

Reflections on Lesson Planning in ESL Classroom through Multiple Lens

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Abstract

Lesson planning has a pivotal role in a teacher training program, where pre-service teachers are taught to transact lessons according to a predetermined plan. However, it is observed that these pre-service teachers, akin to robots, mechanically perform activities based on the submitted lesson plans, which are then evaluated and remarked upon by the language educator. Consequently, teaching skills acquired during micro-teaching lessons remain isolated from the English language lessons delivered in the classroom.

Language teachers face challenges when implementing learning theories using the teaching skills acquired during practice teaching. The English language syllabus, focusing on developing listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar, fails to explore how languages are learnt in different contexts. This outdated exercise, reliant on a predetermined syllabus and textbook culture, fails to bridge the gap between pre-service teachers' orientation and the actual practice of transacting language lessons.

This paper attempts to bring in the teacher educators' reflections on lesson planning and the challenges pre-service teachers face while transacting lesson plans in the classroom. Subsequently, an alternative approach enabling teachers to understand the purpose of lesson planning and, thereby, adapt their pedagogical stance to learners' needs will be drawn upon, which is useful in contemporary times.

Keywords: *lesson planning, ESL classroom, teacher training programme, pre-service teacher, alternative approach*

Introduction

Lesson planning has a pivotal role in a teacher training program where pre-service teachers are taught to transact lessons according to a predetermined plan. Those with a degree or a teacher training certificate would recall spending hours preparing a lesson plan before delivering it in the classroom. The approaches may differ from the Herbartian, Bloom's

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taxonomy, Constructivist or any other approach; still, the purpose is to provide the teacher with a plan of action to teach effectively in the classroom.

A lesson plan can thus be said to be a ‘learning trajectory’, a teacher’s manual to teach a lesson in a particular manner. It includes the learning objectives (what the students are supposed to learn), how to achieve the objectives (the method/procedure), and how to measure if the objectives have been achieved (assessment/learning outcomes). It gives a vivid picture of the classroom ecosystem.

Lesson planning reveals ‘teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and understanding (Baecher et al., 2014) about the learner, content, pedagogy and the like. It involves teacher expertise (Farrell, 2013; Tsui, 2009) and practice. A good lesson plan should integrate the lesson objectives and teaching-learning activities (Backfisch et al., 2020; Nordgren et al., 2021); it further requires an understanding of the aims of education, curricular goals, competencies and learning outcomes (NCFSE, 2023). Studies have reported a positive correlation between the quality of teaching and its implementation. Considering the successful implementation of a plan, teacher education programmes should prepare prospective teachers to prepare lesson plans that develop not only cognitive skills but also holistic development of individuals equipped with 21st century skills (NEP, 2020).

Context of the study

Transitioning from a written plan to its implementation requires time (Maebuta et al., 2010) and practice. However, there are no restrictions to ‘a method’ nor ‘a tailor-made solution’ to the problem. A teacher may use any approach suitable to the context he or she addresses. The teacher, bound by the textbook culture and examination-oriented education system, grapples while linking learning objectives to the core competencies of learners. They face challenges in designing the lesson plan, organizing activities based on learning material and selecting the kind of assessment based on objectives (Fitriani & Budiarta, 2021). As such, they adopt a circuitous route of lesson plans covering teaching points drawn from the text. A similar approach is observed in usual teaching, where the procedural aspect of knowledge construction is non-existent, presenting a depressing and monotonous routine of lesson planning (Sinha, 2002). To address this issue, it is crucial to revoke and reflect upon such futile exercises that hinder teachers’ creativity. Revitalizing the implementation of lessons

using suitable strategies is the need of time. Hence, the study attempts to explore the following research questions:

- What challenges do teachers (pre-service and in-service) face when they transact the lesson plans in the ESL classroom?
- What are the perspectives of teacher educators on assumptions underlying lesson planning?
- What alternative approaches can be recommended to comply with contemporary times?

