extensively implemented in in-person teaching except for some earlier attempts such as Warner (2016). Despite this background of the studies that tried to apply this framework to face-to-face education, exploring the teachers' perception of it in such classes is still in its infancy.

Therefore, to fill the existing gap, the current study seeks to explore the components of effective language teaching from teachers' point of view through the lens of the Col framework in face-to-face classes facing some constraints

compared to their online counterparts (Warner, 2016), with the purpose of facilitating meaningful learning experiences (Garrison, 2016). To this end, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the components of effective language teaching from teachers' perspectives in face-to-face classes?
2. How does Col contribute to these components?

Method

Participants and research context

The participants of this study were 15 English language teachers teaching general English courses to adult and young adult learners using various ELT textbooks in diverse teaching contexts, including private language institutes, state-owned standardized language institutes, public schools, and the private sector in different cities of Iran. To recruit the participants, nearly 30 EFL teachers were contacted via social media (WhatsApp, Telegram, or email) and sent invitations to fill out the narrative forms about their effective teaching components. A total of 20 teachers completed the narrative frames and 15 of them consented to attend semi-structured interviews. The teachers who accepted the invitation to participate in this study were informed of the goals of the research and the anonymity of their responses. Among the volunteer participants, three were male and twelve were female teachers with teaching experiences ranging from about one year to seventeen years and they were between 23 – 40 years old. Nearly half of the participating teachers (n=7) held a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), and three of them were educated in English literature or translation studies. Two of the participants (T1 and T15) held bachelor's degrees in philosophy and public health, non-relevant to English or language teaching. Additionally, one participant was (at the time of this study) a doctoral student of TEFL. It is noteworthy that although not all the participants work in higher education, they all had the experience of studying, teaching, or working in such an environment. The demographic information of the participants is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participating teachers.

| Participants | Education | Gender and Age | Teaching Experience (years) | Teaching Context |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| T1 | BA in Philosophy | Female, 35 | 4 | General English courses to adult learners in Iran |
| T2 | MA in TELT | Female, 33 | 10 | General English courses at private language institutes in Iran |
| T3 | BA in English Literature + CELTA | Female, 26 | 2 | Elementary level English courses at a Chinese school |
| T4 | BA in TEFL | Female, 25 | 4 | Private tutor, teaching online and face-to-face classes in Iran |
| T5 | BA in English Literature | Female, 40 | 17 | General English and preparation for IELTS courses to adult learners in Tehran, Iran |
| T6 | MA in TELT | Male, 25 | 4 | Private tutor in Bushehr, Iran |
| T7 | MA in TELT | Female, 31 | 12 | General English courses to adult learners at a branch of a nationally standardized language institute in Tehran, Iran |
| T8 | BA in TELT | Male, 28 | 6 | General English courses at public high schools (7-9 th grade) in Kashan, Iran |
| T9 | MA student of English Translation | Female, 24 | 5 | General English courses to young adult learners at a private language center in Shiraz, Iran |
| T10 | M.A. in TEFL | Female, 25 | 3 | General English and IELTS courses to adults at a private language institute in Shiraz, Iran |
| T11 | M.A. in TEFL | Female, 39 | 14 | General English to teenagers and adults at a branch of a nationally standardized language institute in Shiraz, Iran |
| T12 | PhD candidate in TEFL | Female, 29 | 8 | Private institutes, private tutoring, general English at universities, teenagers and adults |

| | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|------------|---|--|
| T13 | MA in TEFL | Female, 30 | 6 | Private language institutes, all age ranges Private language institutes and public schools, teenagers and adults Private language institutes, kids and teenagers |
| T14 | MA in TEFL | Male, 30 | 7 | |
| T15 | BA in Public Health | Female, 23 | 1 | |

This study was conducted in the EFL context where all the participants were Iranian teachers of the English language. Similar to any EFL context, the English language in Iran is spoken mainly in the classroom, where the teachers are considered to provide the most important language sample to the language learners. In the EFL context of Iran, English language teaching takes place in various educational settings, including public schools and private language institutions. For more than five decades, English has been taught in Iranian public schools, however, private and state-owned language institutions have played a considerable role in educating language students, particularly in the past two decades (Haghighi & Norton, 2017). These higher-education institutes and schools, together with the private sector, follow the shared aim of helping EFL language learners meet their linguistic needs and objectives. Based on this significant common purpose, researching the effectiveness of language teaching endeavors is of great importance. Therefore, this study sought to unpack the most effective teaching components utilized by Iranian English language teachers in an EFL context.

