

An investigation into difficulties in designing lesson plans experienced by pre-service teachers at the University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang

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Abstract. It is indisputable that developing pre-service teachers' lesson-planning skills plays a key role in the language teacher training program. However, lesson planning is currently inadequately evaluated as a laborious task to many pre-service teachers, and they encounter a host of difficulties in tailoring a meticulous lesson plan. Since there is not much research into this subject in Vietnam, this paper is carried out with the purpose of investigating the difficulties in designing lesson plans experienced by pre-service teachers at the University of Foreign Language Studies – the University of Danang. This research employs qualitative approach of the data collected from questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The subject involves in the research are pre-service teachers majoring in English Language Teacher Education. Seventy (70) trainee teachers took part in the questionnaire at the first stage of data collection. Among these participants, at the second stage for semi-structured interview, the recording was administered to a population of ten (10) pre-service teachers who were chosen randomly with convenience. Hopefully, the research would serve as a source of reference for trainee teachers, in particular and teachers of English in general.

Keywords: lesson plan; pre-service teacher; difficulties in designing lesson plans

INTRODUCTION

Designing lesson plans has long been considered as an integral part in teaching and training system in Vietnam and is used as a core element for a successful lesson since it provides teachers with a detailed road map for their teaching, in particular and enhances teaching innovation process in general (Nguyen, 2011). In the current procedure of teaching foreign languages, as class timing for every lesson is limited, lesson plan is a crucial framework for teachers to allocate time for each activity in the class, ensuring the smooth and effectiveness of a lesson. Therefore, preparing the lesson beforehand not only provides teachers with a sense of control and direction while teaching but also helps them identify and be aware of what they intend to deliver to students (Rusznayak & Walton, 2011).

With a viewpoint: “Effective teaching can be done only with effective planning” (Alanazi, 2019), lesson planning plays a pivotal role in the success of a lesson. The act of listing out all the textbook activities in a given template is not an effective lesson plan. Designing lesson plans is a multifaceted procedure demanding the creativeness and flexibility of the teacher to fulfill all the educational goals. Planning for classroom teaching, thus, is one of the fundamental skills that trainee teachers must gain during their training period at the university to enhance their professional competence for the future teaching career.

In the teacher training curriculum of Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education, students get prepared for teaching practice in real settings in English Language Teaching Methodology 3 (ELTM3) course and teaching practicum. During these two courses, pre-service teachers have opportunities to design lesson plans and use them as guides for their micro teaching. Therefore, with the aim of creating a successful micro-teaching lesson, pre-service teachers need to have a meticulous lesson plan including clear objectives, a wide range of meaningful activities based on the content of the provided teaching materials along with detailed instructions to motivate students during the lesson. Both the lesson plans and pre-service teachers’ performance during micro-teaching classes are then assessed, marked and given feedback by the supervisor.

It is indisputable that the transition from students into pre-service teachers is an extremely challenging task. Teacher trainees, therefore, encounter a host of difficulties during the process of designing lesson plans. Realizing the importance of lesson plans for teachers in general and for pre-service teachers in particular, this research is carried out with the purposes of delving into pre-service teachers’ perspectives towards the designing lesson plans procedure as well as identifying the potential difficulties faced by trainee teachers. All the findings will then form a sufficient ground to put forward feasible solutions with a view of helping them address out all these problems. In addition, since ELTM3 course and teaching practicum are preparation stages for pre-service teachers’ teaching profession, this study is expected to serve as the reference for pre-service teachers to gain insights into lesson planning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, writing lesson plans is an important part of being an effective teacher; however, it is still a complex and challenging process that many pre-service teachers struggle with. With different approaches, researchers have shown interests in studies delving into the difficulties that pre-service teachers encountered during the lesson planning process.

Rolanda (2019) conducted a study focusing on investigating students' problems in designing lesson plans during microteaching class. The study pointed out some common mistakes and difficulties almost all pre-service teachers at the Department of English Language Education UIN Ar-Raniry encountered in the lesson plan preparation process which were formulating indicator, analyzing basic competence to the indicator, and selecting appropriate assessment. Also, some feasible solutions from both students and lecturer sides were given to help improve the situation.

Alanazi (2019) in "A Study of the Pre-Service Trainee Teachers Problems in Designing Lesson Plans", analyzed the pre-service trainee teachers' attitudes, ideas, and obstacles in designing lesson plans at the Department of Curriculum and Educational Technology Northern Border University. Analyzing the results from fifty teacher trainees' interviews, the researcher revealed that pre-service teachers had dignified attitudes of lesson plan as well as its importance. However, problems still arose during lesson planning execution including: (1) pre-service teachers pointed out that they have difficulty in choosing the appropriate activities that suit learners' level, (2) they still depend too much on ready-made instructional materials, and (3) It is extremely hard for them to separate time limit effectively for each activity.

