

From Lesson Plans to Practice: How Teachers Prepare for English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This study examines how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers design and adapt lesson plans for linguistically diverse classrooms. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it explores the integration of learners' first languages (L1s), scaffolding, and differentiated instruction. The study involved twelve Higher Secondary ESL teachers from Assam, utilising lesson plan analysis and interviews. The findings reveal that while teachers create structured plans, they frequently modify them to address varied language proficiencies and backgrounds. Salient strategies observed include bilingual support, peer collaboration, culturally relevant content, and interactive activities. Teachers also grapple with constraints such as mixed-ability management, limited class time, learner anxiety, and a paucity of multilingual resources. The study highlights the necessity for flexible, responsive lesson planning and advocates for enhanced professional training and resource support to augment multilingual ESL instruction and learner engagement.

Keywords: Lesson plans; Practice; Multilingual; Support; Resource

INTRODUCTION

Effective teacher preparation constitutes the cornerstone of achieving optimal learning outcomes across diverse disciplines and educational levels. While approaches to preparation may vary among educators, the central objective remains consistent: to design and deliver instruction that deepens students' understanding and fosters active engagement.

A significant challenge in this preparatory phase lies in catering to heterogeneous learner profiles within lesson plans. This challenge is particularly pertinent in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, where teachers must navigate the complexities of multilingual student populations and their varied first languages (L1s). Consequently, it is imperative that lesson plans must be crafted with meticulous consideration of this linguistic diversity. Although the formats and depth of lesson plans may diverge, ranging from detailed written documents to conceptual mental frameworks, creating these plans remains a universal practice that enhances effective teaching. Richards (1998) highlights that lesson planning enables educators to anticipate potential instructional challenges, structure their lessons

coherently, provide clear guidance during teaching, and keep track of the content covered.

Acknowledging the critical role of lesson plans, it is imperative to examine contextual factors that shape these instructional frameworks. While some educational institutions mandate standardised templates for lesson planning, others grant teachers the autonomy to design their own. Irrespective of the format, every teacher steps into the classroom with either a structured or conceptual plan to direct their teaching. Furthermore, in light of the multilingual characteristics of many ESL classrooms, each teaching context is unique. This underscores the need to investigate how educators tailor their lesson plans to address the diverse needs of learners in linguistically diverse settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vygotsky (1986) asserts that the successful acquisition of a foreign language is closely linked to learners' proficiency in their first language. This perspective advocates for the pedagogical integration of learners' L1s within ESL classrooms, as it supports comprehension and leverages

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existing linguistic knowledge to facilitate new language acquisition. This stance finds resonance in the works of scholars such as Atkinson (1987), Rahman (2013), and Durairajan (2017), who argue that the strategic use of learners’ mother tongues can enhance English language proficiency.

Given the heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds of students, lesson planning must be adaptable and sensitive to this diversity. Farrell (2002) emphasizes that no single instructional guide can foresee every classroom event, such as unexpected disruptions. Effective teaching, therefore, requires professional flexibility, often developed through experience. Similarly, in multilingual classrooms, lack of familiarity with students’ diverse L1s presents unique challenges, necessitating adaptive planning and inclusive teaching strategies.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws upon Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which postulates that learning is a social process mediated through interaction with others, including teachers and peers, before being internalized by the learner. Although grounded in psychology, Vygotsky’s insights hold significant implications for educational praxis. They encourage teachers to implement differentiated instruction tailored to the specific needs of individual learners. Bekiryazıcı (2015) further advocates the importance of assigning varied roles within learning tasks according to learners’ proficiency levels. This approach fosters inclusivity, thereby ensuring that all learners remain engaged and supported in the classroom environment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do ESL teachers design lesson plans to address the linguistic diversity of their students?

- What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing lesson plans in multilingual ESL classrooms, and what strategies do they employ to overcome these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study utilized purposive sampling to select participants capable of providing insightful data aligned with the research objectives. Twelve ESL teachers from Higher Secondary institutions in Assam were selected for the study. These teachers instruct classrooms comprising students from both English and Assamese medium backgrounds. In strict adherence to confidentiality, the identities of the participants have been anonymized using codes (T1, T2, T3, etc.).

Data collection involved a systematic review of participants’ lesson plans complemented by semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach enabled the collection of rich qualitative data on lesson planning practices, pedagogical adjustments, and decision-making processes. Subsequent thematic analysis was conducted to identify emergent themes, challenges, and effective approaches. This methodology enabled a comprehensive exploration of how educators plan instruction in multilingual classrooms and navigate the complexities inherent in such contexts.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Lesson Plans

All lesson plans share certain key elements, which highlight common instructional strategies and approaches used by teachers. These shared components ensure consistency in delivering lessons and contribute to effective teaching and learning in English language classrooms. The following table provides an overview of these common points observed across all lesson plans.

Table 1: Key Patterns Identified in Lesson Plans

S.No	Key Patterns Identified in Lesson Plans	Description
1	Structured Lesson Design	Teachers developed a structured plan for each unit they were responsible for, with clearly articulated learning objectives to guide instruction.
2	Teaching Methodologies	A range of learner-centric methods were implemented, including peer interaction, experiential learning, problem-solving, and interactive teaching.