Data collection

For this qualitative research, data were collected using written narrative frames in Google Docs and in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with each of the participating teachers individually in an online communication platform, mostly in Google Meet. Similar to writing frames, narrative frames provide a "skeleton to scaffold writing" (Warwick & Maloch, 2003, p. 59). Narrative frames, as a valuable tool to collect data in investigating teachers' perspectives, consist of "starters, connectives and sentence modifiers which gives children [teachers] a structure within which they can concentrate on communicating what they want to say whilst scaffolding them in the use of a particular generic form" (Wray & Lewis, 1997, p. 122). Thus, they "have a supportive and guiding function" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 375). In the present study, the narrative frames were employed by asking the participants to complete the following frames: a) The best class I had was when ... because ... b) I did not like one of my classes very much when ... because... c) The best class for me is the one which....

All the researchers were involved in the recruitment of the participants and each of them was responsible for interviewing about 4-5 EFL teachers. In order for the participants to communicate their ideas more accurately and in detail, the interviews were all conducted in Persian, i.e., the first language of the participants. Each semi-structured interview lasted from 30-45 minutes and, with the permission of the participants, was audio-recorded for further analysis. During the interviews, the interviewer used open-ended questions and encouraged the participants to freely express their opinions about the most effective aspects of their teaching based on their own teaching experiences in their classes.

As the interview questions were written in accordance with the Col theoretical framework of this study, the participants were asked to elaborate on the most effective aspect of their teaching in relation to the three interrelated elements from the framework, i.e., the SP, CP, and TP in the higher education experience. To illustrate how information about SP was elicited, the participants were asked the following question: 'How do you encourage a sense of rapport, community, and group spirit in your classes?' The questions were asked with the aim of understanding the most effective components of the EFL teachers' teaching.

Data analysis

Since one of the main aims of the researchers was to arrive at codes and themes that could comprehensively and accurately represent the effective teaching components, the data collected for this study were analyzed following the procedures of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, subsequent to the data transcription stage, the researchers read the transcriptions repeatedly, to become familiarized with the data. Next, initial codes were assigned to the preliminary list of ideas and responses. The researchers who were involved in codifying and categorizing the data were all Iranian language teaching practitioners. The fact that they were all English language teachers having the experience of working in higher education, positioned them as individuals familiar with the peculiarities of the EFL classrooms and the codes and themes that emerged from the data through the lens of the Col.

As for the categorization of the data, following the manual color-coding procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the extracted codes were assigned three color-codes: TP, SP, and CP. In this regard, we developed codes in accordance with the elements of the Col. For instance, the participants' ideas about their most effective teaching skills concerning initiating discussions, giving clear instructions, providing detailed feedback, and motivating students' active collaboration were categorized as the TP. The participants' shared ideas and examples of the effective component of their teaching associated with creating a sense of rapport, community, and/or group spirit in their classes represented the SP. Finally, the teachers' remarks on the most impactful element of their teaching, in relation to promoting meaningful learning and critical thinking in their students as well as engaging their students in thinking and brainstorming activities, were categorized as the CP elements.

At the final stage, to ensure the trustworthiness and the quality of the findings, we adopted a form of respondent validation approach, i.e., interviewee transcript review (ITR). As some of the interviewees had declared that they would like to understand how their remarks would be used for our research purposes, a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their answers was sent to them to be read and reviewed in terms of the accuracy of interpretation of their remarks.

In accordance with ethical guidelines and to ensure the ethical considerations of conducting research with human participants, the interviewers informed the participating

EFL teachers about the purpose of the study, their rights to confidentiality, and the anonymity of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study and filling in the narrative forms. Additionally, as some of the interviewees had declared that they would like to understand how their remarks would be used for our research purposes, a copy of the transcription and interpretation of their answers was sent to them to be read and reviewed, following a respondent validation approach, i.e., interviewee transcript review (ITR) (Rowlands, 2021), participants were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the transcription and interpretation of their remarks.