Zingir Gülten (2013) in "Am I planning well? Teacher trainees' voices on lesson planning" shed light on the difficulties that pre-service teacher faced while preparing lesson plan. 150 second-year pre-service teachers studying at the ELT department at the Faculty of Education, Uludağ University, Turkey were participated in this study. All of the participants were taking ELT Methodology I course as part of their curriculum in their pre-determined sections by the same instructor. Basing on the results and discussion of this study, the most difficult part of designing a lesson plan was the formulation of objectives. In terms of pre-service teachers' perspective about lesson planning procedure, two specific categories were formed:

- "Feeling like a teacher": most participants enjoyed lesson planning procedure. They considered it as an exciting experience that helped them reduce strain while teaching students in the real settings.
- "Hesitations": as pre-service teachers had little experience, they found that designing lesson plans was time-consuming and the procedure of choosing and sequencing activities was extremely challenging. Most of them, therefore, felt disoriented and stressful while writing lesson plans.

Gafoor and Farooque (2010) delved into the difficulties faced by student teachers in connection with lesson planning. Seventy-four teacher trainees who had finished their pre-service preparation constituted as the sample. As can be seen from the result, respondents majored in English pedagogy indicated four primary challenges they encounter during the lesson planning process. "In specifying and educational objectives" was ranked as the most challenging task while designing lesson plans (81%), followed by "choosing learning experiences appropriate to the learners", "deciding and allotting the time suitably for every lesson", and "in executing the planned lesson in classroom" which accounted for 69% the participants.

As cited in Rolanda (2019), Bob (2004) indicated five major difficulties that pre-service teachers most frequent encounter in designing lesson plan including (1) identifying the main objectives of the lesson, (2) designing effective lesson assessment, (3) preparing appropriate teaching materials, (4) writing clear instructions and (5) choosing teaching activities aligned with learning objectives.

The above-mentioned pieces of works mainly studied the challenges that pre-service teachers encounter during the lesson planning procedure as well as point out some helpful teaching and learning methods to improve the situation. However, none of them were devoted to the current situation of English teacher trainees' experience of lesson plans in Vietnam. It is clear that if the difficulties of pre-service teachers in designing lesson plan were not detected soon, it would lead to more and more mistakes in their teacher professional development in the future. Therefore, research on this matter is indispensable.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The importance of Lesson Plans. "Lesson plan is one of the key factors in the educational process." (Nesari & Heidari, 2014). According to Farrell (2002), four primarily benefits of lesson planning are indicated including:

- An effective lesson plan helps teacher prepare beforehand the teaching aids, control the time limit for each session and choose the appropriate and relevant activities to assure the sequencing of the lesson.
- A lesson plan provides teachers a sense of security and prevents them from unpredictable atmosphere during the lesson since all things has been planned.
- A lesson plan provides a detailed record of what has been taught.
- In some emergency cases, a lesson plan helps substitute teacher easily facilitate the lesson to the students.

"Successful teachers are invariably good planners and thinkers" (Gafoor & Farooque, 2010). Borich (2007) (cited in Cicek and Tok, 2014) points out that designing lesson plan is a key element in the procedure of "meeting national content standards and optimizing the outcomes of classroom teaching and learning". Cicek and Tok (2014) also states that implementing a good lesson plan will help students more engaged in the lesson, avoid wasting time and create a work-oriented classroom atmosphere during the lesson.

“Lesson planning is the most important part of teaching, and of improving students learning” (Kibret, 2016). Since the level of learners varies among classes, designing lesson plan enables teachers to execute instructional activities which meet students’ learning outcomes and differentiate instruction to ensure that the students can easily perform and accomplish all the tasks during the lesson. Also, designing lesson plan plays key role in educational process in which teachers integrate their own experience of students learning and the assigned tasks on teaching materials to satisfy students’ needs.

The importance of lesson plans for pre-service teachers. “An important part of any teacher preparation program is the process of planning and writing lessons” (Capobianco & Faber, 2017). Lesson planning is crucial to the growth of preservice teachers during their training as it helps teachers think thoroughly all the necessary pieces of teaching an exemplary lesson. The process of planning a lesson usually comprises of organizing the activities, constructing the goals, and receiving feedback from the supervisor.

Gafoor and Farooque (2010) claims that when pre-service teachers have the ability to design their own lesson plans, they have taken “a giant step toward owning the content they teach and the methods they use” which will help to define them as the teachers. Lesson plans will help new or inexperienced teachers organize content, materials, and methods. While many experienced teachers often reduce lesson plans to a mental map or short outline, new teachers usually find detailed lesson plans to be indispensable.

Rolanda (2019) conducted research delving into the perspectives of pre-service teachers during the process of planning a lesson. According to the responses from twenty participants, three major advantages of lesson plans were mentioned including lesson plans as a teaching guideline, lesson plans as a teaching planning and lesson plans as a crucial aspect of teaching. The students revealed that the lesson plan benefited and facilitated them in the teaching especially for who never had teaching experience before. In addition, the lesson plan helped them in the microteaching class to organize the teaching and to achieve the learning objectives.

