

Student Teachers' Experiences with English Lesson Planning at the University of Namibia; a Case of Khomasdal Campus

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of final-year student teachers of English Language at the University of Namibia (UNAM) when designing English lesson plans, specifically focusing on those preparing to teach Grades 4-7. Using an interpretivist approach and qualitative case study design, data were gathered through interviews with 21 participants. The study found that the participants faced both challenges and benefits when designing English lesson plans. The main challenges included the complexity and rigidity of the UNAM lesson plan template, difficulties in selecting appropriate content and teaching methods, and struggles with creating balanced class activities and test questions. The participants reported increased clarity in identifying learning objectives, greater confidence in selecting teaching methods, and a better understanding of how to activate prior knowledge and reinforce key content, despite the challenges they faced. This study recommends that teacher educators provide more specific guidance on designing engaging introductions and conclusions in lesson planning, as both phases are crucial for stimulating student interest, reinforcing learning, and encouraging reflection. Clear instructions on how to activate prior knowledge through the introduction and consolidate learning through the conclusion will ensure greater student retention and engagement.

Keywords: quality, English language, lesson plans, student teachers, University of Namibia.

INTRODUCTION

Lesson planning plays a crucial role in shaping teaching practices and student engagement, particularly for student teachers. For those training to teach English, the ability to create well-structured lesson plans is essential for professional growth and teaching success (Chikukwa & Kgatle, 2021). A quality lesson plan not only reflects a teacher's understanding of the subject matter but also demonstrates the pedagogical strategies required to deliver it effectively (Pereira & Ramos, 2020). This study explored the experiences of final-year student English teachers at the University of Namibia (UNAM), focusing on both the positive and negative aspects of lesson planning.

Effective lesson planning for student teachers involves more than just content delivery. It integrates various teaching methods, assessment strategies, and classroom management techniques (Mohammed & David, 2023). The ability to create high-quality lesson plans is influenced by factors such as prior teaching experiences, mentoring support, and the availability of resources (Macpherson & Finneran, 2021). At UNAM's Khomasdal campus, student teachers are required to merge theoretical knowledge with practical application. However, they often face challenges in designing lesson plans that effectively address diverse student needs (Greef, 2022). This study aimed to identify both the positive and negative experiences that student teachers faced during the lesson planning process, providing insight into how these experiences shaped their development as future educators.

Positive experiences related to lesson planning often emerged when student teachers successfully applied their theoretical knowledge in practice. These experiences contributed to a stronger sense of professional identity and confidence (Mendelsohn, 2021; Leclercq & Hunter, 2022). However, negative experiences arose due to challenges such as limited mentoring support, insufficient resources, or difficulties in managing diverse

classroom dynamics. Such challenges impeded their ability to create effective lesson plans that were adaptable to the complexities of real-world teaching (O'Shea & Conroy, 2020; Ngoma & Kiriungi, 2023).

Lesson planning is rooted in several key educational theories. According to Gestalt theory, learners understand information better when it is presented in an organized manner (Brown & Green, 2022), which forms the basis of lesson planning strategies. Various educational theories, such as Herbart's focus on content and Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning, have influenced the evolving nature of lesson planning (Williams, 2020; Taylor, 2021). Lesson planning, as described by Edwards and Martin (2023), involves defining learning objectives, organizing content, and selecting appropriate methods to ensure effective teaching. This approach is essential for preventing time wastage, ensuring structured teaching, and addressing diverse learner needs (Davis & Miller, 2021; White, 2022; Lee, 2020).

A quality lesson plan is integral to achieving positive learning outcomes. Skilled teachers use lesson plans to optimize teaching effectiveness and manage classroom dynamics (Bailey, 2016; Richards, 2018; Stronge & Roberts, 2020). Additionally, lesson planning helps student teachers align their teaching with curriculum goals and select materials that enhance learning (Klein, 2019). The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2010) underscores lesson planning as an essential skill, though mastering it can be time-consuming.