Findings

Data analysis revealed a number of sub-themes that emerged under the three levels of the present study underpinning the Col theoretical framework, namely cognitive, social, and pedagogical elements that were considered to be the components of effective teaching from teachers' points of view. The elements are thematically represented in Figure 1, and in each theme, three sub-themes emerged, which include a number of components influencing teaching. These components will be discussed in turn.

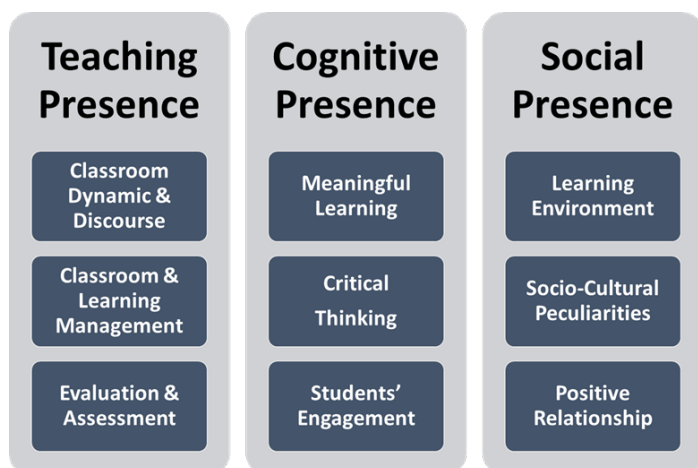


Figure 1. Thematic representation of effective teaching components from Col perspective.

Teaching presence

Regarding teaching presence (TP), three sub-themes emerged from the data. The first sub-theme was classroom dynamic and discourse, which included components such as reducing teacher talking time (TTT), preparedness and adaptability, and presenting clear instruction checking questions (ICQs). T1 explained that engaging students in thinking and brainstorming activities encourages them to speak more in class and participate more often, which reduces TTT as a result. Moreover, T11 asserted that the elements of preparedness and adaptability are of great importance in teaching effectively. She stated in her interview:

I always try to be prepared for my classes, even the ones with fixed syllabuses which I have taught before. In addition, I try to design warm-up activities and present the lesson based on the learners' characteristic

traits and their proficiency level in the class. (T11, Interview)

Giving clear and precise instructions was also considered to be a key component of effective teaching. T10 addressed this point by admitting there were times that her students "felt unconfident and lower than the class educational level" (T10, Interview) because they could not follow the activities through the course. However, T12 stated in her interview that clear and precise instruction delivery is not always effective, especially in classes with negligent students. T5's interview confirmed T12's experience, but she (T5) stated that "although there are always some students who do the activities wrong, by providing clear instructions we can be assured that the majority will do the exercises correctly" (T5, Interview).

The second sub-theme of TP was classroom and learning management. Having a clear and standard syllabus and framework, practical teaching, and using audiovisual aids related to the lesson content were among the important components of the second sub-theme. T14 explained that one of the most effective elements of teaching successfully is following a clear syllabus. He wrote in his narrative:

The class that I didn't like very much was my senior class at ... university where the syllabus and method did not match the level of the students, so the learners' motivation gradually disappeared and I was also worn out. The syllabus and content should also be in accordance with the level of the students in that no student feels afraid of making mistakes. (T14, Narrative Frame)

While T4 confirmed T14's opinion, she also added that giving a clear and fixed syllabus to students in advance helped them "to be prepared for specific tasks related to each session" (T4, Interview). Furthermore, T3 mentioned the idea of teaching "practically with techniques as opposed to merely explaining the theories" to the students (T3, Interview). She argued that in order to learn more effectively, students can benefit from different techniques such as "knowing how to use a dictionary correctly or how to improve their listening through songs and music" (T3, Interview). As the last factor, the idea of using audiovisual aids was introduced by T15 and she asserted that it could enhance students' understanding if it is relevant specifically to the lesson content. (T15, Interview)