Problems in designing lesson plans. Jones, Jones, & Vermette (2011) (cited in Grove, 2014) in a three-year research: “Six common lesson planning pitfalls: recommendations for novice educators” also discussed six specific mistakes that pre-service make during the planning process:

1. The learning objective is unclear: While facilitating the lesson, some pre-service teachers tended to cover too much information beyond the knowledge provided in the teaching materials or/and the lesson lacked a clear goal for student learning.
2. The assessment of student understanding, or the assessment is completed outside of class: pre-services teachers tried to deliver too much knowledge without checking students’ acquisition. Jones et al. (2011) indicated that pre-service teachers often “go through the motions of teaching without ever stopping to see what (if anything) their students have learnt”.

3. Lessons do not include formative assessment: through sequence of activities in some studied lesson plans, the researchers found that students did not have chances to show their understandings and ideas during the lessons.
4. The assessment does not match the learning objectives. Many lessons included nonsense activities that have no effect on practicing or improving students learning.
5. Teacher trainees do not know how to start the lesson: The researchers found that pre-service teachers faced a lot of difficulties in designing meaningful, relevant warm-up activities to catch the students' attention and stimulate their interest for the new lesson.

“Lessons were designed in such a way that students became passive recipients of knowledge” (Grove, 2014): the examined lesson plans involved mainly theoretical knowledge without conducting authentic activity and meaning-making to help students engage in the lesson.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempts to answer these following questions:

1. What are pre-service teachers' perspectives of designing lesson plans?
2. What are problems encountered by pre-service teachers in lesson planning process?
3. What are teaching implications of studying those problems?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1. This research helps students majoring in English Language Teacher Education gain insights into the lesson planning procedure, develop their awareness of potential problems while planning micro-teaching lessons as well as draw out some feasible solutions to overcome their difficulties.
2. The lecturers can have an overview about the problems encountered by pre-service teachers in designing lesson plans during micro-teaching class and teaching practicum. Thus, they can change their attitudes and modify approaches towards the current training methods, which in turn benefit students.
3. This study can motivate the next researcher to conduct further study in order to increase the quality of English teaching learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design. As mentioned above, this research aimed at delving into the difficulties that pre-service teachers at Danang university of Foreign language studies – The university of Danang encountered during the process of designing lesson plans. The study began with some hypotheses drawn from the preliminary pieces of research and assumptions about Vietnamese pre-service teachers' planning competence.

This study applied qualitative method with the support from qualitative information in which participants were asked to accomplish one questionnaire and attend the semi-structured interview. After the collected data were analyzed, they were interpreted and compared with the proposed hypotheses to generate the exact causes of the matter.

In terms of qualitative method, “qualitative methods are used to explore areas where little is known or much is known in order to gain novel understanding. It can also collect details about a phenomenon. The details can include feelings, thought processes, and emotions” (Nyberg, 2012). Maxwell (2013) indicates that qualitative methodology provides the researcher with the opportunity to identify and analyze themes and connections. One of the most important strengths in qualitative research is on the process of gaining deeper levels of information that provide description rather than numerical data of quantitative research. Therefore, basing on the nature of the research, qualitative method is the most suitable facility to fulfill all the objectives.

In terms of qualitative information, questionnaire to verify the qualitative information were necessary as they collected the general opinions of participants involved. Also, semi-structured interview was used to gain in-depth data including pre-service teachers’ perspective towards lesson plans and what they faced during the planning process.

Data collection and Data Analysis. This study is qualitative research. Data collection accomplished through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were then qualitatively analyzed. The study is carried out in two following stages:

Questionnaires: at the beginning of the process, questionnaire is distributed to seventy (70) pre-service teachers who were taken ELTM3 course and are taking internship. While the first part surveys pre-service teachers’ perspectives towards designing lesson plans, the second part aims at ascertaining trainee teachers’ difficulties during this process.

Interviews: in the second stage of the study, ten (10) randomly participants are asked to attend an interview session. The semi-structured interview was conducted through direct interaction between the researcher and the participants, following a guide list of open-ended questions. However, depending on the participants’ responses, follow-up discussions will be applied to gain in-depth information. Then, the researcher records or takes notes the participants’ answers using digital recorder.

The reason for the employment of the random sampling was that any member of the subjects could be given a fair equal chance to be chosen as a member of informants or respondents. It was also due to the financial convenience that the study was not funded; according to the researcher do not have to deal with the payment for the participation or performance of the informants/respondents.

