

English Foreign Language Teachers' Lesson Preparation: A Comparison between Online and Face-to-Face Teaching

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Abstract

Many universities have offered online courses and teachers have transitioned to online teaching. Many scholars have examined how teachers conducted their online teaching. However, a few studies have explored how teachers prepare their lessons for online courses and how different their preparation is in planning their online and offline teaching. Therefore, the current study investigated how the same English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers planned lessons for both online and face-to-face teaching. The study employed in-depth re-called interviews with ten EFL teachers from a public university in Vietnam. The study used a framework of three types of interactions (student-teacher, student-student, and student-content) to analyze the interaction patterns. Findings indicated that most teachers maintained similar planning strategies for both online and face-to-face teaching. Nevertheless, many teachers encountered challenges in planning student-student interaction in online classes and did not prepare student-content interaction in both teaching modalities. The study suggests implications for EFL teachers to plan lessons for both online and offline classes.

Keywords: Online teaching, face-to-face teaching, lesson planning, interactions.

Introduction

A paradigm shift exists in the rapidly evolving present educational landscape as technology becomes increasingly integrated into educational systems. The widespread impact of online teaching platforms is the main driving force behind this transformation (Escueta et al., 2020). In Vietnam, many universities have undergone significant digital transformations. According to Circular 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021), universities can provide synchronous online and face-to-face courses, with the online portion accounting for thirty per cent of the academic load in a full-time or part-time training program. Consequently, the same teachers can instruct both online and offline classes. This transition has prompted numerous studies exploring teachers' instructional methods, especially in online teaching.

Whether teaching online or offline, teachers must plan their lessons. Lesson planning holds immense significance in the teaching process – a cornerstone for effective pedagogy. Earlier research has underscored its critical role in the success of the teaching process (Bassett et al., 2019; Hatch & Clark, 2021). It enables teachers to carefully structure and organize their

instructional activities to address diverse learner needs (Epp et al., 2015). It is a framework for teachers to consider various teaching elements like content, approaches, and assessment (Riddell, 2014). In language teaching, well-crafted lesson plans can enhance teaching efficiency (Bartholomew et al., 2020). Generally, despite technological advancements in education, it is crucial not to overlook the hidden reality of lesson preparation.

Recent studies have researched lesson planning, exploring various aspects like incorporating learner diversity, stages of planning, influences on lesson plans, and reflective practice among educators (Amalia et al., 2020; Black et al., 2019; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018; Contreras et al., 2020; Edi et al., 2021; Emiliyasi, 2019; Hejji Alanazi, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2021; Jantarach & Soontornwipast, 2018). Jantarach and Soontornwipast (2018) outlined a cyclical process of four stages in Thai EFL student teachers' planning. Moreover, Iqbal et al. (2021) proposed a guideline for successful lesson planning in a Bangladeshi university, emphasizing a theory-based approach and pedagogical expertise. Contreras et al. (2020) compared the planning processes of in-service and pre-service teachers, showing differences in consistency and coherence. Edi et al. (2021) responded to the challenges of the new normal with an online-based lesson plan model, highlighting a gap in research on online lesson planning. However, most studies did not pay attention to lesson planning in an online environment.

Generally, previous studies have extensively explored lesson planning; however, there remains a gap in understanding how teachers prepare for synchronous online versus traditional face-to-face teaching at the tertiary level. This study aims to explore these differences through qualitative data analysis, guided by this research question: What are the differences in planning lessons between synchronous online and face-to-face EFL teaching by the same teachers?

Literature Review

Lesson Planning

The concept of lesson planning is complicated, with various definitions provided by scholars in the field. Farrell (2002) described lesson planning as the meticulous process through which EFL teachers prepare the content and delivery of their lessons, creating a structured outline to track student progress. Nesari and Heidari (2014) extended this definition, emphasizing that lesson planning guides teachers in setting objectives, selecting resources, designing activities, allocating time, adapting to teaching conditions, and implementing assessments. Purgason (2013) showed that lesson planning integrates knowledge of teaching and learning with students' understanding to effectively plan class instruction. In EFL education, lesson planning goes beyond a mere procedural outline; it reflects teachers' understanding of language education, curriculum, learners, and the educational context (Li & Zou, 2017). At its core, lesson planning is crucial in instructional preparation for the desired outcomes and organizational aspects of teaching procedures.

