

EOP Lesson Planning for Adult Learners¹

(Planeamiento de clase IFO
para estudiantes adultos)

*Randal Esteban Blanco-Navarro*²

Universidad de Costa Rica, Golfito, Costa Rica

*Patricia López-Estrada*³

Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica, San Carlos, Costa Rica

*Milady Liseth Esquivel-Ibarra*⁴

Universidad Nacional, Heredia, Costa Rica





ABSTRACT

This case study describes andragogical principles and the perceptions of two English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) student teachers with respect to lesson planning for adult learners for their teaching practicum. Data collection was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews, reflective narratives, and lesson plan document review. Thematic analysis revealed two main themes: the participants' perceptions of lesson planning strategies for adult learners, and their implementation of these. Lesson planning for adult learners may pose challenges that language instructors rarely encounter in general English classes. Primary strategies used to plan the classes were team-teaching and the support of a subject matter expert (SME).

1 Recibido: 20 de mayo de 2024; aceptado: 23 de abril de 2025.

2 Sede del Sur. Correo electrónico: randal.blanco@ucr.ac.cr;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7185-9715>.

3 Campus Tecnológico Local. Correo electrónico: plopez@itcr.ac.cr;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4811-5865>.

4 Centro de Estudios de Inglés Conversacional, Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje. Correo electrónico: miladyesquivelibarra@gmail.com;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7642-3825>.



RESUMEN

Este estudio de caso describe principios andragógicos y las percepciones de dos docentes estudiantes de inglés con fines ocupacionales (IFO) sobre el planeamiento de lecciones para estudiantes adultos antes de su práctica docente. La recolección de datos consistió en entrevistas semiestructuradas, narraciones reflexivas y revisión del planeamiento de clase. El análisis temático arrojó dos temas principales sobre las percepciones y estrategias sobre el planeamiento de lecciones para adultos. Planear lecciones para estudiantes adultos plantea varios desafíos diferentes de las clases de inglés general; y se apoyaron de un experto en la materia para planear las clases en un proceso de enseñanza en equipo.

Keywords: English for occupational purposes, adult learners, andragogical principles, lesson planning

Palabras clave: inglés con fines ocupacionales, estudiantes adultos, principios andragógicos, planeamiento de clase

Introduction

The landscape of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) often neglects the unique dynamics of teaching adult learners. While pedagogical principles are present in most classroom settings, the complexities of andragogy—the art of facilitating adult learning—remain largely unexplored in the context of ESP, as suggested by Bocanegra-Valle and Basturkmen.⁵ This paper explores the interplay between the principles of andragogy and ESP instruction by offering the results of a case study conducted to scrutinize the lesson planning practices of two student teachers in Costa Rica, a country where ESP is gaining both implementation and academic interest.⁶

5 Ana Bocanegra-Valle and Helen Basturkmen, “Investigating the Teacher Education Needs of Experienced ESP Teachers in Spanish Universities,” *Iberica* 38 (2019) 127-150.

6 Allen Quesada-Pacheco, Xinia Rodríguez-Ramírez, and Mayra Solís-Hernández, “A TESOL Practicum in Costa Rica,” *Current Perspectives on the TESOL Practicum: Cases from Around the Globe*, Andrzej Cirocki, Irshat Madyarov, and Laura Baecher (Eds.) (Edinburgh: Springer Cham, 2020): 87-107. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28756-6_5.

ESP practitioners and student teachers have faced a distinct challenge: catering to adult learners whose age presents additional hurdles. The need to master professional jargon and to integrate into target communities can have a significant impact on adult learners' self-perception and engagement.⁷ In this case study, the student teachers decided to offer an English-for-Occupational-Purposes (EOP) course in a call center. Research on how ESP practitioners and student teachers navigate the unique features of adult learning remains relatively scarce. The study addresses this critical gap by investigating the underplayed role of andragogy in ESP, and most particularly in EOP lesson planning, thus seeking to make a vital contribution to a neglected area of ESP Teacher Education.⁸

Literature Review

Most student teachers put their theoretical foundations into practice during their practicum, and this research sheds light on their attempts to embrace the tenets of adult learning in their lesson plans. The exploration begins in the early stages of needs analysis, when the student teachers grapple with how adult learners approach new academic endeavors. Although Hashim and Othman⁹ have uncovered some of the challenges of meeting such students' occupational, cognitive, and affective needs as linked to their age, the underlying academic concern here is how EOP student teachers reconcile the established pedagogical methodologies with the distinct requirements of andragogy in their lesson planning.

7 Lisa Evans, "Observations on the Changing Language of Accounting," *Accounting History* 15, 4 (2010): 439-462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1032373210373619>.

8 Elis K. Constantinou and Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous, "Professional Development in English for Specific Purposes: Designing the Curriculum of an Online ESP Teacher Education Course," *Tertiary Education Language Learning: A Collection of Research*, Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous, Elis Kakoulli Constantinou, and Christina Nicole Giannikas (Eds.) (Paris: Research-publishing.net, 2021) 89-109. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.51.1256>.

9 Fuzirah Hashim and Zarina Othman, "The Demands and Expectations in ESP Adult Teaching: English for BBA executives," *Journal of Educational Technology* 3, 1 (2006): 11-17.

This research holds value in shedding light on this under-researched area. By illuminating the unique challenges faced and approaches taken up by EOP student teachers working with students defined by Schwarzer¹⁰ as whole adult learners, this study paves the way for further exploration, ultimately facilitating the development of more effective and responsive EOP curriculum and teaching practices.

The following research questions guide this qualitative study: 1. What are the EOP student teachers' perceptions of lesson planning for adult learners?; and 2. How do the EOP student teachers plan lessons for adult learners?

Adult Learners

Defining the “adult learner” in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research proves trickier than simply relying on age brackets. While this study focuses on individuals aged 25-64 and views them as adult learners, acknowledging the limitations of such boundaries is crucial. Larsen-Freeman and Long¹¹ highlighted the ongoing debate surrounding the critical period for ultimate attainment in L2 acquisition, questioning the very notion of a definitive age cutoff. Similarly, Saville-Troike and Barto¹² acknowledged age differences but refrained from offering a concrete definition, leaving this key term somewhat nebulous.

To address this ambiguity, it is important to understand the social construct of adulthood as encompassing factors beyond mere chronology. Economic independence, marriage, parenthood, and other markers come into play.¹³ Nonetheless, most ESP courses taught at the

10 David Schwarzer, “Best Practices for Teaching the Whole Adult ESL learner,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2009, 121 (2009): 25-33. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.322>.

11 Diane Larsen-Freeman and Michael H. Long, *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research* (London: Routledge, 2014) 276. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315835891>.

12 Muriel Saville-Troike and Karen Barto, *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 82. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316569832>.

13 SNTCWebinars. (2019, December 16). *Using Adult Learning Principles to Create Effective Training*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDfce4FsiT4&t=1953s>.

tertiary level are intended for those individuals that Arnett¹⁴ has viewed as emerging adults—aged 18 to 29. Recognizing this complexity, this study operationalizes the “adult learner” within the specific context of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) classes, given that all students already have formal employment. Thus, for our purposes participants between 25 and 64 years old, regardless of their age of L2 acquisition (AoA), are considered adult learners.

