

PLANNING AND TEACHING DEMO LESSONS TO DEVELOP ONE OF THE COMPETENCIES OF THE EXIT PROFILE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) TRAINING PROGRAM AT UNAE, ECUADOR

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Abstract

The students of the English Language Teaching (ELT) training program at the National University of Education in Ecuador need to develop the competencies of planning lessons and teaching English as part of their exit profile. For this reason, they study the subject Didactics of English in the third semester of their training program. In this subject, they have to learn to use and apply ELT methods and approaches such as the Audio-lingual Method (ALM), Total Physical Response (TPR), Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among others. However, the minimum contents of the curriculum design of the subject only include the ELT methods to teach and a couple of expected learning outcomes that do not lead to the development of the aforementioned competency. This problematic situation has led the authors of this paper to come up with the following research question: How can we teach the subject Didactics of English so that it contributes to the students exit profile and helps them develop the desired professional competencies? In order to answer this question, the following overall aim has been created: To illustrate how lesson plans and demo lessons can contribute to the development of the professional competency in the exit profile of the ELT training program at UNAE. For this purpose, the authors have used a qualitative paradigm based on the action research methodology using class observation, self-reflection and interviews. Peer observations of a demo lesson of students teaching using ALM in the first action research cycle demonstrated that the methodology used to plan and teach was not effective to develop the desired professional competency. A second cycle of action research considering the observations made in the first one and including actions to improve the identified weaknesses was planned and put into practice. The students taught the demo lesson applying the TPR method. It offered a more satisfactory result. However, interviews made to teachers and students revealed that they were not completely satisfied with the obtained advances in the development of the target competency. Then, the authors conducted a third cycle of action research in order to have the students overcome the weaknesses identified in the previous cycles and to plan and teach a demo lesson using the PPP methodology. This methodology was characterized by adapting the Cambridge Delta Observation Criteria for EFL teachers to the students' needs, giving not only oral but also written feedback to the students, using Instruction checking questions (ICQs) and engaging all the students in the peer evaluation. It proved to be effective and allowed the authors to arrive to the following conclusion: planning and teaching demo lessons based on the weaknesses identified by peer observation and interviews to teachers and students contributes to the development of one of the most important components of the major's exit profile.

Keywords: planning, demo lesson, professional competencies, exit profile, ELT training program.

1 INTRODUCTION

The National University of Education (UNAE) is the only national teaching training university in Ecuador. It offers several teaching majors or careers and the English Language Teaching (ELT) program is one of them.

The ELT training program aims to train teachers of English and researchers to teach this foreign language in all the provinces of the country and one of the competencies that the students need to achieve as part of the exit profile of this major is to plan lessons and teach them using the different ELT methods.

In order to develop that competency, one of the subject matters the students study in their third semester is Didactics of English. The main contents of the subjects are the ELT methods and approaches and its main learning outcomes are intended to the students' applications of these methods and approaches in practical activities such as creating lesson plans and conducting demo lessons. This subject is studied

in the third semester of the ELT program, when the students already have B 1.1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference. This allows them to be able to plan lessons and teach demo lessons in English. Planning lessons to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) and teaching them is one of the main competencies in the students' exit profile of this ELT program. The development of this competency requires the use of ELT methods such as ALM, TPR, PPP, task based learning, project based learning among others, and the CLT approach that they study in the aforementioned subject. These demo lessons provide the students with the possibility to create and use didactic techniques and strategies that facilitate the ELT and learning process in junior and senior high schools in the country. In the aforementioned subject, they use Jeremy Harmer's adapted lesson plan Harmer, J (2010, p.161)[1] to plan the lessons and they conduct the demo lessons, teaching their classmates in English and their classmates assume the roles of senior and junior school students. When some students teach, the other do the peer observation and evaluation using the simplified Cambridge Delta Observation Criteria for EFL teachers taken from the Handbook for tutors and candidates. Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages [2].