Lesson plans include crucial details such as activities, timing, objectives, materials, step-by-step instructions, and facilitating interaction (Purgason, 2013). Moreover, a lesson plan's effectiveness centers on fostering meaningful teacher-subject interaction, where decisions on content delivery are pivotal (Lai & Lam, 2011). Lesson planning is essentially a roadmap for teachers, helping them understand students' tasks and ensuring successful classroom instruction execution (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019). In short, lesson planning forms the foundation of good teaching, integrating what to teach, how to teach it, and its significance.

According to Purgason (2013), lesson planning involves multiple steps, emphasizing the creation of varied activities tailored to different models. This study particularly focused on planning activities for both online and offline teaching, emphasizing three types of interactions (Moore, 1989). The upcoming sections will review planned activities for face-to-face and real-time online teaching, with a specific focus on these interactions.

Planned Activities for Interactions in Face-to-face EFL Teaching

Researchers have extensively studied planned activities for face-to-face EFL instruction, focusing on fostering meaningful interactions. First, whether executed synchronously or asynchronously offline (Xie et al., 2023), these pedagogical activities necessitate a direct alignment with predefined course objectives. The goal is to furnish students with experiential opportunities that facilitate interest, motivation, active practice, and constructive feedback, fostering substantive interactions between students and teachers (Moore, 1989).

Other researchers have different ideas about designing activities in language classrooms. Rifkin (2003) said that when designing instructional activities, teachers must carefully consider the nature of students' tasks. Dialogues, role-plays, and information-gap tasks are frequently employed to enhance learners' communicative competence (Littlewood, 2012). Simultaneously, techniques in teaching English, such as class discussions, presentations, small group discussions, pair work, group work, special projects, and task-oriented assignments, have been investigated (Kalmamatova et al., 2020; Willis & Willis, 2007). The authors concluded that all these techniques have the common educational goal of teaching students to communicate in English and fostering individual development, enhancing peer interaction.

In pursuing heightened engagement with lesson content, Brown (2007) underscored the significance of communicative activities that simulate real-life language use. Moreover, researchers advocate for integrating authentic materials and real-life situations into instructional activities. Exposure to authentic texts, videos, and real-life scenarios enhances learners' language proficiency by providing exposure to natural language use (Peacock & Ho, 2003).

In short, while previous research has examined activities for offline EFL teaching, evidence on how EFL lecturers differentiate their planning for offline versus online teaching remains sparse.

Planned Activities for Interactions in Online EFL Teaching

Numerous studies have explored different activities for EFL online classes. These activities can be prepared to occur synchronously or asynchronously (Xie et al., 2023). Synchronous activities like live video sessions, virtual classrooms, and real-time discussions, offer immediate interaction (Martin et al., 2012). Asynchronous activities, including discussion forums, recorded lectures, and online assignments, provide flexibility in pacing and participation (Woo & Reeves, 2019).

Additionally, the learning management system is important in enriching virtual spaces by emphasizing student activity, interaction, and management. Edmodo, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom can be utilized independently or with other applications (Khan & Jawaid, 2020). To cultivate an online community, Berry (2019b) suggested strategies: consistent communication with students, minimizing lecture time, utilizing videos and chats for engagement, and dedicating class time to personal and professional updates.

Collaborative technology-mediated tasks, particularly well-designed small group activities using synchronous and asynchronous tools like Google Docs, foster equitable participation and feedback (González-Lloret, 2020). Bai et al. (2022) demonstrated heightened student engagement in online discussions through gamification with a fantasy element. Zhang and Yu (2021) established that Kahoot! enhances interaction between students and teachers, promoting collaboration in traditional and flipped learning environments. Additionally, Raes et al. (2020) showcased interactive quizzes' capacity to enhance engagement and intrinsic motivation in traditional and virtual learning settings. Banna et al. (2015) employed a qualitative approach to highlight the efficacy of tools like discussion boards, chat rooms, blogs, and group tasks to enhance student-student interaction.

In summary, various activities have been suggested to enhance interactions in online ELT. However, existing studies do not comprehensively understand teachers' practical approaches to lesson planning in this context.

Theoretical Framework

Interaction is crucial in lesson planning, requiring careful consideration. It is essential to design instructional activities that incorporate diverse forms of engagement, facilitating active student participation in the learning process. This study utilized the theoretical framework by Moore (1989), which categorizes interaction into three types.