The lesson planning process is divided into two levels: macro-level and micro-level planning. Macro-level planning involves creating the syllabus and scheme of work, which ensures consistency across the term (Muthusamy, undated). In contrast, micro-level planning focuses on daily lesson plans, derived from the broader curriculum, to guide day-to-day teaching activities (Jensen, 2001). This study specifically focused on the micro-level planning of English language lesson plans and explored the positive and negative experiences of final-year student teachers at UNAM's Khomasdal campus.

Objective

The objective of this study was:

- To establish positive and negative experiences faced by student teachers in lesson planning

LITERATURE REVIEW

The quality of lesson plans is integral to the effectiveness of teaching, especially for student teachers preparing to teach English. Lesson planning provides structure and guidance for achieving learning objectives, ensuring that both the teacher and students remain on track during instruction. In the context of student teacher education, particularly for those studying to teach English, creating high-quality lesson plans is a key component of their development and professional growth (Chikukwa & Kgatle, 2021).

Importance of Quality Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is widely regarded as an essential aspect of effective teaching, as it provides a roadmap that guides the teacher through the lesson and ensures that learning outcomes are met (Pereira & Ramos, 2020). For student teachers, especially those training to teach English, quality lesson plans not only reflect the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter but also their understanding of pedagogical strategies (Edwards & Martin, 2023). In English language teaching, effective lesson plans align with the language proficiency levels of learners, helping them achieve specific language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Bailey, 2016).

Studies have shown that student teachers often face challenges in designing English language lesson plans that are both effective and adaptable to the classroom environment. According to Mendelsohn (2021), while student teachers are exposed to theoretical frameworks during their training, practical implementation of these concepts in lesson planning can be difficult due to various factors such as time constraints, inadequate resources, and insufficient mentorship support. These challenges underscore the complexity of lesson planning and the need for comprehensive support for student teachers (Greef, 2022).

Positive Experiences in Lesson Planning

Positive experiences in lesson planning are often associated with the successful integration of theoretical knowledge into practical teaching (Leclercq & Hunter, 2022). When student teachers feel supported in their learning environments, they are more likely to develop a sense of accomplishment and professional identity, which boosts their confidence (Mendelsohn, 2021). Such experiences contribute to their belief in their ability to apply what they have learned to real-world classroom situations, resulting in more effective lesson plans and better engagement with students (Macpherson & Finneran, 2021).

Positive experiences are also more likely when student teachers receive mentoring from experienced educators. According to Leclercq and Hunter (2022), effective mentoring provides student teachers with the opportunity to observe experienced teachers, discuss lesson planning strategies, and receive feedback on their lesson plans. These interactions can significantly enhance the quality of lesson plans, helping student teachers to refine their planning skills.

Additionally, student teachers who have access to adequate teaching resources and support are more likely to create well-structured and relevant lesson plans. Resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, and digital tools support student teachers in designing lessons that are both comprehensive and engaging (Davis & Lee, 2022).

Negative Experiences in Lesson Planning

On the other hand, negative experiences in lesson planning often arise due to a lack of adequate support, limited resources, and difficulties in adapting to the realities of diverse classroom environments (Ngoma & Kiriungi, 2023). According to O'Shea and Conroy (2020), one of the key challenges that student teachers face is the limited availability of mentorship. Without proper guidance from experienced teachers, student teachers often struggle to integrate theory into practice effectively, resulting in poorly constructed lesson plans. Moreover, student teachers may experience frustration when they are unable to adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of diverse learners, especially in classrooms with students from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ngoma & Kiriungi, 2023).

Another challenge that student teachers face is the lack of sufficient teaching resources. According to Johnson and Taylor (2021), limited access to teaching materials such as multimedia, educational software, and even basic teaching aids can hinder the quality of lesson planning. In some cases, student teachers are forced to create lesson plans based on a narrow range of resources, which can limit the effectiveness of their instruction.

Time constraints also contribute to the negative experiences of student teachers. Many student teachers are expected to balance lesson planning with other academic responsibilities, leading to stress and burnout. As a result, they may rush through the lesson planning process, which can negatively impact the quality of their plans (Mohammed & David, 2023). Additionally, these time pressures may limit opportunities for reflection and refinement of lesson plans, which are critical for professional growth (Macpherson & Finneran, 2021).