The Audio-lingual Teaching Method, as defined by Richards, J and T, Rogers (1986) [3], is a language teaching method that emphasizes teaching speaking and listening before reading and writing. In the ALM, the students listen to the language first, then they speak it, after that they read it and finally write it. The origin of the ALM can be traced back to World War II in the United States, but many of its techniques and procedures are still used worldwide in the twenty first century. It was known as the Army method. The term "Audiolingualism" was coined by Professor Nelson Brooks in 1964. It was the first to be based on linguistic theory and behavioral psychology. According to Maedeh Alemi and Ehteramsadat Tavakoli (2016) [6], the Audio-lingual Method is still in use today, though normally as a part of individual lessons rather than as the foundation of the course. These types of lessons can be popular as they are relatively simple, from the teacher's point of view, and the learner always knows what to expect.

According to Richards, J and T, Rogers (1986) [3], Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method built around the combination of speech and action; it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity. It draws on developmental psychology, learning theory and humanist pedagogy.

TPR is linked to the "trace theory" of memory in psychology, which holds that the more often or the more intensive a memory connection is traced, the stronger the memory association will be and the more likely it will be recalled. It shares with the school of humanist psychology a concern for affective (emotional) factors in language learning.

Richards, J (2006) [4] states that Audiolingualism (in North America) also known as (the Aural-Oral Method), and the Structural Situational Approach in the UK (also known as Situational Language Teaching) are the bases for the 3rd methodology object of study of this research, the Presentation, Practice Production (PPP) methodology.

In a typical lesson according to the situational approach, a three-phase sequence, known as the P-P-P cycle, was often employed. Three Ps approach is a methodology employed by professional schools around the world. David Evans mentioned that current thinking in Second Language Acquisition suggests that 'PPP' approach is totally unjustifiable as a means of teaching. However, it not only persists but seems to flourish (Evans).

On the words of Richards, J (2006) [4], Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Most of these CLT principles can be applied in the production stage of the PPP cycle when the aim of the teaching and learning process is the development of communicative competence.

On the other hand, the 2016 EFL Ecuadorian curriculum (2016) [5] demands the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as two of the main principles of the curriculum so that the students reach the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) when they graduate from high school. However, most of the Ecuadorian teachers of English do not master these methodologies so that they can make good use of them in their classes. This is a reason why these methods and approaches are highly emphasized in the students' curriculum.

According to König, J (2020) [7], lesson planning is a challenging task teachers have to master in their daily work, that is why it is an essential element of the teachers in training syllabus contents. That is why it is important to teach future teachers of English how to do it during their pre-service studies.

As stated by the Delaware Teacher Recruitment and Selection Toolkit [8], a demonstration lesson is simply a planned lesson for a group of students. However, teaching demo lessons is a very helpful class task that prepares students for their future life as teachers of English.

According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) [9] Peer observation involves teachers observing each other's practice and learning from one another, focusing on teachers' individual needs and the opportunity to both learn from others' practice and offer constructive feedback to peers. Peer observation aims to support the sharing of practice and builds self-awareness about the impact of one's teaching practice in order to affect change.

After this brief review contextualized to our object of research, the authors of this paper have come up with the following research question: How can we teach the subject Didactics of English so that it contributes to the students exit profile and helps them develop the desired professional competencies? In order to answer this question, the following overall aim has been created: To illustrate how lesson plans and demo lessons can contribute to the development of the professional competency in the exit profile of the ELT training program at UNAE.

2 METHODOLOGY

To carry out this study, we used action research. Educational action research is principally used for the development of teachers as researchers so that they can use their research to improve their teaching and thus their students' learning. According to Eileen Ferrance (2000) action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. Although there are many types of research that may be undertaken, action research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future.

The action research process conducted consisted of three cycles and the techniques that were used were the survey, participant observation and an interview. The survey was applied to all teachers of English from the Language Center and from the ELT major at UNAE University. The observation process was carried out when the third semester students planned and taught the demo lessons using three ELT methods: ALM, TPR and PPP under the principles of CLT and the interview was conducted to the students who participated in the research.

The first technique used in our research was a survey. Its main purpose was to share the research objective of the project with the tentative participants and to obtain the informed consent of the teachers who wanted to take part in the research.

The AR process was organized in three cycles. In cycle 1, the observation was conducted when the students taught the demo lesson that they had planned using ALM. In the second cycle, the class observed was when the students taught the lesson on TPR and in the 3rd cycle, it was used when they used PPP and applied the principles of CLT.