Interaction has been criticized for significantly impacting the dynamics of teaching and learning in traditional education and distance education (Anderson, 2003; Moore, 1989; Smith & Kurthen, 2007). It can take different forms, including engagement with the instructor, collaboration with peers, and interaction with the course content (Moore, 1989). Firstly, student-teacher interaction involves the exchange of information and communication between learners and the teacher responsible for setting up the program, preparing study materials, making presentations, organizing student discussions, and supporting and stimulating students' interests. Second, student-student interaction means the engagement among individual students or within a group of peers, whether or not the teacher is physically present, and could be carried out synchronously or asynchronously thanks to the assistance of online digital tools. Thirdly, student-content interaction is characterized as the active cognitive engagement with the educational material, leading to alterations in the student's comprehension, viewpoint, or cognitive frameworks (Moore, 1989, p. 2), which means that this interaction occurs as students solve subject-related topics based on resources like visual recordings, lectures, coursebooks, or notes to cultivate students' awareness of meaning.

Previous Research on Lesson Planning

Recent studies have delved into the intricate domain of lesson planning (Amalia et al., 2020; Black et al., 2019; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018; Contreras et al., 2020; Edi et al., 2021; Emiliyasi, 2019; Hejji Alanazi, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2021; Jantarach & Soontornwipast, 2018). For example, Jantarach and Soontornwipast (2018) conducted a grounded theory study to clarify the lesson planning process of Thai EFL student teachers. Through interviews and observations involving 22 undergraduates, they identified a cyclical process comprising four stages: pre-planning, planning, implementation, and reflection or evaluation. Although this study contributed

to the literature on pre-service teachers' lesson planning processes, it did not focus extensively on the detailed planning of teaching activities.

Similarly, Black et al. (2019) explored how three subject teachers from two secondary schools in the South West of England addressed learner diversity in their lesson planning with a specific focus on students identified as having special educational needs. Using interviews, lesson observations, and analysis of lesson planning artifacts, the study presented three detailed cases and, through cross-case analysis, developed a preliminary situated model of lesson planning for diversity. Various planning approaches are identified, including formal, personal, expanded, and in-flight planning, each differing in terms of purpose, formality, documentation, and timing. However, the study examined the design of teaching activities based on learners' characteristics and did not explore the design of teaching activities tailored to the online teaching environment. Moreover, Iqbal et al. (2021) examined possible influences on lesson plans and created a guideline for effective lesson planning at a university in Bangladesh. Findings from a mini-experiment and a survey involving 115 students revealed that successful development and execution of lesson plans necessitate a theory-based approach, strategic classroom seating arrangements, active student engagement observation, and pedagogical expertise. However, this study also investigated lesson planning in a face-to-face teaching context, rather than in a distance learning environment.

Additionally, Amalia et al. (2020) explored reflective practices among teacher educators, tracing their lesson planning journey from early teaching years. Conducting narrative inquiry with three educators from two ELT doctoral programs in Indonesia, the study revealed that teacher educators adapted past experiences, engaged in present reflection, and planned for future improvements. However, this research did not address the planning of classroom interactions; it solely focused on teachers' lesson plan process. Furthermore, Contreras et al. (2020) examined the cognitive processes of lesson planning in in-service and pre-service secondary school English teachers from Chile using the think-aloud protocol. The frequency and content analysis revealed that while both groups exhibited a variety of cognitive processes during planning, in-service teachers demonstrated more consistent, constant, and coherent planning compared to pre-service teachers.

In summary, existing studies have examined various aspects of lesson planning, but have not thoroughly explored how teachers plan activities, particularly those facilitating student-student, student-teacher, and student-content interactions online. This study aimed to address this gap by comparing lesson planning practices across online and traditional face-to-face teaching environments.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design employed in this study was qualitative. More specifically, the study utilized a case study approach to delve into the experiences and practices of individual teachers within their unique contexts. In-depth interviews were utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of how EFL teachers plan their lessons for online and face-to-face teaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, individual interviews provide a conducive environment for participants to share their insights openly. In short, qualitative research is well-suited for gathering data on teachers' lesson planning and exploring the underlying motivations and rationale of their instructional practices (Yin, 2009).

