

Pedagogical decisions in lesson planning and making use of the planning: Perspective of both experienced and novice teachers

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ABSTRACT

The differences between experienced and novice teachers can be observed in how they plan and implement lesson plans in the classroom. Understanding these strategies can aid teacher education programs in refining their curricula to better develop teachers' competencies. This research explores the perspectives and practices of both experienced and novice teachers regarding lesson planning and its actual use. A qualitative case study was conducted, involving two rounds of interviews with one experienced teacher and two novice teachers. Using qualitative data analysis techniques, the data were categorized into several themes. The findings reveal that all teachers recognize the importance of lesson planning. They unanimously agree that written lesson plans, referred to as lesson plan pro forma, are essential for guiding teaching and fulfilling administrative functions. However, differences emerged in how they planned their lessons, responded to policy changes and regulations, and made pedagogical decisions when addressing critical incidents in the classroom. The experienced teacher demonstrated greater readiness and adaptability to changes in the curriculum, classroom dynamics, students' needs, and school regulations. Conversely, the novice teacher, due to a lack of knowledge and skills in lesson planning, tended to rely on the school-selected workbook as the primary resource for teaching directions. Implications for teacher professional development programs and recommendations for further research are discussed.

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Introduction

An individual's experience level can be observed in how they handle unpredictable situations. Teachers' pedagogical expertise is often demonstrated through their ability to self-regulate, adapt, respond to work expectations and surrounding conditions, recognize patterns and typical events, and engage in reflective pedagogical reasoning (Tsui, 2009; Wolff et al., 2015; Li & Zou, 2017). These differences in expertise are also evident in lesson planning, an essential element of teaching where teacher expertise is prominently reflected (Tsui, 2003; Cai et al., 2023).

Lesson plans are organized records that encapsulate a teacher's intentions regarding the content to be delivered in a lesson. They enable teachers to think through the lesson in advance, addressing potential problems, structuring the lesson, providing a roadmap for instruction, and documenting what has been taught (Farrell, 2002).

Consequently, effective teaching and learning are dependent on meticulous planning, which involves a sequence of interconnected activities designed to support the learner's progress. Enhancing teachers' planning skills is crucial for their professional development and growth (FaqeAbdulla, 2024). Effective lesson planning not only deepens teachers' understanding of student thinking, learning pathways, and the use of curriculum and resources but also leverages innovative pedagogies and new technologies (Cevikbas et al., 2024). As a vital aspect of the teaching profession, lesson planning significantly contributes to the development of teaching skills and the effectiveness of classroom instruction (Manzoor et al., 2024).

There are notable differences between experienced and novice teachers in their approach to lesson planning. Experienced teachers, with their sophisticated pedagogical reasoning, tend to plan lessons with a long-term perspective, making informed adjustments based on students' needs and contextual changes. They often rely on less formal, mental plans rather than strictly adhering to prescribed formats (Gün Asst, 2014; Searcy & Maroney, 1996). In contrast, novice teachers frequently depend on prescribed guidelines and struggle with pedagogical reasoning, leading to more rigid, short-term planning and challenges in formulating clear learning objectives and aligning them with instructional activities (Tsui, 2009; John, 2006; Tsui, 2003).

Teacher expertise is also evident in the types of lesson plans that experienced and novice teachers create. Several studies have shown that experienced teachers often use 'mental' plans, planning primarily in their heads rather than following detailed formats as novice teachers do (Gün Asst, 2014; Searcy & Maroney, 1996; Tsui, 2003). Experienced teachers also regularly deviate from their plans for specific reasons. Discussions among experts have highlighted the importance of both the process of planning—solving instructional problems—and the product of planning, such as affordance-based lesson planning or modified pro forma lesson planning (Anderson, 2015; Pang, 2016). Teachers must ensure that their plans accommodate these affordances and respond to them effectively. The affordance-based approach to lesson planning offers several advantages, including being more realistic about how learning may or may not unfold in the minds of learners and more accurately reflecting the teaching practices of experienced teachers (Anderson, 2015).

Understanding teacher expertise in lesson planning requires not only examining what teachers decide and practice but also exploring their beliefs, perceptions, and understandings of lesson planning. These attributes are shaped by various factors, including students' backgrounds, school and classroom settings, societal influences, curriculum, school regulations, staff dynamics, learning assessments, and teaching resources (Borg, 2003). Therefore, what teachers know, possess, do, and decide is deeply interconnected with the specific context of their work (John, 2006; Tsui, 2009; Mutton et al., 2011).

