Exploring pre-service English teachers' difficulties in lesson planning

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Annotation

This study explores the lesson planning competencies and challenges faced by pre-service English teachers. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through self-assessment surveys and focus group interviews among fourth-year university students. Findings revealed that while most participants demonstrated adequate understanding of general planning components such as setting objectives and time allocation, they experienced significant difficulties in more complex tasks. These include developing assessment criteria, designing differentiated tasks, and applying modern planning models such as UDL and SIOP. The study emphasizes the need for additional methodological training to enhance their planning effectiveness.

Keywords

Pre-service teachers, lesson planning, teacher competency, differentiated instruction, UDL, SIOP, Bloom's taxonomy, assessment challenges

Исследование трудностей планирования уроков у будущих учителей английского языка

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Аннотация

В данном исследовании рассматриваются компетенции и трудности, с которыми сталкиваются узбекские будущие учителя английского языка при планировании уроков. С использованием смешанного метода были собраны данные с помощью анкет самооценки и фокус-групповых интервью среди студентов четвёртого курса. Результаты показали, что большинство участников обладают достаточным пониманием общих компонентов планирования, таких как постановка целей и распределение времени, однако испытывают значительные затруднения при выполнении более сложных заданий. К ним относятся разработка критериев оценки, проектирование дифференцированных заданий и применение современных моделей планирования, таких как UDL и SIOP. Исследование подчёркивает необходимость дополнительной методической подготовки для повышения эффективности планирования.

Ключевые слова

Будущие учителя, планирование уроков, педагогическая компетентность, дифференцированное обучение, UDL, SIOP, таксономия Блума, трудности оценки

Bo'lajak ingliz tili o'qituvchilarning dars rejalashtirishdagi qiyinchiliklarini tadqiq etish

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Annotatsiya
Ushbu tadqiqotda bo'lajak ingliz tili o'qituvchilarining dars rejalashtirishdagi kompetensiyalari va duch kelayotgan qiyinchiliklari o'rganilgan. Aralash (mixed-method) yondashuv asosida 4-bosqich talabalari orasida o'zini baholash so'rovlari va guruh intervyulari orqali ma'lumotlar yig'ildi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, ishtirokchilarning ko'pchiligi dars rejalashtirishning umumiy tarkibiy qismlarini, jumladan maqsadlarni belgilash va vaqtni taqsimlashni yetarlicha tushunsalar-da, murakkab vazifalarda qiyinchiliklarga duch kelmoqda. Bular baholash mezonlarini ishlab chiqish, differensial topshiriqlar yaratish hamda UDL va SIOP kabi zamonaviy rejalashtirish modellari qo'llashni o'z ichiga oladi. Tadqiqot samarali rejalashtirish uchun qo'shimcha metodik tayyorgarlik zarurligini ta'kidlaydi.
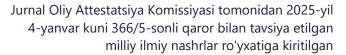
Kalit so'zlar
Bo'lajak o'qituvchilar, dars rejalashtirish, o'qituvchi kompetensiyasi, differensial ta'lim, UDL, SIOP, Bluming taksonomiyasi, baholashdagi qiyinchiliklar

Introduction

In recent years, large-scale educational reforms have been implemented in our country based on several national programs, decrees, and resolutions related to the teaching of foreign languages, particularly English. Between 2020 and 2023, a number of important documents were adopted aimed at improving the quality of education in general secondary, secondary specialized, and higher educational institutions, enhancing teachers' qualifications, and familiarizing them with modern lesson planning technologies. In particular, the methodological preparation of prospective English language teachers, the development of their pedagogical skills, and the enhancement of lesson effectiveness have become among the priority tasks of the day. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze the ways to improve lesson effectiveness by equipping future English language teachers with professional skills, especially through the use of modern technologies in lesson planning.