Participants

In this study, participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as recommended by Guest et al. (2013). Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study's focus. Initially, invitations with clear study purposes were emailed to approximately 50 EFL lecturers employed by the Foreign Language Faculty at a public university in Vietnam. Upon their acceptance, informed consent was obtained from each individual, ensuring their understanding of the study's nature and scope before data collection commenced.

Specifically, this study recruited ten EFL lecturers with substantial experience, each having a minimum of four years in both online and face-to-face EFL instruction. They have been teaching general English courses (English 1, English 2, and English 3) in both online and offline formats for at least three school years. This deliberate selection aimed to capture diverse viewpoints and approaches to lesson planning, thereby enriching the depth and breadth of the gathered data (as in the following table).

Table 1
Demographic information of interviewers

Interviewed teachers	Age	Gender	Years of teaching experience at the tertiary level	Years of synchronous online teaching experience
Teacher 1	48	Female	23	4
Teacher 2	50	Female	13	4
Teacher 3	37	Female	08	4
Teacher 4	40	Female	10	4
Teacher 5	29	Female	05	4
Teacher 6	53	Male	20	4
Teacher 7	42	Female	07	4
Teacher 8	45	Female	10	4
Teacher 9	45	Female	17	4
Teacher 10	39	Female	11	4

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method for this study. The half-hour interviews were conducted individually in Vietnamese and through Zalo video calls for participants' convenience. Moreover, the use of audio recording during the interviews was crucial to ensuring the accuracy of data transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data, a framework based on three types of interactions within lessons was employed: student-teacher, student-student, and student-content interactions. This framework was chosen to provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the different dimensions of lesson planning.

Once the interview data was collected, it underwent a meticulous process of thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This analytical approach is a systematic process that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. It allows researchers to identify recurring patterns of meaning and gain insights into participants' perspectives. Particularly, after being transcribed, the data was thoroughly read and coded using Nvivo 12. Utilizing NVivo software played a vital role in this research phase, aiding in efficiently organizing and categorizing the data (Dhakal, 2022). This enabled the identification of emerging themes within participants' narratives. As a result, this systematic process provided researchers with valuable insights into participants' viewpoints and the broader implications of their teaching practices.

In qualitative studies, researchers utilize various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, firstly, the researchers conducted member checking, where they presented their findings to participants and sought their feedback or corrections. This process helped validate the accuracy of interpretations and ensured alignment with participants' perspectives. Secondly, peer debriefing was utilized, involving discussions with colleagues in the field to gather input and feedback on the research process, data analysis, and interpretations. Through these discussions, potential biases, errors, or alternative explanations were identified, contributing to the overall trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully considered. Before participating, all participants were provided informed consent, ensuring their understanding of the study's purpose, procedure, and rights as respondents. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality and were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point.

Findings

Differences in Lesson Planning between Face-to-face and Online Teaching

The informants' responses showed few differences in EFL lesson planning between online and offline teaching modalities.

Planned Activities to Enhance Student-teacher Interaction

Before lessons, to create interaction with students, all teachers reported adhering to faculty-set objectives. They demonstrated the adoption of a standardized syllabus across all classes, planning consistent activities to achieve common teaching goals.

Between online and offline, there is not much difference. I stick to textbooks, and follow the syllabus. All the ultimate objectives lead to the students taking the final exam. I also plan teaching to help the students perform well in the final exam. (Teacher 4)

Also, interviewees indicated that they attempted to maintain students' motivation and self-direction by identifying what goals their students achieved after lesson completion as having planned or been given lessons to be taught, showing a similarity in this aspect for online and offline classes.

First, you should look at the objectives. After teaching, what students obtain, and what knowledge students will gain? So, I should follow the detailed syllabus of each subject. I have the same syllabus for both online and offline courses ... (Teacher 2)

Second, to facilitate communication and course management between teachers and learners during the courses, interviewees mentioned their initiative in establishing class groups on Zalo. This platform primarily served as a channel for delivering announcements, distributing course materials, and occasionally responding to students' queries during the courses, irrespective of whether these courses were conducted online or offline. Moreover, most of them acknowledged that they did not use any additional platforms to encourage interaction between themselves and their students.