Previous studies have highlighted differences between experienced and novice teachers but reveal a significant gap in understanding how variations in pedagogical reasoning between these groups affect lesson planning and teaching effectiveness. While the affordance-based approach to lesson planning has been discussed, research has not thoroughly explored how pedagogical reasoning influences the practical application of lesson plans. Additionally, the impact of external factors, such as supervisory inspections and varying contextual demands, on lesson planning and pedagogical reasoning remains underexplored (Beckmann & Ehmke, 2023). There is a need for more detailed research into how differences in pedagogical reasoning between experienced and novice teachers influence their lesson planning practices and teaching effectiveness. Understanding teachers' pedagogical reasoning offers a "window into the complex and sophisticated knowledge of practice that influences what they do, how, and why" (Loughran, 2019).

Therefore, this study focuses on the actual processes of lesson planning and implementation, examining how pedagogical decision-making interacts with external factors such as supervisory inspections and specific contextual demands. By doing so, this

research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these elements impact teaching outcomes. The uniqueness of this research lies in its detailed exploration of the intersection between pedagogical reasoning and practical application in lesson planning. The study's findings have the potential to contribute significantly to teacher professional development by offering insights into how different levels of experience influence pedagogical decisions, ultimately enhancing teaching effectiveness and educational outcomes.

Method

The current research employs a qualitative case study to investigate the lesson planning practices of experienced and novice teachers. The study involved three teachers—one experienced, one less experienced, and one novice. The selection of these teachers as respondents was guided by purposive sampling, and they voluntarily participated in the study (Creswell, 2016). Rini was recommended as the experienced teacher due to her status as a senior educator with over twenty years of teaching experience and her role as a teacher-teaching instructor (Li & Zou, 2017). Additionally, the school where she worked is considered one of the top institutions in Yogyakarta Province, Indonesia. Indicators of the school's quality include the average scores on the Final Examination over the past five years, which have consistently been above 8.5 in four main subjects: Mathematics, Science, Indonesian, and English. Another indicator is the school's A-grade accreditation status. The individuals who recommended Rini were those frequently involved in clinical supervision of student teachers at a university, with Rini being one of the key teachers in this role. The other participants—Sari, a less experienced teacher with nine years of experience, and Aiko, a novice teacher—were selected based on their teaching experience of between one and ten years and their employment at less prestigious schools (Li & Zou, 2017).

In this article, pseudonyms are used for the participants to maintain confidentiality. "Rini" refers to the experienced teacher, "Sari" to the less experienced teacher with nine years of teaching experience, and "Aiko" replaces the real name of the novice teacher. The background details of the respondents are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' background

| No. | Teacher's name (pseudonym) | Teaching experience (year) | Additional duties | Schooling level |
|-----|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. | Rini (the experienced teacher) | 22 years | teacher and student-teacher supervisor; task force of school accreditation board; instructor of English teacher training programs | Junior high school |
| 2. | Sari | 9 years (the novice teacher) | homeroom teacher (also teaching other subjects) | Elementary school |
| 3. | Aiko | Less than 1 year (the novice teacher) | - | Elementary school |

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one experienced teacher and two less experienced teachers/novice teachers. By employing such a kind of interview, the respondents could best voice their perspectives unconstrained (Creswell, 2016). There were two rounds of interviewing each teacher. The same questions (being asked in

different ways) were asked and some questions were new. Each lasted about 30 minutes, where they were asked several questions to probe the teachers' perspectives on lesson planning and questions to probe what the teachers do in lesson planning and making use of it.

The data from the interviews, conducted in two rounds, were first transcribed and then meticulously reviewed to summarize themes related to teachers' perspectives on lesson planning and its implementation. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns within the data. After thorough cross-checking, including member checking as outlined by Creswell (2016), two main themes emerged i.e., Main Theme 1, which focuses on teachers' perceptions of the importance of lesson planning, and Main Theme 2, which examines the actual activities or pedagogical decisions involved in lesson planning and the implementation of these plans.

