



Between Lesson Planning And Classroom Implementation: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This research conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine how lesson planning aligns with its actual implementation in classroom environments, with a particular focus on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Settings. Although lesson planning is widely recognized as essential for effective teaching, numerous studies reveal ongoing difficulties in translating plans into practice, often due to institutional limitations, unexpected classroom situations, and mismatches in pedagogical approaches. Drawing upon Constructivist Learning Theory and the framework of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), this review synthesizes evidence from 24 peer-reviewed empirical studies, all selected using a rigorous protocol based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The analysis identifies four central themes: factors contributing to gaps between planning and execution, strategies teachers employ to bridge these gaps, the importance of reflective practice, and the impact of contextual and institutional influences. Employing the PRISMA framework strengthens the transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor of the review. The findings offer actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, emphasizing the importance of integrating flexible, reflective, and context-sensitive planning approaches that can respond effectively to the shifting needs of students and the realities of classroom instruction.

Keywords: Lesson Planning, Classroom Implementation, Systematic Literature Review (SLR).

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INTRODUCTION

Lesson planning is incredibly important for effective teaching and learning. It acts like a guide for teachers, making sure that what they want students to achieve, the activities they use, and how they assess progress all work together towards the same educational goals (Neisari & Heidari, 2014). However, even though lesson planning is a crucial part of teaching, putting it into practice in the classroom can be tricky. Things like not having enough time, keeping students engaged, dealing with classroom dynamics, and unexpected interruptions can cause teachers to stray from their original plan (Farid, 2014). It's really important to understand how lesson planning works in real-life classrooms so we can improve teaching methods and help students learn better.

Many studies have looked into how lesson planning affects good teaching. For example, Ali Bin-Hady and Abdulsafi (2018) found that teachers who thoroughly plan their lessons tend to have more organized and engaging classes. Similarly, Wardani, as mentioned in Zendrato (2016), stressed the importance of making sure lesson plans match what students need and what the curriculum requires. However, research also shows that a lot of teachers have trouble

putting their plans into action because of things like interruptions, not having enough resources, and students reacting differently than expected (Jasmi, 2014; Marliani, 2017). Despite all these studies, there's still a gap in understanding how teachers deal with the challenges of turning their lesson plans into real-life classroom experiences.

This study is rooted in the Constructivist Learning Theory, which suggests that learning is an active process where students take the lead, and teachers act more like guides rather than just passing on information (Vygotsky, 1978). Good lesson planning should be flexible enough to let teachers adjust their strategies based on how engaged students are and what's happening in the classroom. The study also draws on the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Theory (Shulman, 1986) to explore how teachers combine their knowledge of the subject with teaching methods when planning and executing lessons. By bringing together existing research on lesson planning and classroom implementation, this systematic review aims to close the gap between theory and practice. It hopes to provide practical advice that educators and policymakers can use to improve teaching and learning.

The reason for choosing this topic is because teachers often struggle to turn their lesson plans into successful classroom experiences. Many educators worry that sticking too closely to lesson plans isn't always practical (Permana, 2010). Plus, with more digital tools being used and teaching methods changing, it's time to rethink how well traditional lesson planning works in today's classrooms. By looking into this issue, we can gain some really useful insights on how to improve lesson planning so it works better in real-life teaching and keeps students more engaged.

This study is designed to tackle several key objectives. First, it aims to examine how closely lesson planning aligns with what actually happens in the classroom. Next, it seeks to pinpoint the common obstacles teachers encounter when trying to put their planned lessons into action. The study also explores ways to make lesson planning more effective in real-world classroom environments. Finally, it aims to offer practical advice on how to align lesson planning with the dynamic interactions that occur in classrooms, ensuring that teaching strategies remain flexible and responsive to student needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to explore how lesson planning relates to what actually happens in the classroom. The review followed the structured steps outlined by Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016) to maintain high standards of research quality. Additionally, the PRISMA 2020 guidelines were applied to clearly document how studies were selected and screened, ensuring the process was transparent and trustworthy.

A qualitative descriptive approach was also used to highlight common themes and practical lessons from the research. By combining these methods, the study provides a clear and thorough understanding of the challenges teachers encounter when trying to put their lesson plans into practice.