The last sub-theme of TP was evaluation and assessment, which brought giving feedback and regular quizzes and assessments into the spotlight. According to T14, giving precise feedback was a crucial part of the class, especially for productive tasks. He stated that it helped students to know their errors and receive specific solutions to correct them. T2 also mentioned the significance of feedback in the class in a narration:

The best class is the one in which I have my best performance; for example, I make students as active as possible or give them enough chances to speak so I can provide feedback on their vocabulary use and grammatical accuracy. (T2, Narrative Frame)

While T13 agreed with the importance of giving precise feedback in class, she emphasized that it should be conducted correctly. She explained that teachers should present feedback that is “true and real”, as comments that are “excessively positive” may negatively affect the students’ learning (T13, Interview).

Having regular quizzes and assessments was another effective component in students’ evaluation. Two of the teachers stated that for the teaching phase to be effective, it needs to be followed by assessment. T8 believed that the monthly quizzes which he gave his students were effective in their learning. In addition, T2 asserted that “especially after teaching vocabulary”, she tested students’ learning by giving them tests and quizzes (T2, Interview).

Cognitive presence

Cognitive presence (CP) included three sub-themes. The first sub-theme, meaningful learning, was defined by using brainstorming techniques, deep and long-term learning, and having real-life examples. Eight teachers referred to the brainstorming technique as an effective way to activate students’ previous schemata. T15 explained that “connecting the previous content with the new content and drawing a comparison between them is of significant importance, especially in teenagers’ classes and in teaching grammar” (T15, Interview). T7 added to this point by expressing “My students can engage in brainstorming in groups as it encourages collaboration and group work” (T7, Interview). It was also mentioned by T9 as “an enjoyable learning experience” (T9, Interview) for her students when she asked them to think about something and share their ideas.

Deep and long-term learning was another component in defining the meaningful learning sub-theme. T6 mentioned in his interview that “when the students learn new lessons and relate them to their real-life experiences, the things they learn last longer and are better learned” (T6, Interview). T12, however, believed that students’ age plays a crucial role in deep and meaningful learning. She explained that for older learners and higher levels, it could be easier to relate the new content to students’ previous knowledge.

The last component of meaningful learning was having real-life examples in the class. This was pointed out by T6, who stated in his interview that “When I am teaching new words or structures, I ask my students to bring real-life example sentences, which I find to be more effective than reading the examples in the book” (T6, Interview). T14 additionally believed that when the new content is related to students’ real lives, it becomes more meaningful and instills a sense of confidence in them to believe they can use the language learned in the real world.

Critical thinking was the second sub-theme of CP, which comprised two components, namely discussion on both cliché and controversial topics and encouraging students’ production and participation at higher levels. Seven teachers agreed that discussion on different topics for critical thinking worked better with learners of higher education levels. T15 explained in her interview:

Critical thinking begins at the pre-teaching phase. Students are asked to think about a topic and express their opinions which is highly dependent on their age. It means that students with higher knowledge of the language and the world participate in critical activities more than less proficient and younger learners. With younger students, we merely expect yes or no answers and a couple of sentences to discuss at this phase. (T15, Interview)

T4 added that sometimes, especially at lower levels, she helped the students with “activating the initial idea in their minds” so that they had something to discuss (T4, Interview). It was also emphasized by T11 that discussion and critical thinking are more beneficial to intermediate and advanced learners to boost production in speaking activities specifically. She continued in her interview:

Introducing thought-provoking topics is effective when students’ speaking level is appropriate and sufficient. In fact, presenting controversial topics that are trendy in students’ daily lives can enhance their participation in discussion, which eventually leads to more practice and most probably better learning. (T11, Interview)

While confirming the ideas above, T2 believed that not only controversial topics but also discussion could be boosted because of raising the topics of “daily cliché in students’ lives” (T2, Interview). She continued “Because it is related to daily life, everybody has something to share and there are always some opinions that differ from others regarding life stereotypes which could boost discussion and engagement” (T2, Interview).