Needs Analysis

Prior to crafting an effective EOP curriculum, conducting a thorough needs analysis (NA) is paramount. This process aligns with the backward-design or ecological approach emphasized by Richards¹⁵ that seeks to ensure that curriculum development flows directly from student needs. This initial step is even more critical when dealing with adult learners who are seeking to hone their English skills for specific occupational contexts.

EOP student teachers face the challenging task of choosing an appropriate NA model, often opting for those based on either communicative or linguistic competence.¹⁶ However, as Macalister and Nation¹⁷ cautioned, uncovering language needs in occupational settings is far from straightforward. It demands in-depth analysis, ongoing adjustments, and potential validation throughout the course, involving various methods such as testing, interviewing, reviewing past performance, analyzing relevant manuals, examining expected language use situations, and consulting employers and subject matter experts (SMEs).

14 Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist* 55, 5 (2000): 469-480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>.

15 Jack C. Richards, *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

16 Richard West, “Needs Analysis in Language Teaching,” *Language Teaching* 27, 1 (1994): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444800007527>.

17 Macalister and Nation, 5.

These multifaceted procedures, while crucial, present their own hurdles. Sava (2012) warns of potential challenges when ensuring the validity and reliability of the measurements of “the actual status of needs.”¹⁸ To navigate these pitfalls, Cheng¹⁹ suggested seeking the guidance of SMEs during the NA process. Indeed, several authors²⁰ indicate that such expertise can alleviate concerns about specialized terminology and vocabulary and address subject-specific knowledge dilemmas. Investing significant time, theoretical grounding, and effort into NA before and during course implementation is crucial to equipping adult learners with the precise linguistic tools they require for professional success.

Furthermore, despite engaging in meticulous NA processes, EOP student teachers may encounter various obstacles. First, distinguishing needs is far from a clear-cut process. Adult learners may struggle to differentiate between latent, manifest, intrinsic, and extrinsic needs, leaving EOP teachers with an unclear picture of their occupational requirements.²¹ Second, there is the risk of solution bias. Stefaniak²² warned that learners may inadvertently offer solutions instead of identifying needs, prematurely focusing on outcomes rather than on underlying deficiencies. Third, EOP teachers may face choice overload, given that they must navigate various need viewpoints (democratic, discrepant, analytic,

18 Simona Sava, *Needs Analysis and Programme Planning in Adult Education* (Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2012) 79. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbkjvs2>.

19 An Cheng, “Rethinking the Paths Toward Developing ESP Practitioners’ Specialized Knowledge through the Lens of Genre Analysis,” *EaGLE Journal* 1, 1 (2015): 23-45. <https://doi.org/10.6294/EaGLE.2015.0101.02>.

20 Laurence Anthony, *Introducing English for Specific Purposes* (London: Routledge, 2018) 92. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351031189>; Fethi Guerid and Naouel A. Mami, “Designing an ESP Syllabus for Finance and Accounting Staff,” *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* 5, 4 (2017): 771-780. <http://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/espeap/article/view/613>; Yasemin Kirkgöz, “ESP in Teacher Education: A Case Study,” *ESP Teaching and Teacher Education: Current Theories and Practices*, Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous, Elis Kakoulli Constantinou, and Christina Nicole Giannikas (Eds.) (Paris: Research-publishing.net, 2019) 13-26. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.33.923>.

21 Sava, 17.

22 Jill E. Stefaniak, *Needs Assessment for Learning and Performance: Theory, Process, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020) 28. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429287510>.

diagnostic) and analysis types (target-situation, present-situation, job analysis, etc.), adding layers of complexity to the process.²³ Finally, Khalid²⁴ emphasizes the way resource constraints can potentially limit the comprehensiveness of needs identification. According to Purwati and others,²⁵ these challenges necessitate constant reflection on NA results during lesson planning to ensure that the curriculum remains adaptable to evolving needs and adult learning principles.

Evolving Pedagogy: Meeting the Needs of Adult Learners

Prevailing English teaching methodologies often cater to children and adolescents, forcing a paradigm shift for EOP teachers. Embracing the distinct learning styles and preferences of adult learners is paramount. As the EOP student teachers transitioned from NA to practicum, they confronted the reality of mixed-level classes. In such contexts, Benmassoud and Bouchara²⁶ cautioned that weaker learners can be easily left behind. According to Brown and Lee,²⁷ recognizing individual differences in age, cognitive skills, personal circumstances, and learning styles is crucial to effective lesson planning. Additionally, Jensen²⁸ highlights the importance of adult learners understanding the rationale behind activities, while Cozma²⁹ argues that these students come to class with specific expectations for a productive learning environment, factors which must also be taken into account.

23 Brown, 26.

24 Adeel Khalid, "Needs Assessment in ESP: A Review," *Studies in Literature and Language* 12, 6 (2016): 38-46. <https://doi.org/10.3968/8161>.

25 Diana Purwati, Ainol Mardhiah, Enung Nurhasanah, and Ramli Ramli, "The Six Characteristics of Andragogy and Future Research Directions in EFL: A Literature Review," *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies* 4, 1 (2022): 86-95. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v4i1.7473>.

26 Jihane Benmassoud and Aicha Bouchara, "CALL Lesson Planning for ESP Classes in Morocco: Challenges & Opportunities," *Revue Linguistique et Référentiels Interculturels* 2, 2 (2021): 172-179. <https://doi.org/10.34874/IMIST.PRSM/liri-v2i2.29028>.

27 Douglas Brown and Heekyeong Lee, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (New York: Pearson Education ESL, 2015) 117.

28 Linda Jense, "Planning lessons," *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2001) 403-413.

29 Mihaela Cozma, "The Challenge of Teaching English to Adult Learners in Today's World," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 197 (2015): 1209-1214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.380>.

Integrating Andragogy into EOP for Adult Learners

Pedagogy resonates throughout traditional classrooms, yet a different learning theory favors adults. Their life experiences, self-directed goals and professional aspirations demand a distinct mindset—*andragogy*. The inherent mismatch between pedagogical methods crafted for young minds and the realities of adult learners presents a critical challenge. Young learners often thrive on structured curricula and teacher-centered guidance, whereas adults tend to seek a collaborative setting to exchange their own occupational experiences and practical needs. Knowles and others³⁰ claimed adult learners possess a unique “readiness to learn” fueled by intrinsic motivations and a desire to directly apply new knowledge to life’s challenges. This intrinsic drive implies a shift from the “sage on the stage” model to a “guide on the side” approach, in which adult learners become co-creators of the learning journey.

The principals of *andragogy* could guide ESP practitioners on this collaborative path. The cornerstone principle, *self-direction*, empowers adults to actively participate in designing the learning landscape. Knowles and others³¹ also emphasize the importance of involving adults in needs analysis, lesson planning, and assessment, in contrast to the passive absorption expected in traditional classrooms. This shift to ownership resonates deeply with adult learners, transforming them from passive recipients to active architects of their own knowledge.

The second *andragogical* principle of *readiness to learn* highlights the inherent purposefulness of adult learning. Unlike adolescents whose learning may be driven by external pressures, adults actively seek knowledge that directly addresses their immediate needs. ESP, with its focus on specific professional or vocational contexts, aligns perfectly with this principle. Zeivots³² stated that problem-solving

30 Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, Richard A. Swanson, Richard Swanson, and Petra A. Robinson, *The Adult Learner* (London: Routledge, 2020) 67. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429299612>.

