The Web Quest: Its Impact on Developing Teaching Skills of Physical Education Student Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the use of WebQuests would impact the teaching performance of the physical education (PE) teacher candidates enrolled in Minia University. Twenty-eight, third-year teacher candidates were involved in the study (N=28) and were randomly divided into two groups: a control and experimental (14 teacher candidates each). A teaching practice observation sheet was used to assess the teaching performance of the participants. Results indicated that the experimental group, or the participants who used the WebQuest to learn the teaching skills, achieved significantly higher levels in their teaching performance than did the control group, or those who were instructed using the traditional methods of modeling and lecturing. A discussion of the possible reasons for this difference and practical implications of this study on using WebQuests in teacher preparation programs are included.

Key words: Teacher Preparation Programs

Introduction

The WebQuest model was created as a tool for integrating Internet use into classroom activities. The WebQest asks young people to use the Internet to learn about an issue and apply that knowledge to attitudes and to enhance their own environments or future orientations (Abbit & Ophus, 2008). The developers of the WebQuest, Bernie Dodge and Tom March, have written widely about the technique, suggesting that it is a synthesis of inquiry methods, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, and technology integration. While each of the foundational practices has its own body of research, there is limited research about the WebQuest model itself (Dodge, 1998; March, 2000).

WebQuests were originally created by Dodge in 1995, during the early stages of widespread Internet access. With the increase in Internet access in university labs, he began to experiment with effective ways to integrate technology into classroom instruction. As Dodge developed activities for pre-service teachers, "he launched the WebQuest, arguably the most popular approach for integrating the Web in classroom learning" (Gorghiu, Gorghiul, González & de la Santa, 2005; Strickland, 2005).

WebQuest came out as one of the buzz terms that emerged in the last 15 years in multiple fields of education and teacher education alike as they are used to achieve the best use of learners' time, knowledge acquisition and integration and extending and refining knowledge. After working with a WebQuest, learners will have grappled with a significant amount of new information and made sense of it. WebQuests help the participants in meeting standards concentrated on both critical-thinking and analysis skills. Based on ideas of inquiry and constructivism, WebQuests involve cooperative learning, with students having to work on projects in groups. In addition, there is a strong connection between WebQuests and multimedia techniques, which leads to an important opportunity for using the Internet in education.

Williams (2004) asserted that WebQests promote good instructional practice in many ways. They provide structure and guidance for the students and instructors. WebQuests also help focus students' attention on the provided resources, rather than having students search for them. And they are linked to a variety of positive affective outcomes, such as motivation, increased level of engagement, positive attitudes, and decreased anxiety.

Many researchers have attempted to define WebQuests but Dodge, the parent of the WebQuest, made the essential description of the technique. He defined a WebQuest as "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet." Learners gather information, analyze a body of knowledge, transform it in some way into new understandings and demonstrate in-depth understanding of the material by creating a final product that others can react or respond to (Milson & Downey, 2001; Strickland, 2005).

There are different types of WebQuests, taking the form of mystery tasks, retelling of a situation, problem solving, or judgment decisions. All types of WebQuests share the same optimal goal; they aim at structuring and directing higher-order learning using computers. In a WebQuest the learner must interact with the new knowledge to formulate a new hypothesis or to create a new artifact for which the use of computers is essential (Williams, 2004).

WebQuests also share the same structure as they all follow a template design of (introduction, task, sources of information, process, evaluation and conclusion). The introduction describes the topic and purpose of the WebQuest, provides necessary background information and catches the readers' attention to draw them into the quest. The Task explains to the students what they are going to do in the activity, the final performance or product and the tools to be used. The Process describes the steps for completing the tasks. The resources provide the students with the necessary resources to complete the tasks and websites. The Evaluation describes to the students how their performance or products will be evaluated and displays a rubric to measure the product as objectively as possible. The Conclusion wraps up the activity, summarizing what the students have accomplished during the WebQuest in a short paragraph. Additional links or questions can be included to encourage students to extend their thinking beyond the WebQuest (Dodge, 2008; Kelly, 2000).