Research Design

This research employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to review previous studies that exploring the relationship between lesson planning and practical implementation in the classroom. This followed the protocol established by Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou (2016), and employed a structured methodology to identify, select and critically appraise relevant research. This process ensures a tight synthesis of scholarly work, increasing the reliability and breadth of conclusions drawn from the analyzed literature.

To complete this analysis, the study integrated a qualitative descriptive approach, which facilitated a detailed examination of how educational strategies materialize in actual classroom environments. This dual methodology allowed the researchers to observe the theoretical framework and its operationalization in real-world teaching scenarios. As emphasized by Creswell (2013), this methodological combination proved highly effective for analyzing instructional materials and identifying recurring patterns in teaching practices, offering nuanced insights into the challenges and adaptations that occur during the implementation of lesson plans.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search for this study was carried out using two principal academic databases, SCOPUS and ERIC, both of which are widely acknowledged for their comprehensive coverage of educational research. In SCOPUS, the search strategy employed a combination of keywords pertinent to lesson planning and classroom practices, including “lesson plan,” “classroom,” “activities,” and terms related to the TEFL/EFL context. The search was restricted to articles published in English from 2019 onwards, yielding a total of 230 articles.

For the ERIC database, the search utilized the phrase “Between Lesson Planning and Classroom Implementation,” aligning closely with the study’s focus. This search was similarly filtered for English-language articles but was limited to those published after 2021, resulting in 268 articles. Altogether, the initial search across both databases identified 498 articles. These articles were subsequently screened and selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality for the study’s objectives.

Table 1: Search Strategy

Databased	Syntax	Result
SCOPUS	TITLE-ABS ((("lesson plan" OR "lesson planning" OR lesson) AND (classroom OR practice OR activities) AND (tefl OR efl))) LANGUAGE (english) PUBYEAR > 2019	230
ERIC	Between Lesson Planning and Classroom Implementation	268
Total Papers		498

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure the scientific rigor and relevance of the studies included in this systematic literature review, a clear set of eligibility criteria was established. These criteria were designed to guide the screening process by identifying studies that contribute significantly to the investigation of the relationship between lesson planning and classroom implementation. The inclusion and exclusion parameters cover various aspects, including publication date, language, research focus, theoretical framework, study type, and sample characteristics. Table 2 presents a detailed overview of the eligibility criteria applied during the screening process.

Table 2: Eligibility Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Date	Articles published between 2010 and 2024	Articles published before 2010
Language	English	Non-English
Focus	Studies focusing on lesson planning and its classroom implementation	Studies focusing solely on theoretical frameworks without practical application in classroom settings
Theoretical Framework	Based on Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) or Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986)	Studies not aligned with Constructivist Learning Theory or Pedagogical Content Knowledge
Study Type	Empirical studies, qualitative research, or meta-analyses	Editorials, opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed sources
Sample & Generalizability	Studies with sufficient sample sizes providing generalizable insights	Studies with small, non-representative samples

Several rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed in order to guarantee the quality and applicability of the research that were part of this review. Only papers released between 2010 and 2024 were taken into consideration from a temporal standpoint. Because more recent research typically represent the most recent advancements in educational policy, learning methodologies, and the dynamics of classroom teaching techniques, this time span was chosen. Additionally, only English-language articles are included to ensure consistency in comprehension and analysis and to prevent possible meaning distortions brought on by translation errors in scientific publications.

To ensure a targeted and meaningful synthesis, this review included only studies that directly investigated both the planning and practical implementation of lessons within classroom settings. Research that was exclusively theoretical and lacked a clear connection to instructional practice was omitted, as the primary aim was to explore how lesson planning translates into actual teaching and learning processes. Moreover, only studies grounded in robust theoretical frameworks-such as Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986)-were selected. The application of these frameworks was deemed crucial, as they underpin approaches that prioritize students' active construction of knowledge and the integration of subject matter expertise with effective pedagogical strategies.

The review encompasses empirical research, including both qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as meta-analyses, while excluding editorials, opinion pieces, and non-peer-reviewed works due to their failure to meet rigorous academic standards. Additionally, only studies with sufficiently large and representative sample sizes were considered to ensure that

findings could be generalized more broadly. Research with small or unrepresentative samples was excluded, as such studies were unlikely to provide meaningful contributions to the overall understanding of lesson planning and implementation practices.