31 Knowles and others, 295.

32 Sandris Zeivots, “Emotional Highs in Adult Experiential Learning,” *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 56, 3 (2016): 354-373.

tasks and case studies rooted in the learners' occupational domains provide rich ground for immediate application and tangible results. Such experiential learning nurtures motivation and self-knowledge, further fueling the learning engine.

Motivation itself, the third principle in andragogy, becomes a powerful force within ESP settings. Adults bring with them an intrinsic desire to improve their professional standing, secure better job opportunities, and elevate their quality of life. Recognizing this internal initiative, ESP instructors can craft content and activities that directly connect to these aspirations. Another vital principle pointed out by Peterson and Kolb³³ are *interactions*, the forging of links between personal experiences and desired outcomes. Celebrating life achievements within the learning environment, showcasing the real-world applications of acquired skills, and providing timely feedback—all these elements nourish adult motivation.

Nonetheless, the incorporation of andragogy within ESP, and in particular within EOP, is not without its challenges. Adult learners often juggle responsibilities, managing personal commitments and professional pressures alongside their educational experience. Yao³⁴ describes this reality, highlighting the fragmented nature of adult students' study time and the need for self-discipline to carve out learning moments. Tarnopolsky³⁵ echoes this sentiment, suggesting that limited intensiveness and carefully considered homework should guide instruction. EOP student teachers must strike a delicate balance between providing thorough learning opportunities and respecting the time constraints of their adult learners.

33 Kay Peterson and David A. Kolb, "Expanding Awareness and Contact through Experiential Learning," *Gestalt Review* 22, 2 (2018): 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.22.2.0226>.

34 Chunlin Yao, "A Case Study of Chinese Adult Learners' English Acquisition in a Blended Learning Environment," *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 59, 1 (2019): 115-135. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJCEELL.2017.080993>.

35 Oleg Tarnopolsky, "Foreign Language Education: Principles of Teaching English to Adults at Commercial Language Schools and Centers," *Cogent Education* 3, 1 (2016): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1135771>.

In this scenario, lesson planning often requires flexibility and structure. While a pre-defined curriculum may offer a helpful framework, ESP practitioners must remain open to adjustments based on learner needs and emerging interests. Manolis and others³⁶ remind us that “interactions” between curriculum and individual goals are paramount. Constant negotiation to incorporate learner experiences and suggestions in class fosters a sense of ownership and commitment in students. Unlike the rigid confines of traditional pedagogy, this collaborative approach provides fertile ground in which adult learners can flourish.

Along the same lines, the implementation of andragogy within ESP can ultimately cultivate a vibrant learning community. Schwarzer³⁷ emphasizes the importance of authenticity, language learning as a developmental process, and alternative assessment methods—principles that resonate deeply with adults seeking meaningful interactions and continuous progress. Castañeda³⁸ notes adult learners often face unique challenges. Creating a supportive community in which shared experiences and peer support flourish can become a crucial element of success.

Taking all these factors into account to integrate the principles of andragogy into ESP instruction can disclose a pathway for adult learners to navigate the complexities of their learning journey. By recognizing their unique needs, embracing self-direction, and forging connections between individual goals and practical applications, ESP practitioners can empower adults to achieve their full potential.

36 Chris Manolis, David J. Burns, Rashmi Assudani and Ravi Chinta, “Assessing Experiential Learning Styles: A Methodological Reconstruction and Validation of the Kolb Learning Style Inventory,” *Learning and Individual Differences* 23 (2013): 44-52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2012.10.009>.

37 Schwarzer, 28.

38 Sergio B. Castañeda, “Affective Limitations in Second Language Acquisition by Spanish Adult Learners in Vocational Training Programs,” *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning* 10, 1 (2017): 133-160. <https://doi.org/10.5294/laclil.2017.10.1.6>.

EOP Lesson Plans for Adult Learners

Adult learners bring diverse life experiences and sources of motivation to their EOP courses. Unlike the more standardized paths younger learners follow, adult learners require tailored lessons, crafted with careful consideration of their unique traits and needs. In this regard, lesson planning can benefit from a meticulous process that thoughtfully integrates the principles of andragogy with a keen understanding of the adult learning terrain.

One foundational challenge that the EOP student teachers in the case study encountered was the tapestry of differing English proficiency levels within their classrooms. Heterogeneity prevails, with learners ranging from holding a basic grasp of grammar to near fluency. This necessitates differentiated instruction; for such cases, Bowler and Parminter³⁹ suggest the strategy of using tiered tasks. Several authors⁴⁰ confirm that a single worksheet can no longer illuminate the path for all, and instead, a constellation of options should be offered to cater to varied comprehension and skill levels.

Furthermore, the challenges of adult education go beyond English language proficiency. Distinct cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics distinguish adult learners from their younger counterparts. Adult learners' brains, shaped by years of experience, operate under the scaffolding theory of aging and cognition.⁴¹ Information processing might be slower, but problem-solving skills often shine, and motivation is fueled by intrinsic desires. Nonetheless, anxieties may arise, worsened by fear of judgment and a perception of lost

39 Bill Bowler and Sue Parminter, "Mixed-level Teaching: Tiered Tasks and Bias Tasks," *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current*, Jack C. Richards and Willy A. Renandya (Eds.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 59-64. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.010>.

40 Benmassoud and Bouchara; Pham P. Quynh-Na, "Some Strategies for Teaching English to Multi-level Adult ESL Learners: A Challenging Experience in Australia," *Proceedings of the Conference English as an International Language: Setting the Standards* (British Virgin Islands: Asian EFL Journal Press, 2007) 306-322.

41 Castañeda, 138.

agility. Yao⁴² affirmed that EOP student teachers, being aware of these nuances, must offer reassurance and understanding, employing strategies that minimize affective filters and build confidence. On the other hand, personal learning styles, which may be visual, auditory and/or kinesthetic, show how each adult learner navigates foreign language learning differently. Kolb and Kolb's⁴³ experiential learning theory illuminates the issue, and indicate that lesson plans incorporate concrete experiences, occupational roles, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and academic backgrounds.

As adult learners delve deeper into the foreign language they seek to master, their cognitive strengths and challenges come into sharper focus. While younger minds might possess faster processing speeds, some researchers⁴⁴ indicate that adult learners often compensate for this with superior vocabularies and knowledge of the world. EOP lesson plans must acknowledge these differences, crafting activities that leverage existing strengths while offering scaffolding for areas of challenge.

An advantage emerges from the life experiences of adult learners. Herschensohn⁴⁵ reminds us that “higher Age of Onset of Acquisition” implies years of cognitive skills and accumulated academic strategies, granting adult learners a distinct edge in instructed language learning. This strength should be celebrated and harnessed in EOP, fostering collaboration and mutual learning.

42 Chunlin Yao, “A Case Study on the Factors Affecting Chinese Adult Students’ English Acquisition in a Blended Learning Environment,” *International Journal of Continuing Engineering Education and Life-Long Learning* 27, 1-2 (2017): 22. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJCEELL.2017.080993>.

43 Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb, “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education,” *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4, 2 (2005): 193-212.

44 Alison Mackey and Rebecca Sachs, “Older Learners in SLA Research: A First Look at Working Memory, Feedback, and L2 Development,” *Language Learning* 62, 3 (2011): 704-740. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00649.x>; Olga G. Shevchenko, “Sociolinguistic Perspective on Teaching English Intonation for Adult Learners,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 200 (2015): 607-613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.08.045>.