Discussion of Reliability and Validity. The population of the research are seniors at University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang who were accomplished ELTM3 course and having an internship at high schools and primary schools in Danang. Although, the English competence as well as teaching experiences are unequalled among pre-service teachers, there is no substantial gap between their academic and teaching qualification. The results of the study just displayed the pre-service teachers’ perspectives and difficulties they encounter during the process of designing lesson plans. The findings, which can’t be applied to all students majoring English Language Teacher Education in Vietnam, is one of the limitations of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The practice of designing lesson plans in ELTM3 course and teaching practicum. Seventy (70) pre-service teachers who have enrolled in ELTM3 course and teaching practicum participate in this investigation. The questionnaire aims at generating an overview of the practice of designing lesson plans during ELTM3 course and teaching practicum when designing lesson plans. The information collected is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview about the practice of designing lesson plans in ELTM3 course and teaching practicum

		ELTM3 course, %	Teaching practicum, %
Number of assigned lesson plans	Less than 4	2.9	25.7
	5-6	60.0	17.1
	7-8	34.3	17.1
	More than 8	2.9	25.7
Kinds of collaboration when designing lesson plans	Individually	5.7	65.7
	In pairs	22.9	5.7
	In groups	62.9	25.7
	Individually and in groups	2.9	2.9
	Individually, in pairs and in groups	2.9	0.0
Hours spent on designing a lesson plan	Less than 2 hours	14.3	20.0
	3-5 hours	57.1	42.9
	6-8 hours	20.0	28.6
	More than 8 hours	8.6	86.0

Regarding the number of assigned lesson plans, while a majority of pre-service teachers are required to design 5-6 lesson plans (60.0%) or 7-8 lesson plans (34.3%) in ELTM3 course, the number of required lesson plans in teaching practicum varies depending on the workload distributed by the supervisor of each pre-service teacher. However, as can be seen clearly from the table, 40.0% of pre-service teachers are asked to prepare more than 8 lesson plans throughout their internship while only 25.7 % of them design less than 4 lesson plans. The percentage of participants designing 5-6 lesson plans and 7-8 lesson plans accounts for the same data which is 17.1% for each figure. Therefore, with the alterations in the number of assigned lesson plans per participant, it is evident that different pre-service teachers hold different perspectives towards lesson plans.

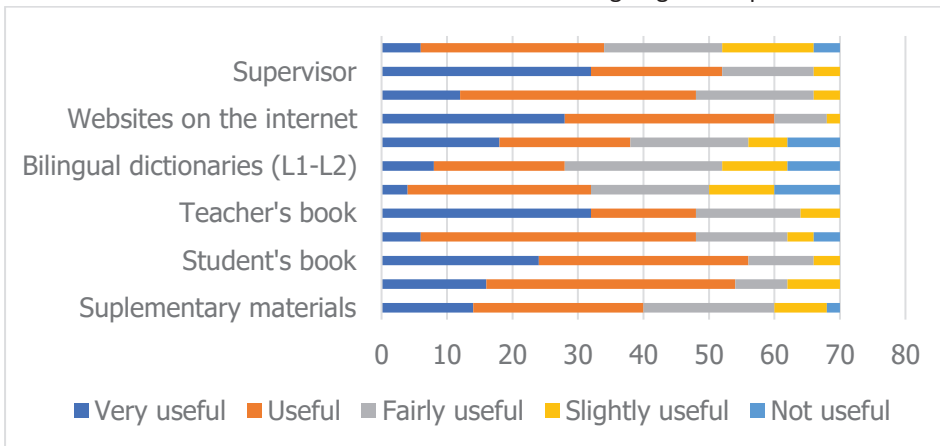
In terms of collaboration when designing lesson plans during two courses, 62.9% of trainee teachers are asked to work in groups during ELTM3 course which takes up a lion's share. This was followed by the proportion of pre-service teachers required to work in pairs and individually, accounting for 22.9% and 5.7% respectively. In contrast, throughout the teaching practicum practice, over half of interns (65.7%) are assigned to work individually. The figures of pre-service teachers who work in pairs or in groups take up a minor share, constituting of 25.7% and 5.7% in turn.

Regarding the information about pre-service teachers' opinions about collaboration when designing lesson plans through semi-structured interviews, all pre-service teachers agree that each kind of collaboration has its own advantages and disadvantages. Although working individually gives them chances to unleash their own creativity in choosing activities and preparing teaching materials when designing lesson plans as well as prevent themselves from conflicts and arguments as there is no discussion during this process, most of them (7-8 participants) claims that the feeling of insecure and unconfident is unavoidable as they cannot re-check their work with anyone. Also, working in pairs or in groups enables them to exchange ideas form each other to ensure that they can bring the most well-prepared lesson to their students. Therefore, irrespective of the aforementioned drawbacks of working individually, pre-service teachers still prefer working with partners rather than working alone when planning a lesson.

In addition, as presented on the table, with the number of required lesson plans, the percentage of pre-service teachers spending 3-5 hours on average to design a lesson plan during ELTM3 course accounts for a bulk, with 57.1%. This is followed by those who devote 6-8 hours per week to design a lesson plan (20.0%). However, only 8.6% pre-service teachers spend more than 8 hours in designing a lesson plan. In contrast, during teaching practicum practice, it is noticeable that pre-service teachers spend more hours to design a lesson plan. Although the group of trainees who spend 3-5 hours per week still ranks first with 42.9%, this figure is decreased by 14.2%.