Recently, teacher educators have applied the WebQuest model with preservice teachers in order to develop technology integration skills akin to those used in everyday schools. Scaffolding, used to support the gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills, may help preservice teachers to better understand the underlying assumptions and assess the feas ibility of WebQuests for their teaching (Wang & Hannafin, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

Traditional teacher preparation programs tend to operate from a subject base. The aim is to help practitioners to improve subject knowledge and expertise. Support is offered by a subject adviser - then practitioners implement the advice and the advisor evaluates the outcomes. Jarvis (1992) asserted that student teachers need advanced strategies that move beyond mere practices. Support for professional development through using the 'WebQuest technique' builds on a model of learning, where practitioners are challenged to find new ways of locating information and of integrating technology in education.

The purpose of this study was to compare the WebQuest technique to the traditional techniques used in teacher preparation institutions in enhancing preservice teachers' teaching skills. The WebQuest technique was administered to a sample of third-year PE teacher candidates enrolled in Minia University, Egypt to enhance their teaching skills.

Methods

Approach to the Problem

The present study utilized a randomized experimental design in order to examine the hypotheses and research question. Trochim (2006) asserts that when random assignment is used, the design is called a randomized experiment or true experiment. Thomas & Nelson (2001) assert that the experimental design allows the researcher to gain insight into the methods of instruction, to have control over the variables and to determine what is best for the population. The specific approach utilized for this study was the pre-post two groups design.

The Participants and Research Setting

The population for this study included 28 third-year PE teacher candidates enrolled in Minia University during the first semester. Participants in both groups ranged in age from 19 to 20 years old and they were all males.

Third-year teacher candidates were chosen because they start their school placement and find it difficult to adapt with their first encounter with real teaching situations. In the traditional instructional methods of preparing these teacher candidates, they watch models, study available materials on the teaching skills, teach exactly the same way they were taught with limited improvisations, and wait for feedback. They need to be trained in a way that allows them to find the knowledge themselves, assess their own practices, and identify their weaknesses and strengths.

During the experiment period, the PE teacher candidates in the two groups studied the three major teaching skills (planning, implementation and evaluation) and how to apply these three skills in any PE class with all its stages of presentation (warm-up, physical preparation and basic skills). The experimental group surfed the WebQuest to find information on such skills with the instructor (the senior researcher, a lecturer within the faculty of PE, Minia University) monitoring and offering help when needed. They also went through the five cycles of the WebQuest (See Procedures, p.7-9). Participants in the control group, on the other hand, were lectured on these skills by their instructor (the co-author, a lecturer at the faculty of PE, Minia University), watched her modeling the skills, and finally peer-taught a model lesson of

their own preparation.

The experiment lasted for three months from February to May, 2008, with two lectures a week for each group (a total of 21 sessions). The time assigned for each session was (120 min.) to simulate the pre-scheduled timetable set by the college regulations. One session was devoted to the orientation at the beginning of the program. The other 20 sessions were divided into 5 major cycles representing the five lessons provided in the WebQuest (each consisting of 4 successive sessions).

Instrument

To measure teacher candidates' teaching performance, the investigators adopted a 70-item observation sheet from a previous study (Azmy & Mohamed, 2006). The teaching practice observation sheet consists of three main dimensions representing the three major teaching skills addressed by the researchers (see Appendix 1); including planning skills (16 items), implementation skills (46 items), and evaluation skills (8 items).

A three-point scale was used as a coding system for weighing each statement (1=Never; 2=Sometimes; 3= Always). Giving 'Always' a maximum score of 3 marks, the maximum score of the first dimension (with a total number of 16 items) was 16 x 3 = 48, that of the second dimension (with a total number of 46 items) was 46 x 3=138, and that of the third dimension (with a total number of 8 items) was 8 x 3= 24. A Cronbach's Alpha for reliability was conducted for each dimension in the sheet. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for dimensions 1 through 3 were between .93 and .98, indicating satisfactory levels of reliability.

The Pearson Correlation Formula was also used to determine the inter-rater reliability of the observation sheet by administering the observation sheet to a randomly chosen sample of 20 fourth year PE teacher candidates in the Faculty of Physical Education, Minia University. The teaching performance of these participants was videotaped and two lecturers at the same university observed these videotapes and rated their performance using the observation sheet. The mean scores obtained by the two observers were calculated and the correlation coefficient was (0.97) which was considered acceptable.