45 Julia Herschensohn, “Age-related Effects,” *The Cambridge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, Julia Herschensohn and Martha Young-Scholten (Eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 317-337. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139051729>.

Nonetheless, the path to foreign language mastery is not always smooth. Errors can block fluency and become emotional sinkholes for adult learners. Castañeda⁴⁶ warns of fossilization and anxieties that may arise. Here, EOP student teachers can offer gentle yet effective error correction strategies within an environment of supportive feedback. Thus, a learner with a low level of proficiency who is tentatively constructing a sentence should not meet ridicule, but instead be offered encouraging recasts and collaborative error analysis which can pave the way for confident progression.

Motivation demands special attention in EOP settings. Each activity, along with its materials, should foster self-direction and spark intrinsic motivation within adults. Crawford⁴⁷ emphasized the importance of authentic and task-oriented materials that are carefully chosen to resonate with adult learners' interests, occupational contexts, and real-world projects. Another motivational tool in any EOP student teacher's arsenal is the creation of a community of learners. Dufour and others⁴⁸ suggest that in these shared spaces adult learners can transcend the isolation of individual journeys and find strength in collective exploration. Such communities foster a sense of belonging and ownership through collaborative projects and peer feedback sessions.

In conclusion, adapting the principals of andragogy to EOP lesson planning for adult learners is a dynamic process that requires constant collaborative reflection and team adjustment. Although challenges exist, recognizing the unique characteristics and motivations of adult learners is essential for successful and effective instruction in EOP settings. Tailoring materials to adult learners' occupational contexts, integrating their life experiences, and fostering a sense of belonging

46 Castañeda, 139.

47 Jane Crawford, "The Role of Materials in the Language Classroom: Finding the Balance," *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*, Jack C. Richards and Willy A. Renandya (Eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.013>.

48 Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, Thomas W. Many, and Mike Mattos, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2010) 11.

through a community of learners all contribute to effective lesson planning. Furthermore, the involvement of adult learners and SMEs in the planning process enhances students' commitment and engagement, ultimately leading to more meaningful learning experiences. Further research is needed to explore the practical implementation and effectiveness of andragogical principles in ESP.

Methodology

This holistic single-case study employs a multi-layered qualitative approach⁴⁹ to examine comprehensively how EOP student teachers planned classes for adult learners within the specific context of their practicum. The study integrates humanistic and interpretive perspectives to delve into the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of the student teachers as they grappled with the unique considerations required by adult learners. The unit of analysis⁵⁰ is defined as the dynamic interplay between the EOP student teachers' knowledge, existing pedagogical frameworks, and adult learning principles within the context of lesson planning for their adult learners.

Participants and Sampling

Following a criterion-based sampling strategy,⁵¹ two EOP student teachers were selected at the Universidad Nacional (Costa Rica). The student teachers participating in this study embarked on their teaching practicum equipped with three crucial courses: Historical Perspectives in ESP, Needs Analysis (NA), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) Course Design. The NA course instilled in them the importance of observing future participants to identify their needs,

49 Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2018), 47.

50 Geoffrey Mills and L.R. Gay, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications* (New York: Pearson, 2018), 15.

51 Musarrat Shaheen, Sudeepta Pradhan, and Ranajee, "Sampling in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Techniques for Workplace Data Analysis*, M. Gupta, M. Shaheen, and K. Reddy (eds.) (Hersey: IGI Global, 2019), 25-51. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5366-3.ch002>.

their target communicative tasks, and the relevant stakeholders.⁵² The EOP course empowered them to craft customized syllabi for their practicum sessions. This structured approach not only broadened their understanding of language curriculum design but also equipped them with the tools to navigate what Macalister and Nation define as intricate “outer” and “inner” components.⁵³

Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: *experience* (having less than 4 years of professional teaching experience); *work with adult learners* (actively teaching adult learners—over 25 years of age—during their practicum); *class size* (at least five adult learners in their ESP course); *age* (under 26 at the time of the study). This purposeful selection aimed to capture the perspectives of student teachers navigating the early stages of their careers while grappling with the complexities of adult learning within EOP. A brief preliminary survey based on operational criteria further guided the selection process, confirming the participants’ understanding and engagement with adult learning principles.

Data Collection Techniques

The triangulation of data sources was employed to ensure the richness and validity of the findings. Three primary techniques were utilized, the first of which consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted before the participants’ practicum to explore initial perceptions and expectations regarding lesson planning for adult learners. Guided by the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework proposed by Castillo-Montoya,⁵⁴ the study ensured focus and consistency while

52 James D. Brown, *Introducing Needs Analysis and English for Specific Purposes* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 18.

53 John Macalister and I. S. P. Nation, *Language Curriculum Design* (New York: Routledge, 2019) 3. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429203763>.

54 Milagros Castillo-Montoya, “Preparing for Interview Research: The Interview Protocol Refinement Framework,” *Qualitative Report* 21, 5 (2016): 811-831. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2337>.

allowing flexibility for exploration.⁵⁵ The researchers conducted the interviews using computer-mediated communication (CMC) via Zoom video conferencing due to its effectiveness, following procedures for qualitative research as described by Archibald and others.⁵⁶ Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis.

Two video-recorded narratives were collected from each participant three weeks after the interviews. In this data collection technique researchers encouraged participants to reflect freely on their lesson planning process, the challenges they encountered, and their evolving perspectives on teaching adult learners. Participants were thus offered a more comfortable and personal means of expression, potentially mitigating interview anxiety while yielding deeper insights, as was suggested by Akinbode.⁵⁷ These reflective narratives were also transcribed verbatim and analyzed alongside the interview data for thematic coherence as indicated by Liamputtong.⁵⁸

The third data collection technique was a lesson plan document review. The detailed lesson plans for the first month of practicum designed by each participant for their adult learners offered valuable data in this case study. This document review allowed researchers to triangulate findings from interviews and narratives, corroborating emerging themes and validating interpretations. This data collection technique provided valuable insight into the concrete application of adult learning principles and pedagogical strategies within the lesson planning framework.

55 Essa Ali R Adhabi and Christina B Iash Anozie, "Literature Review for the Type of Interview in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Education* 9, 3 (2017): 86-97. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v9i3.11483>.

56 Mandy M. Archibald, Rachel C. Ambagtsheer, Mavourneen G. Casey and Michael Lawless, "Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (2019): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>.

57 Adenike Akinbode, "Teaching as Lived Experience: The Value of Exploring the Hidden and Emotional Side of Teaching Through Reflective Narratives," *Studying Teacher Education* 9, 1 (2013): 62-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2013.771574>.

