

Student Teachers' Competence in Lesson Planning During Microteaching

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Patrick Rodrigue Belibi Enama¹

Abstract

Learning how to plan a lesson is central to teacher education, yet there is only little research so far that has investigated how well student teachers write lesson plans. The aim of this paper, therefore, was to explore the competence of student teachers in lesson planning, with a special focus on the Cameroonian context. More specifically, the study sought to find out which stages and aspects of lesson planning caused more difficulty to trainee teachers, and whether collaboration led to better lesson plans. Data consisted of 101 lesson plans, among which 74 were planned by single trainee teachers and 27 planned by groups of two or three teacher candidates. These lessons were collected across two years through a graduate-level English language teaching methodology course. The findings reveal that trainee teachers had more difficulty writing lesson outcomes, aligning lesson outcomes with assessment, providing variety in assessment and quality take-home assignment as well, and asking relevant questions to guide student work. Also, it was found that joint lesson plans contained fewer errors and were better in terms of instructional quality than lessons planned by single teachers. Teacher education programs, therefore, should adopt microteaching and joint lesson planning activities for their potential to improve student teachers' competence in lesson design.

Key Words: Lesson planning, teacher education, microteaching, collaborative lesson planning, Competency-Based Approach

Introduction

Planning, designing, and reflecting on instructional processes are central to teaching (Terhart, 2000, cited in Futter & Staub, 2008). 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. In that vein, Farrell (2002, p.30) defines a lesson plan as “a written description of how students will move toward attaining specific objectives”. Serdyukov & Ryan (2008, p.2) provide an even more elaborate definition in these terms:

A lesson plan is a model of organized learning events within a standard time 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. Both the teacher and students will perform these planned activities intended to achieve the learning goals and specific objectives of the lesson.

¹ University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon, belibipatrick@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-5303-8916

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. Most often, lesson planning involves two steps: an informal step where teachers assess the background knowledge of their students on content and visualize their lesson activities and the sequence of these activities in the classroom, and a more formal step where they write down the various components of the lesson plan following a specific and recommended format (Freeman, 1996). This makes lesson planning quite overwhelming for pre-service and novice teachers.

Previous research (Thornbury, 1999; Ball, Knohloch & Hoop, 2007; Jones, Jones & Vermette, 2011; Yurtseven, 2021) indicates that pre-service and novice teachers struggle with lesson planning. This situation is particularly dire in non-native English contexts where teachers have to teach a language that they do not always master well. In the Bulgarian EFL context, for instance, Tashevska (2008) found that novice teachers had issues with timing their lesson activities, sequencing these activities and anticipating problems that could occur while teaching. In India, Gafoor & Farooque (2010) found that the choice of learning experiences that are appropriate to learners, time allocation for lesson activities, execution of the planned lesson, and making lesson objectives clear are the most recurrent difficulties faced by student teachers when planning lessons. In the Philippines, the findings of a study by Cuñado & Aboejo (2018) reveal teachers' lack of spontaneity in the delivery of their lessons, as well as difficulties to introduce lessons adequately and match assessment with learning objectives. In the Saudi context, Alanazi (2019) discovered that lesson planning made student teachers nervous and anxious, leading to a preference for already available teaching resources online and readymade teaching kits and lesson planning materials, instead of writing their own lesson plans.

It is obvious, then, that trainee teachers of English to speakers of other languages need support and guidance in the domain of lesson planning. Though there are many textbooks that provide information on how to train teachers, there is not enough empirical evidence about teacher lesson planning competence (König et al., 2020). In Cameroon, the context of this study, there is equally a paucity of research on English language teacher education, and more specifically on student teachers' beliefs and practices related to lesson planning and microteaching in general. However, the situation of teacher education in Cameroon may represent other contexts where an innovation in instructional design was recently implemented or is still under implementation. Indeed, Cameroon, just like several other countries, has adopted the Competency-Based Approach recently, and, therefore, needs a well-trained teacher population to implement it effectively in classrooms. The findings of this study could, therefore, be applied in all these similar contexts.

Against this background, the present study aims to investigate student teachers' competence in writing English language lesson plans following the guidelines of the Competency-Based Approach during microteaching in a language teaching methodology course.

This work argues that the development of teaching skills is best achieved through a hands-on-experience approach, and that microteaching in a methodology course can be very effective for that purpose.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The need to train student teachers in lesson planning

Unlike experienced teachers who have acquired the knowledge and skills to visualize how a lesson plan may unfold, and improvise some of what they say and do in the classroom, novice teachers and student teachers lack this knowledge, and therefore, have to prepare and write their daily lesson plans before stepping into the classroom (Mutton et al., 2011). Indeed, writing a lesson plan is beneficial to teachers for several reasons. First, it reminds them of the components and stages of lessons. A lesson plan provides information about “the background of the students, the objectives of the lesson, the skills to be taught, the activities, the materials and texts, the time constraints, and the connections to previous and future lessons” (Jensen, 2001, p. 404). It also reminds student teachers that in terms of organization, a lesson has a beginning, middle and an end. Second, a lesson plan saves time as it keeps the teacher focused on the lesson activities. In this way, lesson planning helps avoid unnecessary digression. Third, teachers have the opportunity to assess their own knowledge of the content to teach while planning their lessons (Reed & Michaud, 2010). Jensen (2001) adds four other benefits of writing a lesson plan: it gives more confidence to the teacher because she knows what to do at each stage of the lesson; it can be kept and used again even after several years; it can be useful for other people including substitute teachers, administrators, and potential employers; and it leads to more unified lessons with smooth transitions between previous knowledge and new knowledge, and between different activities. In that line of thought, Richards (1998, p.103) highlights the importance of a lesson plan in the following words: “the success with which a teacher conducts a lesson plan is often thought to depend on the effectiveness with which the lesson was planned”.