The Role of Pedagogical Knowledge

A crucial factor influencing the quality of lesson plans is the level of pedagogical knowledge that student teachers possess. According to Taylor (2021), student teachers who are well-versed in pedagogical theories and approaches are better able to design lesson plans that are engaging and effective. However, the integration of such theories into practical lesson planning can be challenging, especially when student teachers lack sufficient classroom experience (Edwards & Martin, 2023).

The quality of English language lesson plans is also affected by the balance between content knowledge and teaching strategies. According to Richards (2018), a successful lesson plan must include not only content but also methods of delivery that are tailored to the students' learning needs. This requires student teachers to possess strong knowledge of both the subject matter (English) and teaching methods, such as communicative language teaching and task-based learning, which are commonly used in English language instruction (Richards, 2018).

Therefore, the quality of lesson plans among studentEnglish teachers is influenced by various factors, including mentorship, resources, time management, and pedagogical knowledge. While positive experiences in lesson planning are linked to effective support systems, mentorship, and access to resources, negative experiences arise when these factors are absent.

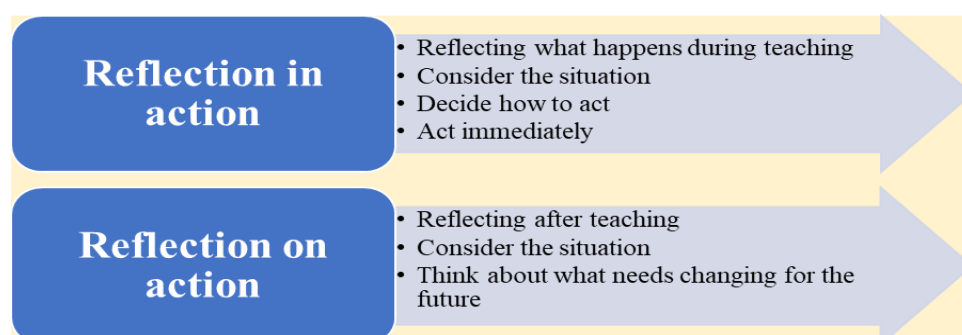
Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical foundations of this study are grounded in several key educational and pedagogical theories that underscore the significance of lesson planning and the incorporation of practical teaching experiences of student teachers in lesson planning. The theoretical frameworks of constructivism, social constructivism, reflective practice, behaviorism, and Gerlach and Ely's instructional design framework provide a comprehensive understanding of the lesson planning process among studentEnglish teachers. These theories offer a framework for understanding the process of lesson planning, the challenges encountered by student teachers, and the factors that impact the quality of their lesson plans.

The constructivist theory of learning, as proposed by Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978), plays a central role in explaining how student teachers develop their lesson plans and how students benefit from these plans. According to constructivism, learners actively construct their own knowledge and understanding through experiences and interactions with their environment. In lesson planning, this implies that student teachers should design lessons that go beyond content delivery to create environments where students can engage actively in the learning process. This theory highlights the importance of involving students in activities that help them build their own understanding of language skills, which is especially relevant in English language teaching (Brown & Green, 2022). Constructivist learning theory also emphasizes the teacher's role as a facilitator who aids students in their learning journey. For student teachers, lesson planning becomes an opportunity to experiment with various teaching strategies aimed at fostering student-centered learning (Mendelsohn, 2021). Consequently, student teachers' lesson plans should be adaptable, flexible, and responsive to students' needs, aligning with the constructivist perspective on education.

Expanding on Vygotsky's work, social constructivism stresses the importance of collaboration and social interactions in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Social learning is not only crucial for the development of student teachers but also for promoting student interactions in the classroom. Social constructivist principles suggest that lesson plans should include activities such as group work, peer interactions, and collaborative problem-solving, which help students improve their language skills through social engagement, an essential element in English language learning. Mentoring and peer support are also critical for the development of student teachers. According to Leclercq and Hunter (2022), collaborative learning through mentoring relationships and peer feedback positively influences the quality of lesson plans. The existence of such collaborative environments allows student teachers to reflect on their lesson planning and improve their practices by learning from each other's experiences and insights from their mentors.