58 Pranee Liamputtong, "Qualitative data analysis: Conceptual and Practical Considerations," *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* 20, 2 (2009): 133-139. <https://doi.org/10.1071/HE09133>.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke⁵⁹ was employed to explore and interpret the qualitative data inductively. Transcripts from the interviews and reflective narratives were carefully revised. Other qualitative tools were a code template, a codebook, a codebook log, and analytic memos. This iterative process involved initial coding, collaboration and negotiation, thematic refinement, and triangulation. First, researchers followed Bloomberg and Volpe's⁶⁰ and Saldaña's⁶¹ advice and collaboratively coded the data line by line, as an interpretative act, identifying significant themes and concepts that were incorporated into a code template. This process took fifty-eight hours. As a second step, researchers met regularly to compare and discuss their initial codes and definitions, refining and merging them into a comprehensive codebook. Next, recurring categories and themes were identified, labeled, and further explored through a dynamic process of reviewing over three hundred codes (mainly descriptive and process codes, though a few were In Vivo codes), with reflection on each researcher's analytic memo. Finally, the themes were compared across all three data sources (interviews, narratives, and lesson plans) to ensure consistency and validity.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The study adhered to the highest ethical standards throughout the research process, ensuring construct validity (the data collection strategies directly addressed the research questions), internal validity (consistent data collection, analysis, and procedures ensured study integrity), external validity (findings were contextualized but transferable to similar settings), and reliability (detailed protocols and documentation ensured replicable research methods).

59 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 2 (2008): 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

60 Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226613>.

61 Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London: SAGE, 2016).

Trustworthiness

The researchers acknowledged the potential influence of their close relationship with the participants as fellow post-graduate program classmates. To address this, Darwin-Holmes⁶² proposed self-reflexivity, which was actively practiced throughout the research process by maintaining open minds, bracketing personal biases, triangulating data sources, utilizing peer debriefing for validation, and engaging in ongoing critical analysis of potential researcher subjectivity. By acknowledging and mitigating potential influences, the researchers aimed to enhance the trustworthiness and accuracy of the study findings.

Limitations

This study was a bounded case study, which denotes that results cannot be generalized. In addition, it only included two participants due to time constraints and the limited qualitative expertise of two of the researchers.

Results

Qualitative analysis of the interviews and reflective data resulted in the identification of themes pertaining to the student teachers' perceptions of planning lessons for adult learners and their actual planning practices, after considerable thematic analysis and data reduction via the coding process. These themes were fused into two main themes to address both research questions in this case study. Direct quotes made by the EOP student teachers were translated from Spanish into English for ease of reading in this paper and are labeled as "Participant 1" and "Participant 2."

62 Andrew G. Darwin-Holmes, "Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide," *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 8, 4 (2020): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>.

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' perceptions of lesson planning for adult learners? / Theme 1: EOP Student Teachers' Reflections on Lesson Planning for Adult Learners

This theme delves into the experiences of EOP student teachers as they cope with the challenges and burdens associated with lesson planning for adult learners. Their reflections, primarily focused on perceived difficulties, address the research question concerning their perceptions of this educational context. Their insights can be categorized into ten distinct categories of challenges and burdens, thus providing a multifaceted picture of the complexities faced by these educators, as shown in table 1.

As a first perception, the EOP student teachers highlighted their witnessing cognitive difficulties and pronunciation challenges among adult learners before and during their practicum. In the interview, Participant 2 revealed the perception that adults process information more slowly: “[An adult learner] needs time in order to think and analyze everything, but when they need to do it in a short period of time, they just can’t think in English.” This construct is reinforced with the claim that adults “might not get the pronunciation that [they] expected,” stating a possible decline in muscle flexibility. The suggestion is that achieving native-like pronunciation might be time-consuming and difficult for adult learners despite training efforts. This participant also concluded that as EOP practitioners, “we also have to take that into consideration, [...] the certain [grammar and pronunciation] difficulties that [the adult students] are having.” This first reflection shaped the approach taken toward adult learning and lesson planning.

Table 1. EOP Student Teachers' Reflections on Lesson Planning for Adult Learners

Categories	Explanation
Cognition and Pronunciation Burdens	Concerns about adult learners' diverse cognitive abilities and varying levels of pronunciation proficiency.
Feelings and Emotional Burdens	Acknowledgment of the importance of addressing learners' anxieties, motivations, and self-esteem.
Time Management and Responsibilities	The key challenge of juggling the needs of adult learners with the student teachers' own time constraints and personal responsibilities.
Job Demands and Income Goals	Recognition of the impact of work schedules and financial priorities on adult learners' participation and engagement.
Language Proficiency Burdens	The challenge of adapting lessons to cater to a range of language proficiency levels.
Personalities and Learning Styles Burdens	Challenges in identifying and accommodating diverse learning styles and personality types.
Technology Burdens	The recurring concern of integrating technology effectively while considering learners' access and comfort levels.
An Interest in Adult Learning Theory	The need for stronger understanding of adult learning principles to inform lesson planning.
Previous Teaching Experiences	The influence of prior positive and negative teaching experiences on student teachers' current approaches to adult learners.
Limited EOP Lesson Plan Procedures for Adult Learners	The uncertainty created by the absence of established procedures for planning EOP lessons specifically for adult learners.

Source: Based on data from codebook, coding log and analytic memos.

The second category explores the feelings and emotional burdens affecting adult learners as perceived by the EOP student teachers. The findings highlight the student teachers' awareness of these emotions and their efforts to create a supportive learning environment that acknowledges adult learners' heightened self-awareness regarding language gaps and the learning process. This awareness can lead to feelings of

frustration, embarrassment, and shame due to language errors, as a participant stated: “I have noticed that adults [...] can be a little bit shy sometimes.” These observations emphasize the importance of a safe and encouraging classroom environment, and the EOP student teachers therefore strove to create a positive learning atmosphere by adjusting lesson plans and providing constructive feedback. However, the informants acknowledged the potential limitations: “You can create a comfortable environment, but not all of them respond as you expect.” This illustrates the complex emotional journey of adult learners and the occasional frustration experienced by the student teachers despite their efforts to compensate for the difficulties known to exist.

The third category refers to the time constraints and competing responsibilities faced by adult learners. The participants confessed that adult learners are often busy and juggle families, jobs, and other commitments that potentially limit their time for the EOP course. This awareness is crucial as adult learners expect each class “to be worth it”. This perception also includes an awareness that factors such as workload, personal duties, and job schedules may affect attendance, interest, and out-of-class engagement, thus potentially hindering progress. The EOP student teachers expressed sensitivity towards these challenges and aimed to design lessons that ensured effective class time management and minimized the impact of personal commitments.

The following two categories are interconnected, in that job expectations and income goals may require higher language proficiency levels among adult learners. The EOP student teachers emphasized that their adult learners were primarily motivated by a desire to improve their job performance, keep their current positions, or qualify for promotions. Consequently, the learners’ employment demands and income goals influenced the selection and planning of class tasks, with the aim that the lessons would be “useful for [adult learners], for their daily tasks at work.” The participants also noted a sense of urgency among the learners and were aware that “if [EOP participants] don’t improve at their job... their job is at stake.” Practical activities were prioritized,

such as role-playing common work phone calls, considering the learners' constant query, "How can I apply this to my daily life [and occupational context]?" These findings suggest that the adult learners' primary motivation stemmed from a desire to improve their career prospects.

The EOP student teachers also identified a challenge associated with the learners' English language proficiency, which tended to be high, typically B2 level. This presented a difficulty in lesson planning, as the activities needed to be stimulating enough for advanced learners. As one interviewee stated, "The adult learners we worked with [...] already know English [...] It's something that's more challenging." This proficiency level led to higher expectations, with learners seeking tools and resources directly applicable to improving their job positions. The informants concluded that their adult learners' high English language proficiency significantly impacted their approach to lesson planning.

A further category explores the influence of adult learners' personalities and learning styles on lesson planning decisions made by EOP student teachers. One participant emphasized explaining instructional choices, providing feedback, and reassuring those adults who might be discouraged by slow progress and mistakes because "we are always going to be learning, we make mistakes." Overall, the EOP student teachers perceived that adult learners' diversity in personalities and learning styles necessitates differentiated lesson planning.