Results

After the researcher read the transcriptions of the interviews several times and listened to the interview recordings, based on the research objectives, several themes were identified and form an almost the same pattern at three teachers' perspectives of lesson planning and the implementation of the plan. The themes include the importance of lesson planning, the procedure of lesson planning, and the making use of the lesson plan. Based on the thematically analyzed data, the findings of this study can be summarized as depicted in Figure 1.

| | |
|--|---|
| The importance of lesson planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guideline • administrative requirements |
| The procedure of lesson planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designing lesson plans with a template • adopting the colleague's lesson plans |
| The making use/implementation of lesson plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modifying plans • using textbooks as the teaching guideline |

Figure 1. Summary of findings

The importance of lesson planning

The results of this study indicated that the teachers shared a similar view on lesson planning. They all considered lesson planning to be highly important for effective teaching, particularly as the guidelines for teaching. Specifically, Sari viewed lesson planning as very important to guide the teachers and as a reminder. If the teacher did not do lesson planning, the way they taught could be unstable, sometimes only based on their mood, and fluctuated. She reported that:

'I feel that we need guidelines so that we don't continue teaching with a bad mood, 'now this is like this', it's not.' (Interview-Sari)

All of them presented her planning in the form of a written lesson plan and found it beneficial. Rini, for example, besides as the guideline for teaching, written lesson plans or 'lesson plans pro forma' proved that the teachers made lesson plans for teaching. She explained that such a document would be checked by the member of BAN-S/M (School/Madrasah- National Accreditation Board. She said that she wanted to help the school keep its status of the school as an A-accredited school. She used the same lesson plans for teaching, but in real practice, she usually made some changes as she stated as follows.

'In my view, this will ultimately result in accreditation since all teachers must submit a lesson plan. Regardless of the format or style in which a lesson plan is created, whether for religious or other subjects, every teacher must have one.' (Interview-Rini)

Like Rini, Sari also had two different sets of written lesson plans; one was just for administrative purposes and had to be submitted to the officer in the regional education office at least once a year at the beginning of the year, and she used the other one for teaching in the classroom. For the submission, she only copied the first type of lesson plan from the school documents. These lesson plans used a certain format based on the guidelines from the sub-district education office and had to contain several components that she found very complicated and inappropriate with conditions in her school. She preferred using the second set of lesson plans because they were made by herself and were simpler and easier to follow as she stated as follows.

'It is submitted to the district at the beginning of the year, usually in January. So because we don't want to bother ourselves and the format that we learned in college, then we teach it in extracurricular activities, it turns out that it doesn't match with the agency. We just take it, print what is in the school, in the school curriculum we have a CD in the form of a syllabus, so we print it even though we never read it and we never use it.' (Interview-Sari)

Interestingly, for Aiko, by having lesson plans, she could manage the time, so using the plan she tried to cover all materials from the workbook. However, she used the same lesson plans used by Sari to be submitted to the sub-district education office.

The procedure of lesson planning

In developing the lesson plans, every teacher had their references. For instance, Rini was guided by the Directorate of Secondary Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture in developing lesson plans. Using the guidelines published by the Directorate, she tried to follow the format suggested. She explained that her lesson plans were not new. She exchanged some components in her lesson plans with the components in the current curriculum. She said that she did not find big problems adapting her lesson plans to match the new curriculum. For example, a descriptive text used to be taught in the first semester, and based on the new curriculum it had to be taught in the second semester. Unlike her previous lesson plans, she had to add two types of materials, i.e., learning materials for remedy and enrichment. Therefore, she had to prepare three kinds of teaching materials, i.e. regular materials, remedial materials, and enrichment materials. I asked her whether she had enough time to prepare them, and she replied,

'Yes, because I can find materials from YouTube and other sources. I usually do this when I am not teaching.' (Interview-Rini)

In addition, in designing a lesson, Rini also chose different methods or eclectic methods depending on the student's needs as she reported:

'On occasion, I do not solely utilize the scientific method. It is simply the case that the design I have created employs the scientific method. On other occasions, I combine it with other methods. If we were to exclusively adhere to this approach, we would become what ... rigid, not creative. This feels forced, even though it does not manifest in this way, so on occasion I employ, combine it with other methods too.' (Interview-Rini)

Meanwhile, Sari's orientation in lesson planning changed since the new regulation was mandated. For several years she designed lesson plans for the English subject as local content. At that time, she designed the lesson plans based on her students' needs although there was no guideline or syllabus she could refer to. However, since the status of teaching English changed into an extracurricular program (not compulsory), the management of

teaching and learning English was organized by the School Principals Working Group at the sub-district level. One of the activities of this group was to develop mid-term and final examinations. Therefore, before this policy, she formulated the learning objectives based on the student's needs in her school. For example, the students could sing English songs, pronounce English words correctly, and ask permission. Under the regulation from the School Principals Working Group, the learning objectives were derived from the items or questions in the exams.