On the verge of their career pre-service educators need to comprehend the vital connection between teaching and designing classes. The literature often indicates a lack of competence in lesson plans, and its implementation is the main challenge for novices in the field. Furthermore, recent research has revealed that most pre-service teachers prefer to use ready-made lesson plans and online teaching tools rather than design them themselves because they find the planning process annoying and struggling (Alanazi, 2019). Yet there is little research on how candidate teachers are competent enough to plan lessons and what kind of challenges they face that they need support by teacher trainers. Thus, this study investigated the competence of student teachers i.e graduate students of English faculty in planning English lessons in Uzbek context. Research questions are:

RQ 1. What is the competency level of Uzbek pre-service teachers in lesson planning?

RQ 2. What stages and aspects of lesson planning cause more difficulty to pre-service teachers.
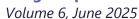
A large volume of published studies describes the role of future teachers' competence in lesson designing in their successful careers. Likewise, all teacher training programs put importance on this skill to be mastered by prospective teachers before starting their professional practice. Thus, most scholars in the field have tried to decipher the notion of lesson planning by promoting various views and concepts. Perhaps, the most detailed definition of lesson planning to be found in the work of Serdyukov & Ryan (2008, cited in Patrick, 2021) in the following statements:

"A lesson plan is a model of organized learning events within a standard period of a formal instructional process. Constructed by a teacher, it determines the structure and sequence of the teaching and learning activities to be performed during that period. The teacher and students will perform these planned activities to achieve the lesson's learning goals and specific objectives." Likewise, Freeman (1996, cited in Patrick,2021) writes that "Preparing a good lesson, therefore, involves taking into consideration learners (age range, background, level of language development and learning styles), lesson goals, objectives and outcomes, content knowledge, materials, various activities, the sequencing and timing of these activities, and assessment (Patrick, 2021).

However, according to T. Mutton, H. (2011) Hagger the appropriate term to decipher the lesson planning process would be a bit more challenging, as each of the detailed 'script' cannot provide a solution to unanticipated problems of the upcoming lesson. Terms such as 'template, framework, projection, sketch, mapping', etc. do not sufficiently describe the product of the pre-active phase because there is always the feature of unpredictability in teaching (Mutton & Hagger, 2011; 405). As the author mentions lesson plan is not a fixed instruction of the procedures of the lesson, rather it is a flexible script for a teacher to mention main points of the lesson. Though there are contradictory definitions of the lesson plan, the fact that the lesson planning competence is a vital skill for future teachers is approved by many scholars in the field.

The importance of planning in teaching has long been a question of great interest in many teaching areas. Thus, this issue has been studied by many researchers using different methods and experiments. According to Md. Iqbal, Sh. Siddiq, Md. Mazid, when a teacher conducts the lesson without the knowledge of designing a lesson plan and its components, as well as the basic concepts of an assessment and the implementation of the curriculum, they are compared to a sailor on a boat without a rudder. In such a situation the teacher fails to keep track of the class, being unable to proclaim the learning outcomes of their class (Hafiz Iqbal, 2021). Moreover, in such lessons, students obtain a passive role which results in boredom of the learners. Thus, developing lesson planning skills of pre-service teachers is also a key issue in teacher education. In the same vein, P. Rodrigue and B. Enama point out that:" Knowledge of lesson planning, then, is without any doubt, the backbone of teacher training. Indeed, a lesson plan is a pre-requisite for effective teaching, a guide or action plan for the teacher in the classroom (Patrick, 2021)." He considers designing the lesson process a vital basic framework for educating future teachers in any field. What's more, as any practice needs an action plan in order to be successful, any kind of lesson needs to be planned as its guidebook. Trevor, et.al, has supported this view. that it is through planning that teachers are able to learn about teaching and through teaching that they are able to learn about planning (Mutton, 2011).

In the above statement authors confirm that teaching and planning are believed to be concepts that are directly connected to each other. Likewise, one wouldn't be able to become proficient in teaching without the

knowledge of planning and in the same vein, a teacher can acquire the skill of lesson designing only through teaching. Furthermore, according to the research, perspective teachers face many challenges concerning planning process.

According to Dr. A.Z. Gulten (2013), pre-service teachers mainly face difficulties in formulating lesson objectives and selecting appropriate types of classroom activities that align with different stages of the lesson. Similarly, B.I. Faqe Abdulla (2024), who conducted research in Iraq, highlights several shortcomings and challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers during the lesson planning process. These include difficulties in clearly identifying the intended learning outcomes for students by the end of the lesson, aligning assessment methods with the selected objectives, effectively integrating information and communication technologies into lessons, and providing students with clear and comprehensible instructions.

