CALL LESSON PLANNING FOR ESP CLASSES IN MOROCCO: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract:
Lesson planning forms a road-map for instructors to set learning objectives and ensure the way they should be presented. A lesson plan shows the instructor’s competence in combining theory and practice (Pang, 2016). Hence, using the objectives planned in the curriculum and students’ needs, instructors determine the form and content of their instruction, such as the lesson stages, activities, feedback techniques, assessment, time and class management, and materials and equipment needed for the lesson. In Morocco, since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, lesson planning is designed not only for a face-to-face instruction but also for a computer assisted language learning (CALL) format. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate lesson plans designed for CALL lessons. The focus was to work on classes of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as this field is relatively unexplored in Moroccan academia. The main explored aspects of CALL lesson planning are activities, feedback techniques, assessments, and time management considering the delivery mode which can be synchronous and/or asynchronous. The methodology follows a mixed method approach. Data was collected through semi structured interviews with ESP instructors and surveys were administered to students to determine their needs. The study showed that instructors faced challenges when switching their lesson plan design to a CALL format. They have also tried to adopt new teaching approaches, techniques, and learning tools to develop synchronous and asynchronous ESP lesson plans. Finally, the feedback from the students’ needs surveys provided insights about future course planning.

Keywords: Lesson plans; CALL; ESP; students’ needs; Morocco

Introduction
The coronavirus pandemic has caused changes in the teaching-learning process in educational institutions worldwide and has influenced the teaching/learning methods, techniques, and interactions between teachers and students. As a consequence of the pandemic, schools and universities were constrained to carry out their activity with students either exclusively online or in a hybrid mode. In this regard, and in order to slow down the spread of Covid-19, the Moroccan government tried to ensure the continuity of the educational process, first through adopting a 100% online learning, and later, as the lockdown ended, many institutions are still adopting a hybrid mode.

Therefore, computer assisted language learning (CALL) which was considered an additional learning material before the coronavirus pandemic, has now become an essential element for maintaining the activity of schools and universities. This paradigm shift has certainly generated many changes/new perceptions about teaching and learning. Thus, through this paper, we try to capture the existence of such changes particularly in designing appropriate lesson plans for CALL lessons.
1. Review of Literature

Previous studies show that CALL has many benefits for students because this kind of learning involves student-centeredness. It is more flexible (Dhawan, 2020) and it can also provide a better interaction with students through asynchronous and synchronous tools such as e-mails, forums, chats, and videoconferences (Marinoni, et.al 2020, Anwar.K & Adnan.M, 2020). Moreover, internet technologies ensure the fast sharing of information and pedagogical content to a large number of students. Online learning platforms grant several advantages to teachers and learners such as control over the content and the time, and thus the teaching techniques and process can be adapted according to the learners’ needs and objectives (Suresh et. Al, 2018).

However, with CALL, there are also some obstacles that hinder students’ process of learning, such as lack of students’ motivation, delayed feedback or help while learning, or feelings of isolation (Yusuf. N & Al-Banawi. N, 2013). Nonetheless, these struggles can be reduced with the help of teachers who should adapt their teaching strategies, techniques, and methods to the needs of students. In order to do so, training about teaching in the online environment is mandatory.

Furthermore, to achieve an effective teaching and learning process either in an online or a face to face classroom, teachers need to design an effective lesson plan. Thus, a lesson plan is considered as the teacher’s road map of what students need to learn and how the learning and teaching procedure should be done effectively during the class time (Malkova, 2011). A well-developed lesson plan has to meet the needs of the students, allow an appropriate use of class time, and facilitate the classroom management and discipline.

A lesson plan consists of goals, activities, sequencing (the order in which activities will be used, including opening and closing activities), timing (how much time should be spent on different activities), grouping (when classes could be taught as a whole and when students are supposed to work in pairs or groups), and resources (which material to choose in order to achieve the objectives of the lesson). Besides, according to Houston and Beech (2008) the minimum requirements for any lesson plan are: the objectives, the teaching procedure, and means of evaluation. Therefore, a lesson plan makes the teaching easy and very well organized: it smoothly leads teachers to achieve their teaching goals and objectives, it helps them predict possible learning issues which students might face and thus find different scenarios to solve them, it definitely improves their teaching skills, and it allows students to know what to expect from the lesson (Houston and Beech, 2008). Equally important, according to Serhat (2020), the teacher needs to adopt the thinking levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy in developing courses and organizing material for students. The low-level and high-level thinking skills are (ibid.):