A further key concern was that adult learners may struggle to integrate the use of technology with their English language practice. A student teacher recounted a specific instance in which an adult learner who works as a call center agent faced issues "combining technology and English." The student teachers acknowledged that unlike digital natives, adult learners may be less familiar and feel less comfortable with technology. This potential barrier was particularly concerning given the virtual delivery mode of the EOP course: "As already mentioned, if they are not maybe so skillful with computers, and our course is going to be virtual, we have to be very careful with all of that." Clearly, the EOP student teachers recognized that technology

use could pose a challenge to some adult learners, and they highlighted the need to address this factor within their lesson plans.

Another category that emerged from the thematic analysis was the student teachers' self-perceived lack of knowledge about adult learning theory. A participant affirmed: "I would like actually to see what the theory says. [...] Honestly, I have not read any research about [andragogy]." This uncertainty about effective strategies for adult learners led the student teachers to express a strong desire for more theoretical grounding: "But I would like to know what the theory says and see if it reflects the experiences that we have with adult learners. I think it is going to be very interesting." The student teachers' interest extended beyond general adult learning principles, and they recognized the potential influence of age on the language learning process. That sparked their curiosity about age-related considerations and adult learning theories. This interest is crucial for them to accommodate their classes to adult learners and their needs in EOP courses: "I want to know what other teaching accommodations are available." This desire highlights the importance of integrating adult learning theory into EOP teacher training programs.

Finally, limited EOP lesson plan procedures for adult learners meant that student teachers drew on their prior experiences working with students. Despite limited exposure to adult learning theory, the participants expressed confidence based on their past encounters with adult learners. They highlighted the importance of leveraging these prior experiences to inform their teaching decisions, with one participant stating that this was valuable "because I have been teaching adults since I started working." Nonetheless, the participants reported feeling discouraged by the lack of established EOP lesson plan procedures. This uncertainty compounded the inherent complexities of designing activities and materials for adult learners, leading one student teacher to remark, "ESP is very tricky." The absence of readily available EOP lesson plan samples further exacerbated their stress. The student teachers felt burdened by the lack of a clear path to follow.

Research Question 2: How can the EOP student teachers plan lessons for adult learners? / Theme 2: Strategies to Create EOP Lesson Plans for Adult Learners

The second main theme revolves around the deliberate, innovative strategies used by the EOP student teachers to design effective lesson plans for adult learners. Directly addressing the second research question, these strategies and adjustments to traditional lesson plans showcase the student teachers’ evolving understanding of how to best facilitate learning in this unique context (see table 2). By implementing these strategies, the EOP student teachers confidently anticipated delivering more targeted and strategically developed instructional activities, thus optimizing the learning experience for their adult learners.

Table 2. Strategies to Create EOP Lesson Plans for Adult Learners

Categories	Explanation
Needs Analysis	Conducting a thorough needs analysis to understand learners’ goals, prior knowledge and preferred learning styles
Post-graduate Professors’ Recommendations	Seeking guidance and utilizing resources from post-graduate professors
Time Constraint Management	Employing strategies such as prioritizing activities, delegating tasks, and using technology efficiently
Material Design	Designing engaging and relevant materials catering to adult learners’ interests and needs
Formative Assessment	Implementing ongoing assessment to gauge learning and adapt instruction accordingly
Affective and Cognitive Support	Providing personalized support to increase motivation, build confidence, and help tackle cognitive challenges
Open Communication	Maintaining open communication and fostering a supportive learning environment
Avoid In-Class Recreational Games	Moving away from recreational games and focusing on purposeful activities that maximize learning opportunities
Learners’ Opinions and Validation	Seeking and valuing learners’ opinions and providing regular feedback
Task-Based Language Teaching	Utilizing task-based approaches to encourage active participation and language use

Source: Based on data from codebook, coding log and analytic memos.

As their first strategy, the EOP student teachers frequently referenced NA results, highlighting their importance in creating “a more specific” lesson planning process for adults. The NA provided details about learners’ skills, needs, interests, and goals, informing lesson content and activities. The EOP student teachers viewed NA as crucial to effective lesson planning. One participant stated, “It’s better we do the needs analysis from the beginning” to understand learners’ strengths, weaknesses and aspirations. Reliance on learner-identified needs was evident. Insights from the NA were translated into lesson activities that encouraged learner participation. The EOP student teachers stressed that in this way students were given “a more active role in our classes.” A participant emphasized listening to learners rather than imposing an idea of their needs on them.

Nonetheless, the limitations of a single NA were acknowledged. One participant highlighted the ongoing nature of needs assessment, suggesting that a deeper understanding of student needs emerges during the teaching experience. Unforeseen changes were anticipated, requiring adaptation based on real-time needs. Potential changes in learner needs due to dropouts were considered. One participant acknowledged that “[student] needs might have changed” and emphasized the need for flexibility. This study demonstrates the centrality of NA in lesson planning for student teachers working with EOP adult learners. While a strong foundation can be laid through the initial NA, ongoing assessment and flexibility are crucial to adapting lessons to meet evolving needs throughout the learning process.

Both participants considered several recommendations made by their post-graduate professors, who emphasized the importance of a clear and concise lesson structure for adult learners. This population often has limited time, so instructors should ensure all activities relate directly to course content. This recommendation aligns with the concept of “time-on-task” which emphasizes maximizing instructional efficiency for adult learners. A student teacher emphasized this issue: “We are going to have very little time, limited [class] time, and I know

they're not going to practice maybe as much after the class, maybe in their homes." As a result, this EOP student teacher confessed restructuring initial warm-up activities to be directly related to the main class topic, moving away from unrelated activities intended solely for relaxation due to the teacher's perception that adult learners often prioritize practical, workplace-related learning over introductory activities with limited connection to professional goals.

A further recommendation made by a post-graduate professor involved material design, encouraging students to bring work samples to class: "Bring whatever you always do. And we can start figuring it out." This strategy proved valuable for the student teachers, who incorporated realia (authentic materials) and work samples, and then tailored class activities to the learners' specific occupational contexts and communication needs. Overall, the recommendations made by the their professors had positive impact on the EOP student teachers' lesson planning in terms of time management and job-related content for adult learners.

The findings further highlighted a preference for formative assessment over traditional summative evaluation when working with adult learners. The student teachers acknowledged that adult learners might find traditional evaluation demotivating. One participant stated, "[Adult learners] are not interested in just getting a grade, passing a test." Lesson plans therefore incorporated various assessment methods, including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and frequent formative feedback through recasting. This approach emphasizes progress and improvement over simply obtaining a grade.

Another key strategy emotional monitoring. Participants described "constantly paying attention to [the students] and how they were feeling." This focus on learner motivation and interest allowed the student teachers to adapt the course and ensure that it met their adult learners' emotional and educational needs. One participant stated that her adult learners expected "to be more confident when picking up the phone... more confident and faster when writing an email."

Ultimately, adult learners seek a sense of self-fulfillment, progress, and growth through their participation in an EOP course.