Data Collection Techniques

To advance the systematic review, this research used a qualitative descriptive approach, by incorporating insights from previous research on the implementation of learning planning. Data collection methods include analyzing lesson plans developed by teachers to assess their alignment with curriculum standards and instructional objectives. The reviewing existing studies that focus on the structures of lesson planning and the strategies employed by teachers. The method of Classroom Observation this search Observing actual classroom environments to see how teachers execute their lesson plans and whether they make any modifications during instruction. Utilizing checklists to evaluate the effective application of lesson plan elements, including objectives, materials, activities, and assessments.

These approaches are consistent with earlier research on lesson plan analysis, including Maulani's (2019) study, which investigated the relationship between teachers' lesson plans and their practical application in the classroom.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed based on their goals, methodologies, findings, and relevance to the research questions. A thematic analysis framework, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to uncover patterns and classify significant findings. The analysis process included:

- Familiarization with the data: This involved reading through and summarizing the main points from each study.
- Generating initial codes: Here, common themes related to the effectiveness of lesson planning, challenges faced in the classroom, and teacher adaptability were identified.
- Categorizing themes: Similar findings were grouped together to establish broader themes.
- Synthesizing results: Conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made based on the reviewed literature.

Validity and Reliability

To strengthen the credibility of the research, we adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines outlined by Moher et al. (2009). Additionally, two independent reviewers cross-checked the selected articles to minimize bias and increase inter-coder reliability during thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

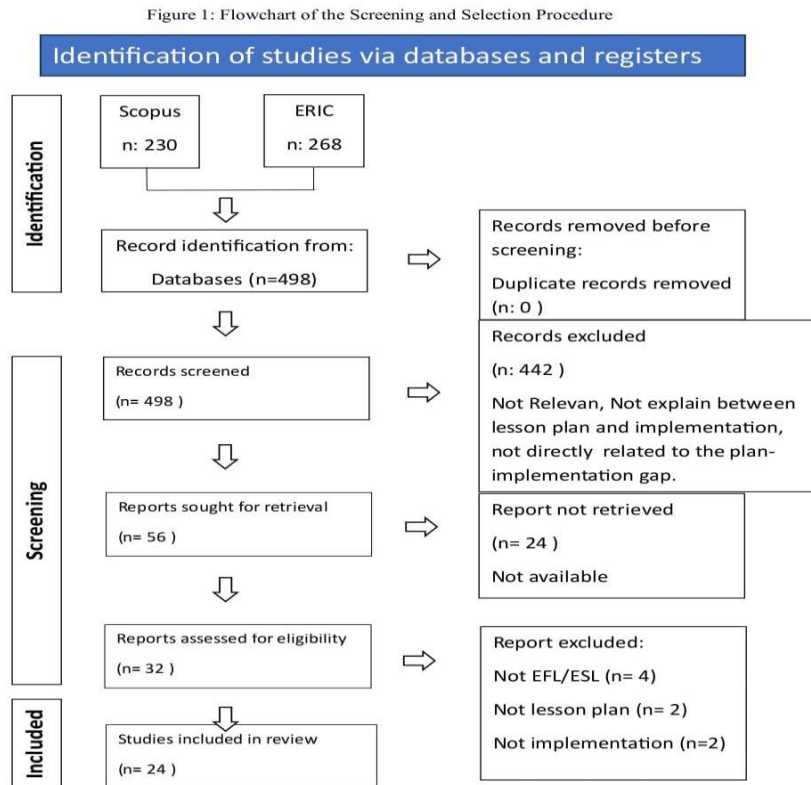
This research relies on secondary data, which means that no human participants were engaged. Nonetheless, we adhered to ethical standards by accurately citing all sources and maintaining the integrity of our data collection and analysis processes.

RESULT & FINDING

Study Selection

An initial search of the SCOPUS and ERIC databases identified 498 articles concerning lesson planning and classroom implementation in EFL/ESL settings. The first round of screening involved reviewing the titles and abstracts of these articles. During this process, 442 articles were excluded because they did not meet the study's focus. Most of the excluded works centered on topics such as digital learning tools, general teaching strategies not specific to

lesson planning, or broader curriculum issues that did not specifically address the connection between planning and classroom practice.