The Reflective Practice Model, introduced by Schön (1983), stresses the importance of reflection in professional development. This model underscores the importance of reflective practice in teacher development, outlining a two-step process: reflection-in-action during teaching and reflection-on-action after the lesson.



Source: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/reflectivepracticeinearlyyears/chapter/3-3-donald-schon/>

This model highlights the two-step process of reflection: reflection-in-action, which occurs during the teaching process, and reflection-on-action, which takes place after the lesson (Schön, 1983). Teachers can enhance their effectiveness in the classroom Through this continuous cycle of self-assessment and reflection. For student teachers, engaging in reflective practice is particularly vital during the lesson planning stage. It allows them to critically assess their lesson plans, pinpoint areas for improvement, and make necessary revisions. Reflection, as described by Greef (2022), enables student teachers to evaluate the success of their lesson plans and adjust their methods in response to the realities of classroom dynamics. Moreover, reflective practice contributes to the development of professional identity. Leclercq and Hunter (2022) argue that student teachers who regularly engage in reflection are better equipped to align their lesson plans with their teaching philosophies and pedagogical strategies. This, in turn, fosters greater confidence in their ability to design lessons that engage students and promote effective learning.

Behaviorist learning theories, particularly those of B.F. Skinner (1953), emphasize observable behaviors and how they can be shaped through reinforcement. In the context of lesson planning, behaviorist principles guide student teachers to create lessons with clear objectives, reinforcement strategies, and structured activities that result in measurable outcomes. Despite criticisms of behaviorism for focusing on observable behaviors, it remains relevant in lesson planning, especially when developing assessment methods and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies (Williams, 2020). Skinner's behaviorist theory suggests that student teachers should integrate frequent assessments in their lesson plans to track student progress and reinforce learning. Tools such as quizzes, tests, and performance-based evaluations allow teachers to assess students' language acquisition (Bailey, 2016), also providing valuable feedback for refining lesson plans based on student performance.

Gerlach and Ely's instructional design framework is highly relevant when examining the positive and negative experiences that student teachers face during lesson planning. It provides a structured, methodical approach that helps student teachers organize their plans effectively. However, its effectiveness can vary depending on a teacher's experience, understanding, and ability to adapt to the model. This instructional design framework offers a clear and systematic method for lesson planning, which is especially useful for student teachers. It serves as a guide to build confidence in lesson development. Rooted in constructivist theory, the framework promotes a student-centered approach, where learners are actively engaged with the content, fostering deeper understanding (Gerlach & Ely, 1980). The model encourages student teachers to customize lessons to the needs of their students, promoting flexibility and adaptability. As Smith (1990) notes, the framework's cyclical nature ensures that components like content, objectives, and assessments are continuously interconnected, allowing for the ongoing refinement of lesson plans.

Despite its advantages, the framework also presents challenges for student teachers. Managing multiple elements such as aligning learning objectives with assessments, selecting appropriate teaching strategies, and choosing relevant resources can be overwhelming, particularly for those who are still developing their lesson planning skills (Gustafson & Branch, 1997). Balancing the need for detailed planning with a flexible, student-centered approach can also result in stress and uncertainty. Leclercq and Hunter (2022) point out that student teachers often struggle to meet curriculum standards while also experimenting with innovative teaching methods.

Furthermore, while the Gerlach and Ely model encourages adapting lessons to meet students' needs, the constraints of rigid curriculum requirements and time limitations can hinder the full implementation of these strategies (Davidson-Shivers & Rasmussen, 2007). Morrison, Ross, and Kemp (2010) suggest that student teachers may find it difficult to select the most effective teaching methods, given the pressure to meet educational standards while providing engaging and meaningful learning experiences for students. Despite these challenges, the Gerlach and Ely framework remains an invaluable tool for student teachers in creating comprehensive and effective lesson plans. The model provides a strong foundation for teachers' professional development by promoting reflection, flexibility, and alignment with educational objectives. When implemented effectively, it enhances both student engagement and teacher confidence, creating a positive and productive teaching and learning environment (Gerlach & Ely, 1980; El-Ghalayini & ElKhalili, 2012).

