

Preparing Preservice English Teachers for Learner Centred Instructional Design Through Constructive Alignment

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Abstract: Preparing English language teachers to design learner-centred instruction requires a defensible connection between knowledge of learners and the decisions embodied in a lesson plan. This conceptual study develops a framework for teaching that connection in preservice education. A purposive theoretical synthesis integrates constructive alignment, learner agency, accessible task design, language education descriptors and formative assessment. The analysis examines which planning decisions each perspective supports and where additional decision rules are needed. Its principal result is a five-component framework linking learner evidence, integrated educational purposes, learning activity, assessment evidence and conditional revision. A design matrix and an illustrative English lesson show how a common communicative objective can coexist with differentiated support and explicit opportunities for respectful participation. The framework locates professional competence in the quality of justified design decisions rather than the completeness of a lesson-plan template. Its contribution is an operational account of how responsiveness to individual learners can be made visible and reviewable before classroom implementation. The proposed relationships are theoretical and require empirical evaluation; no intervention effects or learner gains are reported. Implications concern teacher education assignments, mentor questioning and assessment of instructional design portfolios.

Keywords: Preservice English teachers; learner-centred education; instructional design; constructive alignment; learner agency; lesson planning; formative assessment.

Introduction: A lesson plan can contain objectives, activities, resources and assessment while leaving its most consequential decisions unexplained. A proposed discussion, for example, may be attractive but inaccessible to learners who have relevant ideas and limited linguistic resources. A concluding test may be easy to administer while failing to capture the communicative performance the lesson was intended to develop. For preservice English teachers, learning to complete a planning form therefore differs from learning to design a coherent opportunity for particular learners to participate and progress.

This distinction is especially relevant to a learner-centred educational environment. In this article, learner-centredness refers to the deliberate use of information about learners, meaningful opportunities

for choice, accessible participation and feedback that informs subsequent action. It is not equated with unrestricted choice or the absence of teacher direction. The teacher remains responsible for making the learning purpose intelligible, selecting appropriate content and ensuring that participation serves an educational objective.

The broader purpose also includes the social and formative dimension of education. In the Uzbek expression *o'quv-tarbiya jarayoni*, teaching is connected with personal development and the cultivation of responsible relationships. In English language education, this connection can be enacted through listening to others, representing a partner's position accurately, sharing responsibility and disagreeing respectfully. These purposes need

observable opportunities in the lesson, although a single performance cannot establish a learner's enduring values or moral character.

Constructive alignment connects intended learning outcomes with activities and assessment (Biggs, 1996). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion volume provides a language education perspective that includes interaction and mediation (Council of Europe, 2020). However, selecting an outcome and a corresponding task does not automatically explain how a novice teacher should respond to variation in learners' readiness, confidence and access. A design procedure must make those responses explicit without replacing a common educational purpose with unrelated individual tasks.

The present study addresses the question: how can preservice English teachers be taught to justify learner-centred design decisions within an aligned lesson? Two subsidiary questions concern the evidence needed to support those decisions and the conditions under which a planned adaptation should be reconsidered. The objective is to develop a usable conceptual framework and demonstrate its internal logic through an instructional example. The contribution concerns the structure of professional reasoning, rather than a claim that a particular teaching intervention has already proved effective.

METHODS

Research design and selection of conceptual resources. The study employs conceptual model development through purposive theoretical synthesis. Following Jaakkola's (2020) methodological argument, the analysis specifies the function of the selected perspectives and separates the resulting propositions from empirical findings. The source selection was directed by the research question; it was not a systematic review and does not claim exhaustive coverage of instructional design research.

The conceptual resource set comprises seven works listed in the references. Biggs supplies the relationship between objectives, activities and assessment. The Council of Europe supplies the domain-specific perspective on language use. CAST supplies principles for anticipating barriers to participation. Ryan and Deci supply an account of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Sadler (1989) supplies a basis for

connecting judgements of quality with action. The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages provides a professional reflection and documentation context (Newby et al., 2008). Jaakkola supplies the methodological rationale for constructing the model. Inclusion depended on a clear conceptual contribution and identifiable publication provenance.

Analytical procedure. The unit of analysis was a planning decision, defined as a choice about an intended learner performance, the conditions for producing it, the evidence to be collected or the response to that evidence. Four operations were undertaken. First, the central contribution of each perspective was stated in relation to this unit. Second, the perspectives were mapped onto decisions made before, during and after a lesson. Third, potential tensions were examined, particularly common standards versus differentiated support and learner choice versus curricular responsibility. Fourth, the resulting relationships were translated into a planning matrix and tested for logical consistency using a constructed lesson example.

