

## The Impact of Reflective Practice Questionnaires on Tertiary Language Education

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### Abstract

The article deals with the impact of reflective practice questionnaires on Language for Specific Purposes teaching and learning at the tertiary education level. Reflection was recognized as an essential factor for improving teaching quality and students' motivation to develop their skills in both native and target languages. To convey this idea, there was conducted a multistage survey to identify students' language awareness and learning abilities, to examine their reflection on the course design and teacher's performance, as well as to monitor their progress throughout the course. There was described a survey procedure with the samples of questionnaires to be used. The obtained findings allowed assessing the process of enhancing the quality of teaching and achieving learning outcomes by students. The authors suggested some practical techniques to help teachers apply meaningful strategies and guide their students through reflective learning by making them active participants in constructing knowledge and educational experiences.

*Keywords:* assessment, language education, quality, questionnaire, reflection

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## Introduction

In the modern era of tough educational competition, higher education institutions strive to meet all the necessary standards and guidelines to ensure the highest quality and respond to growing expectations for higher education. Current academic guidelines envisage a more student-centered approach to learning and teaching, developing flexible learning paths and new forms of delivery and assessing educational provision (ESG, 2015). For this purpose, the interaction between teachers and students is needed to adjust diverse students' abilities and their changing needs to the existing educational program to create "a supportive and effective learning environment for students" (ESG, 2015, p. 16). Therefore, in the constant search for the most efficient ways of providing successful teacher–course–student relationship, enhancing the overall effectiveness of instruction and achieving learning outcomes by students, most educators appeal to reflection or reflective practices to assess academic performance quality.

In tertiary education institutions, academic excellence demands creating the opportunities "to gain high-level language and cross-cultural communication proficiency that will serve them both professionally and personally in the global environment of the twenty-first century" (Long, 2017, p. 1). Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is an interdisciplinary field providing many of the student-centered, multidisciplinary curricular design elements and plays a crucial role in developing generic competences. LSP courses and programs offer students applied knowledge related to not only professional domains, but they also develop field-related communicative competence, critical thinking skills, and cognitive capacities. Hence, these courses may become such constructive environments, in which reflective practices become an effective technique to help instructors apply meaningful strategies and guide their students through reflective language learning.

## Literature review

The human capacity for high-order critical thinking and our ability to make connections between thoughts and ideas are often referred to as reflection (Denton, 2011). Though there are discrepancies in its definition, researchers mostly agree on its main characteristics: persistent, active, and conscious consideration of the form of knowledge and recent experiences, and engaging learners with educational practices (Dewey, 2004); a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with a deep understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas; constant interaction and continuity (Rodgers, 2002); an analysis of experience or self-analysis, which activates learning and strengthens personal and professional efficiency (Bubnys, 2010); an essential practice in developing criticality and life-long learning, which must be embedded in providing meaningful and productive teaching throughout the curricula (Bharuthram, 2018). Reflection is considered to facilitate academic mastery, foster critical thinking, and meaningful demonstration of learning, and contribute to personal growth and civic engagement (Ash, 2001). When considering the ways of becoming a reflective teacher, Brookfield (2017) identified reflection as one of the main practical tools that help align teaching with desired student outcomes, see teaching practice from new perspectives, engage learners via multiple teaching formats and model students' critical thinking. Reflections represent a process of considering one's practice before, during, and after concrete activities: preparation and planning of teaching, its performance, guidance and course, classroom climate, evaluation of students' progress (Maksimovic, 2018), and thus constant improvements. Moreover,

reflection forms a habit of continual learning from own experiences, framing, and reframing problems within broader perspectives (Kayapinar, 2016, p. 1672) aimed at taking action and making a difference in education.