S.No	Key Patterns Identified in Lesson Plans	Description
3	Time Management	Teaching hours were systematically divided into distinct phases, such as topic introduction, content delivery, learner engagement, and activities, with specific time allocations.
4	Activities	Classroom activities were designed to accommodate learners from various linguistic backgrounds, typically focusing on one or two language skills, listening, speaking, reading, or writing, within group settings.
5	Materials/Resources	A variety of educational tools, including games, debates, worksheets, and charts, were used to support teaching and enhance student participation.
6	Tasks to Do	Both individual and group tasks were incorporated at the end of each class session, complemented by follow-up assignments to be completed at home.

Strategies Employed by Teachers to Plan their Lessons for Linguistically Diverse ESL Classrooms

Differentiated Instruction

To address the varying levels of language proficiency within their classrooms, all twelve teachers implemented differentiated strategies in their lesson planning. For instance, T4 and T7 encouraged students to first discuss concepts in their L1 with peers before transitioning to English. T4 also used visual aids, such as images, to explain grammatical concepts in Assamese and Hindi, the two predominant L1s in the class. T6 adapted writing tasks according to learners' skill levels, providing sentence starters to students requiring additional support, while T9 included bilingual instruction for learners with limited exposure to English. These differentiated strategies reflect a conscious effort to scaffold learning across proficiency levels.

Instructional Methodologies

All participants employed a blend of pedagogical methods, integrating lecture-based, participatory, and experiential learning techniques. T2 facilitated a debate on astrology during the analysis of *The Tiger King*, connecting the text to students' lived experiences to stimulate discussion. T5 used pair work and collaborative summarisation tasks to foster peer-supported learning, while T11 frequently incorporated peer teaching and storytelling. T8 emphasised reflective writing exercises that encouraged learners to relate literary content to their personal lives. Despite variations in execution, the teachers agreed that

teaching methodologies required flexibility and were often adapted in real time based on student engagement and comprehension levels.

Scaffolding Techniques

Teachers reported using multiple scaffolding tools to support language acquisition. T1 and T3 incorporated bilingual dictionaries, while T1 also allowed students to use digital translation tools such as Google Translate to facilitate comprehension. During a lesson on *Going Places*, T3 engaged students in a discussion on personal fantasies versus real-life goals, an approach that enhanced vocabulary development and stimulated class participation. T6 and T9 utilised concept maps and graphic organisers, whereas T12 scaffolded difficult texts using sentence-level analysis followed by group explanation. These strategies enabled learners to build confidence and progressively develop language skills.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Cultural relevance emerged as a key component of the participants' lesson planning. T10 cited the character Saheb-E-Alam from *Lost Spring*, noting that students were able to relate to the character's struggles through their own observations of child labour in local settings. T11 highlighted *Magh Bihu*, a culturally significant text, stating that it prompted students from Assamese, Bengali, and Nepali communities to share their own experiences of the festival, thus fostering intercultural dialogue. T8 linked class discussions to students' community traditions, while T2, T6, and T7 mentioned incorporating region-specific idioms and references to enhance learner relatability. Such

practices were instrumental in cultivating an inclusive, learner-friendly environment.

Language-Based Activities

Interactive activities featured prominently in the teachers' planning as tools to develop language skills and promote collaboration. T3 applied the "Think, Pair, Share" model, encouraging ideation and articulation around imaginative topics like "fantasy." T5 focused on grammar-based tasks, such as identifying errors in short paragraphs, while T12 used peer review methods, where in students composed reflections and evaluated each other's work. T1 divided the class into two groups and assigned them the task of collaboratively listing the acquired concepts on the board. Points were awarded for originality, and each group had a student acting as the leader. T6 and T9 emphasized role-play and dramatization, while T7 and T11 used reading circles. T8 designed language games such as word association and vocabulary bingo to enhance lexical development. All twelve teachers reported that these activities increased engagement, improved participation, and supported holistic language acquisition.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing their Lesson Plans in Multilingual ESL Classrooms

Despite detailed and well-structured lesson plans, the participating teachers encountered a range of challenges during classroom implementation, largely due to the multilingual and heterogeneous nature of their student cohorts. These challenges, identified across all twelve teachers (T1–T12), were thematically categorized as follows:

- 1. Classroom Management in Linguistically Diverse Settings:** The varying linguistic and academic proficiency levels of students posed substantial difficulties in classroom management. Teachers noted that maintaining consistent engagement among learners was challenging, particularly when comprehension levels and task performance varied significantly across the class. This heterogeneity made it difficult to adhere strictly to pre-designed lesson plans. New and unpredictable challenges frequently emerged, such as students struggling with grammatical structures, sentence formation, collaborative tasks, or time-bound

assignments, which required teachers to make real-time adjustments. For instance, T3 and T9 mentioned that group work occasionally had to be restructured to better align with students' interpersonal compatibility and working pace.