It is obvious that lesson planning depends on a practical and ideological context (Mutton et al., 2011). The need to train student teachers in lesson planning has an even more heightened relevance in the Cameroonian context today as the adoption of the Competency-Based Approach (henceforth CBA) in recent years has led to changes in curricula and lesson design, and raised the stakes in terms of standards for learning and teaching by increasing demands on teachers. CBA, the educational component of the

vision to make Cameroon an emergent economy by 2035, was adopted by the Cameroonian government in 2012 in view of aligning educational goals with the demands of a more skilled workforce. While the previous paradigm, Skills-Based Approach, focused more on learners' acquisition of knowledge, CBA placed more emphasis on using the knowledge acquired in class to help solve real-life problems. An immediate consequence of this reform was that teacher education programs were urged to adapt to the demands of the innovation in order to produce teachers ready to implement it in their classrooms (see Nkemele & Belibi, 2019). Pedagogic guides for the implementation of CBA were distributed to educators across the country, and seminars on CBA were offered in an attempt to familiarize teachers rapidly with the main principles and practices of the curricular reform. Knowledge of lesson planning following CBA guidelines immediately became the yardstick for measuring in-service teachers' professionalism and pre-service and novice teachers' readiness to teach. Then most departments in teacher training colleges hired pedagogic inspectors and secondary education teachers to teach methodology courses, especially those handling aspects of lesson planning, so as to produce a well-trained teacher population capable of planning lessons and implementing CBA in their classrooms.

As far as the subject English Language is concerned, a CBA lesson plan template was first introduced in July 2014 by the National Inspectorate of English, and later amended to its present format in September 2018. The most recent template then comprises eight stages which are described below.

- i. Lead-in: Here, the teacher activates learners' previous knowledge on the lesson to be taught.
- ii. Discovery: A clearly stated problem is presented to the learners.
- iii. Research: In small groups, learners seek solutions to the problem presented in the previous stage. They emit hypotheses and verify them.
- iv. Comparison and validation of results: Learners present their answers to the class. These answers are compared to those of other groups. The wrong answers are discarded while the correct ones are validated.
- v. Institutionalization and formulation of the new knowledge: The teacher generalizes the hypothesis that was verified in the previous stage. This becomes a rule that forms part of the notes which students copy in their exercise books.
- vi. Consolidation: Learners apply the rules of the language to do oral or written tasks. This is the stage where teachers assess learners' understanding of the lesson.
- vii. Partial integration: Learners use the new knowledge to solve a real-life problem. Generally, language use involves a combination of both oral and written communication skills.
- viii. Remediation: Learners are given more exercises intended to iron

out what was not understood in the lesson.

All stages are mandatory, except Partial Integration which is not necessary at the end of each lesson. Before the eight stages described above, teacher candidates must provide preliminary information on their lesson, which consists of details such as learners' age, level, class size, lesson title, previous knowledge, lesson outcomes, etc. Knowledge of lesson planning following CBA design is of critical importance here as previous studies (see Nforbi & Siewoue, 2015; Njwe, 2016; & Belibi, 2018) have found that in-service teachers have difficulty implementing CBA in their classrooms because of lack of training or insufficient professional development. This is additional pressure on teacher education programs, as in-service English teachers already shoulder the burden of making French-speaking Cameroonian students learn English in a low-resource context characterized by learners' lack of motivation towards English, insufficient textbooks, poor school infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms.

Several studies have found that collaboration is one of the most effective strategies to maximize student teachers' chances to master lesson planning. Caven et al (2013, p.6), for example, believe that "collaborative planning can create a culture of continuous improvement where colleagues brainstorm together and decide on educational approaches to meet the needs of each child". Meanwhile, Futter & Staub (2008) studied the effects of collaborative lesson planning on teacher learning during the practicum and found that this type of lesson planning was more beneficial to student teachers than joint reflection after teaching a lesson. Their study equally demonstrated that lessons planned with peers were better in terms of instructional quality than those planned by single teachers. In the same vein, Gutierrez (2019) found that scaffolded collaborative lesson planning resulted in "mutual leadership leading to increased feeling of effectiveness ... and improved teacher professional identity". Finally, a study by Carreño and Ortiz (2017) involving field teachers found that collaboration on lesson plans provided educators with opportunities to improve their practices and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Microteaching

McGarvey and Swallow (1986, p.1) argue that teaching in a real classroom "is not only a potentially threatening experience for beginning students, but also does not easily provide them with both feedback about the teaching performance and the time for analytical and reflective thought that are necessary for swift learning gains". In other words, teaching is quite a complex activity, and beginning teachers need some type of hands-on-experience training through which they receive feedback about their teaching performance in view of improving their teaching skills. After all, it is common knowledge that student teachers do not learn to teach "just by being told what to do and how to do it" (Freeman & Cornwell, 2002, p.1). Instead, they learn best by trial and error, and microteaching provides them with an opportunity to develop effective

teaching skills.

Microteaching— which is often viewed as a scaled down version of teaching lessons since it involves a smaller number of students, limited time, lesser content and complexity (Mayhew, 1982; Cruickshank & Metcalf, 1993; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Morrison, 2010)— is one of the most effective ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice as it allows teacher educators to gauge their students' understanding of knowledge, tools and practices required to be effective teachers (Ghanaguru, Nair & Yong, 2013). It involves certain activities including the planning and delivery of short lessons before the class, observing lessons of peers, receiving, and giving feedback, and engaging in self-reflection (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

The first microteaching model developed by Allen and Ryan (1969) comprised six interrelated stages: planning, teaching, observation and criticism, re-planning, re-teaching, and re-observation. At the planning stage, pre-service teachers design their lesson activities and write their lesson plan following a specific model. At the teaching stage, they implement their lesson plans. The goal here was to make student teachers observe teacher educators, then emulate their practices when they plan and implement their own lessons. Lesson implementation was only 15 to 20 minutes long. The supervisor and the other teacher candidates observe the lesson and provide a constructive critique. After this feedback, the trainee teacher plans another lesson to teach before the class, taking into consideration the suggestions in the critique. Microteaching, therefore, offers the advantage of repetitive practice for pre-service teachers to hone their skills, develop reflective practices and self-efficacy beliefs.

Since then, other microteaching models have been proposed. Sole's (2002) model, for instance, involves longer lessons with plenty of visual aids, examples, and questions to check understanding. Another model by Houser Pineiro (2002) consists of teacher journal reflections on the lessons they have taught, with an end-of-practicum portfolio that presents the teacher candidate's reflections on three lessons they have taught among which one at the beginning of the semester, another in the middle and the last at the end of the semester. A common variation of microteaching, also called peer-group microteaching (see Clifford et al., 1977), simulated teaching (Cooper & Allen, 1970), on-campus microteaching (see Amobi & Irwin, 2009) involves student teachers presenting their lessons before their peers and the lecturer within the framework of a teaching methodology course. This model— though criticized on grounds that because it does not use real students, it fails to provide student teachers with a genuine teacher-pupil experience— presents at least two advantages, especially for teacher training programs in under-resourced contexts. First, peers are easily available and can provide helpful and constructive feedback to trainee teachers. Second, having peers as students allows teachers-in-training to concentrate on improving one specific teaching skill and repeat their practice as many times as possible until they become more comfortable with using that technique without the fear of boring students. This

is the approach we followed in this paper as it makes peer-group microteaching less threatening for pre-service teachers.