Additionally, the use of open communication and learner feedback were perceived as important lesson planning strategies within EOP courses, allowing ESP practitioners to navigate the specific needs of adult learners. The case study yielded the category of open communication with adult learners for the purpose of “adjusting EOP instruction.” Student teachers emphasized the need for frequent communication before and during the course because this allowed them to understand their learners’ experiences and challenges, to “even talk about different situations that are affecting them.” This aligns with previous strategies of collecting work samples to assess language skills and potential performance gaps. Open communication facilitated learner participation by allowing student teachers to “listen carefully and take into account every contribution or suggestion.” This continuous exchange also served to ensure learners’ expectations were being met. Student teachers stated their plan “to have open communication with [the adult learners] and plan to do so if at a certain point... [the students] don’t feel that they are getting what they expect [so] that they can use their voices, right?, to ask for it. So, we can make changes.” Essentially, the student teachers aimed for constant communication to gauge learner perceptions of the classes, activities, and overall course effectiveness. The student teachers thus actively sought learner opinions and validation to adapt lesson plans to better suit students’ needs, interests, and expectations.

This consultation process occurred not only during the course but also beforehand. As one informant noted, “If we stay with the needs analysis and the results from the analysis, and we don’t ask them for an opinion, I think that we might have a problem.” Learners were even consulted about their workplace-specific needs, with requests for samples from their target situations: “Tell me how you’re implementing all these topics in your job.” By frequently consulting learners and incorporating their perspectives, the student teachers

expected their lesson plans to align with overall course objectives and learner needs. This strategy allowed for adjustments before and during the practicum, acknowledging the learners' job expertise. Learner feedback was expected to be ongoing, and the participants would "ask [the students...] to modify something or rearrange something" as the course progressed. This approach allowed student teachers to monitor the alignment of course content with learners' employment realities, ultimately enhancing their confidence in the course's effectiveness.

Despite lacking prior experience with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the student teachers considered this to be a strategic and surprisingly adaptable approach for adult learners in the EOP context. The emphasis on job-related tasks resonated with their perception of adult learning needs. Nonetheless, this adoption presented a "dual burden," in both learning and implementing a new approach within the specific demands of EOP. The transition from general English (GE) to EOP involved a significant shift in lesson planning. Previously reliant on CLT principles and textbooks, the student teachers noted a change in the format of the lesson plan due to the specificity of EOP content. Unlike GE, which focuses on general language skills such as grammar and pronunciation, EOP demands a more innovative approach such as that of TBLT. This shift highlights the need for lesson plans that directly connect language instruction to the occupational context of the adult learners.

A further strategy that this case study emphasized as beneficial is the inclusion of SMEs in the EOP teaching team, specifically targeting call center environments. The participants enriched their practicum with the strategic advantage gained through the presence of a company insider or witness, who also happened to be an SME in the call center domain. Having a team member play this dual role offered significant support in lesson planning for adult learners. The SME was familiar with "many different situations" and provided valuable insight into the learners' occupational context and language use within the call

center. One of the participants stated, “Having someone who is from that company and knows what is done in that company, is definitely going to be useful, to keep [the adult learners] focused.” The collaboration between the SME and the other student teacher fostered a dynamic team-teaching environment during lesson planning. They could discuss ideas, reflect on activities, and adjust plans as needed, and this ultimately led to improved learning outcomes for the students.

Two further benefits of SME collaboration and team teaching include content validation and tailored learning. The SMEs’ expertise allowed for validation of lesson content because strategies, tasks, and materials were assessed for their relevance to the call center environment by constantly asking, “Do you think that is something that they are going to face in their job?” This ensured practical application thanks to the presence of an SME within the EOP teaching team for call center training.

To conclude, the two main themes explored reveal the multifaceted nature of planning lessons for adult learners within the EOP context. The student teachers grappled with various challenges while employing diverse strategies in the attempt to cater to the specific needs and preferences of their adult learners, and these findings can inform the development and the revision of EOP programs. Both tables summarizing these results provide a readily interpretable overview of the key findings.

Discussion

Lesson planning for adult learners clearly demands an approach which is different from that taken up for younger students. The risk of dropouts and the challenging needs of adults make EOP teaching a more volatile instructional environment than GE. This stark difference surfaced in the reflections of the EOP student teachers, highlighting the need for flexibility and a backwards curriculum design process guided by learners’ needs. While familiar with ESP principles and

procedures such as NA, the informants in this study were open to recognizing that a fundamental shift in their mindset is required for adult education, even though they were not fully familiarized with the principles of andragogy.

The EOP Student Teachers' Reflections on Adult Learning Lesson Planning

Pedagogy and andragogy further shape how language instructors approach adult learning. The ten themes initially identified as perceptions can also be viewed as challenges inherent to the “backwards” design process. The EOP student teachers participating in this study drew upon their past experiences with adults, comparing them to younger learners. This tendency reflects the concept of the “age of onset of acquisition (AoA)” in SLA, in which younger learners often have an initial advantage in language acquisition.⁶³ Recognizing the cognitive and pronunciation challenges faced by adults early in L2 acquisition formed the basis for the student teachers' reflections. It appears they needed a point of reference, leading them to draw parallels with their experiences with children. This highlights the need for dedicated training in ESP settings where encounters with adult learners are more likely. Comparing GE and ESP, adults and younger learners, and exploring both “backwards” and “forward” curriculum designs could equip EOP student teachers with the tools to more successfully navigate this unique foreign language teaching landscape.

The EOP student teachers perceived adult learners to face greater cognitive burdens in areas such as memorization, pronunciation, and information processing due to age factors. Although Leuner and Gould⁶⁴ support the reduction of neuron production in adulthood, it is essential to avoid generalizations. Cozma⁶⁵ emphasizes the diverse

63 Herschensohn, 323.

64 Benedetta Leuner and Elizabeth Gould, “Structural Plasticity and Hippocampal Function,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 61, 1 (2010): 111-140. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100359>.

65 Cozma, 1210.

cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of adult learners, while Herschensohn⁶⁶ stresses that adult learners possess advanced cognitive abilities and intellectual tactics that are beneficial to instructed language learning. Manolis and others⁶⁷ highlight the way adult learners seek meaningful experiences, job-related tasks, and cognitively demanding activities in their classes. In fact, an overlooked principle of andragogy is harnessing life experiences as instructional resources. Knowles and others⁶⁸ indicate that adult learners bring a wealth of personal and professional experiences that can enrich language learning.

All of this leads us to recognize the need to revise the assumption of younger learners' superiority due to naturalistic exposure or instructed exposure. At the same time, as emphasized by Larsen-Freeman and Long,⁶⁹ the advantages and peculiarities of how adults learn and the resources they bring to the learning experience should be explicitly incorporated into lesson plans. EOP instructors should thus encourage adult learners to share their academic accomplishments and occupational experiences in a way that challenges their intellects and aligns with their learning goals. In this case study the NA results guided the EOP student teachers to follow a particular path in terms of content specificity and course design; nonetheless, these practitioners were able to incorporate activities that allowed their adult students to share their experiences and occupational contexts, thus enriching the lesson content and fostering deeper connections.