The usefulness of resources in designing lesson plans. As mentioned above the frequencies of using resources in designing lesson plans, question number 17 in questionnaire aims to delve into the effectiveness of these resources among pre-service teachers. The data collected is presented on the bar Chart 1:

Chart 1 The usefulness of resources in designing lesson plans



There is an evidently high number of those (32) who think Teacher’s book and Supervisor are the most useful resources they use as references to prepare lesson plans. Also, the figures for those who rate “useful” are 16 and 14 respectively and there is no pre-service teacher partaking the survey believe these two resources are totally useless. According to the interviews, pre-service teachers admit that since Teachers’ book not only provide the answers but also introduce guidelines and instructions for each activity in the textbook, pre-service teachers can easily follow the guided instructions, organize their lesson plan in a logical order and prepare beforehand the answers for activities. All these things help pre-service teachers simplify the planning procedure and they feel less stressful when designing lesson plans.

In terms of the support from supervisors, all interviewed participants agree that supervisors play a pivotal role in the success of a lesson plans. As they have more teaching knowledge and experience, their comments and feedback on pre-service teachers’ lesson plans are indispensable. Pre-service teachers claim that they are not confident to deliver the lesson to students without receiving feedback from supervisors. Also, pre-service teachers use the constructive feedback and marks given by the supervisor as a record of their progress during ELTM3 course and teaching practicum practice.

Another interesting point is that no pre-service teachers refuse the usefulness of websites on the internet. 28 trainees rate websites are very useful to their planning process, 32 students surveyed think that websites are useful and only 10 pre-service teachers rate fairly and slightly useful. Therefore, through the collected data, it is evident that websites are indispensable resources for teacher trainees to support them during the planning procedure for each lesson. Through data collected from interviews, a wide range of websites are employed during different stages of designing a lesson plan. Noticeably, along with the development of technology and the infrastructure of schools, pre-service teachers can now integrate online platforms in activities which can not only show the creativity and flexibility of a teachers but also enhancing the motivation of students in the lesson.

Perspectives of pre-service teachers of designing lesson plans. As mentioned earlier in Literature Review, lesson plans play a prominent role that have had a desire impact on learners. Having said that, the pre-service teacher’s awareness of lesson plans remains controversial. The investigation into intern’s perspectives on the lesson planning procedure aims to present their own outlook on this process. Collected from the question 9 of questionnaires for those who have enrolled in ELTM3 course and teaching practicum, their perception of the lesson plans is expressed in Table 2.

Table 2 The importance of a lesson plan for a pre-service teacher

No.	The importance of a lesson plan for a pre-service teacher	%
1.	Preparing lesson plans is the most indispensable skill that a pre-service teacher needs to create a successful lesson.	85.7
2.	A meticulous lesson plan minimizes classroom management problems.	54.3
3.	Preparing lesson plans is an easy task to fulfill before performing micro-teaching practices.	25.7
4.	Lesson plan is just the process of listing out the activities during the lesson.	14.3
5.	A meticulous lesson plan leads to the success of a lesson.	57.1
6.	Lesson plan has no effect on the success of a lesson.	2.9
7.	A pre-service teacher can still confidently deliver the lesson without a lesson plan.	8.6
8.	Lesson plans help a pre-service teacher to close the gap between theory and practice.	62.9
9.	Preparing lesson plans enable a pre-service teacher to gain experience since it forces them to reflect what they have taught.	51.4
10.	Preparing lesson plan is the most important thing a pre-service teacher needs to accomplish before every micro-teaching practice.	45.7

The highlight of the data is that being questioned about their perception in this field, 60 out of 70 pre-service teachers agree with the view: “preparing lesson plans is the most indispensable skill that a pre-service teacher need to fulfill to create a successful lesson”. Also, 62.9% of interns affirm that lesson plan helps a pre-service teacher to close the gap between theory and practice and 57.1% of participants agree that a meticulous lesson plan leads to the success of a lesson. Therefore, through all these features, it can be proved that trainee teachers fully apprehend the considerable importance of designing lesson plans skill in their teacher training in particular and in their teaching career in general. Interestingly, over a half of participants (51.4%) states that preparing lesson plans enable a pre-service teacher to gain experience since it forces them to reflect what they have taught. This means that pre-service teachers not only consider lesson plans as a road map for their micro-teaching practice but also use them as records for reflections.

In addition, there are only two participants state “lesson plans have no effect on the success of a lesson” or “a pre-service teacher can still confidently deliver the lesson without a lesson plan” accounts for a minor share, with 2.9% and 8.6% respectively. Interestingly, the idea that lesson plan is just the process of listing out the activities during the lesson receive the agreement of only 14.3% of participants, indicating that most trainee teachers appreciate the creativeness in designing lesson plans. Through interviews, they both recognize the importance of a meticulous lesson plan with the variations in collaborations among students and interesting activities play a key role in motivating learners during the lesson. Hence, pre-service teachers usually flexibly adapt the ready-made activities in the textbook and make modifications, if necessary, instead of over-relying on it.

