Designing and Evaluating a Lesson Plan within the Context of Academic English Module: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract: The current piece as part of TESOL Methodology Postgraduate assignment presents an individually designed, rationalized and reflected upon lesson plan (LP) for Foundation Level students. It reveals to what extent various theoretically justified methods in language teaching breed student-centeredness in reality and what role preliminarily set forth teaching techniques and strategies play in content acquisition. Based on colleague's observation and self-reflection, valuable takeaways and several notional drawbacks for further elaboration and teaching quality enhancement are suggested.

Keywords: Bloom's taxonomy, formative/summative assessment, backward design, authentic materials, teacher/student-centered approach.

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE

Learning Objectives

The Academic English (AE) module is a core year-long module allowing students to consolidate, expand and develop their proficiency in academic English. To meet the specified purposes and learning experiences of the crafted curriculum, the LP was created following the backward design approach. Since assessment of students' knowledge for this module lies in producing a group report, formative assessment elements are made central.

Following the reframed Bloom's taxonomy, the set LOs are based on measurable verbs and target the students' development of both lower-order and higher-order thinking skills (LOTs and HOTs). Proper design of the LP should be based on breaking the knowledge level verb into assessment types, and only afterwards, considering the range of smaller actions. The LP pursues to engage students in student-centered learning and construction of meaning through task-based oral and written discourse.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

When crafting the LP, the idea of building it in conjunction with what the whole gamut of authentic materials, media resources (YouTube videos) and technological tools (PPPs, electronic handouts, LMS, QR-codes) have to offer was of the foremost concern. Students show a predilection for the use of YouTube when learning English and bringing similar experience in class helps teachers to enhance LOs and render engaging and authentic learning through versatile classroom activities.

When selecting the materials, I prioritized their being interesting and authentic, and to what extent they would fit the content, objectives, module LOs, students' age and level of language efficiency. Having compared these evaluation criteria with those suggested by Tomlinson (2014), I found that they majorly embrace the three categories considered by TESOL teachers although often subconsciously: Pedagogical, Psychological and Process/Content Validity (p45). I should admit that this stage of developing instructional material takes the longest to decide upon. To ensure the materials properly fit my students' needs, I adapted the sources one using several commonly utilized techniques, such as adding, extending, expanding, deleting, abridging, simplifying and reordering materials (Masuhara, 2004 cited in Duarte and Escobar, 2008).

Teaching Approaches

To meet the learners' needs and differentiate instruction, the current LP intends to intertwine two main approaches:

1. Teacher-centered Approach. This approach, mostly relies on behaviorist theory. Although being associated with rote learning, it is it is essential for effective learning, especially when a bulky amount of information needs to be taught in a short span of time (Serin, 2018, p165).

2. Student-centered Approach. Since this approach is built on the basis of a constructivist view of learning, the students are allocated a more active role through various patterns of interaction. The main focus in designing the activities for the class is on encouraging students to search new information, lead small group discussions and

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pair work, allow time for self-reflection and peer review.

Teaching Methods

To adhere to a student-centered learning format, the diversity of versatile methods allows a teacher to combine their multiplicity within a single class. A closer analysis of my LP reveals the following methods:

1. Content-based Instruction (CBI) aka "competency-based instruction" or "language for specific purposes". The Academic English module has little concentration on the aspects of grammar; rather it serves as a vehicle for specific, viz. academic, content instruction and elaboration of formal writing principles. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (2003) found that academic subject matter is the most popular content taught with the succinct CBI method (cited in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p174).

2. Inquiry-based Teaching (IBT). This method is the most advocated in HE, especially when one considers addressing questions and solving and scaffolding small group work and whole class interaction. Silva claims student-centered instruction by means of IBT is effectively implemented when organizing a larger cohort of students into small learning teams of 4-5 (2015, p222).

3. Whole Language. Although it is relative to CBI, the idea why I want to consider it separately is that the entire class is taught in English only and the language as a means of instruction and content coverage is regarded holistically. This method activates HOTs and helps embrace Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) through increased social interaction among students and between teacher and students (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p183).

Teaching Strategies and Techniques

My LP is inclusive of various strategies, promoting active teaching of a mixed-ability class and encouraging cognitive and affective domains of students' learning purposefully tailored to the lesson objectives.

Techniques are often linked with both an approach and method the consistency of which is essential for accomplishing set objectives. The major focus in creating the activities for the current class is on top-down to let students reveal meaning by applying their own schemata. Since the class envisages all major skills development (with particular emphasis on writing and research), such techniques as corrective feedback, peer-review, reflection, summarizing, discussion and role play are integrated to achieve set objectives.

Reflection

Reflective practice for teacher educators working in TESOL is needed to realize their commitment to what they preach, what their strengths and weaknesses are and how their practice could be enhanced. Despite meeting most objectives, a few notional aspects require close analysis for future lesson planning quality enhancement:

1. Although HE educational contexts may heavily rely on non-explicit and incidental teaching, selecting authentic sources for plenary tasks, such as a discussion, should match students' frame of reference and level of language expertise. Matsuda, (2012) recommends gauging and knowing students' levels when evaluating, selecting, and developing teaching materials (p172). Besides, materials need to be viewed as "an embodiment of the aims, values and methods of the particular teaching learning situation" for they probably represent the only most essential decision an ELT teacher is to make (Hutchinson, 1987 cited in Tomlinson, 2014, p37).

2. Entirely teacher-centered approach may lead to undesired mini-lecturing and procrastination. It is believed that inefficient use of mini-lecturing contributes to low cognitive effort because of a unidirectional teacher failing to maintain an ongoing rapport (Draskovic, *et al*., 2004, 451-454). Engin, (2014) relates such an approach to macro-scaffolding which is an essential convention for a teacher to consider while planning a lesson. Thus, teacher-talking time (TTT) should not interfere with students' engagement and opportunity to construct their own knowledge and autonomy through self-exploration and deep learning.

CONCLUSION

Putting theoretical knowledge into practical on various pedagogical methods, strategies and approaches while planning a lesson may not always guarantee smooth delivery, but to increase the chances of establishing more effective learning, at least, two main areas needs a closer consideration and they are elaborating on principles of material design and diversification as

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well as shifting a focus from teacher-centered approach to that of students'.

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