The last sub-theme of CP was students’ engagement which consisted of two significant components, namely, having motivated students and having creative activities in the class. T4 wrote in her narrative frame:

The best class I had was IELTS classes because students are active and motivated, so there is no need to persuade them to learn more and more. You do your job, and it is up to them to study or not. I did not like one of my elementary classes very much. The reason is that they lacked motivation and discipline. The best class for me is the one in which I can work on IELTS speaking. It helps me broaden more knowledge about various topics and students enjoy it as well. (T4, Narrative Frame)

T1 and T10 both confirmed the idea in their narrative frames. They mentioned that students’ motivation and ‘eagerness’ are among the key factors for their engagement in the class. T10 narrated:

The best class I had was the one which was three months long and we worked on *Mindset for IELTS* book 2. It was the best because almost all of the students were motivated to study hard and engage in the activities for the entire 35 sessions. They were really eager to learn and take part in discussions. (T10, Narrative Frame)

T14 added creativity as an important factor in teaching effectively and engaging students in class. He mentioned in his interview that “creativity should be within the order and framework of the class” in order to be effective (T14, Interview). T1 also explained in her interview:

Having a creative learning environment is of great importance. Because it enables students to use the language as a tool for communication so that they can engage in class activities instead of focusing on learning the language directly, which can be less interesting or exciting. (T1, Interview)

Social presence

Social presence (SP), which is the last theme of our framework, also comprised three sub-themes: the learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationships. Regarding the first sub-theme, learning environment, two components were found: creating a safe and encouraging learning environment, and defining classroom norms. Thirteen teachers in the study mentioned the importance of creating a safe and encouraging learning environment. T1 stated that having team activities is a necessary component of a safe learning space. T5 confirmed and addressed the issue in her interview:

When my students make mistakes while doing teamwork, I try to show that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process and there is no shame in that. Moreover, I encourage them to not only learn from their own mistakes but also from their partners’ mistakes. (T5, Interview)

T8 mentioned the importance of setting classroom norms to have a successful learning environment. He illustrated this by saying “When I set clear norms for my classes, students expect each other to respect the norms as members of a small community. Because, you know, every community has some rules” (T8, Interview). T1 also believed in the importance of having classroom norms, as she wrote in her narrative form ‘The best class for me is the one which the students are eager to learn and also they are punctual’ (T1, Narrative Frame).

Socio-cultural peculiarities are the second sub-theme of SP, which includes comparing teaching methods, teaching unsuitable classes, and financial satisfaction. T5 posited that in order to have a successful teaching experience, it was crucial to have students’ respect and trust. She wrote in her narrative form:

I didn’t like the classes in which students compared my method of teaching with their previous teacher’s, even though that method seemed awkward, and asked or expected me to do the same! The best class is the class in which students trust me and see the beneficial effects of my teaching method! (T5, Narrative Form)

T10 additionally stated that it is significantly important that we teach the appropriate class based on our potential. She narrated:

I didn’t like the first class I had. It wasn’t suitable for me. As the first class, I shouldn’t have had an adult class with three grown-up men when I was only 22 and had no idea how to manage the class! Also, they had to be prepared for the PTE exam in 40 days and I didn’t know a thing about it, so, they would ask me a lot of questions that I wasn’t able to answer. (T10, Narrative Frame)

Financial satisfaction was another influential factor in a successful teaching experience addressed by T12. She addressed the point in her interview by saying ‘If teachers have career and financial satisfaction, they can reduce the number of their classes. Consequently, they will have more time to prepare educational material, which eventually results in having a more effective teaching experience’ (T12, Interview).

The last sub-theme of SP was a positive relationship. It was defined by a significant code which was encouraging rapport in the class. Encouraging rapport was expressed by 10 teachers participating in the study. T6 asserted that “I always try to be friends with my students and when they say something wrong or make mistakes, I calmly correct them. I don’t like to be so serious about it” (T6, Interview). T13 considered “having a good rapport” as one of the most important elements of her teaching (T13, Interview). T14 added that ‘the amount of rapport depends on teachers’ characteristics, but it is really important to create some levels of personal connections with the students, which is beyond the class level’ (T14, Interview). While none of the teachers denied the crucial role of having rapport in the class, T3 mentioned that it could be unachievable in some circumstances which could make a course less fruitful. She explained in her interview:

Encouraging rapport is very difficult as I am a foreigner who doesn’t share the same L1 with the children at school. So, it seems that students do not like this idea and tend not to listen to me most of the time, especially during group activities. It prevents me from performing the task properly as they don’t seem to like to follow my instructions. (T3, Interview)

However, she tried to find alternative ways to create rapport in her classes. She stated “I understood that they enjoy watching videos in the class and become extremely happy when I play videos for them. Therefore, I used the idea to encourage some amount of positive relationship between us” (T3, Interview).