Thus, reflection is regarded as a valuable activity for both teachers and students, which is based on metacognition or critical awareness and subsequent reconstruction of educational experiences implying interaction of all its participants that promotes “the desire to contribute to the larger good” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 847). In the realm of teaching, reflection implies promoting depth of understanding by applying a broad range of instructional approaches and conducting a thorough exploration of the impact of teacher’s actions and search for solutions to overcome the identified gaps and weaknesses. The completeness of the teacher’s own ability to design, observe, pay attention, perceive, and adjust their instruction would be disputable and almost improbable without systematic reflection on their professionalism and experience. In this case, both students and teachers share the responsibility for achieving learning outcomes, generating solutions, and developing short-term and long-term educational strategies. The process of reflection is believed to enhance one’s ability to think independently but in parallel to learning about teaching and learning (Newby, 2007), and to become “a core aspect of student-centered evaluation processes in higher education” (Iglesias et al., 2020). In response to reflection and collaborating with others, teachers explore and experiment with methodologies to make the most of their mission.

### **Reflection in language teaching and learning**

Language, being the most useful medium of communication, allows people to express their thoughts and ideas in written and oral form. Language learning is claimed to be the process of constructing knowledge and skills which demands continuous restructurings, advances, retreats, and vacillations according to the student’s internal possessing of the information obtained (Usó-Juan, Ruiz-Madrid, 2007). It is the process which is highly dependent on prior linguistic knowledge, mental activities, and capabilities of elaborating, inferencing, and socially affective performance. These, among other reasons, spurred the need to identify the starting point in language learning and to understand better the factors that facilitate exploring motivation, readiness, and capacity for language learning experiences.

Bárcena et al. (2014) claim that LSP courses traditionally involve collaboration and interaction, innovation, and flexibility. Thus, reflective practices in language teaching-learning methodologies should be used to “rethink issues such as the relationship between learning and acquisition; the role of and types of previous knowledge; the relevance of communicative approaches; the relationship between language and cultures, and the role of self-assessment” (Usó-Juan, Ruiz-Madrid, 2007, p. 3). As a result, the teacher becomes a designer of not only teaching-learning situations favoring language acquisition but also language learning strategies for continuous progressing. Being engaged in sustained reflective practices, language practitioners are becoming committed to initiating change and integrating innovation into education (Cirocki, 2019).

The scope of our research embraces reflective practices in both native and target language courses in higher education institutions. The courses of Ukrainian for Specific Purposes (USP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in universities of Ukraine are mostly taught to students in

their junior years of university studies. They are aimed at fostering not only course target competences, but also developing or contributing significantly to generic competences. They create a “qualitative portfolio” (Kallioinen, 2010, p. 59) for further training and development of professional competences. This is the reflection competence that can be used by students to evaluate their learning and formulate a personal development plan; identify development challenges and problems; assume a role in a group or team and learn to acquire and analyze information systematically (Kallioinen, 2010). Thus, language courses can provide the basis for developing reflective practices and enhancing quality assurance of reflective teaching and learning.

Kayapinar (2016) considers reflective observation to be aimed at discussing “immediate feedback on specific successful student engagement or confusing and problematic situations in the classroom environment” (p. 1677). Identifying weaknesses and creating effective strategies to improve teaching and shaping the activities are those skills that can be enhanced with the help of reflective practices (Maksimovic, 2018). A prevailing communicative approach to learning languages, context-based performance, meaning-focused interaction, and reflecting upon a language seem to create an effective learning environment for reflective practices. Student evaluations can be collected regularly, giving teachers opportunities to make real-time adjustments to their teaching. Teachers learn about their students from feedback questionnaires “to build an understanding of the needs of the student and plan for future work accordingly, the teacher is also able to identify a student with specific learning difficulties, ascertain the nature of support they need and put in place appropriate strategies and programs to enable them to cope with the particular difficulties they are encountering” (Saefurrohman & Balinas, 2016, p. 90). Quesada (2011) also claims that reflective inquiry brings flexibility in instructional settings by helping teachers examine successes and failures in a constructive environment and promote self-awareness and knowledge through personal experience.