The theoretical frameworks of constructivism, social constructivism, reflective practice, behaviorism, and Gerlach and Ely's instructional design framework provide a comprehensive understanding of the lesson planning process among student English teachers. These theories stress the importance of designing student-centered lessons, reflecting on teaching practices, and adapting instruction according to learners' needs. They also offer guidance to student teachers in creating high-quality lesson plans that align with educational goals, pedagogical strategies, and students' diverse needs. This study drew from these theoretical perspectives to examine the experiences, both positive and negative, of final-year student English teachers in lesson planning.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, seeking to understand the subjective experiences and perspectives of student teachers involved in the lesson planning process. Interpretivism posits that reality is socially constructed, with meaning emerging from individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2016). This philosophical stance helped explore how student teachers at the University of Namibia designed their lesson plans, including the challenges they encountered and the factors influencing their practices (Bryman, 2021).

A qualitative case study approach was used, which was ideal for gaining a comprehensive understanding of teacher educator's and student teacher's views on what constitutes a quality lesson plan (Creswell, 2016). This design allowed for an in-depth examination of the experiences and planning practices of final-year student teachers as they created English lesson plans. It provided a detailed picture of their competencies, challenges, and strategies in lesson planning, offering a valuable insight into how they applied educational theories in their lesson planning practices.

The study was conducted at the University of Namibia's Khomasdal campus, which offers training for teachers in both pre-primary and primary education. The university, as one of the oldest teacher-training institutions in Namibia, provided a rich context for exploring how student teachers at this institution developed lesson planning skills.

The population for this study consisted of full-time, registered final-year student teachers majoring in English at the University of Namibia, specifically those training to teach grades 4–7 in senior primary education. Additionally, one English lecturer who trains these student teachers participated in the study, providing a professional perspective on the training process. The student teachers' active involvement in lesson preparation made them the ideal group for assessing the quality of their lesson plans.

The study involved a sample of 21 participants, including 20 final-year student teachers and one English lecturer. The sample size was chosen to ensure a manageable yet representative group that would allow for in-depth qualitative analysis. The participants were selected based on their academic status as final-year students majoring in English and their direct involvement in lesson planning for senior primary education.

A non-probability sampling method, specifically purposeful sampling, was used in the study. This technique allowed the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research, such as their final-year status, major in English education, and active involvement in lesson planning. Purposeful sampling ensured that the sample was composed of individuals most relevant to the research focus, enabling a deep exploration of their lesson planning practices.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with the student teachers and the English lecturer. These interviews allowed the researcher to explore the participants' views on the lesson planning process, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they employed. The unstructured interview format provided flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific issues that arose during the interviews.

The researcher obtained permission from the University of Namibia to collect data from the final-year student teachers and the English lecturer. After receiving ethical clearance, consent letters were sent to the participants, informing them about the study and ensuring their voluntary participation. The data collection process included interviews, with the researcher ensuring that the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout.

The data collected through interviews, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that involves identifying patterns and themes in the data. The analysis was guided by the research questions and triangulated with data from multiple sources to ensure validity. The findings were presented under specific research questions, and the data was categorized into themes for further analysis.

The researcher adhered to ethical procedures outlined by the University of Namibia, ensuring that all participants gave informed consent and were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and the researcher ensured that all data, including lesson plans and interview responses, were kept secure and not linked to any individual participant. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study to ensure the integrity of the research process.

Data Presentation

This section presents findings about the lived experiences, both positive and negative, of final year English student teachers regarding designing English lesson plans. .

Negative experiences

Participants were asked about the negative experiences they face during lesson planning. Participant 10 stated the following: *“The UNAM lesson plan template is too long. I feel like it asks us about the smallest of details and it’s exhausting and time consuming. I also believe that it leads to over explaining because one runs out of things to write”*

Participant 1 stated that: *“The English department should probably contextualize their own lesson plan template not use the generic UNAM lesson plan as there are certain features of the lesson plan necessary for English such as “theme and focus” that are not listed on the generic and we often forget to edit them on the template which makes our planning incorrect when its UNAM’s fault and not us.”*