Discussion

As a response to a view of teaching which considers it a multifaceted issue (Ko et al., 2013) and not simply transferring information from one person to the other, multilayer analytical frameworks are brought into the spotlight, one of which is the Community of Inquiry (CoI). This framework was adopted in the present study in order to identify the underlying elements of effective teaching from teachers’ perspectives, which comprised social, teaching, and cognitive components (Garrison & Akyol, 2013). The novelty

of this study lies in its attempt to apply this framework to face-to-face education, considering that it was originally proposed for an online one. Each component and sub-theme in this study helps understand the Col framework per se in the context of language education. These findings can assure the readers of how these Col elements are fruitful in increasing the desired outcome of language classes.

Our findings elucidate teachers' perceptions of what makes their teaching effective through the Col framework. From the TP aspect of Col, classroom dynamic and discourse, classroom and learning management, and evaluation and assessment were highlighted by the participants. Not only are these findings identified by the participants of this study, but also the effectiveness of these components and their constituents (e.g. exam-oriented teaching and preparedness) have been affirmed by numerous studies (Alzeebaree & Hassan, 2021; Ko et al., 2013; Tajeddin & Kamali, 2023; Tavakoli & Baniasad-Azad, 2016; Walker, 2008). For example, overuse of TTT is considered inappropriate because the more a teacher talks, the less chance there is for the students to practice their own speaking (Tajeddin & Kamali, 2020). Therefore, the findings of this study reveal that teachers can boost their performance by paying closer attention to techniques and principles underlying the TP such as conducting regular quizzes at the end of each chapter or by providing clearer instructions. Meaningful learning, critical thinking, and student engagement were sub-themes of CP that emerged from the data to be the most effective components in the cognitive aspects of effective teaching. These results corroborate the findings of numerous researchers (Chen, 2007; Saleh, 2019; Yang & Gamble, 2013) that confirm the effectiveness of techniques and approaches, such as encouraging critical thinking, that form these principles. In life, there will be situations where people should make important decisions or give responses to complex situations and questions. Without promoting critical thinking in classrooms, learners may not be able to address these situations effectively enough to succeed in an L2 community. Kamali (2014, 2021, 2023) posited that teacher metamorphosis (transforming a teacher – or a teacher trainer – to a material designer, assessor, and critical thinker) is a path toward effective teaching; the concept that this study further confirms. This study could add to this concept arguing that teacher metamorphosis is not only needed in online learning but also seems essential considering that there are new skills in the contemporary world that teachers should attain urgently and critically such as digital literacy, multicultural and multilingual peculiarities, global representations and the like. There are also three main elements in the SP of effective teaching including learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationship. The findings of this study on this theme are in line with previous studies (Davis, 2001; Hainsworth et al., 2023; Javahery & Kamali, 2023; Martin & Collie, 2019) which argued that positive relationships can enhance the experience of learning and teaching. This research contributes to the existing pool of knowledge arguing that teachers' positive attitude towards supportive relationship with students also facilitates this process. The fact that most participants considered establishing a good rapport with learners as an effective element in their classrooms emphasizes the importance of psychological and affective

factors that may not be assessed directly, i.e. rapport and good relationships with learners cannot be measured in numbers but can be deduced implicitly by the success rate of learners. Furthermore, sociocultural peculiarities, like teacher job and pay satisfaction, have been also proven to have a positive correlation with teaching performance (Kamali & Nazari, 2023). This is not a new finding, however, since previous studies on management and organizational behavior have already discussed it for years (Currall et al., 2005; Jinyevu, 2013; Kavalić et al., 2023).