All things considered, the collected data leads to a firm ground that a majority of trainee teachers are highly conscious about the essential roles of lesson plans to learners as well as their pedagogical competence in designing lesson plans.

Tasks in lesson planning process pre-service teachers find difficult. The statistics from the questionnaire draw out some valuable information about the current situation in designing lesson plans of pre-service teachers. The information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Tasks in lesson planning process pre-service teachers find difficult

No.	Tasks in lesson planning process pre-service teachers find difficult	%
1.	Planning a logically structured lesson.	74.3
2.	Analyzing the content in the student’s book.	37.1
3.	Formulating and identifying aims and objectives of the lesson.	37.1
4.	Choosing in advance the appropriate classroom activities that match aims and objectives of the lesson as well as the level of students.	71.4
5.	Deciding warm-up activities to motivate students at the beginning of the lesson.	51.4
6.	Designing meaningful activities in production part to enhance language competence especially speaking skill of students.	71.4
7.	Allocating the time for each stage/activity.	28.6
8.	Deciding on appropriate interaction patterns among students (individual work, pair work, group work, etc.).	17.1
9.	Writing clear and detailed instruction for the activities.	22.9
10.	Selecting assignments that enhance student mastery of content.	31.4

As can be seen clearly from the table, among the trainee teachers surveyed, 74.3% participants state planning a structured lesson as the main stress part during the process of designing lesson plans. Through the information collected from in-depth interviews, pre-service teachers claim that with the constraints of time and knowledge delivered in a lesson, they need to consider thoroughly and organize activities in a logical order to ensure that there is a connection in each part of a lesson.

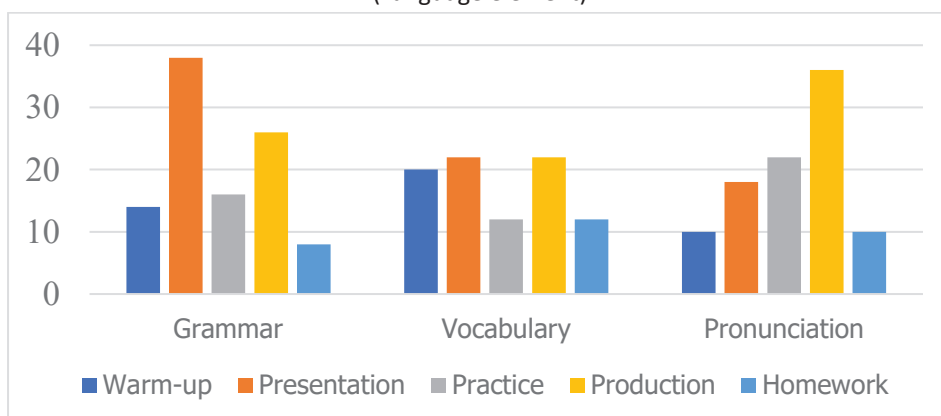
Standing in the second place are two aspects: “choosing in advance the appropriate classroom activities that match aims and objectives of the lesson as well as the level of students” and “designing meaningful activities in production part to enhance language competence especially speaking skill of students” which are voted by 71.4% of pre-service teachers. They encounter a host of difficulties in deciding the classroom activities to motivate students during the lesson. They point out that if the activity is too easy, strong students are more likely to get distracted and feel bored, whereas if the activity is too difficult, it is extremely hard for weak students to catch up with the flow of the lesson and feel demotivated. Therefore, they always need to make modifications and adopt the given exercises flexibly to ensure the smooth and effectiveness of a lesson. Also, ranked in the fourth and fifth position are “Deciding warm-up activities to motivate students at the beginning of the lesson”, “analyzing the content in the student’s book” and “formulating and identifying aims and objectives of the lesson” which are voted by 51.4% and 37.1% of pre-service teachers respectively.

Moreover, it is immediately evident that a minor number of trainees encounters the difficulties in “deciding on appropriate interaction patterns among students” (17.1%) and “writing clear and detailed instruction for the activities” (22.9%). It is due to the fact that pre-service teachers already know the nature and process of each activity they plan. Hence, they do not face any obstacles in the procedure of distribution of interaction patterns among students of writing instructions for activities.

Parts of a lesson pre-service teacher encounter difficulties when designing a lesson plan. To gain in-depth knowledge about the lesson planning process, trainee teachers are asked to recognize which parts of a lesson they encounter difficulties when designing a lesson plan. The data collected is stated on Charts 2 and 3.