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research methodology to understand the perspectives of teacher educators on lesson planning and the challenges teachers face while applying theory to classroom practice. The tools used in this study include a semi-structured interview and classroom observation. The target population for this study were teacher educators and teachers (in-service and pre-service) from Delhi. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that selected subgroups in the population were adequately represented.

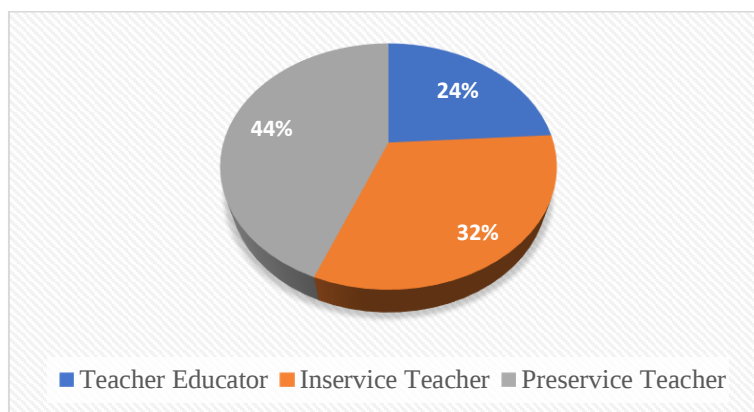


Figure 1: Sample Size

As indicated in the pie chart (Figure 1), twenty-five teachers differing in expertise level – six teacher educators (24%), eight in-service teachers (32%) and eleven pre-service teachers (44%) constituted the study *sample*. The participants were the teacher educators from the Department of Education (CIE), Delhi University and its affiliated colleges; the pre-service

teachers selected were from the batch 2022-23. Lastly, the in-service teachers were alumni from the same department, as their orientation to training would be similar.

The study was deliberated in two phases. In the first phase, pre-service and in-service teachers were interviewed, and lessons were observed to identify and comprehend the challenges in lesson planning and classroom practices prevalent in school. In the second phase, teacher educators were interviewed to understand their perspective on lesson planning. Since they are experienced and have observed the transition of lesson planning through various approaches, interacting with them and conceptualizing the theory with practicum was felt necessary. The data collected were analyzed and interpreted with the help of the thematic analysis technique.

Findings and Discussion

From the analysis of the transcribed interview data and classroom observations, various themes emerged that helped in understanding the challenges faced by teachers while transacting English lessons in the classrooms.

Challenges faced by Pre-service teachers

The themes that emerged were:

- Monolingual classroom environment
- Low proficiency level of students
- Textbook and examination-focused teaching-learning
- Time management
- Inappropriate classroom infrastructure for language teaching
- Gap between theory and practice

Theme 1- Monolingual classroom environment

Teachers face a dilemma while transacting their lessons in a diverse classroom due to the nature of language classes, which are monolingual and based on the *autonomous model* of teaching-learning (Rai, 2021). For instance, a participant stated:

“I was transacting the poem ‘Childhood’ by Markus Natten in class XI and was explaining the first stanza in English and then in Hindi for better comprehension as most of the students were first-generation learners, but my supervisor remarked why I was explaining in Hindi in English class.”

Other pre-service teachers faced similar issues in their respective classes, as evident from the following excerpt shared during the interview.

“Whenever I use Hindi to explain the chapter briefly, I am rebuked by the supervisor who wants me to speak only in English. For instance, one day I was explaining the poem ‘Meadow Surprises’ to the class, but the class teacher told me to teach in the English language as the subject is English and not science.”

Differences in opinion regarding the written plan and its execution were observed. While the supervisors were fairly rigid with the contents and the medium of instruction, the pre-serviceteachers felt that the students were disinterested in responding to the lesson when it was explained solely in English. In such cases, there would be either ‘silence’ or ‘blank faces’ during the class.

The nature of language classes was not different from the in-service teachers who admitted that negotiations were made by providing a Hindi equivalent to explain difficult words. Hence, explaining the lesson briefly in Hindi seemed essential to transfer knowledge.