Moreover, the Group did not publish a guideline or syllabus for helping the English teachers to plan and design a lesson. In addition, sometimes she collaborated with her colleagues from other schools to learn items in the examinations to make blueprints and used them to develop lesson plans. Consequently, the process of learning and teaching was oriented to pass the minimal score, i.e. 75 only. She added that the main target of the teaching was to get high scores. Once she heard a student said 'Miss, can we sing and play games again?'. It showed that the students did not feel happy with the activities of learning in the classroom which only were oriented for getting the passing grade.

'The objective is to achieve 100% grade completion in one class. Thus, the only students who did not meet this standard with the original score were one and two individuals, respectively, across all classes.' (Interview-Sari)

This study also reveals the phenomena in the classroom taught by Aiko, the novice teacher. Throughout the interviews, she explained that in teaching she relied on the materials provided in a certain student workbook selected by the school. She appeared to use this workbook to guide her in choosing the materials to teach and the order for presenting them in the classroom. She did not make her lesson plans. The following is her report.

[showing the workbook]

Researcher: *"What are the guidelines? Is there a syllabus?"*

Aiko (novice teacher): *"There's no syllabus. From the beginning when I entered, there was no syllabus. The content is usually from the workbook only from beginning to end."*

Researcher: *"Who chose the workbook?"*

Aiko (novice teacher): *"The school"*

(Interview-Aiko)

Sometimes the workbook did not help. She usually met some problems when using the workbook. The interviews with Aiko were conducted only a few days before the mid-term exam. As mentioned earlier that the tests for both mid-term and final exams were designed by the School Principals Working Group of the sub-district level. The blueprints of the test were only shared through WhatsApp Group.

Another problem was the materials from the workbook did not match the blueprints. It was the school that chose the workbook from a publisher. It was also supported by Sari's explanation that it was true that the school chose the publisher to provide the workbooks for all students in the school. She heard from the principal that the choice was also based on the agreement with other principals of other elementary schools in the same local region under the coordination of the School Principals Working Group.

The making-use of the lesson plans

Regarding the implementation of lesson plans, the teachers seem to have different strategies and respond to unpredictable situations variously. Rini, in particular, adjusted her materials to better meet her students' changing needs, interests, and proficiency

levels. Although she had a government-prepared textbook, she found it often lacked relevance and challenge for her students. To address this, she supplemented her lessons with resources from 'YouTube' and other online platforms, ensuring her materials were more engaging and appropriate. Despite having written lesson plans, she frequently made in-the-moment adjustments based on her observations of task difficulty and material suitability as she reported below.

'If this is already functioning adequately, I believe it may be beneficial to alter the material to introduce some variety. Should it be determined that the majority of the material is derived from the attachment and is therefore too similar, I will simply make the necessary adjustments. If this is indeed the case, it would be helpful to know which topic is currently the most relevant.' (Interview-Rini)

All the teachers also adapted their lessons to overcome various challenges and to meet students' needs. For example, when the audio material for a listening activity was too fast for students to understand, Rini used a program to slow it down. She also adjusted her plans when a school agenda unexpectedly cancelled all lessons, asking students to complete tasks at home instead. She communicated clearly with students, emphasizing the importance of completing the tasks at home to avoid missing out during the next class. Additionally, she addressed classroom discipline issues by implementing a pre-class agreement. To manage noise and disruptions, she established rules where noisy students would either have to leave the class or sit in the front row. She found these measures effective in maintaining good discipline. Sari, one of the novice teachers, in making use of her plans in teaching in the classroom, also tried to adjust her plans to her students' condition, such as the student's responses and abilities:

'The same lesson plan is used for teaching two classes. The students' responses are different, there are some are slower. To learn groups of vocabulary, a class, for example, can understand them in 10 meetings, but the other class can do it in 5 or 6 meetings.' (Interview-Rini)