## Methods

The subject of our research is a multistage survey procedure of using reflective practice questionnaires to increase language teaching quality and enhance student engagement in quality assurance. The research tasks are: (1) to examine students’ reflections as a changing factor of the teaching performance and the ESP and USP courses content; (2) to suggest different forms of reflective practices for students to evaluate their progress and teaching quality within the ESP and USP courses; (3) to assess the implications of student feedback literacy for teaching and course design.

Hundred Bachelor students majoring in Law (52 in USP course and 48 in ESP course) in their junior years of university studies agreed on participation in the survey conducted during the academic year 2018–2019. There was decided to combine the English (foreign) and Ukrainian (native) languages for specific purposes although the goals, objectives, methods, and approaches to their study are different because both these courses are targeted at achieving the same learning outcome – to be able to create effective field-specific communication in native and target (foreign) languages. The ESP course is preceded by the course of English as a Foreign Language and USP

during the first year of study at the university.

Technology-enabled approaches to feedback are believed to be more welcomed by students because they facilitate “timely and convenient sharing of comments” (Carless, 2018, p. 1317). We decided to collect primary data via free online surveys (Google forms) or open online polls on Telegram. These E-learning techniques enabled obtaining different data directly from the target group, eliminating interview bias, and providing anonymity for respondents.

Reflective teaching can generate written products that can be used for formative and summative assessment of student learning in an accessible way for both students and instructors (Ash, 2001). To develop effective feedback cycles and provide all-round implications of reflective practices, the survey procedure consisted of three stages embracing entry survey (language awareness and language style questionnaire); ongoing feedback processes conducted using messaging services on smartphones; self-assessment test; and a summative questionnaire (see Table 1).

Table .1 Survey procedure

Stage	Questionnaire type	
Stage 1	Quest. 1	Language awareness and language style questionnaire
	Quest. 2	Ongoing formative assessment
Stage 2	Quest. 3	Ongoing formative assessment
	Quest. 4	Ongoing formative assessment
Stage 3	Quest. 5	Self-assessment questionnaire
	Quest. 6	Summative questionnaire

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to answer the research questions. Descriptive analyses, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize the distribution of the qualitative data.

Entry surveys provided additional information from the students that the teacher then used to improve the course content and teaching methods, ensuring student motivation and active engagement. Taking into consideration the students’ perspective and their learning style became a useful tool to find the factors that contributed to efficacious language learning.

Ongoing formative assessment, which had more to do with interactive, dynamic, and consistent feedback, was mostly used to monitor learners’ progress, identify the ways to help learners develop their abilities and achieve their goals, as well as eliminate the possible barriers on the way to their goals, and examine what changes the teacher needs to make. It involved such tools as short online in-lesson polls and self-evaluations with closed-response questions.

Summative reflective assessment practices were used to capture the whole picture of student’s progress and growth. They demonstrated the insights into the efficiency of the used methods and techniques, materials, and structure, followed by the overall course rating. The information provided by students’ responses becomes feedback only when students act on it to

improve work or learning strategies closely consistent with social constructivist learning theories (Carless, 2018). It helped recognize the implications of using this theory in practice and identify the reflective elements essential for teaching quality improvement (see Table 2).