I created a Zalo group, and uploaded the textbook materials. I don't have a Learning Management System (LMS) for educational management. (Teacher 1)
Usually, a Zalo group is created. If students encounter any difficulties, they can ask, for online situations. But not many questions were raised. (Teacher 8)

For planned activities to commence the presentation stage, most teachers indicated that they designed warm-up activities like games, quizzes, or puzzles to create interaction between themselves and their students to enhance student interest, engagement, and learning motivation. However, these activities remained insufficient and consistent across instruction modes. One teacher pointed out time shortage as the reason for not preparing warm-up activities.

There are games, but this depends on lessons. I'm a bit pressed for time, so games are planned around 2-3 times per semester, to change the atmosphere. (Teacher 3)

However, only a teacher mentioned a slight distinction in preparing warm-up activities between online and offline teaching. She showed that activities such as playing games, doing quizzes or puzzles, watching videos, and answering were planned to apply for offline ELT more regularly than for online ELT. She noted that the varying nature of online and offline environments accounted for this dissimilarity. Specifically, she explained the reason is in online classes, teachers could not see or control the whole class as well as in offline ones.

If students are not very engaged, I might include fun activities with word puzzles, a video, and questions in offline classes... Online classes are a bit more challenging because I can't see the students and know how they are. I have to ask how everyone is when they join the Zoom. I inquired if they have any intense study sessions in the previous class or not. Usually, warm-up activities aren't diverse. (Teacher 5)

To prepare for lesson presentations, most participants mentioned using the same lesson PowerPoint slides supplied by the textbook publisher. Several teachers adapted these slides to align

with the unique requirements of their classes, depending on the instruction mode. They explained lessons to students by explaining the slides. However, though there were some differences between online and offline teaching, teachers only added more details to the PowerPoint slides in online classes. One of the teachers explained.

Designing lesson slides is different. I put more effort, into showing every detail in online lesson slides. But, in offline classes, I provide key points. During lectures, I can elaborate, expand, and introduce more, depending on the audience. For online classes, I prepare and ask lots of questions. Meanwhile speaking, I add effects to display the question visually. Designing online lessons is more challenging. (Teacher 1)

Moreover, for the presentation phase, to improve teachers' interaction with students, the teachers intended to consistently pose questions to students during live lessons. However, this interaction activity was reported to be helpful for a small number of students in online classes because the teachers did not spend enough time calling all students to respond.

I usually ask students questions in all settings. (Teacher 5)
During lectures, I ask students for opinions. Sometimes, I assign those raising hands and make impromptu designations. This is to see if any students haven't been paying attention and have been feeling lost in the lesson. (Teacher 6)

However, although the same techniques like lecturing or asking questions were planned in both teaching modes, one teacher said that she felt it was easier to teach online classes because she could call them to answer questions randomly and evenly.

It's similar to an offline class... However, in an online class, it's sometimes easier. I must be more deliberate in calling on students to make sure everyone gets a chance and to avoid situations where students might try to avoid participating... (Teacher 3)

Also, all teachers reported activities for review and immediate feedback, ensuring students' opportunities to reinforce their learning. However, the predominant activities involved the exchange of simple questions and answers between teachers and students, as indicated in the feedback.

In short, most of the respondents demonstrated the same planned activities to enhance student-teacher interaction for online and face-to-face lectures, in which teachers explained the lesson and called out the students to answer questions.

Planned Activities to Enhance Student-student Interaction

Regarding activities to create student-student interaction, while the same teachers shared the same planned activities to some extent, they raised challenges in planning student-student interaction in online courses.

During the practice phase, on the one hand, most teachers prepared similar activities to foster interaction among students. These activities included pair work or group work, with online classes using breakout rooms.

It depends on designed activities. There may be class or group discussions or individual work. For difficult questions to give an opinion, students must respond individually. Online and face-to-face classes are the same.” (Teacher 3)

On the other hand, the interviews showed difficulties predicted and encountered while the teachers plan student-student interaction in online classes. First, Internet connection or students’ technical or personal issues shortened the amount of time in online classes. The limited time posed a challenge for teachers in designing and executing activities for meaningful student-student interaction.