- **Remembering**: involves retrieving prior knowledge from long-term memory and using the connections to aid in current understanding.
- **Understanding**: includes using strategies to draw conclusions from current information, such as summarizing and interpreting ideas, comparing meaning from messages, and interpreting both oral and written texts.
- **Applying**: requires implementing the procedure for learning.
- **Analyzing**: entails dividing information into meaningful parts, while ensuring that they the parts remain relevant to the each other and the overall goal.
- **Evaluating**: includes critiquing and assessing information based on the outline learning criteria.
- **Creating**: involves organizing the ideas into a new structure to form a coherent pattern of understanding.
Today, taking into consideration the growing interest in CALL by Moroccan universities as a response to the futuristic vision of the Ministry of higher education, Scientific Research and Innovation, it has become imperative to adapt lesson plans to either a hybrid mode or a 100% online mode of teaching. Teachers are more urged to use different digital tools such as videos, audios, pictures, Learning Management Systems (LMS), games, video-conferencing, etc.” Besides, the lesson plans need to cater to different students’ needs depending on their specialties. Taking English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a case study in this paper, teachers are required to research / recognize the objectives behind learning English for different fields of engineering, or mathematics, technology, tourism, etc. Students who study in this fields and at university level are adults who are supposed to know clearly what they need to learn in order to be ready for their professional career. In fact, Yang (2005) believes that university students are independent learners, have considerable experience and knowledge, and are most apt to be interested in topics that relate to the professional stage of their lives. The adult learner is most interested in ideas that can both be applied immediately and can solve problems that they are or might be struggling with in the future.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

For this study, a mixed method approach is used to collect out data. The justification for choosing this approach can be attributed to the fact that it provides an opportunity to uphold valuable findings using different kind of questions to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, the data in the present study is collected and analysed through using a student’s questionnaire from three institutions in Morocco (Cadi Ayyad University, Abdelmalek Essaadi University, and Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Sciences). Consequently, the use of the mixed method approach has provided extensive numerical and narrative data that allows for a better understanding of the issue under investigation. In addition, the collected data led this research study to the exploration of the design of lesson plans for CALL lessons in an ESP context based on students’ needs.

2.2. Instruments

The study procedures have been conducted over 4 months’ period, resulting in a set of 120 completed students’ questionnaire which took only 10 minutes to be answered. The selection of the three institutions was through using a cluster sampling approach, which involves a random selection of groups, and not individuals (Rick yount, 2006). Furthermore, all instructions were in English since the target population was ESP students. The data collected from the questionnaire were carefully assessed to the statistical software SPSS while interviews were analysed through content analysis.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1. Students’ Profile

Students are 63.3% females and 36.7% males aging from 18 years old to 25, 82.5% age between 18-20, and 17.5% are between 21-25 years old. The institutions to which the students belong are mainly three: School of Technology, Essaouira at Cadi Ayyad University (49.2), Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Sciences in Rabat (37.5%), and Faculty of Science and Technology in Tangiers at Abdelmalek Essaadi University (13.3%). Most of the students are in the field of engineering (49.2%), while 20.8% are in tourism, 10.8% are studying technology, and 10% are specialized in science.
This population of students was given questions to collect their perception about the different components of lesson planning researched in this study. We look into the teaching activities, teachers’ role, assessment, classroom interaction, language skills and sub-skills, and difficulties faced by students.

3.2. Teaching activities

Based on a large percentage of students, the activities that are used in their ESP classes and are very useful in the order of importance are as follows: watching videos (55.8%), discussion and debating (51.6%), listening to audios (48.3%), games (45%), projects and presentations (44.16%), and lecture (42.5%).

The findings show that ESP students find activities adopted in the communicative language approach as very useful. In fact, they prefer an interactive audio-visual material and fun activities such as games. These are very likely to increase students’ concentration and motivation. They also highly recommend activities which increase their exposure to speaking skills such as discussion, debate, projects, and presentations. All of these activities enable students to work collaboratively, learn from each other, and encourage independent learning. Moreover, students selected “very useful” the activities which rank in the higher order of thinking skills of Bloom’s taxonomy. These are related to analysing, evaluating, and creating. However, students still considerably value the teacher’s lecturing. Thus, the role of the teacher is still considered to be a pillar in students’ conception of learning whether in face-to-face or distant learning.