Table 2 *Summative questionnaire*

Q No.	Question
<b>Q 1</b>	<b>Teacher-specific: teaching methods, practices, clarity, and engagement</b>
1.1	The teacher used class time effectively.
1.2	The teacher encouraged student participation in class.
1.3	The teacher presented the course material in a clear manner that facilitated understanding.
1.4	The teaching methods were effective and aided in my learning.
1.5	The teacher stimulated my interest in the subject matter.
1.6	The online course platform was updated, clear, and easy to work with.
1.7	The teacher created a welcoming and encouraging learning environment.
<b>Q 2</b>	<b>Course materials</b>
2.1	The classes, readings and assignments complemented each other.
2.2	The instructional materials (i.e., handouts, multimedia, software) increased my knowledge and skills in the subject matter.
2.3	The course workload and requirements were appropriate for the course level and facilitated my learning.
2.4	The tests/assignments accurately assessed what I learned during this course.
2.5	The course followed the syllabus.
2.6	The course environment was a welcoming place to express my ideas.
<b>Q 3</b>	<b>Student engagement and involvement.</b>
3.1	I attended the classes regularly.
3.2	I consistently prepared for classes.
3.3	In this course, I was challenged to learn more than I expected
<b>Q 4</b>	<b>Course structure.</b>
4.1	This course increased my interest in this field of study.
4.2	This course gave me the confidence to do more advanced work on the subject.
4.3	My learning was fairly assessed (e.g., through oral and written tasks, tests, projects, and other graded work).
4.4	The grading practices were fair and clearly defined.
4.5	This course was challenging.
<b>Q 5</b>	<b>Student learning and course learning outcome.</b>
5.1	This course helped me develop intellectual capacity and critical thinking skills.
5.2	My ability to identify, voice, and solve problems has increased.
5.3	I am capable of using language-learning strategies to further individual progress.
5.4	This course helped me further develop my writing ability.
5.5	The course improved my verbal communication skills.
5.6	The course increased my ability to cooperate and work in teams.
5.7	The course increased my intercultural knowledge and language awareness.
<b>Q 6</b>	<b>Overall rating.</b>
6.1	I would highly recommend this teacher to other students.
6.2	This course had a high educational impact.
6.3	This course was useful to progress toward my degree.

## Results and Discussion

Our survey started with the entry questionnaire to define “the point of departure for the students’ learning” (Veine et al., 2020, p. 155).

Table 3 shows the results of the entry questionnaire that was taken by students-participants before the ESP and USP courses started. The questionnaire provided information about students’ self-assessment of their language awareness and their learning styles. The answers given did not present any significant discrepancies between students’ attitudes to studying native and target languages, except for Q2, Q5, Q6,

Q9, Q13, and Q15. The answers to Q2 showed that students realized the potential of the English language knowledge that made them stand out. Responses to Q5 and Q6 revealed the students' higher ability to express their opinions and ideas in Ukrainian than in English. Responding to Q9, they similarly found their Ukrainian language knowledge sufficient for a future successful career, which was proved by Q15 when they agreed on the possibility to work autonomously, which couldn't be the case with the target language. The obtained answers to Q13 also presented the students' higher ability to rely on listening rather than reading skills in Ukrainian, whereas the listening skills in English had to be improved.

Table 3. Results of language awareness and learning style questionnaire

Question	Group of students	Number of students	Results, %		
			agree	not sure	disagree
Q 1 I enjoy learning languages.	USP st.	52	48	40	12
	ESP st.	48	47	39	14
Q 2 My language proficiency makes me look more educated for people around me.	USP st.	52	50	36	14
	ESP st.	48	68	20	12
Q 3 I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning languages.	USP st.	52	66	20	14
	ESP st.	48	68	24	8
Q 4 When I am in my language class, I'm eager to volunteer answers as much as possible.	USP st.	52	67	15	8
	ESP st.	48	68	18	14
Q 5 I can easily express myself or explain something.	USP st.	52	68	11	21
	ESP st.	48	48	39	23
Q 6 I can clearly formulate opinions and discuss problems.	USP st.	52	62	12	26
	ESP st.	48	41	35	24
Q 7 I am ready to interact, communicate, and work in a team.	USP st.	52	76	15	9
	ESP st.	48	69	15	16
Q 8 I do not feel anxious when I speak in public.	USP st.	52	34	40	26
	ESP st.	48	28	40	32
Q 9 My language skills are sufficient for a successful career.	USP st.	52	80	16	4
	ESP st.	48	36	26	38
Q10 I remember things better when discussing them with somebody.	USP st.	52	59	29	12
	ESP st.	48	57	32	11
Q11 I remember something better when writing it down.	USP st.	52	76	15	9
	ESP st.	48	78	18	4
Q12 I learn better with visual images.	USP st.	52	82	16	2
	ESP st.	48	86	13	1
Q13 I prefer to learn by listening to the teacher rather than reading a text.	USP st.	52	79	11	10
	ESP st.	48	64	14	22
Q14 I need a lot of repetition and practice to remember things.	USP st.	52	65	16	29
	ESP st.	48	72	10	18
Q15 I can develop my language skills autonomously.	USP st.	52	87	5	8
	ESP st.	48	61	26	13