Theme 2- Low proficiency level of students

Since the study was conducted in a low-fee government school, most students had difficulty comprehending English. They were not habituated to reading in their first language; hence, they could not comprehend the text prescribed in the school. This corresponded to the students’ lack of interest in studying a second language, which was alien to them. The English teachers teaching classes VI to VIII faced difficulty, which they shared in the interview. They said:

“...most students in middle school lack a basic understanding of grammar, such as nouns, verbs, and prepositions, which they learned in their primary classes. A few of them cannot construct sentences. While answering the questions, they cannot read or identify the differences in terms like what, why,

and how. In such a situation, matching the syllabus with the student's basic understanding of English is difficult."

The above excerpt showed a relationship between the type of school and the learner's proficiency level in the second/foreign language. Teachers of a second or third language(s) are compelled to teach in a structural or behaviouristic approach, resorting to methods promoting memorization and imitation, which does not stimulate cognitive thinking.

Theme 3- Textbook and examination-focused teaching-learning

It was also observed that textbook culture predominates the education system as the school focuses primarily on examination-based assessment rather than developing communication competence. While the in-service teacher focuses on completing the syllabus and preparing the students to learn from worksheets given to them from time to time, the pre-service teachers are expected to help them complete the course, as evident from the narrative given.

"Since we have to teach for almost five months as an intern, we are pressured by the school teacher to complete the syllabus as the students have to appear for exams."

Theme 4- Time management

The pre-service teachers often complained of being unable to satisfy their learners' queries in a limited time. A participant stated,

"During my practice teaching, I felt balancing time was difficult since I had to explain certain phrases or stanzas of a poem in depth, but my supervisor advised me not to deviate from the topic and be mindful of time."

Time management was a common issue with most pre-service teachers, but writing reflective journals and discussing with the pedagogue helped them understand the need for planning and delivering within a time limit. The in-service teachers felt complying with the syllabus and the needs of the students was a challenge due to the teacher-student ratio, which ranged from 1:40 to 1:60. Such a large class is unmanageable for language teachers who have the responsibility to engage their learners with tasks in a limited time.

Theme 5- Inappropriate classroom infrastructure for language teaching

It was observed that most classroom size was small and had meagre resources. Further, the seating arrangement represented hierarchy, with the teacher facing the students while the students sat behind one another, giving less scope for group activity. In one of the classes I observed, the pupil-teacher looked perturbed while trying to arrange activities during the class. She complained about the inability to create a movement for learners to perform any activity due to a lack of space. She grumbled,

“I want to teach using language games, but it is unmanageable as there are more than fifty students in a class which is dingy and lacks space to perform any role play....”

Theme 6- Gap between theory and practice

Most school teachers were reluctant to allow transacting steps of lesson plans at the senior level. They preferred traditional teaching on the pretext that the board examination demanded a prescribed set of assessments. Therefore, anomalies in theory and practice were felt while interacting with the participants, which defeats the entire purpose of B.Ed. programme. Such a situation was also observed in studies where the trainee teachers demanded to understand the purpose the lesson plan serves when spending time preparing it should instead be substituted with thinking about what to do in the class the next day (Lederman & Niess, 2000).

In the school teacher group, most in-service teachers faced challenges coping with syllabi and teaching language to a group of first-generation learners. They reported that the methodology is not different whether it applies to teaching a language or any subject. Therefore, what they learn during the internship is at stake due to a lack of autonomy. Most of them shared their opinions, as stated below:

“A language class is similar to a social science or science class, focusing on teaching points (content). Activities such as decoding to develop reading skills, learning new words for vocabulary and memorization of grammar rules qualify it as an English period. While reading and controlled writing is practised in junior classes, listening and speaking skills are assumed to be acquired inevitably. We are guided by the textbook and examination system since our promotion also relies on how many have passed the examination.”