The EOP student teachers additionally acknowledged the time constraints and responsibilities faced by adult learners, which potentially have a negative impact on class attendance and engagement. Taking into consideration adult students' preferences for straightforward explanations and concise and meaningful activities remains essential. EOP student teachers should not only address these potential

66 Herschensohn, 323.

67 Manolis and others, 45.

68 Knowles and others, 149.

69 Larsen-Freeman and Long, 276.

burdens but also consider the aspirations of their adult learners. This necessitates careful environmental analysis before crafting lesson plans, anticipating future adaptations and acknowledging the dynamic nature of adult learners' lives and motivations.⁷⁰

The informants' reference to learning styles warrants further exploration. Moving beyond the simplistic visual/auditory/kinesthetic framework, Kolb and Kolb (2005) highlight the influence of individual singularities, occupational roles, academic background, and current job positions on learning styles. Each adult learner brings a unique essence and diversity shaped by their experiences, and as already seen classes will be more effective when these factors are considered.

Despite the uncertainty expressed by the EOP student teachers regarding appropriate lesson planning strategies, they implemented open communication with their adult learners, which proved to be a valuable tool. Open dialogue with participants and even SMEs can provide much-needed reassurance and guidance. The eagerness to learn and improve shown by the interviewees reflects a commendable commitment to professional development and growth. Creating adaptive spaces and collaborative tasks in which adult learner input shapes material design in lessons could empower students to take ownership of their learning journey.

In conclusion, effectively planning lessons for adult learners requires a nuanced understanding of their unique needs, challenges, and strengths. The EOP student teachers involved in this case study expressed concern regarding their limited experience working with adults, yet their ability to adapt and utilize diverse strategies to create better learning opportunities for their adult learners is commendable.

By embracing andragogical principles, acknowledging individual differences, and fostering open communication, EOP student teachers can create enriching learning experiences that empower adult learners to reach their full potential.

⁷⁰ Schwarzer, 27.

Strategies to Create EOP Lesson Plans for Adult Learners

The intricate path of EOP lesson planning poses unique challenges to student teachers. One obstacle for the participants in this case study seemed to be the absence of a map—a solid theoretical framework rooted in adult learning principles. Lacking andragogical principles, the EOP student teachers relied on familiar landmarks: their own teaching experiences and recommendations from their university ESP professor. While these tools offer some guidance, they fall short of illuminating the landscape of adult education. Consequently, adjustments to lesson plans often arose instinctively, rather than from a deep understanding of how adults learn best.

The initial step was conducting Needs Analysis, both at a large scale and a smaller scale.⁷¹ This revealed the company dynamics, including personnel changes and unexpected dropouts, but cast doubts that left the EOP student teachers questioning the validity of their meticulously crafted lesson plans. Sava⁷² asserts that uncertainty such as this adds tension to an already demanding task in adult education, increasing the pressure to deliver effective learning experiences to a constantly evolving group of adult learners.

Time management in lesson planning becomes a precious commodity. Juggling adult learners' tight schedules with the need for meaningful content and engaging activities requires a delicate balancing act, lending credence to Tarnopolsky's⁷³ suggestion to have limited intensiveness. The EOP student teachers found themselves struggling to squeeze comprehensive lessons into fragmented time slots and still deliver value without overburdening their busy students.

Beyond time constraints lies the intricate puzzle of material development. Tailoring content to specific occupational contexts and language needs requires meticulous effort. Sourcing authentic materials, crafting relevant exercises, and ensuring accessibility for learners

71 Anthony, 63.

72 Sava, 24.

73 Tarnopolsky, 10-12.

with diverse levels of digital literacy are just a few of the pieces that must be meticulously assembled to form a cohesive picture of effective EOP instruction.

Adding another layer of complexity to adult instruction is the clash with pedagogical frameworks, which often appear ill-suited to the autonomous, self-directed nature of adult learners. The EOP student teachers grappled with the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy, wrestling with the question of how to foster a learning environment that respects the unique experiences and motivations of adult learners while still providing the required guidance and support.

Despite these challenges, this case study highlights effective ways to tackle lesson planning for adult learners. Open communication and flexibility become critical tools, allowing teachers to bridge the gap between their plans and the learners' expectations. Engaging in regular dialogue with their students helps teachers identify potential pitfalls, offer affective support, address dissatisfaction, and make informed adjustments.

Collaboration and effective team teaching emerged as other successful strategies. Teaming up with SMEs from the adult learners' workplaces proved invaluable. As insiders they can enrich the initial needs analysis, provide access to authentic materials, and offer crucial insight into the specific language demands of the occupational setting. This symbiotic relationship with SMEs strengthens the foundation of lesson planning, ensuring its relevance and fostering teamwork and active collaboration. By leveraging the expertise of both parties, educators can ensure that lesson plans are grounded in reality, reflect the ever-evolving nuances of the professional world, and provide learners with the tools they need to navigate the challenges and opportunities awaiting them.

Promoting Knowles and others'⁷⁴ andragogical principle of self-directed learning empowers adults to take ownership of their learning journeys. In this sense, embracing a task-based methodology can foster

74 Knowles and others, 65.

interaction, collaboration, and the development of problem-solving skills—crucial attributes for success in any professional setting. Learning-to-learn skills enable students to adapt to changing occupational demands, overcome obstacles, and become lifelong learners capable of navigating not just the specific landscape of their current roles, but the ever-shifting terrain of the professional world.

This research revealed the resourceful nature of two EOP student teachers despite the inherent challenges of their task. They employed a range of strategies tailored to their adult learners' specific needs. Their successful efforts illustrated cornerstones of EOP instruction and lesson design, including conducting a thorough NA, aligning the curriculum with the learners' occupational contexts and language requirements, prioritizing formative assessment techniques, seeking guidance from SMEs, managing time constraints, and using authentic materials resonating with the learners' professional lives.

Conclusions

Effective EOP classes play a crucial role in equipping adult learners with the language skills necessary to thrive in their professional environments. Adult learning theory within EOP training programs must be strengthened, as student teachers require a robust understanding of how adults learn if they are to undertake teaching such courses successfully. Engaging and impactful lessons for this unique population demand specific considerations. EOP student teachers stepping into the adult learning arena deserve greater academic guidance. Unlike their experiences with younger learners, these educators encounter a multitude of challenges that reshape their pedagogical approach and introduce andragogy instead.

This research sheds light on the complexities and nuances of EOP lesson planning for adult learners, offering valuable insights to both practitioners and researchers in this field. The EOP student teachers in this case study perceived lesson planning for adult

learners as challenging, yet they displayed flexibility and seemed aware that more explicit consideration of the principles of andragogy could help overcome the inherent difficulties faced. If adult learning theory were more explicitly addressed and integrated into EOP courses, student teachers and in-service practitioners would have more adult teaching principles at their disposal instead of relying on isolated initiatives or strategies without direct links to adult learning theory.

Conducted under the tenets of adult learning theory, a carefully tailored NA could speed up the process of finding ways to blend language training successfully into adult students' busy lifestyles. EOP student teachers would benefit by greater awareness of the principles of andragogy rather than exclusively relying on pedagogical notions meant for younger students. Considering that most adult learners have very tight agendas, needs analysts, EOP course designers, and language instructors could quickly disregard planning tasks that would not serve the needs of this population.

This case study additionally validates the importance of team teaching and collaboration with subject matter experts (SMEs) in EOP settings, acknowledging the shared expertise and support system that such alliances can provide. SME contributions during the NA and lesson planning stages require further study to comprehend the collaborative path to be followed by SMEs and ESP practitioners, a partnership that could yield more strategically elaborated EOP lesson plans for adults. Similarly, team-teaching during practicum also deserves careful consideration in terms of potential benefits and the best means of implementing this strategy.