Microteaching is widely reported to be beneficial to pre-service teachers. Evidence suggests that it improves pre-service teachers' skills in the areas of planning, implementation, and evaluation (Fernandez, 2005; Amobi & Irwin, 2009), self-efficacy beliefs (Mergler & Tangen, 2010), and reduction of anxiety (Benton & Kupper, 2001; Al Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016).

This work, therefore, conceptualizes lesson planning during microteaching from the perspective of Kolb's (1984) and Kolb & Kolb's (2011) experiential learning theory, which views learning as a cyclical process governed by the resolution of the dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. In this theory, learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.41). In other words, students learn by doing things and develop new understandings from the basis of their own previous experience. Experiential learning theory conceptualizes learning as a holistic process that consists in observing, reflecting, making decisions, and solving the problems that occur in the learning environment.

This theory is relevant here because it fits so well into the experience that microteaching provides to future teachers. In fact, the student teachers involved in this study were immersed in a real teacher environment where they had multiple opportunities to develop a critical understanding of the lesson planning process. First, they were taught how to plan a lesson; they were provided with a lesson plan template and received explanations on what to do at each stage of lesson planning. Second, they were made to observe lessons taught by the course instructor and peers. Third, they developed a critical appraisal of lesson plans through the lesson study. Fourth, they designed lessons independently and received feedback from the course instructor. Fifth, they designed lessons in small groups and received feedback from the course instructor. And sixth, they taught their lessons before classmates and received instant feedback from the audience (peers and the course instructor).

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore student teachers' competence in lesson design during microteaching. Thus, the study sought to answer these two questions:

1. What stages and aspects of lesson planning cause more difficulty to trainee teachers?
2. What is the impact of collaboration on student teachers' competence in lesson planning?

Methodology

Context and Participants

This study involved 74 5th-year student teachers of the Bilingual Studies specialization who took a methodology course on English language teaching (ENG 517 Teaching English as a Foreign Language) in the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years at the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde. French-English bilingual student teachers are trained primarily to become teachers of both English language to Francophone Cameroonians and French to Anglophone Cameroonians. Therefore, apart from 6 core courses in education sciences and psychology, students enrolled in the two-year graduate teacher training program in English-French bilingual studies take courses from the departments of French (seven in the 4th year and three in the 5th year) and English (ten in year 4 and seven in year 5). So, these students take each year one methodology course on how to teach each language subject. Generally, a few 5th-year student teachers are in-service— which means that they have an experience of three years or more in the field— while the remaining majority (pre-service) has not taught before. Participants of this study, therefore, had taken a methodology course on teaching English in the 4th year (ENG 417 English Language and Literature Teaching Techniques) which comprised microteaching sessions based on specific teaching techniques such as Total Physical Response, using the L1 or literature in the English class, visual scaffolding, etc. throughout the semester, and lesson planning (essentially on grammar) in the last three class meetings. The author used two groups of student teachers from two academic years for two reasons. First, although the two groups had different sizes, their characteristics were very similar. In fact, both comprised a few in-service teachers and were taught the methodology course in the 4th year by the researcher himself. Second, a larger pool of lesson plans was used for purposes of reliability and validity of the findings.

Table 1 below provides further details on the study participants.

Table 1.

Details about participants

	In-service student teachers		Pre-service student teachers		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2018-2019	01	03	06	24	34
2019-2020	02	05	07	26	40
Total	11		63		74

As Table 1 shows, 74 student teachers participated in the study among whom 11 (14.86%) were in-service and 63 (85.14%) pre-service teachers. Also, it can be deduced from the above table that 16 (21.62%) participants were male while 58 (78.38%) were female.

Research design

This study used a quantitative research design. Data collection was done through an English language teaching methodology course that I offered to two groups of 5th-year French-English bilingual student teachers at the Higher Teacher Training College Yaounde over two academic years. Each participant was required to plan and submit two lessons: a vocabulary lesson which they were to design alone, and another lesson which they were required to plan with one or two other classmates. The course, which was taught over 14 weeks, consisted respectively of lectures in the first two meetings, then simulated teachings of lessons by the course instructor and lesson study by student teachers, and, finally, simulated teachings of lessons by student teachers for much of the remainder of the semester. On the third class meeting, the course instructor simulated teaching a sample vocabulary lesson, then provided copies of that lesson to student teachers for an in-depth study. The aim here was to help student teachers understand what is required of them during microteaching sessions. After that, these trainees were all given a take-home assignment which consisted in planning a vocabulary lesson (for example on blue-collar jobs, or parts of a school) alone and submitting their work within the next 14 days. After the student teachers submitted their lesson plans, the lecturer graded them and provided personalized feedback to all of them. Over the two years, 74 lesson plans produced by single teachers were collected. Then, on Week 4, the course instructor would randomly divide the class in small groups of two or three students and assign them lessons selected from the officially recommended 3e¹ English language textbook. So, students were not allowed to choose group members, nor the specific language skill, sub-skill or lesson to teach. However, the instructor ensured that no group had two in-service teachers. The perceived difficulty of the teaching skill or sub-skill, and content of the lesson to be taught determined the number of teacher candidates placed in a group. Then, a grammar lesson on reported speech and a writing lesson on *a body paragraph* were to be planned by teams of three student teachers while a pair of teacher candidates was assigned a less complex lesson such as *using the present perfect tense*.

Weeks 5 and 6 were then dedicated to comparative studies of grammar, reading comprehension, writing, listening, speaking and pronunciation lessons. This means that on week 5, students were presented with sample grammar, reading comprehension, and writing lesson plans which they had to study carefully, so as to identify differences among these lessons at each stage, and reflect, in small groups, on how to

¹ The 3e class in French-medium education is the equivalent of Grade 9.

deliver instruction on these lessons effectively in classrooms. On week 6, the same was done with sample listening, speaking and pronunciation lesson plans.

After placement in their respective groups, student teachers were to collaborate on their lesson plans over a period of three weeks before submitting them to the course instructor. In each class meeting as from week 7, three groups had to teach their lessons before their peers – who acted as students— and the course instructor. The teacher candidates received feedback both on their lesson plan and teaching performance from the course instructor and peers immediately after teaching their lesson.