To add to the challenge listed above, participant resonated that *“I struggle a lot with the theme, it really confuses me.”* While participant four indicated that: *I know the syllabus indicates the content to teach but I struggle with finding content to go with the objectives and when I find an article or something to use sometimes I do not know how to use it.*

It was further brought forward by participant 20 that: *“My biggest challenge is identifying the correct teaching methods to use.”*

Meanwhile, participant 19 stated during the interview that: *“Setting up questions for a class activity or test is hard for me because I hear from my mentors that the questions are too easy or hard.”*

Positive experiences

The participants were asked about their positive experiences during English lesson planning. Participant 2 stated during the interview they find it easy to *“identifying learning objective and basic competency as they are clearly indicated in the syllabus and I just take them as they appear without changing anything.”*

Participant 8 further stated that: *I find it easy to identify teaching approaches to use when lesson planning as well as finding information on the content for development for the lesson which helps me structure my lesson from planning to when I go teach it.”*

Participant 18 state that: *“Lesson planning has taught me to easily establish the learners background knowledge and that tells me how much more knowledge I need to teach them and also have exciting introductions for the learners as it arouses their mind.”*

Participant 16 stated that: *“It took me a while to understand the lesson plan but now I understand that the conclusion is also important so that you can repeat what was taught so that the learners can always remember it and not just giving homework and I like that.”*

Whereas Participant 12 pointed out that: *“Reinforcement is simple because the exercise must just be in line with the learning objectives and basic competency of the lesson which are already there in the syllabus. so, coming up with activities during reinforcement to assess learners and see if they really understood is fun for me.”*

Participant 9 said: *“I have come to realize that the UNAM lesson plan template is an excellent document that helps one learn how to design a detailed lesson plan and it also guides us as student teachers on what and how we should teach our lessons even if its long its leaves no stones unturned.”*

Additionally, participant 19 indicated that: *“I find lesson planning as an effective way for student teachers in training on how to clearly explain how the lesson is going to be taught, the skills integration, time frame within each component.”*

Whereas participant five indicated that: *“Once you look at the lesson plan, everything gets to be clear and this is an advantage that minimises time wasting as well as mistakes that unprepared teachers make in front of the learners.”*

Lastly participant fourteen indicated that: *“It is good because it allows student teachers who are under training to become good planners and put more effort in their work as it requires a lot of time and careful decision making to be completed.”*

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collected highlights two key themes: Negative Experiences and Positive Experiences in lesson planning for student teachers.

Negative Experiences

Effective lesson planning requires balance, as overly detailed templates can sometimes hinder teachers' preparation. Research indicates that complex lesson plans often overwhelm teachers, leading to cognitive overload and distraction from key teaching components (Harris & McGinty, 2022). Participants frequently expressed frustration with overly detailed templates, such as the UNAM lesson plan, citing the time-consuming nature of the process. Participant 11, for instance, critiqued the UNAM template for its excessive length and unnecessary details, making lesson preparation tedious. Tatto et al. (2022) argue that rigid lesson planning structures reduce flexibility and stifle creativity, essential elements for effective teaching. Harris and McGinty (2022) further support this, explaining that cognitive overload from complex templates detracts from more essential aspects, such as content delivery. Similarly, Tomlinson and Strickland (2021) stress that such templates are particularly restrictive for student teachers, who may already struggle with organizing lesson content.

Another concern with the UNAM template is its lack of context for English language teaching. Research underlines that lesson plans must align with the specific demands of the subject being taught (Becker, 2021). For English language instruction, integrating themes, language functions, and communicative skills is critical; yet, these components are often overlooked in generic templates (Müller & O'Keefe, 2021). This observation resonates with Participant 1's suggestion that a more subject-specific template would better address these needs, thereby improving the planning process for student teachers. Studies suggest that generic templates can hinder subject-specific planning, ultimately affecting lesson quality and student outcomes (Harris & McGinty, 2022).

Selecting appropriate materials and methods remains a common struggle for student teachers. Participant 4, for instance, noted difficulties aligning resources with lesson objectives. This aligns with research by Krause & Swanson (2021) and Benedict & Elliott (2020), which emphasize that new teachers often struggle to choose materials that align with learning goals, causing frustration and diminishing confidence. Zhao & Li (2022) also highlight the importance of targeted support in helping new teachers curate relevant educational resources.