Once the informed consent of teachers was obtained, the observation process began. In the case of the action research process that led to this article, the observed participant was the teacher of the subject Didactics of English in the 3rd semester of the ELT program and the observers were a teacher of Learning Theories of the major and a student of senior semesters. The teacher of Didactics of English, who is one of the participants in this action research process taught the different ELT methods as part of the subject and asked the students to plan and teach a lesson in small teams using each studied method in the class that followed the theoretical class. Then, the other ELT teacher and a senior student participating in the action research process observed how the teacher of Didactics discussed the lesson plan that each small group of students had created and how they taught the demo lessons and how he gave feedback to the presenters. The overall aim of this activity was to help the teacher improve his teaching skills in conducting the demo lessons and to help students gain competencies in planning and teaching demo lessons. An observation protocol designed by the researchers and validated by the research group was used for the classroom observation.

The last technique used was the interview. The students who participated in the study were interviewed so as to know their perceptions on how planning and teaching demo lessons using the studied ELT methods had helped them develop these professional competencies that they need as future teachers of English

3 RESULTS

3.1 The application of the research techniques and instruments during the action research process revealed the following results.

3.1.1 *The survey results*

The survey applied to 36 English teachers from UNAE had two purposes: to share the research objective of the project and to obtain the participants' informed consent. The survey revealed that 34 out of the 36 gave their informed consent to participate in the study. Two of these teachers are part of the research team that conducted the action research process that led to this paper. One of them was the teacher of Didactics of English, whose classes were observed, and the other one was a teacher of Learning Theories, who was one of the observers (observer 1). The other observer was a senior student of the major who had previously received the subject Didactics of English (observer 2).

3.1.2 *Observations and reflection process*

In cycle 1 of the action research process, the observation took place when teams of two or three students made demo lesson presentations using the ALM. In each team, one of the students was in charge of presenting the lesson plan on the overhead projector and the other(s) had to teach the demo lesson. At the same time, another team of students made the peer evaluation of the presented activity. Once presenters finished their demo lesson, the peer evaluators provided them feedback. After that, the teacher of Didactics of English also gave feedback to the students who presented the demo lesson they had planned using the ALM. In the 2 hours session there were 4 presenter groups and 4 peer assessment teams.

The other teacher (observer 1) and senior student (observer 2) participating in the action research process observed each group presentation, students peer evaluation, and how the teacher of Didactics managed the class and gave feedback to the presenters and peer observers during the demo lesson. This first observation yielded the following results:

The observers pointed out to the observed teacher that the presenter students really did not use many of the ALM strategies and techniques. They used the traditional techniques that they had learned in the previous studied ELT methods and they did not show the physical posture required for a teacher of English as a foreign language when teaching the demo lesson (e.g., pulling shoulders back, keep eye contact with the audience, avoid turning their back to the audience). Observers also told the teacher that he had given the feedback to the presenters only orally and it might have a better effect if it is given in writing so that the students store the comments in their long-term memory. They also commented to the teacher that the quality of the presenters' Power Point slides was not good enough. They also noticed that not all the students acting as peer observers and evaluators spoke the same amount of time, that is to say, that only one gave the feedback to the presenters when in a foreign language class all the students should speak to develop their communicative competence. It was also noticed by the observers that some students spoke in Spanish while working in the small groups and the teacher did not take any action about this. Finally, they highlighted that the teacher corrected the students' mistakes directly a couple of times during their presentations and this is not a good way of making the error correction in a foreign language class. Based on these observations and reflections, the two observers gave the teacher the following recommendations.

The Learning Theories teacher (observer 1) observing the class recommended to:

- Include in the rubric for oral presentation some elements related to the posture, tone of voice, visual contact (overthought this was highlighted by the evaluator students).
- Giving students a written feedback could make them reflect on the topics to improve for a longer period. This is also because they might need to receive feedback in oral and written form considering they are developing their language skills.
- Insist on students' enthusiasm because that might also be assimilated in the audience. Also, the professor might include in the rubric some general ideas on how to prepare the PowerPoint (font size, use of colors, etc.).
- Encourage equal participation of all team members (despite the teacher asked other members of the groups, only one student talked). This was the case in the first evaluator group but not in the second evaluator group. In addition, the first presenters talked quite the same amount but in the second group of presenters, one of the students talked more than the other two girls.