While 13 joint lessons were planned and taught by student teachers in the 2018-2019 methodology course, 14 were recorded in the 2019-2020 session, making a total of 27 lessons planned by small groups of two or three teachers. The joint lessons under investigation in this study included the following language skills and sub skills: pronunciation (02 lessons), reading comprehension (06), speaking (02), listening (02), writing (04), vocabulary (04) and grammar (07).

Method of data analysis

A lesson plan analysis tool (LPAT) based on the components and stages of a CBA lesson plan was developed by the researcher for the purpose of this investigation. The LPAT, which is found in the appendix, was designed by the researcher after a preliminary evaluation of student teachers' performance in lesson planning during the first semester of the 2017-2018 academic year. At the time, the researcher was teaching the TEFL course to both 3rd-year and 5th-year student teachers of the Bilingual Studies specialization. The LPAT used in this study comprises 8 major points including (i) preliminary information (which contains information about school, class, number of students, the average age of learners, lesson duration, date, name of the teacher, previous knowledge, lesson outcomes, justification for teaching the lesson, teaching aids, references, previous knowledge, lesson outcomes and teaching aids), (ii) lead-in, (iii) discovery, (iv) research, (v) comparison and validation of results, (vi) institutionalization and formulation of new knowledge, (vii) consolidation and (viii) remediation.

Each major point further consists of listed categories of analysis that represent the basic tools used to dissect lesson plans painstakingly, with the aim of finding out which aspects of planning were well executed and which ones were not. This design made data analysis easier, as the researcher only had to obtain frequencies of occurrence of errors for each category of analysis and calculate their percentages. A point-by-point method of evaluation was preferred to holistic evaluation for purposes of objectivity. Also, the instrument was developed through an iterative process whereby information gathered initially from lesson plans of both 3rd-year and 5th-year student teachers was used to add to, refine and specify the categories of analysis, levels of performance as well as its wording and content. Then, instead of a tool containing different descriptions for different categories of analysis and levels of performance, we opted for a tool

comprising three descriptions only— representing the three levels of performance—that could be applied to analyze all categories. The three levels of performance are described in the key under the LPAT (see Appendix).

Findings

This section presents the results of this investigation. First, it provides results on student teachers' competence in writing lesson plans both individually and in small groups. Second, results on the analysis of the most common error types found in lesson plans are presented. These results are organized according to the major stages of the LPAT and presented in charts and tables.

Student teachers' competence in writing lesson plans

First, this paper sought to find out about student teachers' competence in filling out preliminary information in lesson plans. Figure 1 below compares the results obtained by student teachers in this stage after working individually and in small groups on lesson plans.

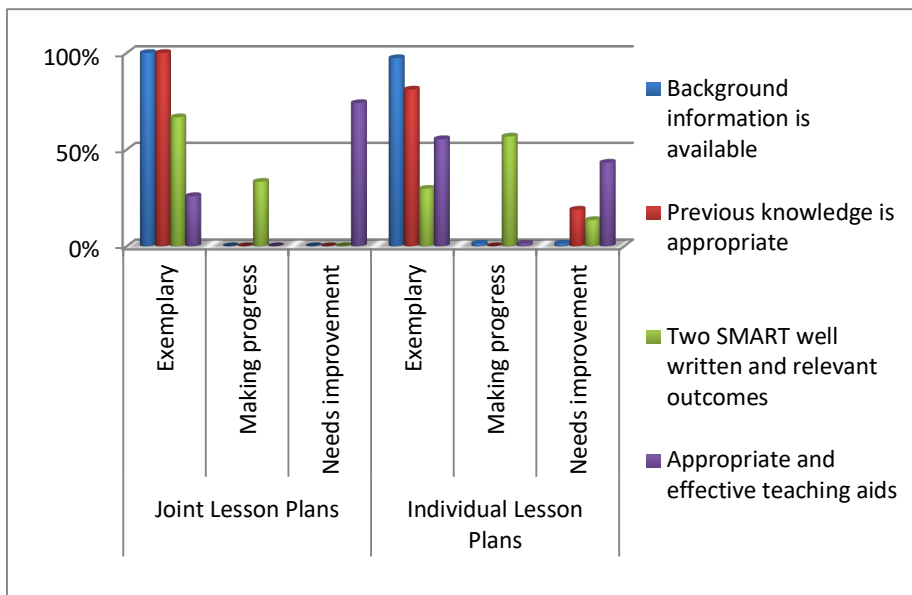


Figure 1: Competence in filling out the preliminary information in lesson plans

It is clear from Figure 1 that despite evidence of weaknesses in writing SMART lesson outcomes and providing relevant teaching aids, participants got 100% exemplary performances in providing the background information (school, class level, size, etc.) and previous knowledge of their lessons. Also, out of 4 categories of analysis, joint lesson plans obtained higher percentages of exemplary performances in 3 cate-

gories, while individual lesson plans got higher exemplary performances only in their use of teaching aids.

Competence in introducing lessons was the second point of analysis. Figure 2 below compares the results obtained at this stage in individual lesson plans and in joint lesson plans.

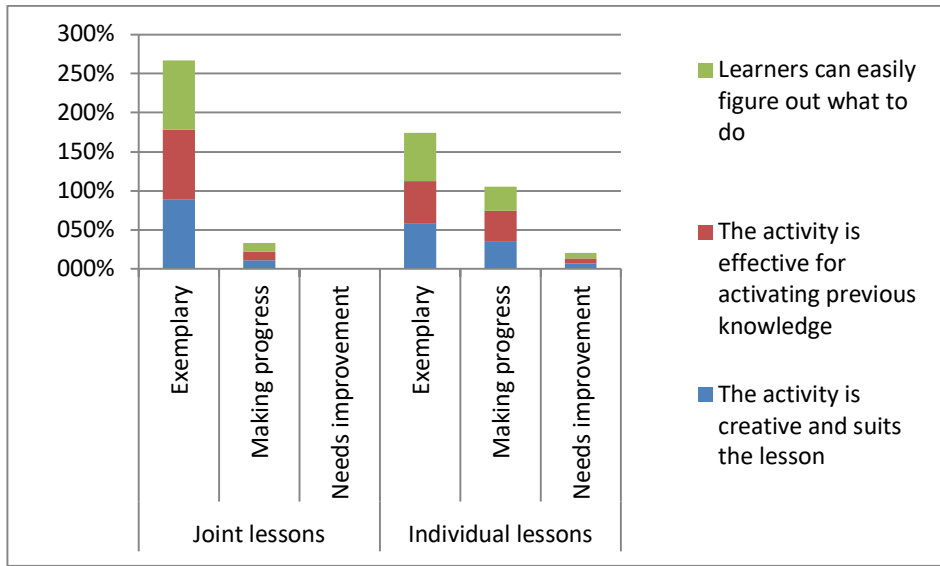


Figure 2: Student teachers' competence in introducing lessons

Figure 2 clearly indicates that joint lesson plans were better introduced than individual lesson plans in all three categories of analysis. In general, student teachers did not encounter great difficulty introducing their lessons.