An overview of the teachers' perspectives verified that classroom practices are akin in all situations. Discrepancies were observed in the lesson plans and their transaction, suggesting that written plans may not always capture the pre-service teachers' thinking (Schmidt, 2005). Most pre-service teachers felt they could not teach beyond a set of syllabi. Though the teacher education curriculum introduces educational theories that pre-service teachers are familiar with, it becomes challenging when it comes to applying them in classroom practices. Hence, difficulty complying with students' diverse learning and behavioural needs (Nagro et al., 2019), which consumes much time and disrupts classroom management, was a challenge these teachers had to deal with while transacting the lesson.

Further to accentuate the matter, school teachers are more concerned with complying with the authorities' demands rather than teaching language using optimal resources as taught during the internship. Language teachers lack the autonomy to use their creativity in the classroom with the available infrastructure and resources. A predetermined curriculum and examination system binds them. Therefore, the use of authentic materials like newspapers, brochures, and railway tickets is rarely brought into the classroom.

Perspectives of teacher educators on assumptions underlying lesson planning

While sharing their perspectives about lesson planning, the teacher educators indicated a gap between theory and practice. For instance, a pedagogue commented:

“The pre-service teacher focuses more on delivering the content while neglecting the learners' background. Though we cannot ignore the textbook in schools, a connection between the learner and the content should be maintained. In following the structured way as in the Herbartian approach, larger objectives in terms of inquiry, innovative practices, and creativity should not be ignored. We are not dismissing the older approaches that have been useful in teaching ESL, but now constructivist and CLT approaches are more in vogue.”

Another expert shared his views on the rationale of lesson planning but also mentioned what precautions one should consider while implementing the plan. He commented:

“It is a route map that a teacher should follow but not ‘a heavy bundle of cargo’ to be delivered. Planning a lesson on a poem or a short story and then

transacting it in the classroom brings out an adventure and thrill in a teacher who, through creative activity, acquaints the learners with different cultures and facilitates the construction of knowledge in the learners.”

Commenting on the underlying assumptions of a lesson plan, an experienced teacher educator referred to it as one of the rituals that a pre-service teacher goes through before becoming a regular teacher. She added,

“The teacher’s job is not just to transmit knowledge to the child but to facilitate children to construct their knowledge. A teacher should, therefore, understand the cognitive and social processes the child engages in while learning a language.”

A senior Professor shared his views on the need for lesson planning. He said:

“In my opinion, a lesson plan is the teacher’s road map of the teaching-learning process in which the teacher plans what learners need to learn and how it will be done effectively during class time. It reminds us what we want to do and how we want to do it?”

On a similar note, another teacher educator stated,

“Lesson planning is important to the extent it draws a learner’s potential. The structure and format should not be rigid, but the teaching techniques are important. The pre-service teacher should improvise the lessons according to the learner’s needs. After delivering the lessons, they should reflect on whether the teaching went smoothly or something went wrong.”

The above discussions and analysis of the transcripts signified the need for a lesson plan. The experts reiterated it as an essential component of a teacher training programme. They suggested focusing on learners’ needs and not treating them as passive recipients of knowledge but enabling them to construct their knowledge as active participants. Criticizing dependence on textbooks was another view shared by the experts. Further, while teaching lexical items, relating to the semantic and pragmatic use of language was suggested rather than memorization of synonyms and antonyms. Innovative methods such as technology, language games, role-play, and authentic materials such as newspapers and realia were suggested to make teaching-learning interactive and learner-centred.

Suggestions and Alternate Approaches

Based on the discussions with the experts, a few recommendations were drawn upon that comply with the needs of contemporary times.