- Give the students the chance to reflect on how some activities presenters did were related to audio-lingual method (not just to repeat the sentences teachers wrote on the whiteboard but also, for example, use “broken phone” strategy).
- Be aware of how students react when they are interrupted to give them feedback. Sometimes students might get confused and lose concentration after feedback some others, maybe more confident or better-prepared may receive the feedback and then continue their exposition with any problem.

The senior student (observer 2) made the following recommendations:

- The teacher should guarantee that the students do not speak Spanish while working in activities in the small groups
- The corrections should be made on the spot to add accuracy.
- The teacher should request the students teaching the demo class not to ask if the other the students understand, but rather, ask Concept Comprehension Questions (CCQs) or Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs)

Even though not all the reflections and recommendations made by the teacher of learning theories (observer 1) and the ones made by the senior student (observer 2) coincided, these were discussed and analyzed with the observed teacher. The three participants in the action research process, that is, the observed teacher and the two observers agreed on what to discard and what to include in the following action research cycle.

In cycle 2, the observation process was similar to the one developed in the first cycle, however, this time, the students planned and taught a demo lesson using TPR. The teacher of Didactics incorporated the recommendations made by the observers in the first cycle. The objective of the teacher (observer 1) and senior student (observer 2) observing the class was to check up to what degree the recommendations and suggestions made by them had been considered by the observed teacher in this second cycle. This second observation offered the following results:

This time, before the students started presenting the lesson plans and demo lessons, the teacher of Didactics showed a Power Point slide with the following written information, discussed it with the students, and asked them to consider it when making their presentations. These rules were:

- **When presenting:**

- Talk to your students not to the board!
- Never use your hand to erase the board!
- Do not stand up in front of the board impeding your students to see what is written on it.
- Do not write on the board with the projector on, that is, do not write on the projection. Either turn it off or write on the spaces not covered by the slide projection.
- Be enthusiastic, try to engage your audience so that they feel motivated, and pay attention to you!

- **When evaluating:**

- ALL team members have TO SPEAK approximately the same amount of time.
- Take down notes and give them to the presenters so that they can consider them for their next presentation.

- **Other important points to observe besides the ones in the rubric.**

- English language accuracy (grammar, pronunciation, no use of Spanish) and fluency.
- PPT quality- big enough Font so that the last students sitting at the back of the room can see it well, not excessive use of texts, clear illustrations, appropriate use of colours.
- Presenters' posture, tone of voice, visual contact
- Did the presenters really use the strategies and techniques of TPR studied in class and illustrated in the video? -commands, drills, actions and pictures to illustrate new vocabulary, etc.

The teacher also explained and illustrated the use of Concept Comprehension Questions (CCQs) and Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs)

The two observers noticed an improvement in the students' presentations and in the teacher's conduction of the class and on how he gave feedback to the students. This time, the two observers coincided in their points of view. They considered that the teacher had taken most of their recommendations and suggestions into account and they agreed to make the following observations to the observed teacher in order to plan the third cycle of action research which was expected to reach the desired effect of the process. The two observers pointed out that:

- The students still speak Spanish while working in activities (One of the presenters answered a question in Spanish) and the teacher did not ask him to speak English.
- Students, while teaching, need to speak louder (maybe by removing their mask, which they still use because of the recent covid pandemic) and students need to stand up when giving feedback so that they project their voice for all the class to be able to listen to them.
- Students need to present to the class not read from the board. The teacher should insist on this fact.
- During the demo classes, students just repeat what the presenters are saying and it seems that they lose interest after a while because some students are talking while the others present.
- The presenter just reads the lesson plan. The teachers should ask them to explain in her own words.
- Maybe instead of asking if the audience understood the presentation; it can be assigned one person at least from one table to resume the key points of the presentation and give recommendations.
- When teaching the demo lesson, instead of saying, "do you have any questions"?, It might be better to ask concept checking questions.

These observations showed that, even though there has been an improvement, another action research cycle is necessary, so the third cycle of action research was planned and implemented.

In the 3rd and last cycle, the observation was conducted when the students planned and taught a demo lesson using PPP and the observers' aim this time was to verify if the teacher had incorporated their latest recommendations and suggestions in the conduction of his class. The following were the results derived from this last observation:

The lesson began with activities that are more practical. The teacher shared some oral presentation techniques and illustrations of the use of ICQs and CCQs so that the students could see that is better to apply these techniques than to ask the question: Do you understand? To which students always answer "Yes" even if they do not understand.