At the Discovery stage, student teachers are expected to present a problem-solving situation to their learners. Figure 3 below compares their competence in planning this stage in small groups and individually.

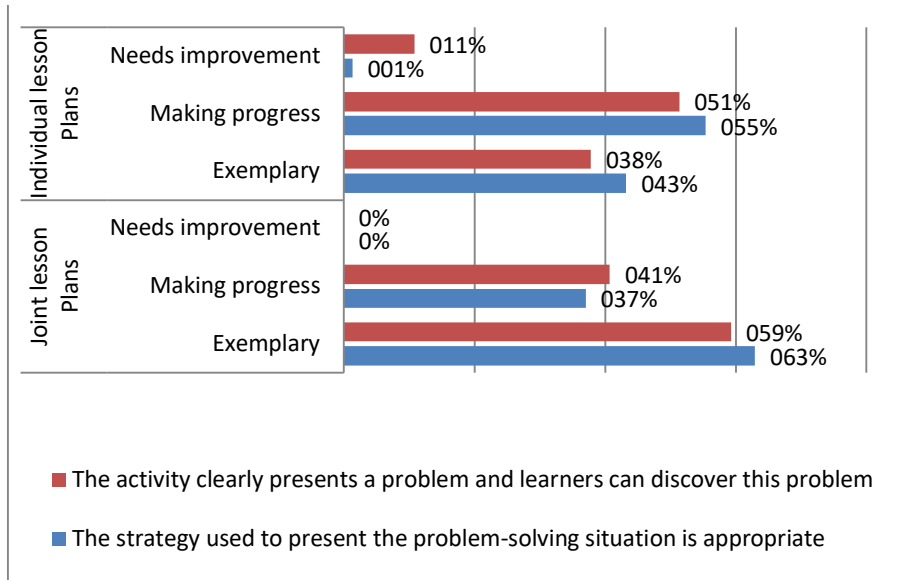


Figure 3: Student teachers' competence in planning the Discovery stage

Figure 3 shows that joint lesson plans had the highest percentages of exemplary performances in the two categories of analysis. Also, it appears that the teacher candidates encountered the same levels of difficulty when selecting a strategy to present the problem-solving situation and designing an activity to present this situation to learners in both joint lesson plans and individual lesson plans.

CBA requires that teachers organize the class in small groups to do a task, and that they provide students with relevant questions to guide their work at the research stage. The figure below compares the results of student teachers' competence in planning this stage individually and in small groups.

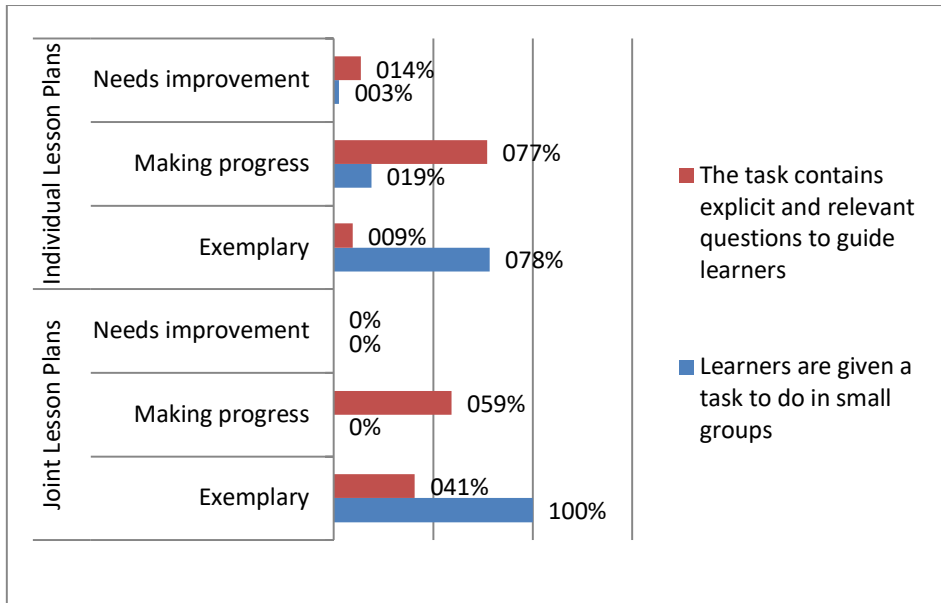


Figure 4: Student teachers' competence in planning the Research stage

It is clear from Figure 4 that teacher candidates were much more successful at providing collaborative learning activities than asking explicit and relevant questions to guide the work of their students. Also, it is evident that joint lesson plans obtained higher percentages in exemplary performance both in providing learners with a task to do in small groups and asking explicit and relevant questions to guide their work.

At the Comparison and Validation of Findings stage, teachers have to provide expected answers to the questions raised at the research stage. Figure 5 below shows how participants performed at this stage when working alone and in small groups.

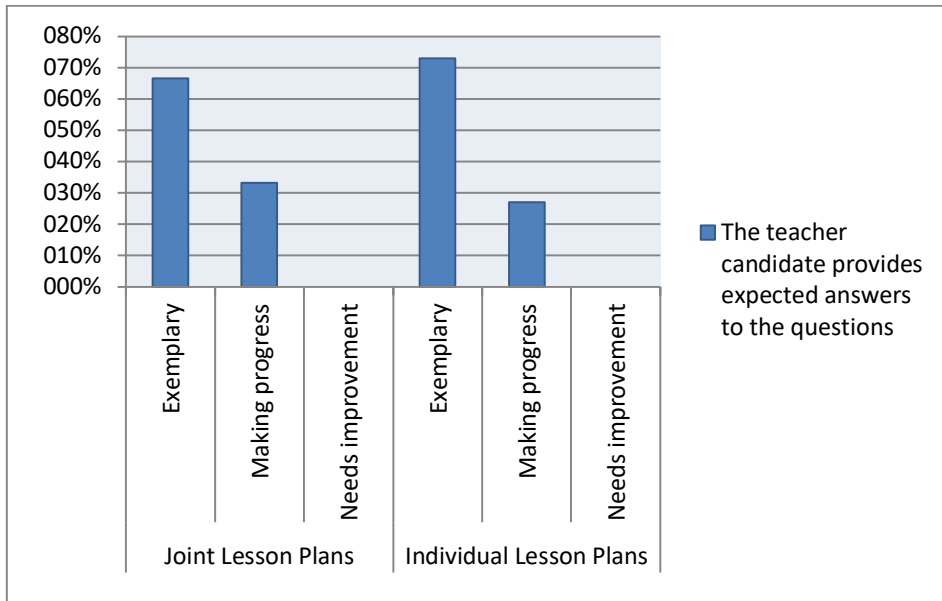


Figure 5: Student teachers' competence in planning the comparison and validation stage