Time was a real challenge in online teaching. Holding activities that got students talking to each other was tough. Meaningful pair or group work needs time. (Teacher 9)

Moreover, all teachers expressed that the workload made it difficult for themselves to allocate sufficient time for interactive activities, particularly collaborative tasks. One teacher explained:

In online teaching, I find group or pair work very difficult. I only check students individually. If planning more group work, I won't have time. Time is very limited, but the lesson load is heavy. (Teacher 7)

Besides, most teachers reported using breakout rooms for group work, and managing breakout rooms were proved to be challenging. Technical difficulties, ensuring equitable group distribution, and monitoring student progress were the reasons. Therefore, they hesitated to plan group work with breakout rooms.

In Zoom, I divide students into groups. However, most students are passive, waiting for other students to speak, not participating and working. When asked, students said, "My network is weak, I've been logged out," or "My mic is broken", etc. Students must be responsible, but when it comes to teachers' controlling or evaluating students, online classes have such difficulties. I can't control all student participation. (Teacher 2)

However, one teacher showed her preference for online teaching as she responded that online EFL classes would benefit learners who lacked confidence in front of a large audience. Therefore, this teacher admitted she completely did not plan any group or pair tasks, and she only set up individual interaction. Moreover, she also said this was also true for her offline teaching. The reason for this was the large class size and students’ comfortable feelings and time constraints.

For shy students, studying online is better and more comfortable.... In a face-to-face class of 60 students sitting close together, it's difficult for students to stand up and answer. Sometimes they are embarrassed to ask questions. In an online class, they can text or ask directly without embarrassment. (Teacher 3)

Moreover, she preferred online teaching despite the challenges. She intended to implement an attendance-checking activity. She said teachers had the right to impose class rules to improve students' interactions.

In offline classes, I can observe students face-to-face. But, in online classes, I can't see them, so the only way is to call randomly and continuously. I apply more difficult classroom rules. Specifically, students will be considered absent if they don't respond immediately to my call for any reason. Those students will receive minus points. (Teacher 3)

Finally, for the production stage, teachers noted the absence of planned discussion forums for both online and face-to-face ELT, limiting post-lesson student engagement. One teacher acknowledged the benefits of asynchronous online activities like Google Classroom assignments but hesitated due to lack of compensation and student participation concerns.

... We have no official discussion forums.... I know the benefits of Google Classroom or Facebook groups, but honestly, I never planned to do that. No extra pay for it. Students are lazy because their study program is heavy. (Teacher 1)

In conclusion, participants highlighted challenges in fostering student-student interaction in online classes, including time constraints, breakout room management, technical issues, and heavy workloads. Though beneficial for shy students, the lack of official discussion forums restricted post-lesson interactions.

Planned Activities to Enhance Student-content Interaction

Interviewees showed insufficient preparedness for facilitating student-content interaction across two teaching modalities.

Firstly, all the interviewed teachers said that the same coursebooks were required in offline and online synchronous lessons. Textbooks were the primary material and the tasks in the textbooks were too many for their students to do. However, they said that they rarely asked students to read or complete tasks in the coursebooks at home.

Homework assignments are good, but I'm sure our students don't do it. They are required to work in class, both online and offline. Using the LIFE textbook is sufficient. (Teacher 4)

For references, most teachers said they did not employ other materials to enhance students' process of intellectually interacting with content. Some teachers added that they intended to introduce very few materials to students or encourage them to engage in self-study at home, not making such content mandatory and tested, attributing to the limited time and heavy workload.

From a teacher's perspective, it's quite challenging. Teachers have 30 or 45 periods for a course. If they have to manage this on top of that, the school needs to allocate extra periods. Otherwise, if we let them do it and then start assessing this and that, the workload becomes too much. So, it's only encouraging, not mandatory for students to read reference materials at home. (Teacher 9)

Third, during the lesson presentation time, PowerPoint slides for lectures were the primary content resource to engage students in learning activities. However, it was reported that additional interactive materials, such as recorded videos or audio, were hardly ever planned because of limited time and technical challenges. It means that students were just assigned to complete tasks in textbooks.

For offline tasks, I can ensure a certain amount of work is done within three 45-minute classes. But, for online tasks, it's not possible to complete, because the time frame is uncertain due to many other factors like technical issues. Sometimes, when you all work on it, you may encounter problems, so you have to ask for more time, which means you sometimes can't cover all the prepared content. (Teacher 5)

Fourth, although students had to complete online exercises designed by the publisher on an online platform (MyELT), teachers admitted that they did not do anything for this part. Specifically, they just informed students of course keys and deadlines in the first meeting without requiring any teachers' intervention, such as tracking and checking students' changes in understanding or cognitive development. Consequently, teachers did not plan any more supplementary papers or online materials for students as homework.