The analysis of the results from Table 3 helped language teachers realize what group of students

they had to work with, as well as collect data on what teaching techniques to apply to reach each student and make the educational process more exciting and appealing.

Table 4 shows statistically significant differences in the data describing students' perception of the teaching/learning processes collected in three steps: at the beginning (AS1), in the middle (AS2), and at the end (AS3) of the term. This ongoing evaluation revealed the tendency of improving the design of ESP and USP courses through the prism of students' perception. Thus, the responses to Q1–Q4 demonstrated the shift to the increase of positive evaluation of the discussed items with each step, having the best results in the last one. Similarly did the answers to Q5, but the increase by 1% of the too-slow-pace option showed the difficulty in establishing the pace of learning within heterogeneous USP and ESP groups. However, this increase was minimal when compared to other data and didn't deteriorate the overall positive dynamics of students' satisfaction with the offered mode of teaching.

Table 4. Results of ongoing formative assessment

Q No.	Group of students	Number of students	Assessment step	Results, %		
Q 1	<i>I find the volume of homework</i>			<i>too big</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>too little</i>
	USP students	52	AS1	46	23	31
			AS2	38	39	23
			AS3	11	72	17
	ESP students	48	AS1	52	21	27
			AS2	40	38	22
AS3			15	67	18	
Q 2	<i>The classwork was</i>			<i>too difficult</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>too easy</i>
	USP students	52	AS1	41	54	5
			AS2	29	66	4
			AS3	9	89	2
	ESP students	48	AS1	48	45	7
			AS2	32	63	5
AS3			12	85	3	
Q 3	<i>The studied material was</i>			<i>too difficult</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>too easy</i>
	USP students	52	AS1	46	44	10
			AS2	32	60	8
			AS3	12	84	4
	ESP students	48	AS1	52	46	12
			AS2	41	50	9
AS3			25	68	7	
Q 4	<i>The teacher's explanations were</i>			<i>too difficult</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>too easy</i>
	USP students	52	AS1	27	67	6
			AS2	19	76	5
			AS3	9	88	3
	ESP students	48	AS1	32	59	9
			AS2	24	69	7
AS3			11	83	6	
Q 5	<i>The pace of learning was</i>			<i>too quick</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>too slow</i>
	USP students	52	AS1	65	29	6
			AS2	44	49	7
			AS3	21	72	7
	ESP students	48	AS1	72	24	4
			AS2	56	40	4
AS3			21	74	5	

Table 5 offers the results of the self-assessment questionnaire, which we find obligatory in today's language education. It allowed students to evaluate their advances in learning languages and distinguish



their gaps and weaknesses. The questionnaire was offered to students at the end of the USP and ESP courses. Their responses showed that the students progressed in learning both disciplines with no significant discrepancies between learners' answers, except for Q4, where ESP students still lacked the necessary abilities to discuss and debate field-related topics.