Data Analysis

The Teaching Practice Observation Sheet (Azmy & Mohamed, 2006) was administered again to determine the extent to which participants exhibited a change in the peer-teaching performance following the intervention period. Posttest scores were obtained for each participant of the two groups; each participant was videotaped again while teaching one model PE class in the University sports hall and the three judges observed these videotapes and rated their performance. Independent t-tests were used to analyze the extent to which there were statistically significant differences between pretest and posttest scores for the addressed two variables. The effects of the dependent variables were considered statistically significant at $p<0.05$.

Procedures

To investigate the impact of using the WebQuest techniques on enhancing teacher candidates' teaching skills, the participants were randomly divided into two groups; the experimental and the

control (14 participants each). They were instructed by the two researchers; one for the experimental group using the WebQuest technique, and the other for the control group using the conventional methods of instruction (e.g. lecturing and modeling). Participants in the regular classes listened to the instructor's lecture, took notes, watched the instructor modeling, participated in discussions on the given teaching skills, and taught a mini-class as an application.

Pretest scores for the observation sheet (Azmy & Mohamed, 2006) were obtained for each participant of the two groups to identify their level of performance considering the three target teaching skills before being exposed to the treatment intervention; each participant was videotaped while teaching one model PE class in the university sports hall. Three external judges (experts in PE curriculum and instruction) observed the videotapes, rated their performance using the observation sheet two times for each participant (once for the pre-measurement and the other for the post one), and the average was calculated from the three obtained raw scores of the judges giving a total of two scores for each participant (one for the pre and one for the post) to ensure objectivity of the evaluation process.

The instructor who taught the experimental group utilized a five-cycle intervention. Before going through the five successive cycles, he started with an orientation session at the very beginning of the program in which he provided a brief theoretical background on the WebQuest. He also explained why they are using the Internet, how to surf for the WebQuest and when and how to ask for help from the instructor. A random selection divided the experimental participants into three sub-groups.

The students then went through the five WebQuest Cycles; in each cycle, participants were required to choose one lesson from the WebQuest and prepare a lesson plan to peer-teach at the end of the cycle. The suggested five lessons incorporated different types of warm-up, physical preparation and basic skills and participants who were surfing the WebQuest were required to choose one of them with all its components for their peer-teaching. Each cycle consisted of four successive sessions. The task for each group was changed among cycles switching the three target teaching skills among the groups giving the PE candidate teachers the opportunity to choose from among the different exercises that can be employed in applying these skills. Figure 1 depicts the four sessions of implementing each WebQuest cycle (Insert Figure 1 here) They can be briefed as follows:

Figure.1 The WebQuest Cycle

(P: Planning, I: Implementation, E: Evaluation)
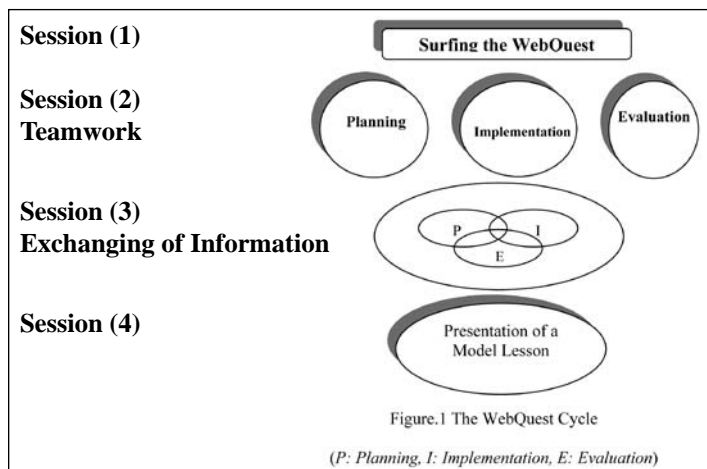
Session 1: Surfing the WebQuest (120 min)

In the first session of each cycle, participants of the experimental group used the university lab to surf the Internet through the WebQuest. They read through the general instructions on the required mission for each group; each group had to gather information about one teaching skill from the Internet (planning, implementation or evaluation). They also read through the evaluation rubric to identify their level of performance. Then, they used the available resources to find the required information on the target skill.

Session 2: Teamwork (120 min)

Teacher candidates teamed up in their sub-groups and shared the information they retrieved among themselves. They exchanged and reconstructed the information about the one target skill assigned for each group and finally came up with an idea on how to present their assigned skill to the members of the other two groups.