Furthermore, the selection of teaching methods often presents a challenge. Participant 20's uncertainty in choosing appropriate strategies reflects the broader struggle among student educators. Studies show that student teachers frequently lack the confidence to choose methods that address diverse learning needs, leading to ineffective lesson plans (Bennett et al., 2022; Jin & Kaser, 2021). Research by Harmer (2020) highlights the need for continuous professional development to support pedagogical decision-making, helping new teachers overcome these barriers.

Finally, designing appropriate assessments is a recurrent difficulty. Participant 19's experience with test questions being either too easy or too difficult is a common issue noted in the literature. Brophy (2023) confirms that student teachers often struggle to design assessments that match students' readiness levels, leading to confusion and poor alignment with lesson objectives. This challenge further emphasizes the need for clearer guidance on assessment design, particularly for new teachers working in diverse classrooms (Harris & McGinty, 2022).

Positive Experiences

Despite the challenges, effective lesson planning remains an essential tool for student teachers' development. Well-organized lesson plans are foundational for arranging content, selecting teaching strategies, and assessing student understanding (Brophy, 2023). For student teachers, aligning lesson components with learning objectives serves as a framework that helps engage students and cater to diverse needs (Müller & O'Keefe, 2021).

Several participants expressed confidence in identifying learning objectives and competencies, with Participant 2 noting the clarity provided by the syllabus. Research supports this, showing that aligning lesson plans with syllabus objectives streamlines the planning process and ensures that lessons remain focused (Harris & McGinty, 2022; Brophy, 2023). Many participants also reported confidence in selecting teaching methods and organizing content. Participant 8, for instance, found it easier to align teaching strategies with content, which helped structure lessons more effectively. Studies suggest that when student teachers can match teaching strategies to lesson content, it enhances their classroom control and preparedness (Jones & Peterson, 2021). This alignment ensures that teaching methods are purposeful and effective in achieving lesson objectives (Benedict & Elliott, 2020).

Incorporating students' prior knowledge into lesson planning was another positive experience shared by participants. Participant 18 emphasized the value of assessing students' background knowledge, allowing them to tailor lessons to individual needs. Tomlinson and Strickland (2021) assert that activating prior knowledge enhances student engagement and retention. Similarly, Richards & Rodgers (2022) argue that tapping into students' prior learning fosters inclusivity, making lessons more accessible and relevant to diverse learning styles.

Additionally, understanding the importance of lesson conclusions was another positive takeaway. Participant 16 highlighted the value of summarizing lessons to reinforce key concepts, aligning with empirical findings that show effective conclusions improve student retention and comprehension (Brophy, 2023). Recap activities, as noted by Harris & McGinty (2022), help reinforce learning and allow teachers to assess the achievement of learning objectives.

The UNAM lesson plan template also provided clarity and helped some student teachers reduce the time spent on planning. Despite its length, Participant 9 noted that the template provided structure, ensuring no key elements were overlooked. Müller & O'Keefe (2021) highlight that, while detailed templates may be time-consuming, they offer student teachers a systematic approach that reduces cognitive load and facilitates more effective planning.

Many participants noted that lesson planning helped improve their overall teaching skills. For example, Participant 19 mentioned that it enabled them to integrate various teaching strategies, manage time better, and structure lessons more effectively. Tomlinson and Strickland (2021) suggest that consistent lesson planning not only organizes content but also fosters reflective practice, encouraging teachers to continuously refine their

teaching methods. Regularly planning and evaluating lessons helps teachers adapt their strategies to meet students' needs, improving both professional growth and classroom effectiveness (Harris & McGinty, 2022). Teachers gain deeper insights into student dynamics through reflection, allowing them to tailor their approaches to enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Benedict & Elliott, 2020). Such reflective practices also contribute to building confidence, enabling teachers to navigate the complexities of classroom management with greater ease and efficacy (Zhao & Li, 2022). Furthermore, continuous engagement in lesson planning strengthens the ability to assess and respond to diverse student needs, ensuring that lessons are both relevant and impactful (Jin & Kaser, 2021).