MyELT is similar in two modes. I don't care what students do in there. Sometimes students send messages like: "Teacher, I can't log in. Why did I write it this way but it's marked wrong? How is it graded? ..." I say that "if you encounter this issue, contact faculty staff." (Teacher 4)

They have to study many other subjects, so I rarely assign homework. I tell them to do the MyELT online exercises. Online and offline are the same. (Teacher 1)

Fifth, for both courses, some teachers said that they occasionally integrated extra activities, such as playing games on platforms like Kahoot, doing quizzes, listening to audio files, watching videos, or reading online articles, etc.

...It would be relaxing and enjoyable for students if I incorporated extra activities, but time is the problem. So, I'm hesitant. (Teacher 3)

Finally, regarding content for review and assessment, most teachers relied on preparing one-time multiple-choice tests in the middle of the courses, both online and offline, either in paper format or using Google Forms. Only one teacher reported planning games for review and assessment purposes.

In summary, participants showed gaps in planning student-content interaction in both online and offline teaching, relying heavily on coursebooks and in-class activities. Technical issues and time constraints hindered online tasks, while homework was beneficial but often neglected. Refining approaches is crucial for enhancing student-content interaction across diverse teaching settings.

Discussions and Recommendations

This study investigated how different lesson preparation for activities between online and offline EFL teaching by the same teachers and reported the findings to answer the research question: What are the differences in planning lessons between synchronous online and face-to-face EFL teaching by the same teachers? The primary discovery of the study indicates that the teachers planned activities for interaction similarly in both online and offline EFL teaching settings. There was no noticeable difference in the preparation of activities to facilitate interaction between students and teachers in online versus face-to-face contexts.

Firstly, all teachers adhered to identical lesson objectives, resulting in the planning of comparable activities to attain common goals for both instructional modalities. This aligns with the results of a recent study by Emiliyasi (2019) suggesting that teachers typically structure their lessons using a six-step process: reviewing core and basic competencies from the syllabus, searching for learning resources, selecting learning media, determining the material, choosing a learning method, and compiling indicators and goals. In addition, a significant challenge emerged as the planning for online and offline teaching by the same teachers could not be identical, given the distinct characteristics of the two teaching modes. Furthermore, the establishment of online class groups, as previously mentioned, aligns with the research of scholars such as Mabrito (2006) and Yadav (2016). These studies suggest that the integration of Zalo provides an ongoing platform for student interaction, leading to increased engagement and the cultivation of a sense of community (Berry, 2019a; Hrastinski, 2008). However, a notable issue identified in the research is that Zalo groups primarily serve as a means to convey class notifications rather than foster meaningful interaction between students and teachers or among students. Meanwhile, the design of warm-up activities to boost communication between teachers and students, such as games, quizzes, or puzzles, remained consistently inadequate due to time constraints across both teaching modes. In presenting lessons, teachers opted to use identical PowerPoint slides. Familiar techniques, such as lecturing or posing questions (Masrom et al., 2021), were planned for implementation in both online and face-to-face teaching.

When planning activities to encourage student interaction, challenges unique to online classes were found, consistent with previous studies (Masrom et al., 2021; Sadeghi, 2019; Taghizadeh & Ejtehad, 2023). Common obstacles included limited time, difficulties in managing breakout rooms, technical issues, and high workloads. This finding partially aligns with the results of the study by Mokoena (2022), which highlighted the challenges faced by rural English teachers in planning and preparing lessons in the online teaching environment. Consequently, it becomes imperative for teachers to receive training or encouragement to devise diverse activities and voice concerns to address these challenges in the interest of student learning. Furthermore, although some benefits were noted for shy students, the absence of official discussion forums restricted post-lesson interactions. This contrasts with the idea that planned activities should be simultaneously enhanced for both synchronous and asynchronous modes (Xie et al., 2023).