The consistency examination applied three questions to each proposed component. Does it connect with a recognisable learner need or learning purpose? Does it specify something a teacher or learner can do? Does it identify evidence that would support retaining or changing the decision? A component that only repeated a desirable principle without a decision consequence was treated as insufficiently operational. The resulting framework is the product of this analysis; no expert panel, classroom observation or statistical validation is implied.

The example concerns a hypothetical lower-secondary English class working around A2 proficiency. This is a design context, not a recruited sample. Its task targets are locally formulated and are not presented as verbatim CEFR descriptors or as certification criteria. Timings and support options illustrate a feasible planning arrangement rather than findings from an implemented intervention.

RESULTS

A framework for making design reasoning visible. The synthesis produced five interconnected components. The first, learner evidence, specifies what the teacher knows about learners' current performance and

participation conditions. The second, integrated purposes, states the communicative learning outcome and the social action through which the formative purpose can be practised. The third, learning activity, specifies the task, resources, grouping and support. The fourth, assessment evidence, identifies what will count as a relevant demonstration of learning. The fifth, conditional revision, states how the design will change if that evidence does not support the original assumption.

These components are connected by justification rather than by chronology alone. The choice of a sentence frame, for example, should follow from a diagnosed difficulty in formulating a response. Its usefulness should then be considered through the learner's subsequent performance. The same frame may become restrictive when a learner can already formulate an independent response. A learner-centred plan therefore includes the possibility of withdrawing support, not only adding it.

Table 1. Components of the proposed design framework

Component	Planning question	Reviewable evidence
Learner evidence	What can learners currently do, and what may obstruct participation?	Brief task sample and a documented access or participation condition
Integrated purposes	What language performance and social action should the task enable?	Communicative target and a related participation expectation
Learning activity	How will learners attempt the performance with appropriate support?	Task instructions, resources, grouping and support options
Assessment evidence	What will show the quality of the intended performance?	Individual response and a criterion linked to the target
Conditional revision	What decision changes if the evidence challenges the plan?	A stated trigger and a corresponding instructional adjustment

The distinctive feature is the final connection back to learner evidence. A plan is incomplete when it records only what the teacher intends to do. It also needs a reasoned response to plausible learner difficulty. This is not a demand to predict every classroom event. It requires a small number of consequential contingencies, such as an inaccessible input text, an unequal distribution of speaking or a final task that reveals rehearsed language without understanding.

Alignment at two educational levels. The framework distinguishes two levels of alignment. At the school level, pupils' language outcomes, classroom tasks and assessment evidence must correspond. At the university level, the preservice teacher's intended competence, design assignment and assessment must also correspond. If the university objective is to develop responsive planning, assessing only a polished final lesson plan omits the reasoning that the programme claims to teach.

A suitable university assignment consequently contains a learner profile, a lesson plan, a short design rationale and a revision note. The profile should be based on classroom evidence when available; during introductory coursework, a clearly identified teaching

case can be used. The rationale explains a limited set of consequential decisions. The revision note considers what the teacher would change when a stated assumption is not supported. The dossier function of EPOSTL provides an established context for documenting such professional work (Newby et al., 2008), while the particular four-part assignment is proposed here.

Teacher educators can assess the coherence of this assignment through targeted questions. Why does the selected task require the intended language function? What evidence makes the support necessary? How will the quieter learner's understanding become visible? Which result would lead the teacher to alter the task? These questions direct attention to the quality of professional judgement rather than to decorative presentation or the number of methods named in a plan.

An illustrative English lesson. Consider a constructed 45-minute lesson in which learners decide on an activity for a visiting group of pupils. The communicative target is to recommend an option, give a relevant reason and respond to another person's proposal. The related formative purpose is to practise

considering a partner's contribution before reaching a shared decision. The context allows more than one defensible answer and does not require learners to disclose private family information or personal expenditure.

A short initial task asks each learner to match an activity with a reason and make one recommendation. The

teacher uses the response to distinguish unfamiliar vocabulary from difficulty connecting an idea with a reason. The subsequent materials provide brief descriptions of several activities, optional vocabulary support and a small set of useful expressions. All learners work towards the same communicative target. They may choose the activity they recommend and select support appropriate to their present need.