On the other way around, novice teachers like Aiko in this study may observe that the planned learning activities are not as appropriate as expected and might modify the strategies even though reached failure. In using the textbook, she had some problems in explaining the materials there. When she found her students difficult to understand the materials in the textbook, she made some strategies. One of them was to use 'a sticky man picture to explain the grammar. The other strategy was to add the meetings. When it still failed, she would skip teaching it. Translating the sentences or the questions was another technique she used when her students got confused. It was done either individually or classically. Even, she had to translate them by herself.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed a shared perception of the importance of lesson planning among the teachers. All participants recognized that lesson planning is crucial in teaching, aligning with findings from [Angaiz et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Alghamdy \(2023\)](#), which emphasize that lesson planning is vital for creating a successful classroom environment. All the teachers agreed that producing written lesson plans, referred to as 'lesson plans pro forma,' was necessary. This contrasts with findings from previous research, where experienced teachers often utilize "mental" plans or plans devised in their thoughts, rather than adhering strictly to predetermined formats as less experienced teachers typically do ([Hatch & Clark, 2021](#); [Gün Asst, 2014](#); [Tsui, 2003](#); [Searcy & Maroney, 1996](#)).

Both experienced and novice teachers in this study were required to create written plans for several purposes, including serving as guidelines and fulfilling administrative functions. Sari and Aiko submitted their lesson plans to the sub-district education office,

while Rini prepared hers for school accreditation purposes. The differences in planning documents may stem from whether they were used in informal planning contexts or formal situations, such as inspections (Beckmann & Ehmke, 2023).

In developing their lesson plans, each teacher used different references. Rini relied on guidelines from the Directorate of Secondary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, which were based on the current curriculum. This approach aligns with Martinez and Whiting (2021), who state that curriculum significantly impacts classroom lessons, teaching methods, and students' learning experiences. Sari initially based her lesson planning on a needs analysis of her students and discussions with colleagues from other elementary schools, as she could not find standardized guidelines from the government. However, after the Sub-district School Principals Working Group regulated English teaching in elementary schools within the sub-district, including developing exam items, Sari shifted her focus to ensuring her students achieved a minimum score of 75 in the final examination. Consequently, she oriented her teaching towards achieving high scores and had to use student workbooks selected by the school board, which she and her students found unsatisfactory. Aiko, teaching in the same school, also had to use the same workbooks and relied on them as her primary teaching resources, following the materials as presented without creating separate lesson plans. This scenario aligns with Pang (2016) and Mundy-Henderson (2023), who suggest that using a planning template can be essential for creating an optimal learning environment. Moreover, novice teachers like Aiko may lack sufficient knowledge and experience in lesson planning, leading them to use other teachers' lesson plans or follow textbooks (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Rini, the experienced teacher, appeared unconcerned about curriculum or regulatory changes. She demonstrated flexibility in adapting to unpredictable situations without compromising substance. For instance, when preparing three different types of materials—regular, remedial, and enrichment—she collaborated with colleagues and student-teacher supervisees to find and select appropriate materials. This ability to collaborate easily with others is consistent with Tsui (2003, 2009), who noted that experienced teachers tend to be more independent and flexible in making modifications based on students' needs and policy or curriculum changes. Additionally, in the current digital era, technology can greatly support teachers in enhancing student learning, such as using YouTube videos, web-based platforms for adjusting learning material complexity (Nugroho et al., 2022), and searching for meaningful learning resources (Izlin & Widiyati, 2023; Novković Cvetković et al., 2022). Furthermore, as Marcelo-Martínez et al. (2024) found, experienced teachers are more active in using social media networks to search for resources and easily establish connections with other teachers.

Both Rini and Sari had strategies for when lessons could not proceed as planned. Rini, the experienced teacher, replaced difficult materials with easier ones, indicating she was always prepared with supplementary materials. She also used specific technology programs to adjust the difficulty levels of the materials (Nugroho & Triana, 2021; Tsui, 2003; Tsui, 2009). In Rini's, Sari's, and Aiko's schools, it was common to have no classes on weekdays. Consequently, the teachers had to employ strategies to ensure students still learned the materials planned for that day. Sari and Aiko rescheduled the meeting for the next day, while Rini preferred to assign the materials as homework for independent learning.

Conversely, novice teachers like Aiko may find that their planned learning activities are less effective than anticipated and might adjust their strategies when faced with setbacks. This is particularly true when novice teachers, who may have limited pedagogical training and experience, encounter unpredictable classroom scenarios. Implementing theories acquired on campus, which often differ from real-world classroom experiences, can be challenging for novice teachers, as noted by Kosel et al. (2024) and König & Rothland (2022).