Session 3: Exchanging of Information (120 min)

Members of the three groups sat together in one big circle to exchange the information they retrieved about the three major teaching skills. At the end, they chose one lesson from the suggested ones in the WebQuest to peer-teach in the next session in the sports hall. They also chose one student from each group to teach (a total of three students, one for each stage of presentation).

Session 4: Teaching and Feedback (120 min)

In this final session of each cycle, the three chosen teacher candidates presented their planned lessons (in 90 min.); one student prepared and arranged the equipment for the class, one taught the lesson and one did the evaluation stage of presentation. At the end of this session, a post conference was held with all members (30 min.) in which they all sat in one big circle with the instructor in the middle. They assessed the teaching performance of their mates on the basis of the WebQuest's evaluation rubric.

Results

Analysis of the collected data on the participants revealed improved scores in all domains of the observation sheet. A paired samples t test revealed a statistically reliable difference between the mean scores for the experimental group in the pre-performance in the planning, implementation and evaluation skills ($M=21.93$; $M=65.43$; $M=12.21$) and in the post-performance on the observation sheet ($M=40.79$, $M=126.64$; $M=18.79$), $t=30.92$, $p=0.000$; $t=42.91$, $p=0.000$; $t=14.12$, $p=0.000$, respectively (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Differences between the Pre-post Measurements of the Teaching Practice Observation Sheet for the Experimental Group*						
Teaching skills	Pre		Post			
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.	t	Sig.
Lesson Planning	21.93	1.21	40.79	1.67	30.92	0.000
Implementation	65.43	3.99	126.64	5.03	42.91	0.000
Evaluation	12.07	1.31	20.71	1.05	18.16	0.000
*P<0.05						

Findings on the control group also revealed a statistically reliable difference between the mean scores in the pre-performance in the planning, implementation and evaluation skills (M=21.71; M=65.14; M=12.07) and in the post-performance on the observation sheet (M=37.64, M=114.21; M=20.71), t=27.99, p=0.000; t=33.40, p=0.000; t=18.16, p=0.000, respectively, (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Differences between the Pre-post Measurements of the Teaching Practice Observation Sheet for the Control Group*

Teaching skills	Pre		Post			
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.	t	Sig.
Lesson Planning	21.71	1.64	37.64	1.08	27.99	0.000
Implement-ation	65.14	4.67	114.21	2.33	33.40	0.000
Evaluation	12.21	1.21	18.79	1.44	14.12	0.000
*P<0.05						

Data analysis of post testing all participants revealed that participants of the experimental group surpassed their counterparts in the control group in all domains of the observation sheet. An independent samples t-Test revealed a statistically reliable difference between the mean scores of post testing the teaching performance in the planning, implementation and evaluation skills, the t=5.90, p=0.000; t=8.39, p=0.000; t=4.05, p=0.000, respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Differences between the Mean Scores of the Two Post- Measurements for the Two Groups*

Teaching skills	control group		Exper. group			
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.	t	Sig.
Lesson Planning	37.64	1.67	40.79	1.08	5.90	0.000
Implement-ation	114.21	5.03	126.64	2.33	8.39	0.000
Evaluation	18.79	1.44	20.71	1.05	4.05	0.000
*P<0.05						

Discussion

Since the concept of inquiry-oriented WebQuest activity was first introduce in 1995, this educational technique has been the focus of professional development workshops and pre-service teacher preparation courses as an example of the effective integration of technology in education.

This study marks the first attempt to apply the WebQuest technique to the PE teacher candidates in the Egyptian environment. Future research can be built upon the results from this study and thereby improve other aspects of the teaching process within teacher preparation programs. The research question being addressed was to what extent would using the WebQuest technique in the teacher preparation programs affect the teaching performance of the PE teacher candidates. The researchers hypothesized that there would

be a significant statistical difference (favoring the experimental group) between means of scores obtained by subjects of the experimental and the control groups in the post performance as measured by the teaching practice observation sheet. Data analysis using t-Test indicated that the hypothesis was accepted; subjects of the experimental group (who were instructed by using the WebQuest technique) surpassed their counterparts in the control group (who were instructed by using the conventional methods of modeling and lecturing) in their post teaching performance (see Table 3). This indicates that using the WebQuest in training PE teacher candidates has positively affected their teaching performance.