The teacher highlighted to the students the importance of speaking English all the time as they have to reach a C1 level of English proficiency in order to graduate and practicing English whenever they work in groups is the only way to reach this goal. Then, he established rules to punish the ones who speak Spanish while working in groups.

In this class, the original Cambridge Delta Observation Criteria for EFL teachers that had been used in the previous cycle for the peer observation and evaluation was simplified to the 3rd semester students' needs. The teacher and the observers realized that the rubric was too demanding for the students' level and used a more simplified version of it.

In this lesson, the teacher and peer students' feedback to the presenters was not only given orally, but also in writing so that the students could go back to those written notes when planning and teaching future demo lessons.

The instructions that the teacher gave for the development of the demo lesson activities this time were always followed by Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) so that the students could see their value in verifying if the instructions have been understood.

Each team member acting as peer observer and evaluator was given a sheet of paper with the simplified rubric and they had to make an individual written report with the feedback. Then they gave this written report to the presenters after the oral feedback was given and discussed with them and other class students who were not the peer observers were also asked questions on how to improve certain aspects of the presented demo lessons. This way, most of the students had an active participation in class.

The improvements in the methodology used by the teacher of Didactics to guide and assess the students when planning and teaching the demo lessons during the observations in the three action research cycles proved to be effective. However, the researchers decided to conduct an interview to get the class students' perceptions on the use of planning and teaching demo lessons for the development of their

future professional competencies as teachers of English as a foreign language. The results of the interview are in the coming section.

3.1.3 The interview results

The interview was conducted to the 26 students who participated in the study. That is, all the students in the class where the action research process was developed. The results expressed in the following graphs and tables include all the students' answers and it is important to consider that some individual answers contained more than one single idea; consequently, the total of answers does not correspond to the total of students.

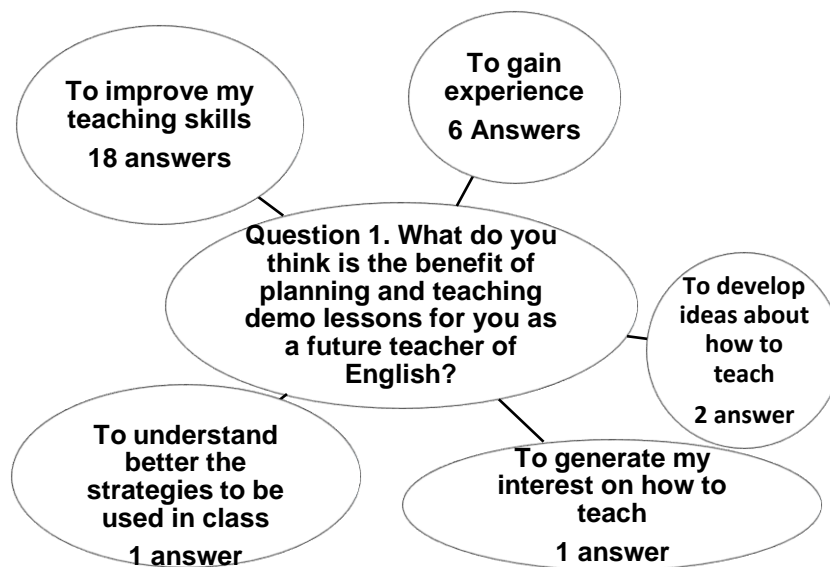


Figure 1: Students' answers to question one

Note. Question 1 was: *What do you think is the benefit of planning and teaching demo lessons for you as a future teacher of English?*

Most of the students consider the planning and teaching of demonstrative lessons contribute to the improvement of their teaching skills. Some students' answers were: *"It helps me to correct my mistakes". "It helps me to teach in a more organized way". "It provides me with knowledge on how to plan a lesson". "It helps me to improve my vocabulary and pronunciation in English". "It helps me to plan how to avoid possible problems that I might face in my class". "It helps me to improve my communication skills with the students". "The feedback the teacher gives me helps me to improve my teaching skills and my English".*

The second common answer revolves around the idea that planning and teaching demo lessons helps students to gain teaching experience. In that sense, students considered this learning activity helped them to get used to teaching, to be more confident and not to be afraid, and to learn ELT methods, activities, strategies and techniques.