How Student Teachers Successfully Navigate Lesson Planning Challenges

Despite facing numerous obstacles, many student teachers successfully navigate lesson planning by leveraging structured tools, engaging in reflective practices, and refining their strategies. While the UNAM template has been criticized for its complexity, several participants found it beneficial for organizing and structuring their lessons. Müller & O'Keefe (2021) argue that such structured frameworks help reduce cognitive overload, enabling student teachers to focus on essential aspects of lesson design.

Some student teachers, like Participant 8, succeeded by aligning teaching strategies with content, which enhanced their sense of control and preparedness in the classroom. Research confirms that this alignment helps maintain student engagement and ensures lesson objectives are met (Bennett et al., 2022; Jones & Peterson, 2021).

Understanding and incorporating students' prior knowledge was also key to effective lesson planning. Participant 18's focus on assessing background knowledge aligns with Tomlinson & Strickland's (2021) findings that activating prior learning leads to greater engagement and comprehension. This approach fosters inclusivity, as it tailors lessons to students' individual learning needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2022).

Finally, reflective practices are crucial for navigating challenges. Continuous self-reflection and feedback allow student teachers to refine their lesson planning and teaching strategies, leading to professional growth and increased confidence (Bennett & Elliott, 2020; Tomlinson & Strickland, 2021). As such, structured lesson planning, combined with reflective practices, enables student teachers to improve their pedagogy and design more effective, engaging lessons.

CONCLUSION

This study found that final-year student teachers at UNAM faced both challenges and benefits when designing English lesson plans. The main challenges included the complexity and rigidity of the UNAM lesson plan template, difficulties in selecting appropriate content and teaching methods, and struggles with creating balanced class activities and test questions. On the positive side, student teachers reported increased clarity in identifying learning objectives, greater confidence in selecting teaching methods, and a better understanding of how to activate prior knowledge and reinforce key content.

A significant challenge was the detailed and time-consuming nature of the UNAM lesson plan template, which many students found overwhelming and cognitively taxing, limiting their creativity in lesson design. The structured format, however, helped some students stay focused on essential lesson components. Another difficulty arose from the lack of specific guidance for teaching English in the generic template, which left students struggling to address language functions and communicative skills effectively.

Choosing appropriate content and teaching methods was also challenging. Many student teachers were unsure how to integrate multimedia and other resources into their lessons, and they lacked confidence in selecting suitable strategies for diverse student needs. Additionally, designing balanced class activities and assessments was difficult, as teachers were unsure how to assess student readiness effectively.

Despite these challenges, the lesson planning process provided student teachers with valuable insights. It helped them gain clarity in identifying learning objectives and competencies, which made lesson planning

more focused. Many student teachers also became more confident in selecting teaching methods and organizing content, which improved their overall teaching practices.

While the UNAM lesson plan template was detailed and cumbersome, it provided a useful structure that ensured no important components were overlooked. Overall, regular engagement in lesson planning contributed to the development of crucial teaching skills, enhancing student teachers' ability to organize and deliver lessons effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from the experiences of final-year English student teachers with lesson planning, several recommendations are proposed. This study recommends that teacher educators provide more specific guidance on designing engaging introductions and conclusions in lesson planning, as both phases are crucial for stimulating student interest, reinforcing learning, and encouraging reflection. Clear instructions on how to activate prior knowledge through the introduction and consolidate learning through the conclusion will ensure greater student retention and engagement, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of lesson plans.

This study also recommends that teacher educators offer additional workshops to student teachers or resources focused on maintaining coherence across lesson phases: introduction, development, and conclusion, while also emphasizing effective time management. These workshops should teach student teachers pacing strategies and incorporate flexibility to adjust lessons based on student responses, ensuring that student teachers can balance content delivery with student engagement.

Limitations

This study focused exclusively on final-year English student teachers at UNAM. Consequently, the findings may not be applicable to student teachers at other universities or in different countries, as the experiences and challenges they face may vary based on factors such as educational systems, curriculum, and teaching environments. Therefore, the results are specific to this particular case (UNAM) and may not reflect the broader experiences of student teachers in different contexts.

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