- Language elements

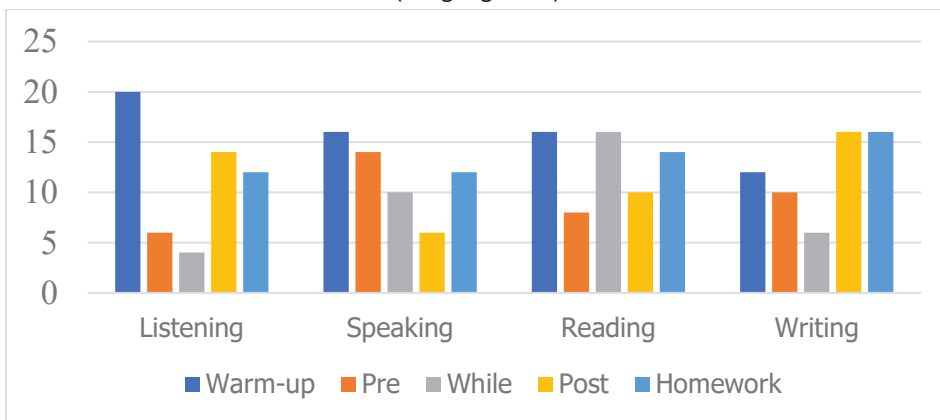
Chart 2 Parts of a lesson pre-service teachers encounter difficulties when designing a lesson plan (Language element)



It is immediately evident that with different language elements, pre-service teachers face difficulties in different parts of a lesson:

- Grammar: 38 out of 70 pre-service teacher surveyed reply that they find presentation stage is most difficult when designing a lesson plan. It is mainly because this process demands planning beforehand in details the usages, structures and examples of specific grammar points and they need to think thoroughly the effective ways to convey to students in the most comprehensible way.
- Vocabulary: there is not a wide disparity between the results of each part. 21 out of 70 pre-service teachers on average encounter difficulties in designing a vocabulary section. Through interviews, 8-9 participants surveyed reveals that thanks to the availability of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries as well as the sources of illustrations, pre-service teachers can provide students not just the meaning of words/phrases but also give out the examples and illustration, helping them fully understand all the new words.
- Pronunciation: over a half of participants face difficulties in designing production part when designing lesson plans for pronunciation session. According to the data through the interview, pre-service teachers share that as activities for production stage demand the self-practice among students, it is hard for pre-service teachers to choose meaningful activities that can help students practice pronouncing while controlling and correct mistakes.
- Language skills

Chart 3 Parts of a lesson pre-service teachers encounter difficulties when designing a lesson plan (Language skill)



Different from language elements, choosing warm-up activities for each language skill is considered as the most difficult stage when designing lesson plans. Also, 20 surveyed pre-service teachers state that they encounter difficulties in planning while-reading activities for students. Although the exercises are already in the student’s book, pre-service teachers claim that the process of giving answers for each activity is quite tedious if they just follow the textbook. Therefore, pre-service teachers always

make modifications to boost students’ interests in these activities by playing games or interactive activities. In terms of writing skill, equal number of pre-service teachers (16) claim that they have difficulties in planning for post-writing and homework session. The main problems mentioned from interviews related to the level of students and time pressure. As time spending on fulfill a writing task and writing correction part can be differed depending on student’s level and nature of a class, pre-service teachers encounter difficulties in choosing appropriate activity in production part to conclude the lesson.

Factors related to difficulties in designing lesson plans of pre-service teachers. With the previously discussed difficulties that pre-service teachers encounter when designing lesson plans, question 15 on the questionnaire aims to delve into the factors causing challenges for pre-service teachers in designing lesson plans. The data is presented in Table 4 and Chart 4.

Table 4 Pre-service teachers’ evaluation of time pressure in designing lesson plans

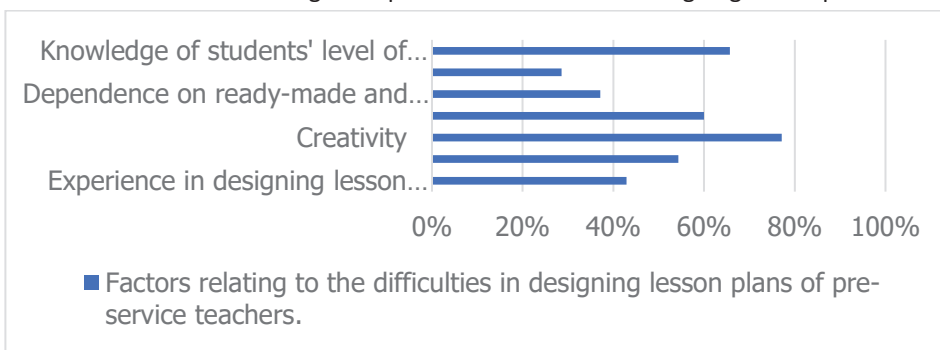
		ELTM3 course, %	Teaching practicum, %
Time pressure	Do not have any problem with time pressure	8.6	2.9
	Sometimes under time pressure but could manage it	85.7	80.0
	Often under time pressure and could hardly manage it	5.7	14.3
	Do not have enough time to prepare lesson plan	0.0	2.9

According to the chart, over 80.0 % of the pre-service teachers surveyed admits that they sometimes encounter the time pressure when designing lesson plans. However, they can still manage and accomplish all the assigned task on time. Interestingly, pre-service teachers tend to suffer time pressure more during teaching practicum practice, with the proportion of trainees who often could hardly manage time when designing lesson plans triple the figure for ELTM3 course. Also, while there is no participant who do not have enough time to prepare lesson plan in ELTM3 course, two pre-service teacher claims that they find the process of planning a lesson is extremely stressful and they do not manage time effectively to design the assigned lesson plans.