Table 2. Illustrative alignment within a 45-minute lesson

Phase and time	Learner action	Evidence and design response
Initial task, 5 minutes	Formulate a recommendation with a reason	If vocabulary blocks meaning, introduce a brief illustrated glossary
Preparation, 8 minutes	Compare activity descriptions and prepare an option	Offer prompts according to demonstrated need; retain independent preparation
Pair interaction, 12 minutes	Exchange proposals and respond to the partner	If one learner dominates, use a first-turn routine and individual preparation time
Joint decision, 12 minutes	Agree on an option and explain the partner's contribution	If reasons remain disconnected, model one link between a criterion and a choice
Individual exit response, 8 minutes	Recommend an option and explain a response to another proposal	Use each response to plan the next lesson's support and challenge

The exit response is important because an acceptable group product can conceal unequal understanding. Each learner therefore supplies a brief individual contribution. Language use is considered through relevance, intelligibility and response to the interlocutor. The formative purpose is examined through task-specific behaviour, such as acknowledging a partner's suggestion, rather than by assigning a score for being a respectful person.

The design also exposes limits to equivalence. A recorded monologue may demonstrate the ability to recommend and justify, but it does not by itself demonstrate interaction. If a learner needs an alternative participation arrangement, the teacher must preserve the construct being assessed, for example through a supported one-to-one exchange. Accessibility changes the route to evidence without automatically making unlike performances interchangeable.

Propositions for subsequent investigation

Three propositions follow from the model. First, requiring a justification for adaptation should make the relationship between learner evidence and instructional choice more visible in preservice teachers' work. Second, specifying an assessment response

before teaching should encourage teachers to collect evidence relevant to their objectives. Third, examining individual contributions within collaborative tasks should reveal design weaknesses that a group product alone can obscure.

These are propositions for empirical investigation. They do not establish that the proposed assignment improves competence or that its effects exceed those of existing coursework. A suitable future study would compare independently rated design portfolios, examine the relation between written plans and classroom enactment, and document the time needed to use the framework. Evidence of improved documentation would need to be distinguished from evidence of improved teaching.

DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests that learner-centred instructional design can be taught as a sequence of justified decisions. Constructive alignment remains the organising relationship, while learner evidence and conditional revision make its application responsive to a particular classroom. The framework's contribution is therefore not a replacement for established theory. It is a specification of the reasoning that connects established principles when preservice teachers design English lessons.

An important implication concerns the relation between agency and structure. Ryan and Deci (2000) identify autonomy, competence and relatedness as significant motivational needs. The design inference developed here is that choice should be accompanied by an intelligible purpose and usable support. A learner who chooses a topic but cannot access its language demands has received a formal opportunity without sufficient means to use it. Conversely, a teacher can provide explicit guidance while allowing the learner to make meaningful decisions about content and participation.

CAST (2024) encourages the anticipation of barriers through multiple means of engagement, representation and action. Within the proposed framework, this principle becomes a requirement to state which barrier a planned option addresses. It does not justify unlimited variation in assessed performance. Teacher educators should ask whether each alternative still permits a warranted judgement about the same intended outcome. This issue is especially consequential when assessing spoken interaction, where changing a task into an individual written response changes the available evidence.

The framework also makes the formative dimension more concrete. Social purposes are easy to state at the top of a plan and easy to neglect in the task itself. Assigning pupils a genuine need to understand another person's proposal creates an opportunity to practise a related social action. Nevertheless, observing one courteous exchange cannot support a conclusion about stable character development. The appropriate claim concerns the opportunity designed and the behaviour observed in that situation.

The study has several limitations. Its source selection is purposive, the conceptual mapping reflects an interpretive synthesis, and the example is constructed. No reliability evidence exists for using the framework as an assessment instrument. Implementation may be constrained by class size, mentor workload and access to information about pupils. The recommended starting point is therefore a small number of documented decisions per lesson rather than an additional lengthy administrative form.

CONCLUSION

Preparing preservice English teachers for learner-

centred instructional design requires attention to the reasons behind a plan. The proposed five-component framework connects learner evidence, integrated purposes, activity design, assessment and conditional revision. Its practical value lies in making those connections explicit enough to discuss, assess and improve during teacher education. A university design assignment should therefore require both a lesson plan and a concise account of why its major decisions fit the intended learners. Empirical work is needed to establish whether this form of preparation improves classroom responsiveness and learning opportunities.

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