According to the majority of the students, the activities that are used in their ESP classes and are useful in the order of importance are as follows: gap filling dialogue and reading comprehension (57.5%), practice grammar exercises and paragraph and essay writing (55%), memorizing bilingual vocabulary lists (53.3%), question and answer (46.6%), memorize a dialogue and creative group writing (45.8%), and role play (37.5%).

The results indicate that ESP students find activities adopted in the audio-lingual method as useful and suitable to their needs. Also, most of these activities such as gap-filling dialogue, grammar exercises, question and answer, and memorizing vocabulary lists and dialogues rank in the lower order of thinking skills of Bloom’s taxonomy. These are related to remembering, understanding, and applying. It is observed that students chose mainly the activities which they can conduct individually.

3.3. Teachers’ Role

In an online class, most of the students agree that teachers’ role should be as the following in order of importance: guide them through correcting mistakes (93%), respond to their online messages (85.8%), discuss the answers with them live (85%), correct their mistakes (76.6%), send the answers of class activities (71.6%), and tolerate making mistakes (70%).

The majority of students express their need and preference for identifying their mistakes, examining them, and then solving them on their own with the guidance of the teacher instead of simply being corrected by the teacher. Another observation is related to synchronous and asynchronous learning. Students favour their teachers to discuss the answer key with them live more than checking the answers on their own. This might show that, to some extent, students continue to rely on the instructor and are not yet ready to explore knowledge completely independently. This might also be related to the teachers’ lack of instant feedback to students’ questions and inquiries in an asynchronous mode. In fact, most students express that an essential role which teachers should manage is to “respond to their online messages”.

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3.4. Assessment

Concerning online assessment techniques, according to the students, the best type of assessment for online classes are: multiple-choice questions (MCQs) (43.3%), oral assessment (29.2%), exercises in vocabulary, grammar, and other skills (22.5%), and paragraph or essay writing (5%).

The fact that the majority opted for MCQs which are categorized as a type of formative assessment can be justified using two reasonings. The first one might be due to the online format of assessment which students might feel frustrated because of a poor Internet network and less concentrated in front of a screen than the traditional pen and paper for an extended period of time to take an exam. The second reason returns to the possibility that students prefer to be assessed based on their lower-order thinking skills (remembering, understanding, and applying). Indeed, if we take a look at the percentage of students who selected writing as an assessment, we only find a small percentage of 5%.

In addition to being time consuming, writing is a skill which demands the application of all the six thinking skills from the lower order to the higher order (analyzing, evaluating, and creating). Nevertheless, more than a quarter of the students selected oral assessment techniques which, in the questionnaire, included the following: present projects, question/answer, debate, and poster. This minority is ready to be evaluated based on a summative assessment. Not only that but they also prefer to work in groups in an asynchronous mode during online evaluations. This might suggest that this last choice reduces students’ stress and anxiety during an exam because of the risk of losing internet connection and enables them to support each other.

3.5. Language Skills and Sub-Skills

ESP students assert that they need to improve the following English language skills in order of priority: speaking skills (83.3%), writing skills (60.8%), vocabulary (52.5%), grammar (36.7%), listening skills (30.8%), and reading skills (21.7%).

The three skills and sub-skills which students believe they need to improve are speaking and writing skills and their vocabulary. Concerning speaking, students justify their choice by saying that it will enable them to communicate better and, more importantly, it is essential to speak English fluently since they will use it in their professional careers: speak to business representatives, make presentations, talk to foreign clients, and build an international network. These needs are indeed related to the studies and age of the respondents as the majority studies engineering and tourism and is a young population which uses speaking more than writing to express itself.

Despite the fact that quite more than half the respondents are aware that they need writing skills for the work environment, most of them rejected writing as a type of assessment as we have seen in the previous section. We can say that writing is quite a daunting experience for the students.

Moreover, half of the students assert that they need to improve their vocabulary. They believe that if they acquire it, they will be able to speak fluently, write effectively, debate and discuss points of view, and be able to switch between formal and informal registers. This incomplete understanding of the necessity of learning vocabulary shows that students are not well aware of what they really need to reach a proficient level in English.