After the initial screening process, 56 articles were selected for a full-text review. However, 24 of these could not be accessed due to paywalls or lack of institutional access. This left 32 articles available for a detailed evaluation to determine their suitability. In the final eligibility assessment, 8 studies were excluded for the following reasons: (1) Four articles did not pertain to the EFL/ESL context, which is the main focus of this systematic review. (2) Two articles did not address lesson planning, making them irrelevant to the central research question. (3) Two articles discussed lesson planning only in theoretical terms, without exploring how these plans are implemented in real classroom settings, thus lacking the essential connection between planning and practice.

A total of 24 studies were ultimately chosen for the systematic review. These studies were thoroughly examined to shed light on how teachers manage the intricate connection between planning their lessons and putting them into practice in the classroom. The step-by-step search and selection strategy is shown in Figure 1 using the PRISMA 2020 template for systematic literature review.

Finding

A review of 24 articles in the table examining the relationship between lesson planning and classroom practice in EFL settings found that teachers often face persistent challenges that hinder the delivery of lessons as planned. The research identified four main themes: (1)

Reasons for the gap between what is planned and what actually happens in the classroom, such as difficulties in predicting student responses, time constraints, and unexpected classroom dynamics. (2) How teachers respond and adapt when things do not go as planned, including making on-the-spot adjustments to activities or pacing. (3) The different strategies teachers use to overcome these mismatches, such as drawing on experience, modifying tasks or using flexible teaching methods. (4) The significant impact of time constraints and the level of student engagement, which often shaped the successful implementation of lessons and the need for real-time changes.

Overall, the findings highlight that while lesson planning is essential for organizing instruction, teachers must remain flexible and responsive to classroom realities, often adjusting their plans to better meet students' needs and manage practical limitations.

Lesson Planning and Actual Teaching

In the lesson planning stage, teachers develop a learning activity plan that includes the objectives to be achieved, the material to be taught, the learning strategies and methods to be used, the supporting learning media, and the type of assessment to be applied. This planning process is carried out systematically and structurally, following the curriculum framework and relevant pedagogical theories, such as Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge concept (1986) which emphasizes the importance of combining mastery of material and how to teach it. In addition, teachers also consider students' characteristics and prepare themselves to anticipate various obstacles that may occur during the learning process. For example, teachers can design task-based learning, learning that develops higher order thinking skills (HOTS), learning that adapts to individual student needs (differentiation), or even use technology such as chatbots and artificial intelligence-based platforms in its implementation.

However, when learning takes place in the classroom directly, the implementation often does not fully match the initial plan. In a dynamic classroom setting, teachers have to deal with various unexpected situations that require them to make adjustments quickly. Based on the studies reviewed, although teachers have prepared a thorough plan, the reality in the field often forces them to simplify activities, change teaching methods, or even abandon parts of the plan due to time constraints, minimal facilities, and low student readiness. For example, in a study by Crosthwaite et al. (2023), teachers of English as a foreign language had understood the concept of Data-Driven Learning (DDL) in their planning, but in practice, they rarely implemented it because they felt less confident or technically prepared.

External Systemic Factors

Many research studies highlight that rigid curriculum requirements can seriously limit teachers' ability to customize their lessons to suit students' needs. For example, Orhan and Beyhan (P4) show that when curriculum references are too strict, teachers have little room to adapt their teaching methods or content, making it difficult to respond to the diverse dynamics in their classrooms. This rigidity often forces teachers to stick to prescribed content and steps, even when their professional judgment suggests that a different approach would better support student learning.

Similarly, a lack of resources-such as outdated facilities or inadequate technology-further limits teachers' options. Bouqetyb (P5) notes that without adequate resources, it is almost impossible to implement more interactive or student-centered teaching strategies, such as project-based learning. These constraints mean that even well-designed and flexible lesson plans cannot be fully implemented in practice, as teachers are constrained by the demands of the curriculum and the practical limitations of their teaching environment.

In this case, time constraints are a common issue. Some teachers said that they do not have enough time to implement detailed and interactive lessons as they would like (Early Childhood Planning, P24; Suryani, P18). In addition, the absence of a support system makes things even more difficult, so teachers have to figure things out on their own without help from their institutions (Resilience of English Language Teachers in Indonesia, P11).