Unlike previous studies (Alzeebaree & Hassan, 2021; Ko et al., 2013; Nel & Muller, 2010), the findings of this study did not count English proficiency (subject knowledge) as an important effective teaching element since it was absent in the responses given by the participants of our study. Tsang (2017) argues that although English proficiency is a major effective factor in language teaching, other teaching components become more important once a certain level of language proficiency is achieved. Therefore, the reason for not stating language proficiency as an effective element of teaching may be that the participants had crossed that threshold so other skills became more prominent in their view. That is, the extensive knowledge of a teacher in General English, surpassing that of typical language instructors, may not significantly impact a student. This shows there may be more important factors such as emotional and social factors (e.g., rapport) which can have a greater impact on learners. Therefore, this study implies the superiority of SP over TP components.

The inclusiveness of our study is one of its novel qualities as it scrutinizes the elements of effective teaching from multiple aspects of the Col framework in face-to-face education which can provide teachers and teacher educators the opportunity to prepare more effectively for this mode of classes and workshops.

Conclusion

Our research contributes to deepening teachers' understanding of effective elements that can be used in classrooms in order to enhance learning outcomes in language classrooms. The Col framework employed in this project helped us to analyze effective language teaching components in a broader scope including not only teaching but also social and psychological (cognitive) factors affecting the process of language teaching and learning. Thematic analysis on the data with an eye on the underpinning theoretical framework of the study (Col) revealed nine sub-themes in different Col themes: classroom dynamic & discourse, classroom & learning management, and evaluation and assessment in TP; meaningful learning, critical thinking, and students' engagement in CP; and learning environment, socio-cultural peculiarities, and positive relationship in SP.

Three groups of scholars can benefit from the findings of this study, namely teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers. Teachers, first, may deepen their understanding of effective teaching by delving into the results of this study and comparing it with their own classroom experiences. This can be done by teachers asking themselves questions regarding

any of the components of this study. For example, "Am I using effective classroom management techniques?" or "How can I reduce TTT in my classes and encourage my students to produce and practice the target language more in a purposeful manner in a context similar to that of a native L2 community?". Second, teacher educators can design Col-informed courses for teachers that deal with different aspects of teaching, curriculum and syllabus design, and assessment rather than sticking to older theories and traditional techniques. Thereby, teachers who learn Col-based teaching techniques may automatically produce better outcomes, since those techniques have been identified as more effective, especially with a consideration of learners' cognitive and affective factors, as opposed to their older counterparts. Finally, policymakers can apply the results of this study in their strategic planning and education to facilitate the process of effective teaching through means such as adapting the coursebooks and their topics, providing digital equipment for classrooms, and educating pre-service and in-service teachers about effective teaching.

A promising avenue for future research lies in different ways to improve teachers' capabilities in each area or elicit more elements of effective teaching from teachers in various educational contexts in different cultures. Besides, using modern computer-mediated tools and software such as Nvivo, MAXQDA, etc. may further help in providing more robust data analysis. This is especially beneficial when there is a larger pool of participants, replicating the study with which, may enlighten teachers and researchers more about effective teaching techniques. It would also be useful to investigate the ways through which governments and education authorities can facilitate implementing these criteria in a nationwide scope.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- In your opinion, what are the most effective elements of your teaching?
- What do you think about the impact of teaching styles and strategies on the success of your sessions?
- What do you think about the impact of learners' cognitive abilities on the success of your sessions?
- What do you think about the impact of sociocultural issues on the success of your sessions?
- How can promoting meaningful learning and critical thinking of your students make your teaching effective?
- What are the potential effects of engaging students in thinking and brainstorming activities in your classes? Why is it effective/ineffective?
- How do you encourage a sense of rapport, community, and group spirit in your classes? What do you think would be the effects of them?
- What are the effects of the following teaching skills in your classes? Initiating discussions, giving clear instructions, providing detailed feedback, and motivating students' active collaboration. How do these skills affect the quality of your teaching?
- Are there any other strategies you employ to allow your students to benefit from your teaching even more effectively? Please explain.

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