Additionally, Aiko, as a new teacher, likely depended on a textbook chosen by the school to guide her teaching and learning activities, rather than developing detailed lesson

plans. Textbooks are widely regarded as important resources for teaching and learning (Shah, 2023). However, her reliance on the textbook differs from the rationale of other teachers. While other educators’ choices and adaptations of textbooks are influenced by various interrelated beliefs—including their views on effective instruction, the need for engaging and motivating materials, more effective learning activities, and the importance of incorporating local cultural education—Aiko’s reasons for using the textbook may not align with these factors (Hsiang et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Rini and Sari employed different techniques for managing students’ rude behavior during lessons. Rini anticipated such behavior by establishing rules and communicating them to students before the lesson began. She also implemented punishments as consequences for breaking the rules. On the other hand, Sari preferred to reward students who behaved well. According to Blömeke et al. (2015), as illustrated in Figure 2, adaptability in utilizing lesson plans is a continuum of personal dispositions, including professional knowledge, decision-making skills, and classroom teaching history.

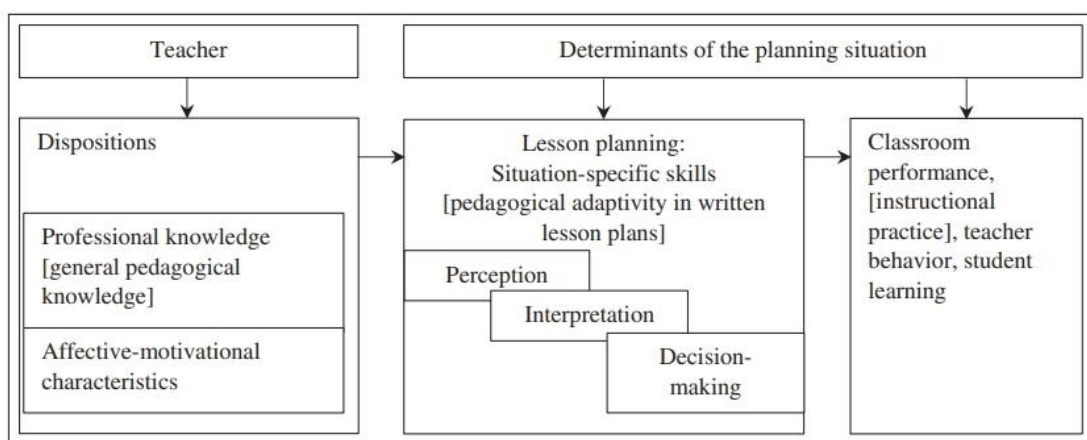


Figure 2. Heuristic of modeling lesson planning as part of teacher competence following (Blömeke et al., 2015)

Following this model, pedagogical knowledge and aspects of attitude and motivation influence the formation of skills in adapting learning plans, which will shape perception, interpretation, and decision-making. This pedagogical adaptivity competence will be represented in instructional practice, teacher behavior, and student learning in the classroom (Dasaka & Surampudi, 2020).

Conclusion

This research investigated teachers’ perceptions of lesson planning and how they implement these plans in the classroom. Interviews with one experienced teacher and two novice teachers revealed that it was common among them to use written lesson plans, or "lesson plans pro forma." These lesson plans served both as instructional guidelines and for administrative purposes, such as accreditation and compliance with school district authorities. The teachers utilized different resources to determine learning objectives and select learning materials. The experienced teacher referred to curriculum documents developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, while one novice teacher based her objectives on previous examination questions. The other novice teacher relied solely on student workbooks as her primary reference. The study also found that different teachers employed varied strategies. The experienced teacher demonstrated greater readiness and adaptability to changes in the curriculum, classroom situations, students’ needs, and school regulations. Although the first novice teacher, with nine years of teaching experience, preferred to set her own goals and develop her own materials, she adhered to

the directives of policymakers within her teaching context, such as the school principal and the sub-district school principals working group.

One limitation of this study is that the data were gathered solely from interviews with the teachers. The study would be more comprehensive if it also included classroom observations to examine how teachers implement their plans in practice. Several recommendations are suggested for English Teacher Training Programs, mentor teachers (including experienced teachers serving as practicum supervisors/mentors), and future researchers. It is recommended that English Teacher Training Programs provide prospective teachers with knowledge about curriculum development, lesson planning, English language teaching in the Indonesian context, and practical teaching skills.

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