Table 1

Questions 2 and 3

Nº of answers	Question 2. What challenges did you face when you had to plan and teach the demo lessons?	Question 3. How could you overcome the challenges from the previous question?
12	To understand the lesson plan template (Relationship among the topic, the objectives and the activities Difference between aims and objectives)	Research on how to create lesson plans and practicing Feedback (from the teacher and classmates) To find out whom is the lesson intended to

8	Feeling nervous when teaching the demo lessons	Still feel nervous (4 students) To teach my classmates who are also my friends (1 student) To receive positive feedback from them (3 students) Not to keep eye contact with the audience (1 student) Participating more in class (1 student)
4	Time management	With my classmates' help Doing research on how to do it Teacher's feedback
1	Not to be used to the activity	Practice and teacher's feedback Applying new methods whenever I teach
1	Things do not turn out as planned	To take a few seconds to solve the problem

Note. This table shows the relationship between the students' answers to the questions 2 and 3.

Thirteen students reported that the most common challenge they faced was the understanding of the lesson plan template. At the same time, they said this was a challenge they overcame by their own research, the feedback they received and even taking into account the characteristics of the learner the lesson plan was intended to. To the same question, nine students reported nervousness. It is particularly interesting that four of them reported this was something they have not overcome yet. Apart from the other responses shown in table 1, some other answers to question 2 were: to apply the methodology according to the students' age. Each ELT method requires a different type of teaching. To teach the lesson. Not to know if the lesson will be interesting for the audience. To learn to accept the classmates' feedback. To meet the team members in order to plan the activities to be presented. The previous answers were from one student each and the different ways students have overcome those challenges was by researching, practicing and the feedback they received.

Table 2: Students' answers to question 4

<i>Nº of answers</i>	<i>Moment or activity</i>	<i>Describe how that moment or activity helped you learn more</i>
13	To plan the lesson	To do research about it. It helped me to understand the structure of the lesson plan template. To teach the lesson. To observe the other classmates' presentations. No to make the same mistakes again. To gain experience. To keep in mind the students' needs when planning. To choose appropriate objectives and techniques. How to create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound objectives To plan a warm up to feel more confident and relaxed in front of the students To understand the problems the students face in the evaluations To see the difference between aims and objectives
8	Teacher's feedback (7) Classmates' feedback (2)	To correct my mistakes
4	To work in groups	To share ideas and to learn vocabulary due to group communication To help one another

Note. The question 4 was: *During the planning and teaching the demo lesson processes, what moments and specific activities do you think that helped you learn more?*

Table 2 shows students' response in relation to what they consider is the moment or activity during planning and teaching demonstrative lessons that contributed the most for their learning. Thirteen

students reported the process of planning the lesson was in itself the activity that helped the most to learn. The reasons why this activity was the most outstanding for their learning were that it allowed them to learn by doing. Specifically, students reported that planning the demo lesson helped them to understand the structure of the lesson plan, to learn by observing their classmates' teaching, to gain more experience, to choose appropriate objectives and techniques, and other reasons shown in the table. Eight students mentioned the most valuable moment for them was receiving the feedback because according to their opinion it helped them to correct their mistakes; and 4 students considered it important to have the opportunity to work in groups because it allowed them to share ideas and help each other.

Other answers are related to two main elements: the improvement of their English skills and the use of didactic resources. For example, four students considered teaching demonstrative lessons helped them to improve their vocabulary and to use the English grammar structures correctly. On the other hand, eight students considered the use of worksheets, videos, PPP, and creating stories helped them to put into practice what they have learned.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The action research process carried out to write this scientific paper benefited the teacher of Didactics of English as he improved his teaching methodology to conduct the students' lesson planning skills and demo lesson teaching competencies that they need to develop as an essential element of their exit profile. It allowed the researchers to answer the research question: How can we teach the subject Didactics of English so that it contributes to the students exit profile and helps them develop the desired professional competencies? The recommendations derived from the three observations made to the demo lessons development allowed the teacher to improve his methodology to conduct the students teaching of the demo lessons as he could incorporate the suggestions given by another teacher and a senior study for the betterments of his classes and students answers to the interview questions proved that the activities associated to planning and teaching demo lessons are effective for the development of their professional competencies as future teachers of English.

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