Figure 5 shows that about 70% of lesson plans were exemplary in terms of providing expected answers to the questions asked to learners. Also, the above results indicate relatively similar results for both joint lesson plans and individual lesson plans at the comparison stage.

At the Institutionalization and formulation of new knowledge stage, teachers are expected to copy concise notes in their lesson plans and provide vivid examples to facilitate learners' understanding of content. Figure 6 below provides details about how participants performed at this stage.

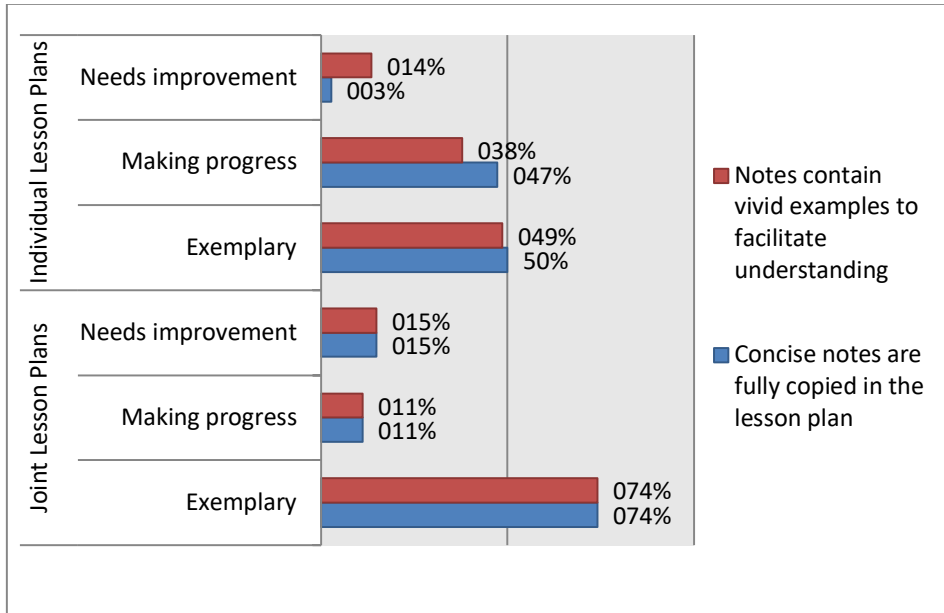


Figure 6: Student teachers' competence in planning the Institutionalization stage

Figure 6 reveals that joint lesson plans obtained higher percentages of exemplary performances than individual lesson plans in terms of providing both full and concise notes and vivid examples to facilitate learners' understanding of content. Also, the results indicate that participants faced similar levels of difficulty with the two categories of analysis.

At the Consolidation stage, teachers have to provide at least two effective yet diverse assessment activities that align with lesson outcomes. Figure 7 below presents the results of participants' performance at this stage.

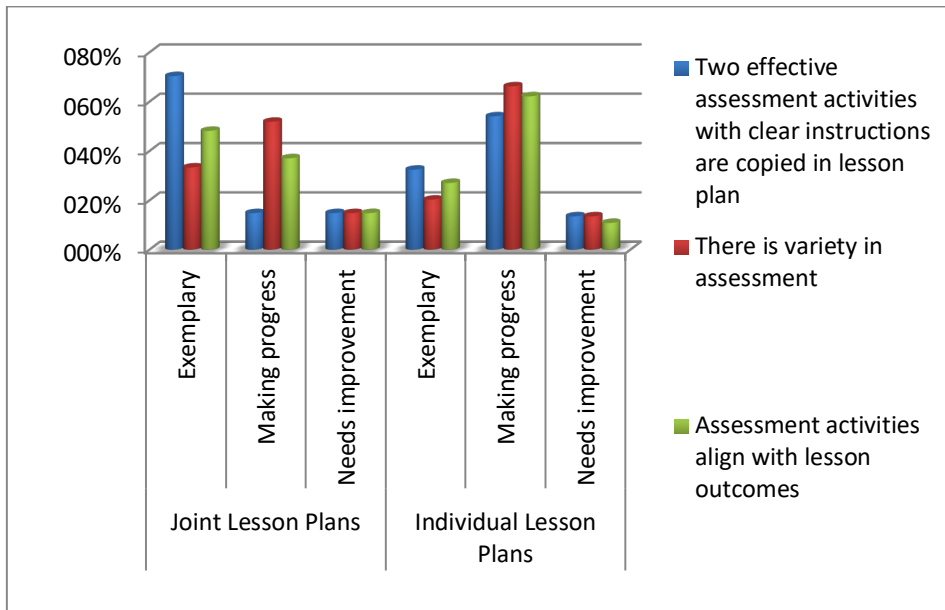


Figure 7: Student teachers' competence in planning the Consolidation stage

It is evident, from Figure 7, that joint lesson plans provided assessment activities that aligned better with lesson outcomes and were more effective and diverse than individual lesson plans. Also, the results above indicate that student teachers had more difficulty making assessment activities diverse than providing two effective assessment activities that align with lesson outcomes.

Remediation is the stage where teachers seek to consolidate the knowledge acquired by learners through tasks that integrate the new knowledge into real life communicative situations, and which involve a combination of other language skills and sub-skills. Figure 8 below presents the results of participants' competence in planning remedial activities individually and in small groups.