The hypothesis implicitly predicted a significant statistical difference (favoring the experimental group) between the pre and the post comparison of scores obtained by the participants of the study on the observation sheet. Data analysis using the t-Test indicated that the obtained t-values of the pre and the post comparison of the experimental and the control groups are both significant (favoring the post measurement). The population as a whole in both groups showed statistically significant improvement in all domains of the observation sheet (see Tables 1 and 2).

Yet, it is obviously clear from the two t-values that subjects of the experimental group performed much better on their post teaching performance than those of the control one in all the teaching skills combined in the observation sheet (Lesson Planning, Implementation and Evaluation).

These results indicate that the conventional methods used in instructing the control group had a positive impact on developing the teaching skills of third year PE teacher candidates, while using the WebQuest had more of an impact on developing these skills as it worked to create an effective, interactive and self-paced learning environment. These findings coincide with previous research conclusions of other studies (Gorghiu et al., 2005; Hassanien, 2006; Williams, 2004) who asserted that using the Internet in the teacher preparation programs (in which learners research, organize and synthesis findings) helped learners gather information, then arrange and structure their findings, and finally present this new synthesized knowledge to others.

This public presentation by student teachers of their new learning is in itself a significant element in students' learning experiences. This way, learners move beyond the knowing theory to being able to use knowledge appropriately as they understand the broader implications and applications of their learning. The researchers attribute these results to the fact that e-learning, in contrast with the traditional face-to-face learning, provides unbound, time flexible, selective, self-paced, and convenient learning opportunities for student teachers. The designed WebQuest served as an effective example of integrating the Internet in education, and also provided learners with educational resources that they would never approach in a traditional class. Learners were also introduced to various topics, instructional resources, evaluation techniques, models, along with a wide variety of delivery methods used to reach the different types of learners helped in enhancing retention which was also significantly better than in a traditional teaching learning situation.

Besides ensuring guided navigation, the designed WebQuest also aimed at developing learner's critical, analytical, problem-

solving and creative skills in a manner that assured their direct involvement both in locating and practicing the intended knowledge. Thus, learners had the upper hand in controlling their learning environment, which increased the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. The post conference that was held after the actual teaching of the student teachers also had a positive impact on the teaching performance of the subjects of the experimental group. It paved the way for better self, peer, and teacher assessment as all the participants together with the instructor himself were given mutual opportunities to give feedback and exchange views and suggestions for a better presentation of the target lesson. It also helped in revealing their points of weaknesses and points of strengths that provided learners with an extra eye to view their teaching skills, which is rarely found in the traditional methods of instruction. These findings suggest the effectiveness of the WebQuest technique in enhancing the teaching performance of PE teacher candidates.

With the current call for new and effective trends in the field of teacher preparation programs that is being evidenced across the Egyptian environment, findings such as the ones in this research study are very promising to PE instructors who are in constant search for integrating Internet technology in their instruction to maximize the learning outcomes of their learners.

Finally, this study supports the notion that the WebQuest can be effectively employed in teacher preparation programs and can result in better learning outcomes when it is properly designed, implemented and monitored.

Practical Implications

This study serves to demonstrate the practicality of incorporating WebQuests into the teacher preparation programs in the faculties of physical education. The procedures followed in this study can be successfully incorporated into the methodology sessions addressing different teaching skills and sub-skills. The WebQuest can also be modified according to the nature of each sport presenting various models of how to: plan for a PE class, manage the class, and evaluate the outcomes of the students. Additional research into the WebQuest model is needed. The WebQuest should also be evaluated in various subject areas with learners of differing age groups and academic abilities.

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Appendix (1) The Teaching Practice Observation Sheet

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
I.	Lesson Planning Skills.			
1	Lesson objectives are clearly stated.			
2	Objectives are behavioral, observable and measurable.			
3	Objectives suit the level of maturity of students.			
4	Levels of learning for each area of the lesson objectives are clear and specific.			
5	Place of the lesson is well-equipped in a way that allows the implementation of the activities of the lesson.			
6	The content (description of the desired performance and the learning stages) is formulated in a clear manner that suits students' age level.			
7	Evaluation techniques that assess the achievement of the objectives are specific.			
8	The educational resources used by faculty to increase the effectiveness of teaching are mentioned clearly.			
9	The alternative tools mentioned suit the designed activities, students' number and their level.			
10	Lesson formations suit the designed activities.			
11	The chosen method of teaching is specified in a manner that suits the educational situation.			
12	The educational content of activities (steps) takes into consideration logic implementation (according to the logical and psychological organization).			
13	The content of the activities suit the instructional time.			
14	Activities for students with specific needs are stated in the lesson.			
15	The activities suit the weather.			
16	The lesson contains a variety of activities that create learning situations to develop students' values and sports culture.			