Delving into the causes of this matter through in-depth interviews, most pre-service teachers agree that working individually and the number of lesson plans per week required by supervisor are two dominant factors leading to their pressure during the lesson planning procedure. In addition, comparing to the targeted learners during ELTM3 course which are their classmates, the teaching practicum practice forces them to have exposure in the real settings which are high school students or primary students. Therefore, comparing to the same level of learners in ELTM3 course, the differences in level of students and the nature of each class in teaching practicum force pre-service teachers to devote more effort in choosing and designing appropriate activities that can motivate students during the lesson.

Other challenges for pre-service teachers in designing lesson plans. As can be seen in Chart 4, creativity heads the lead with 77.1% vote from pre-service teachers, closely followed by the factor “knowledge of students’ level of learning, needs and expectations” which is chosen by 65.7% of participants. According to the responds from the interviews, pre-service teachers agree that they consider and hesitate when choosing the activities in the class for some first lessons during their practicum as they do not know exactly the level of students. Moreover, to boost students’ motivation in the class, pre-service teachers need to provide a variation of activities on the class. Therefore, teacher trainees face a host of difficulties in constantly coming with new ideas to design new but meaningful activities for students.

Chart 4 Other challenges for pre-service teachers in designing lesson plans



Also, nearly 60.0% of pre-service teachers fail to design an effective lesson plans due to the wrong choice of teaching methods and poor time management skill. Interestingly, only 28.6% of teacher trainees think “the selection of qualified teaching resources” is a contributing factor relating to difficulties in designing lesson plans.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion. From the aforementioned findings and discussions, it is asserted that the research presents overall main issues and impressive progressives in some aspects as follows:

- The findings have revealed that most of the pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of lesson planning, and they found it difficult to design a meticulous lesson plan. Pre-service teachers’ perspectives on the lesson plan of microteaching class are as a teaching guideline, teaching planning and plays a crucial aspect of teaching. The teacher trainees have agreed that the lesson plan benefits and facilitates them in the teaching especially for those who have little experience before. In additions, the lesson plans help them in the microteaching class to organize the lesson and to achieve the learning objectives.

- The researcher has identified three main problems faced by students in designing lesson plans. They were (1) Planning a logically structured lesson, (2) Choosing in advance the appropriate classroom activities that match aims and objectives of the lesson as well as the level of students and (3) Designing meaningful activities to motivate students at the beginning of the lesson. In terms of language skills and elements, pre-service teachers encounter different parts when designing lesson plans. However, warm-up stage is recorded as the most difficult part to write lesson plans about language skills and practice and production stages are two main stressful part in planning lesson procedure.

Pedagogical Implications. While the study has come to valid conclusions drawn from results of the investigation, some practical measures are implemented to tackle the difficulties in designing lesson plans experienced by pre-service teachers.

- To the pre-service teachers - With the purposes of enhancing the situation, it is suggested that pre-service teachers are expected to understand and have well-knowledge about the lesson plan. Moreover, pre-service teachers should pay more attention to some the aforementioned difficulties as well as make use of various resources to design effective lesson plans such as websites on the internet or methodology books for English teachers to enhance the competence in designing lesson plans.
- To the lecturers - We cannot deny the role of lecturers to pre-service teachers' training process because they are main sources of knowledge delivered to students. Thus, lecturers should thoroughly analyze the process of lesson plans guide pre-service teachers to the quality of the teaching-learning process by introducing the strategies in order to enhance the pedagogical competence of the trainees in designing lesson plans. Also, lecturers should constantly adapt the update of current English curriculum of high schools and primary schools to make modifications in the process of teaching and training.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Undeniably, there are still many problems that the research has not satisfactorily covered and solved. This study is restricted only to pre-service teachers at the University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang. Under the time constraints, the study has been conducted on a relatively small scale which may give rise to the fact that the generalization of the findings may not be so high. Therefore, the scope of the study should be widened for future research to produce more reliable and valid results. To achieve more thorough and detailed study of lesson plans, we expect to look into these issues in a further study:

- What are pre-service teachers majoring in English Teacher Education in Vietnam' perspectives towards the process of designing lesson plans?
- What are problems encountered by pre-service teachers in lesson planning process?

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