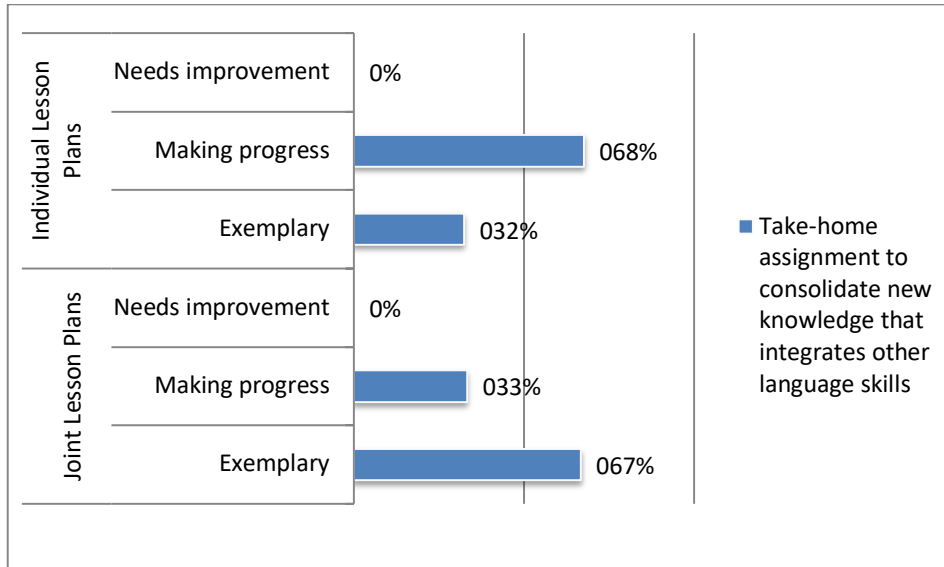


Figure 8: Participants' competence in planning Remediation activities

As Figure 8 shows, only one third of individual lesson plans had exemplary remedial activities while two thirds of joint lesson plans scored exemplary performances in these activities.

Error types found in student teachers' lesson plans

The second aim of analyzing 101 student teachers' lesson plans was to find out about error types and examples of these errors in lesson plans. Table 2 below provides further details on this.

Table 2.
Common error types found in lesson plans

Error type	Example	Occurrence
Preliminary information		
Previous knowledge is missing	//	14 (18.92%)
One lesson outcome only	//	09 (12.16%)
Poorly written lesson outcomes	<i>Students should know how to use the words.</i>	04 (05.4%)
Packing measurable verbs in one outcome	<i>Students will identify blue collar jobs and give their descriptions.</i>	09 (12.16%)
Lead-in		
Asking questions that students cannot answer	<i>Define a blue-collar job.</i>	04 (05.4%)
Lesson material (song, picture or video) announced, but not available	//	05 (06.76%)
Discovery		
Lesson material (chart, text, picture or video link) announced, but not available	//	08 (10.81%)
Giving lesson notes at this stage	//	04 (05.4%)
Research		
Asking only one or no question to guide students' work	//	10 (13.51%)
Institutionalization and formulation of new knowledge		
The lesson notes are lengthy	//	05 (06.76%)
No contextualization of the words taught in sentences	//	05 (06.76%)
The examples used are not effective	<i>Peter is a mechanic. / Tom is a welder.</i>	04 (05.4%)
Consolidation		
No written assessment activity	//	04 (05.4%)
Asking students to construct sentences with the words taught	//	10 (13.51%)
Ineffective assessment activity	<i>Ask students to draw a carpenter. Name four other blue-collar jobs.</i>	05 (06.76%)

Table 2 reveals that the most common error types produced by trainee teachers include respectively: not providing previous knowledge when filling out preliminary information (18.92%), asking only one or no question to guide students' work at the research stage (13.51%), asking students, in a vocabulary lesson, to construct sentences with the words taught at the consolidation stage (13.51%), over-packing one lesson outcome with two or more measurable verbs (12.16%), providing a single lesson outcome (12.16%) and announcing lesson material (text, picture, song or video) that is not available at the discovery stage (10.81%). Also, the table indicates that the three stages where student teachers struggled most include filling out preliminary information, followed by consolidation and institutionalization.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore student teachers' competence in planning English language lessons during microteaching in a language teaching methodology course. The analysis of 101 lesson plans among which 27 joint lesson plans and 74 individual lesson plans indicates that student teachers encountered more difficulty in the following stages: preliminary information, research, consolidation, and remediation.

That trainee teachers experience difficulties with providing background information on lesson plans may seem surprising at first, yet a closer study of some aspects of lesson preparation including providing two SMART, well-written lesson outcomes and selecting effective and appropriate teaching aids shows that such skills are much more complex than they appear, and that their mastery requires sufficient and adequate training. Writing SMART lesson outcomes, for instance, requires mastery of several abilities such as differentiating between lesson goals, objectives and outcomes, understanding the four components of lesson outcomes (audience, behavior, condition, and degree), using Bloom Taxonomy (verbs) to write lesson outcomes, making lesson outcomes specific, measurable, attainable, research-oriented, and time-bound. Failure to master anyone of the above abilities would likely result in the student teacher writing flawed lesson outcomes. This result corroborates the findings of Gafoor and Faroque (2010) and Cuñado and Abocejo (2018) that student teachers and novice teachers struggle with writing effective lesson outcomes.

In the same vein, selecting appropriate teaching aids is not a push over; it requires following at least two basic guidelines, including cultural relevance and appropriate size of the visual materials. Besides, it may require a few digital and online skills, including searching for pictures and videos online, downloading and printing them for use in the classroom.

That about 26% of student teachers only could provide, in an exemplary manner, at least two diverse, clear and effective assessment activities that align with the lesson outcomes shows that teacher candidates have a hard time planning the Consolidation stage. This could be explained by the fact that assessment, especially formative assessment types and strategies, is not always taught explicitly to student teachers. In fact, formative assessment, which should normally consist of two activities among which a guided practice task and a free practice task, therefore, requires variety between the two tasks. In other words, if the first task of a vocabulary lesson is a matching activity, the second could involve sentence completion or cloze with the target words. Two similar consolidation activities make assessment less effective in the sense that lack of variety fails to address students' different learning styles.

Also, effective formative assessment evaluates learners only on knowledge and skills taught in the lesson, and is suitable to the target language skill or sub-skill. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the demand of pedagogical adaptivity, which refers to "the ways in which lesson assignments fit with the cognitive level of learners so that they are guided into their zone of proximal development" (König et al., 2020, p.800). This means, for example, that learners cannot be required, at the consolidation stage of a vocabulary lesson on blue collar jobs in which they were taught 6 words, to construct sentences with the target words, as sentence construction involves knowledge of syntax (grammar rules), which was not taught during the lesson. Should such a task be given, it should feature in the partial integration stage, with the supposition that

learners have acquired the structures they need to use the target words in meaningful sentences. In the same way, it is not advised in a vocabulary lesson to have two oral tasks at the consolidation stage. Students should always have a written consolidation activity which could help them revise whenever the need arises.