In terms of activities designed to enhance student-content interaction, the findings underscored a significant gap in preparing activities that effectively engage students with content in both online and offline teaching settings. The findings are different from other previous studies which focused on the process of lesson planning (Black et al., 2019; Contreras et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2021). The study added to the literature this point because no previous researchers have examined lesson planning in terms of teaching activities especially student-material interactions. The current study showed that respondents primarily relied on coursebooks and in-class activities, with limited integration of supplementary materials. It is suggested that teachers should prepare activities for students to interact with materials which is similar to what Quadir et al. (2022)

recommended, emphasizing the importance of developing more interactive and practical learning content. The study suggests a need for reconsideration in how teachers plan their online and offline lessons. The integration of more interactive and diverse learning materials, along with addressing technical challenges and time constraints, is essential for fostering effective student-content engagement.

In response to these findings, it becomes imperative for educators to adopt a proactive stance in addressing the identified challenges and disparities within their lesson preparation methods, irrespective of the teaching mode. This necessitates the tailoring of online teaching strategies to mitigate the identified challenges specifically. Regarding student-student interaction, teachers should design activities that occur asynchronously after live lessons for both online and offline meetings. The study suggests that teachers should plan students' discussions through asynchronous online forums or plan recorded lectures for students to watch at home. Setting out class rules for students' class attendance is also recommended. As a result, teachers and students have more time for planned activities in synchronous settings, increasing students' interactions.

Recognizing the challenges in online settings, teachers should create opportunities for effective communication among students by not only establishing groups on platforms like Zalo but also actively managing and encouraging meaningful interactions among students. Simultaneously, there is an obvious need for instructors to emphasize planning for student-content interaction, thus augmenting the overall effectiveness of their teaching approach. Teachers should engage with students' online exercise performance, assess their homework assignments, and create opportunities for students to delve deeply into lesson content by planning more activities in live classes, such as group discussions, critical thinking exercises, and responses to what they have learned or read. This approach ensures a more comprehensive and practical adaptation to the demands of different teaching modes, fostering an enriched learning experience for both online and offline students. By addressing these considerations, educators can contribute to a more effective and inclusive educational environment.

Conclusion

This study shed light on the crucial aspect of lesson planning in transitioning to online teaching within the realm of EFL instruction. Through in-depth interviews with ten teachers, the research provided valuable insights into how educators prepared for online and face-to-face classes. The findings revealed a notable continuity in planning strategies between these modalities, highlighting the adaptability of teachers in response to changing educational landscapes.

However, challenges emerged when it came to fostering student-student interaction in the online environment, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies to enhance collaborative learning in virtual classrooms. Moreover, a significant gap was identified in scheduling student-content interaction in both teaching modes, suggesting a potential improvement in lesson design.

In light of these findings, it is imperative to advocate for providing professional development opportunities for EFL teachers. This support should encompass effective strategies for designing online and face-to-face lessons, specifically optimizing various forms of interaction.

Overall, this study serves as a foundation for further exploration in the field of EFL instruction, offering practical implications for educators to enhance their planning practices in both online and offline settings. As universities continue to adapt to new modes of instruction, understanding and refining the lesson planning process remains critical to ensuring quality education for all students.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, it does have some specific limitations associated with its methodological approach. Firstly, its reliance solely on in-depth interviews may have led to potential biases such as social desirability bias or interviewer effects. This could have restricted the breadth of perspectives obtained. This limitation might have impacted the study's findings by potentially skewing participant responses or overlooking certain aspects of the phenomena under investigation. To address this in future research, combining interviews with classroom observations could provide a more comprehensive understanding while mitigating these specific limitations. Additionally, the small sample size of ten participants might not fully capture the diversity of experiences and practices among all EFL teachers. Recruiting a larger and more diverse sample could enhance the generalizability of findings in subsequent studies.

Moreover, to address the limitations of this study, future research could adopt specific methodologies tailored to its objectives. Complementing the qualitative findings, quantitative methods could be employed to provide broader data for generalizability, facilitating statistical analysis for a deeper exploration of trends and patterns in lesson planning for both online and face-to-face classes. For instance, surveys or structured observations could provide quantitative insights into the prevalence and effectiveness of various teaching strategies. Additionally, experimental research offers a promising avenue to assess the efficacy of specific lesson planning techniques, particularly in the online context, by systematically manipulating variables and measuring outcomes. By rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of online lesson planning strategies, especially in terms of facilitating student interactions and engagement, future studies can contribute to evidence-based best practices in EFL instruction and further advance the development of online education.

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