Table 5. Results of self-assessment questionnaire

Question	Group of students	Number of students	Results, %		
			agree	not sure	disagree
Q 1 I find it easy to operate the field-specific vocabulary.	USP students	52	86	18	16
	ESP students	48	71	13	16
Q 2 I can read field-related texts for general information.	USP students	52	89	8	3
	ESP students	48	81	4	5
Q 3 I can read field-related texts for specific information.	USP students	52	88	6	6
	ESP students	48	69	22	9
Q 4 I can discuss and debate field-related topics.	USP students	52	69	19	12
	ESP students	48	48	35	17
Q 5 I can find and process field-related information from specialist literature.	USP students	52	84	8	8
	ESP students	48	73	11	16
Q 6 I can paraphrase, generalize, and summarize information.	USP students	52	84	9	7
	ESP students	48	72	15	13
Q 7 I can extract and interpret information from graphs.	USP students	52	92	6	2
	ESP students	48	83	14	3
Q 8 I can make presentations on field-related topics.	USP students	52	79	16	5
	ESP students	48	75	16	9
Q 9 I can write field-related documentation and reports.	USP students	52	71	12	17
	ESP students	48	62	17	21
Q 10 I can deal with business correspondence.	USP students	52	89	7	4
	ESP students	48	78	10	12

The data was generalized within each set of questions presented in Table 2 to analyze the summative questionnaire results. Table 6 shows the mean values of the results that revealed students' responses. They supported the positive dynamics of students' perception of the process of teaching and learning languages at the tertiary educational level. Thus, the group-relevant methods of teaching, the pace of learning, and the possibility for students to actively participate in designing the course turned them (students) from mere recipients of transmitted knowledge into

active constructors of their learning environment with a deep understanding of what was learned, how it was taught, and what results were to be achieved. Thus, the students positively evaluated the course and most of them responded with the “agree”-option.

Table 6. *Summative questionnaire results*

Question	Group of students	Number of students	Results, %		
			<i>agree</i>	<i>not sure</i>	<i>disagree</i>
Q1 Teacher-specific: teaching methods, practices, clarity and engagement	USP students	52	92	5	3
	ESP students	48	93	3	4
Q2 Course materials	USP students	52	87	3	10
	ESP students	48	86	5	9
Q3 Student engagement and involvement	USP students	52	82	11	7
	ESP students	48	84	7	9
Q4 Course structure	USP students	52	80	15	5
	ESP students	48	84	12	4
Q5 Student learning and course learning outcome	USP students	52	91	5	4
	ESP students	48	93	4	3
Q6 Overall rating	USP students	52	88	8	4
	ESP students	48	89	7	4

Though feedback processes in higher education are commonly misunderstood, difficult to carry out effectively, and do not fulfill their aspiration of significantly influencing student learning (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Evans, 2013), we found student ratings a vital source of evidence of teaching effectiveness and learners' performance. Students were highly involved in reshaping the educational process through their engagement in reflective practices, which strengthened their reflective literacy. They showed positive motivational beliefs. They were encouraged to identify what good performance and goals were as well as to provide quality information about their learning. Based on findings, persistent efforts were made to develop and update the learning materials and the course syllabus, to support students' learning and assessment through reflection. Though textbooks have always been seen as a static and relatively inflexible means of learning support, student feedback reflected students' interests. It encouraged teachers to look for contexts and examples beyond the textbook to make learning more relevant and meaningful according to students' cognitive and emotional growth.

### Conclusions

It can be argued that students are mere education service consumers. However, from the standpoint of student-centered and constructivism approaches, students are active builders of their knowledge basing on their own experience. The process under study enabled providing the opportunities to engage students in constructing their learning environment via participating in the survey at different stages of studying ESP and USP according to the offered survey procedure.

Reflective practice questionnaires via E-forms enable educators to monitor students' progress quickly and cheaply, to collect reliable and essential information on improving the course content, teaching methods, and pace of learning. Assessment procedures can provide a continuous picture of the learner's ongoing progress and become a valuable tool for self-assessment. The questionnaires and polls can be used as formative and summative evaluation, implying both regular corrections to continuous teaching practices

and making strategic decisions about introducing changes to the course syllabus essentials.

Based on the obtained results, students reflecting on their own and teacher's activities became highly motivated in studying ESP and USP. They could develop critical thinking on their language learning and evaluate their performance. Teachers could collect effective feedback that was used to help shape the teaching and modernize the content. Thus, such a collaborative and reflective environment provided the opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance, i.e., to identify missing students' language skills and find optimal ways to improve teacher's performance by tailoring content and methods used.

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