In M. Naeem's (2025) study, time constraints, resistance to innovative methods, and low student motivation were identified as the main challenges. The identified challenges in lesson planning and the shortcomings of pre-service teachers may primarily be linked to their lack of sufficient experience and unfamiliarity with the planning process (Tataroğlu-Taşdan, 2022). Moreover, according to F. Ozyildirim, there is a possibility that these outcomes are also related to the teachers' professional mindset (Ozyildirim-Gumus, 2022).

Methodology

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the competency levels and difficulties faced by pre-service English language teachers in lesson planning. The study involved a total of 52 fourth-year pre-service English teachers studying at Namangan State University. Participants were selected based on their varying levels of experience and knowledge in

lesson planning during their training. A questionnaire based on a Likert scale was used to assess the participants' self-evaluation of their lesson planning skills.

The questionnaire included items related to various stages of lesson planning, lesson components, and modern planning technologies, including contemporary models such as SIOP, Gagne's theory, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. To gain deeper insights into the difficulties and challenges encountered in lesson planning, focus group interviews were conducted with selected participants. Questionnaire results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and percentages. Transcripts from the focus group interviews were analyzed thematically to identify key difficulties and challenges in lesson planning.
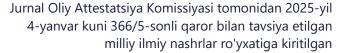
Results

According to the survey results, the average self-assessed score of the pre-service teachers regarding their lesson planning competence was 3.2 out of 5. This suggests that while most participants believe they have a sufficient understanding and skill set in lesson planning, they do not yet feel fully confident or prepared. It indicates a need for further self-development and additional methodological training. Participants identified their strongest areas as defining the overall lesson objectives and estimating the lesson duration. Many of them reported being able to clearly articulate lesson aims and realistically allocate time, which are essential for organizing an effective and efficient lesson.

RQ2: What stages and aspects of lesson planning are the most challenging for pre-service teachers?

Findings from both the survey and focus group interviews indicated that the following aspects posed the greatest challenges for the participants:

- *Developing assessment criteria:* Participants struggled to create clear and fair criteria for evaluating students' knowledge and skills. This can lead to a

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decrease in the effectiveness of the assessment process.

- *Planning differentiated tasks:* Many found it difficult to design activities tailored to individual student needs and varying levels of proficiency. Differentiation remained a complex aspect for them.
- *Using modern lesson planning models such as UDL and SIOP:* Due to the novelty and complexity of these models, participants expressed uncertainty and a lack of sufficient experience in applying them effectively in practice.

Focus group discussions further revealed that participants particularly struggled to integrate *higher-order thinking skills* (HOTs) – such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating – into their lesson plans, which correspond to the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy. They expressed uncertainty about how to design tasks that promote such skills and how to foster students' advanced cognitive abilities. This represents a significant barrier to achieving high-quality teaching and learning outcomes.

Moreover, participants highlighted the urgent need for additional methodological support and training in modern educational technologies and lesson planning approaches. They emphasized that regular methodological workshops and practical sessions could help them develop the necessary skills to plan and implement higher-order thinking tasks more effectively.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that pre-service English language teachers have a sufficient understanding of general aspects of lesson planning. However, they experience difficulties in developing assessment criteria, designing tasks of varying difficulty levels aligned with lesson objectives, ensuring logical sequencing within lessons, and applying modern planning models. These results are consistent with the findings of Davronova and which also emphasize the need for thorough methodological preparation to ensure effective lesson planning(Davronova, 2022).

Certain limitations of the study must be acknowledged: the limited number of participants and the subjective nature of self-assessment surveys. Future research should focus on broader sample sizes and the development and testing of practical training modules related to lesson planning.

Conclusion

Pre-service English language teachers demonstrate an average level of competency in lesson planning. Additional training is particularly needed in complex stages such as designing assessment tools and differentiated instruction. Therefore, it is recommended that pedagogical higher education institutions regularly organize methodological seminars and hands-on workshops based on modern lesson planning models.

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