Internal/Design-related Factors

Quality lesson planning is essential behind the scenes. Sometimes, lesson plans are poorly made because teachers simply copy and paste without thinking (Yulia & Mahayanti, p.15), resulting in ineffectiveness. Teachers also tend to overestimate what their students can handle, resulting in plans that are too ambitious for the actual classroom situation (Suryani, p.18; Akhmetova et al., p.19). In addition, errors in the technical details of lesson planning (Çicek, p.20) can directly prevent teachers from implementing lessons as intended.

This research shows that the discrepancy between planning and implementation is usually not caused by one factor alone. Rather, it is the result of a combination of wider system issues and weaknesses in the planning process itself.

Teacher Responses and Adaptation

This theme focuses on how teachers demonstrate flexibility and resourcefulness as they manage the challenges that arise between lesson planning and classroom implementation. This theme focuses on teachers' ability to adjust strategies, rethink approaches and respond creatively to unexpected situations to bridge the gap between what is planned and what actually happens during teaching.

Adaptive Teaching

In a dynamic classroom setting, teachers often have to go beyond following a set lesson plan. For example, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in Indonesia demonstrated remarkable adaptability by flexibly adjusting their teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic (P11). This adaptability is crucial as it allows educators to effectively address unexpected challenges, such as sudden changes in student needs, technical issues or shifts in the learning environment. By being flexible, teachers can create a more responsive and supportive learning experience, ensuring that students continue to engage and succeed despite disruptions.

Reflective Practices

Reflection has an important role in helping teachers adapt and improve their practice. Several studies, including those conducted by Rozimela et al. (P12, P14), highlight how approaches such as lesson study and context-based reflective models can support teacher development. These methods allow educators to recognize the difference between what they plan to teach and what students actually learn, allowing them to adjust future learning more effectively.

Mohamed (P17) points out that action research provides teachers with an effective way to analyze their own teaching, make meaningful changes, and continuously improve their lesson plans using evidence gathered from their classrooms. This process is not a one-time event, but an iterative sequence: teachers plan an intervention, put it into practice, observe the results, and reflect on what happened. Based on these real-world insights, they adjust their approach and start the cycle again, leading to continuous improvement.

Through this reflective and iterative process, teachers bridge the gap between educational theory and the everyday realities they face in the classroom. Instead of relying solely on abstract principles or outside demands, teachers use action research to test ideas, collect data and see

what really works for their students. This allows them to make informed decisions tailored to their unique context, leading to more effective teaching and better outcomes for students.

Through action research, teachers can also develop their professional growth. Teachers become more self-aware, develop stronger problem-solving skills and gain confidence in their ability to make change. By collaborating with peers, sharing findings and learning from each other, they build a supportive community focused on continuous improvement. Teachers' success in bridging the gap between lesson planning and classroom implementation depends largely on their ability to be flexible, thoughtful and creative. In continuously adapting to changing situations, reflecting on their teaching practices and coming up with innovative strategies, teachers can effectively overcome the challenges that arise when trying to put plans into action. This dynamic approach is key to ensuring that what they envision on paper translates smoothly into meaningful learning experiences for students.

CONCLUSION

The results of this systematic literature review, titled “Between Lesson Planning and Classroom Implementation: A Systematic Literature Review,” indicate that discrepancies between lesson plans and their actual execution in the classroom are common and consistent, influenced by a range of both systemic and personal factors. The gap is partly caused by factors outside the teacher’s control, like curriculum rules, the variety of students, and limited resources. However, the way the planning is done also plays a role; plans that are shallow, too ambitious, or poorly designed tend to result in bigger differences between what’s planned and what actually happens. Teachers are not simply passive when faced with these mismatches. Instead, they actively respond by adapting, reflecting, and coming up with new approaches to bridge the gap between planning and implementation. Strategies like reflective teaching, working together on lesson plans, co-teaching, and incorporating AI and digital technologies are clear examples of how educators work to minimize this divide. Providing teachers with effective professional development and the right technology is key. When educators receive meaningful training and have access to useful planning tools, they are much more capable of turning their plans into real classroom practices.

This review highlights that planning needs to be flexible and responsive to the specific context. Simply making perfect or one-size-fits-all plans isn’t enough; effective teaching demands careful consideration of what actually happens in the classroom and the ability to adapt plans as you go.

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