Accordingly, the most difficult skills according to 45% of the students is speaking, 20% think it’s the writing skills, 15% claim its grammar and only 11.7% who find vocabulary difficult. In fact, it is only logical to find that students have difficulties with the same skills they think they need to improve. The productive skills are usually the ones which we become comfortable with once we reach B2 – C2 levels.
3.6. Classroom Interaction

In an online classroom, 55.8% of the students prefer interaction with the teacher, 50% with the whole class, 28.3% with a group of students and only 6.7% with another student. While in an offline classroom, 50% of the students are inclined towards interaction in small groups, 35.8% with the teacher, 29.2% individually and 16.7% in pairs.

When we analyze the percentages given to each interaction based on whether it’s an online or offline classroom, we can conclude that during an online class, students rely heavily on the instructor more than any other interaction. In addition to having difficulties working independently, this might be explained by the fact that such interaction with the teacher would allow students to improve their concentration and minimize distraction. Obviously, amid an offline class, students are aware that the presence of the teacher is not instant and that they have to rely more on fellow classmates or on their own in the learning process.

In fact, learning in small groups is most preferred among half of the respondents in either class. This corroborates with previous findings which claim that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same material is presented in other instructional formats (Davis, 1993; Barkley, Cross & Major, 2005).

These findings suggest that students believe that small group work can be an effective method by virtue of the fact that it can motivate them, encourage their active learning, and develop their communication skills.

Finally, the best type of class according to the majority of ESP students (64.2%) is the online class and only 35.8% of students prefer the offline class. This explains that the online classroom environment has a positive effect on students’ learning. It is inferred that most students learn best when they are exposed to a logical sequential, delineated lesson, along with a professional instructor who provides help when needed. However, it may be argued that some students prefer a self-paced and independent learning whether working with classmates or on their own.

3.7. Learners’ Difficulties

Concerning learning challenges, most of the students (53.3%) do not face any difficulties in taking online and offline English language courses but an interesting percentage of 46.7% states that they do encounter difficulties. Reasons behind those obstacles return to:

- poor quality of internet connectivity which makes students miss different parts of the online class. This results in a lack of understanding, frustration, and commitment,
- lack of concentration especially when students have to sit for long hours during the day dragging class after class. One student complains “we can't pay attention to the teacher, and sometimes we are frustrated after being in front of a laptop during 8 hours per day, so we don't have that energy that makes us able to concentrate all the day”,
- lack of interaction with the teacher: students mention that the instructor and students don’t see each other despite the presence of the camera, and that some instructors do not interact enough with them,
- distraction in the working environment of the students: noise, lack of personal working space, family and house chores duties.

Conclusion:

ESP students showed awareness that in order to achieve higher level thinking skills, they must first develop their lower level thinking skills. This should definitely inform the teachers
to adapt Bloom’s Taxonomy to the students’ levels. However, it is not an easy task since ESP language classes are usually mixed level classes; where some students might be left behind.

Most ESP classes are in need of developing productive skills, mainly speaking. However, like all language skills, speaking cannot be taught in separation from other language skills and sub-skills. It is essential that students learn both receptive and productive skills with special focus on the latter and based on the specificity of each ESP class.

This study shows that students are eager to become independent learners as long as they receive the right guidance, coaching, and encouragement from their teachers. Equally important, we cannot expect students to become autonomous if teachers do not respond to students’ messages and give continuous feedback.

It is also worth mentioning that students learn best when they collaborate together by not only improving their English language skills but also their soft skills; which consequently will serve them in their future professional endeavours.

Formative assessment is always useful for the teachers to check the students’ progress through the course and to re-consider any changes in their syllabus. Despite students’ preference for this kind of assessment, it should not dominate the technique of evaluation in order to test the necessary language skills and the achievement of the learning objectives. Consequently, formative assessment could be adopted in an online mode while summative assessment could be done either face-to-face or in an asynchronous mode of delivery.

The main difficulties that students face in distance learning are problems due to internet connectivity and to the heavy load of class time. It is highly recommended that university campus provides free and high internet connectivity for students and faculty. Moreover, the pedagogical and administrative bodies need to re-think the programming of schedules and the length of each online class. In the case of blended learning, the schedule should be adapted in accordance with asynchronous and face-to-face classes.

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