It was found that student teachers struggle to align assessment with lesson outcomes. This result further corroborates the findings of Cuñado and Abocejo (2018). Indeed, it was obvious that because some teacher candidates already had considerable difficulty writing effective lesson outcomes and designing appropriate assessment activities, they would also struggle to align assessment with lesson outcomes, and that this would wear down their overall competence in planning the Consolidation stage of their lessons. Because assessing students requires designing tasks that inform the teacher on how well each learner has attained the lesson outcomes (Biggs, 2003), teacher candidates need to be reminded as often as possible that their lesson outcomes, lesson activities (instruction) and assessment should be mirror images of one another (Shrum & Glisan, 2009). Also, instructors should emphasize the importance of alignment in instructional design, since aligning assessment with lesson outcomes, content and teaching strategies significantly improves the quality and effectiveness of instruction (Martin, 2011).

That one third of individual lesson plans only had exemplary performances in remedial activities implies that teacher candidates pay little attention to this aspect of lesson planning. Indeed, when they do not omit it completely, student teachers tend to give back a remedial task similar to one of the Consolidation stages done during the lesson. Yet, a take-home assignment should be a little more complex for students than ongoing assessment which immediately follows instruction in the classroom. In the context of CBA, homework should involve language use beyond the targeted language skill in the classroom.

The fact that joint lesson plans obtained higher exemplary performances than individual lesson plans in almost all major stages and categories of analysis indicates that when student teachers collaborate in lesson design, they become “more confident and more self-analytical” (Clifford et al., 1977, p. 234). This translates into lesson plans with less errors, more appropriate lesson outcomes and assessment activities, smoother transitions from one major stage to another, and overall higher instructional quality.

In a nutshell, lower percentages in exemplary performances for providing preliminary information and planning the research, consolidation and remediation stages of lessons indicate that student teachers need more training in these areas of lesson planning. Also, providing opportunities for student teachers to collaborate in lesson design makes them overall better instructional designers.

Conclusion

This study investigated the competence of student teachers in planning English language lessons during microteaching. For that purpose, 101 lesson plans among which 74 planned by single teachers and 27 by small groups of teachers were analysed following a lesson plan analysis tool (LPAT) previously designed by the researcher. The findings indicate that joint lesson plans had fewer errors and were better in terms of instructional quality than lessons planned by single teachers. Also, it was found that student teachers had greater difficulty writing lesson outcomes, aligning assessment with lesson outcomes, asking relevant questions to guide student work, and providing variety in assessment and quality homework that goes beyond the language structures targeted in the classroom. Therefore, instructors of language teaching methodology courses should prioritize joint lesson planning activities and spend more time working with trainee teachers on the aspects of lesson design which they struggle to master.

Competence in lesson planning in the context of the adoption of an innovation in instructional design is vital, since without it, the reform is doomed to failure. This requires well-calibrated timely interventions during teacher training for optimal acquisition of teaching skills, which only can be achieved through microteaching. As Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007, p.117-118) posited,

... teacher candidates need to have opportunities to practice and reflect on teaching early on and continuously in their preparation and during their initial entry to teaching. When well-supervised practicum and student-teaching experiences precede or are conducted jointly with coursework, studies find, students are better able to connect theoretical learning to practice, more comfortable and confident in learning to teach, and more able to enact what they are learning in ways that are effective for students.

Microteaching, then, appears as a zone of potential development for student teachers that instructors could exploit in a judicious way to develop their trainees' acquisition of teaching skills. The findings of this study, therefore, can help teachers, teacher educators and student teachers in their respective educational contexts to avoid some of the aforementioned pitfalls when designing their lessons or when training student teachers in lesson planning.

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Appendix: Lesson Plan Analysis Tool

I. Preliminary information				
Level of performance Category ⇨ ⇩	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
Preliminary Information (school, level, class size, average age of learners, date, lesson duration, name of teacher, lesson title, references, and justification of the lesson) is present.				
Previous knowledge is appropriate.				
Lesson plan has at least two SMART and relevant outcomes.				
Teaching aids are appropriate and help learners understand content.				
II. Lead-in				
Level of performance Category ⇨ ⇩	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
The activity is creative and suits the lesson to be taught.				
The activity is effective for activating background knowledge.				
Learners can easily figure out what they have to do.				
III. Discovery				
Level of performance Category ⇨ ⇩	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
The strategy used to present the problem-solving situation is appropriate.				
The activity clearly presents a problem, and learners can easily discover this problem.				

I. Research				
Level of performance \Rightarrow Category \Downarrow	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
Students are given a task to do in small groups.				
The teacher candidate asks explicit and relevant questions to guide students' work.				
II. Comparison and validation of findings				
Level of performance \Rightarrow Category \Downarrow	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
The teacher candidate provides expected answers to the questions of the research stage.				
III. Institutionalization and formulation of new knowledge				
Level of performance \Rightarrow Category \Downarrow	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
The teacher candidate provides concise notes that the students can understand. These notes are fully copied in the lesson plan.				
The notes contain vivid examples aimed at facilitating learners' understanding.				
IV. Consolidation				
Level of performance \Rightarrow Category \Downarrow	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment
At least two assessment activities with clear instructions are fully copied in the lesson plan.				
There is variety in assessment activities.				
Assessment activities align with lesson outcomes.				
I. Remediation				
Level of performance \Rightarrow Category \Downarrow	Exemplary	Making progress	Needs improvement	Comment 1
A take-home assignment that helps consolidate new knowledge is given to students. This assignment integrates other language skills and involves language use in real life				

LPAT Key:

Exemplary

Well done. The candidate shows mastery of this particular lesson planning skill. The candidate's intentions and actions are clear, concise, and appropriate for the classroom. The strategy used is appropriate. No element is missing.

Making progress

Fairly well done. The candidate shows understanding of this specific skill, but one element is missing. The strategy used is not the best to maximize students' understanding of content. Some of the candidate's actions and intentions are not clear.

Needs improvement

The strategy used by the teacher candidate is missing or not appropriate at all. Instructions on tasks are not clear. Several elements are missing, and students will probably have difficulty understanding what the teacher is doing or talking about.