- A *constructive approach* based on Vygotsky's and Piaget's theory of learning will help develop learners' autonomy. This approach enables learners to construct their knowledge and sharpen their skills. Through the process of accommodation, assimilation, and equilibrium (Jung, 2009), the learner engages with the language, experience and environment (Mattar, 2018). Thus, a learner is able to use his previous knowledge to test hypotheses, identify challenges, interact, and solve while being involved with real-world situations (Al Mamun, Lawrie, & Wright, 2020). If need be, the teacher can scaffold. Subsequently, a functional approach to second language learning is recommended that discourages memorization and accuracy of language usage. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is recommended, which adheres to the learners' needs.
- An effective ESL lesson plan should incorporate a learner-centred pedagogical stance (Weiying & Weicheng 2017) where language development is incidental and meaning-focused (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In this regard, the Bangalore Project needs special mention. A challenging task is given to the learner, and a desire to solve the problem is created in the learner's mind. This way, the learner learns the target language while actively engaging in a task, focusing on the meaning, content and knowledge, not the language (Prabhu, 2019). Such an approach to language teaching is plausible and can cater to the linguistic diversity prevailing in Indian classrooms. It reduces anxieties that hamper language learning.
- The present role of the teachers needs to change. They need to take their journey as an adventurer and co-learner who would scaffold their learners in the language learning process. Teachers should be encouraged to use authentic materials in classrooms. The practice of pouring knowledge from textbooks should be replaced with teaching the functional aspects of language practised in society. The reason is that even the best textbook cannot provide all the materials to make children's lives worthwhile in school. The main objective of a language class should be to allow the children to

develop reading and writing skills to sharpen their abilities to respond to situations they encounter in real life (Kumar, 1999).

- Celebrating India's diversity, multilingualism should be used as a resource (Agnihotri, 2014), and teachers should be made aware of the 'multilingual practices' in language classrooms. A *multilingual pedagogy* that will promote learners' participation should be adopted. This pedagogy uses 'the learners' rich linguistic resources, ways of learning and the unlimited knowledge they bring from their culture to construct new knowledge' (Rai, 2021).
- After the lesson is transacted, the teacher should *analyze and reflect* upon their actions for further improvement. This process of *self-evaluation*, which is a critical process, enables a teacher to reflect upon questions such as what aspects of the lesson were implemented differently than planned, how they would teach the same lesson to a different group of learners, and what challenges they encounter which perplexed them while connecting the text to the learners' queries? Similarly, while analyzing the lesson transacted, they may consider how effective were the teaching methods/approaches, activities, and material aids they used and how this information will help them in future lesson planning.

These approaches to language teaching are suitable to Indian conditions as they lead to additive learning of language(s) as opposed to the present system of parallel monolingualism where language(s) are learnt linearly (L1+L2+3.....). Advocating such an approach to language provides equality, harmony, and social justice (Agnihotri, 2014). One cannot deny the intrusion of technology in every aspect of human life, and education is not untouched by it. The knowledge previously believed to reside in textbooks with teachers as the sole transmitters has gradually shifted towards tech culture. Vast resources of knowledge can now be googled through Artificial Intelligence (AI). Hence, it is time that conventional teaching method needs to be replaced by innovative ways. A language classroom should be activity-based, providing experiential, hands-on learning rather than memorizing.

Conclusion

Despite different viewpoints, lesson plan was considered an essential component of the teaching-learning process. Terms such as 'route map', 'road map' and 'guidelines' were used

to define a 'lesson plan'. The participants agreed that planning a lesson makes teaching-learning effective as an unplanned lesson may go unproductive due to digression from the topic. This substantiates the need for a lesson plan.

A constructive approach incorporating a learner-centred pedagogical stance and adapting to a multilingual approach in language teaching will promote learner participation in the classroom. Thus, a successful implementation of lesson plans, which means putting theory into practice (Maebuta, 2010), is exercised as suggested by Jim Scrivener: "*Prepare thoroughly. But in class, teach the learners, not the plan.*"

Abbreviations

B.Ed. – Bachelor in Education

CIE- Central Institute of Education

CLT- Communicative Language Teaching

ESL- English as a Second Language

NEP- New Education Policy

NCFSE- National Curriculum Framework for School Education

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