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
	II. The Implementation Skills			
1	Escort students from class to the field.			
2	Finishes the administrative work on time so as not to affect the actual time of other parts of the lesson.			
3	Begins the actual performance of the lesson at the beginning of the period.			
4	Follows the regulative methods\Keeps order while assigning activities.			
5	The warm-up activities suit the objectives put for them.			
6	Models and performs the skill effectively and precisely in a way that suits students' age level.			
7	The alternative tools used are appropriate for learning motor skills.			
8	The available formation suites the learning style of the motor skill.			
9	Provides students with opportunities to guess.			
10	Stands where all students can easily see.			
11	Creates opportunities for application to make the most of his instructional time.			
12	Uses equipments appropriately in a way that helps students learn motor skills effectively.			
13	Avoids long pauses during the implementation of the lesson.			
14	Takes into consideration the principles of teaching motor skills while presenting the target skill.			
15	Carries out formations in an aesthetic manner.			
16	Smoothly moves among activities without having to stop as if the lesson is a total unit.			
17	Demonstrates mastery in manipulating the aiding media sets.			
18	Specifies an organizational method in distributing tools among students.			
19	Determines the location of students' entry onto the court to guarantee the principle of security and safety.			
20	Moves through and among students during the implementation of the activities in a way that allows him to note the performance of each student.			
21	Speaks in a clear and expressive manner so that all students hear him\her.			
22	Uses the appropriate reinforcement techniques that encourage students' performance.			
23	Sticks to the prepared lesson plan.			
24	Properly uses the whistle when needed.			
25	Makes good use of the spaces and gaps in the court taking into account safety and security factors.			
26	Distributes his attention among all students during the implementation of the lesson.			
27	Always there for the students while performing a difficult skill that might be dangerous for them.			
28	Vary his voice pitch according to the learning situation.			
29	Demonstrates effective body gestures or facial expressions to draw the attention of his\her students.			
30	Establishes a good rapport and an effective interaction and communication with the students.			
31	Uses proper and well-mannered expressions to speak with the students.			
32	Encourages behaved behaviors of students.			
33	Motivates students to participate in the activities of the lesson.			
34	Shows sharpness and firmness in both observing and managing different learning situations.			
35	Provides students with some educational situations that develop their personal qualities and values.			

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
36	Focuses on the previous educational experiences and makes use of them in teaching the new intended educational experiences.			
37	Takes into consideration the individual differences among students during the implementation of the activities.			
38	Employs the surrounding environment for the implementation of the activities.			
39	Uses modern teaching techniques that provide opportunities for students to self-assess their performance.			
40	Varies his\her teaching techniques to avoid boredom.			
41	Capable of demonstrating high self-control towards the popping up of situations.			
42	Utilizes exercises correctly and in accordance with the rules.			
43	Presents the material according to the level of each learner.			
44	Maximizes time-on-task for practicing different skills, taking into account the performance and rest periods.			
45	Creates opportunities for students' innovation and creativity through the competitive nature of the activities.			
46	Is organized in collecting tools and equipment immediately after the lesson and before students leave the court.			
	III. The Evaluation Skill			
47	Uses the appropriate evaluation techniques to measure the objectives.			
48	Uses a variety of evaluation techniques (e.g. Observation Sheets and Level of performance records).			
49	Discovers individual and group mistakes and corrects them immediately.			
50	Provides opportunities for peer-assessment so that students evaluate each others' performance.			
51	Comprehensive evaluation of the lesson objectives to include cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains.			
52	Capable of diagnosing students with learning difficulties.			
53	Keeps reports on his\her students' level of performance for future diagnosis and assessment.			
54	Evaluates each phase of the lesson after finishing its presentation.			

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