- 2. Time Constraints and Curriculum Demands:** The standard instructional time allotted for English classes, typically between 45 to 60 minutes, was widely viewed by the participants as insufficient for effective lesson execution. Teachers were expected not only to cover curriculum content but also to facilitate the development of core language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) within this limited timeframe. Given that the majority of students primarily used their first language (L1) outside of the classroom, additional support during class time was often required to help them navigate home assignments. Several teachers, notably T5 and T8, expressed that these competing demands of content and language instruction constrained their ability to fully realize the pedagogical objectives outlined in their lesson plans.
- 3. Student Motivation and Language Anxiety:** Low self-esteem and reduced motivation, especially among students from underrepresented linguistic backgrounds, emerged as a recurring concern. Teachers observed that learners who felt insecure about their pronunciation or fluency, whether in English or the language used for peer interaction, were often reluctant to participate in class discussions. T6 and T11 provided examples of Nepali-speaking students who, when attempting to communicate in Assamese, struggled with pronunciation, resulting in lowered confidence and classroom silence. To address this, teachers adopted strategies such as individualized encouragement, peer-supported tasks, and deliberate use of students' L1s to create a more inclusive environment. For instance, T2 and T4 intentionally used phrases in the students' native languages and invited feedback on pronunciation, which not only engaged the learners but also helped normalise linguistic diversity in the classroom.

4. Limited Access to Multilingual Resources:

A significant barrier identified by nearly all participants was the scarcity of multilingual teaching materials. Most teachers reported creating their own instructional content or relying on freely available online tools. However, resource limitations became especially problematic when teachers were not fluent in all the languages spoken by their students. T1, T7, and T12 noted that while they could manage three or four L1S, their classes often included speakers of additional languages unfamiliar to them. In such cases, tools like Google Translate were cautiously integrated into classroom practices. Teachers emphasised the limitations of machine translation to students and illustrated these shortcomings through examples, encouraging learners to approach such tools critically. This approach promoted learner autonomy while maintaining instructional coherence.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms the critical importance of structured yet flexible lesson planning in linguistically diverse ESL classrooms, a finding that resonates strongly with the theoretical underpinnings provided by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist framework. According to Vygotsky, learning is inherently a socially mediated process, emerging through interaction with others within a cultural context. The teachers' strategic use of learners' first languages (L1S), peer collaboration, and culturally relevant content illustrates this principle in practice, facilitating meaningful social interaction that supports language acquisition. This approach aligns with previous research emphasising the pedagogical value of incorporating L1 to scaffold new language learning (Atkinson, 1987; Rahman, 2013; Durairajan, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings underscore the necessity of differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques, corroborating Farrell's (2002) assertion that lesson plans must remain adaptable to the unpredictability of classroom dynamics. Teachers' flexible modification of lesson plans in response to diverse learner needs reflects the professional agility that Farrell highlights as critical in multilingual settings. Additionally, Bekiryazıcı's (2015) notion of

differentiated roles within learning tasks is evident in the varied instructional methods employed by teachers, ensuring all learners were actively engaged despite their varying proficiency levels.

Moreover, the challenges identified, such as classroom management, time constraints, student motivation, and resource limitations, highlight the gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities. These issues demonstrate that while lesson plans provide a vital structure, effective teaching demands responsiveness to immediate classroom contexts, echoing Vygotsky's emphasis on the social and dynamic nature of learning environments.

This study provides valuable insights, though it has certain limitations. The research is based on a small sample of twelve teachers from a specific geographical and cultural context in Assam, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other ESL contexts.

In conclusion, the study supports the existing body of literature advocating for culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive pedagogy within ESL instruction. The integration of L1, adaptive scaffolding, and interactive language activities promotes learner autonomy and engagement, yet their success is contingent upon institutional support and resource availability. Therefore, policy-level interventions and professional development programs that focus on multilingual teaching competencies are imperative to enhance ESL education. Future research should delve deeper into effects of adaptive lesson planning on long-term language proficiency and academic outcomes, thereby contributing to the evolving discourse on multilingual pedagogy.

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EDITORIAL TRANSITION NOTE

English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI) and the *Journal of English Language Teaching* (JELT) place on record their sincere appreciation to **Prof. Chitra V. R., Former Professor of English, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India**, for her dedicated service as Editor-in-Chief from **May 2025 to December 2025**. During her tenure, Prof. Chitra upheld the scholarly standards of the journal, guided its editorial processes with care and professionalism, and contributed thoughtful editorial direction that enriched the journal's engagement with contemporary developments in English language teaching and research. We extend our heartfelt thanks to her for her valuable leadership and service to the academic community and to ELTAI.

We are pleased to welcome **Prof.G.Suvarna Lakshmi, Professor, Department of English Language Teaching, The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, India**, as the new Editor-in-Chief of JELT. A distinguished scholar in the field of English language teaching with extensive experience in research and academic publishing, Dr Suvarna Lakshmi brings to the role a strong commitment to scholarly excellence and editorial integrity. We are confident that under her leadership, the journal will continue to strengthen its academic profile and expand its engagement with teachers, researchers, and practitioners in the field.

The journal remains committed to supporting English language teachers, researchers, and practitioners through the dissemination of quality scholarship and the promotion of ethical and inclusive publication practices.

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