DEMO LESSONS OBSERVATION, REFLECTION, AND IMPROVEMENT TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) TRAINING PROGRAM AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION (UNAE) IN ECUADOR

U. Recino

UNAE (ECUADOR)

Abstract

The present research study was carried out because the exit profile of the ELT program at UNAE University demands the graduates to be able to teach effectively; however, the teaching methodology to develop this competency is not stated in the major's project. This fact led the author to propose the following overall aim: To illustrate how demo lessons can contribute to the development of professional competency in the exit profile of the ELT training program at UNAE. For this purpose, the author applied the action research methodology using class observation, self-reflection, and interviews. This process was developed in two cycles. The first cycle did not show the expected results so a second cycle was planned and developed to mitigate the weaknesses identified in the first one and it offered more satisfactory results. In the first cycle, the observation took place when teams of two or three students made demo lesson presentations using the Total Physical Response (TPR) teaching method. Once the presenters finished teaching, the rest of the class, acting as peer evaluators, provided feedback to the presenters. After that, the observed teacher (the class teacher of Didactics) also gave feedback to the presenters on the demo lesson and the two external observers gave feedback to the class teacher so that he could improve his teaching process. The main suggestions were on the use of the mother tongue by the class students when doing group work, suggestions about checking if students had understood instructions to do the activities, etc. Then, a second cycle was planned and developed. In cycle 2, the observation process was similar to cycle 1, but the students planned and taught a demo lesson using the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) methodology, and the teacher of Didactics incorporated the recommendations made in the first cycle. This time, before the students started teaching the demo lessons, the teacher showed a Power Point with written general rules, discussed them with the students, and asked students to consider them when teaching the demo lessons. These included general rules for presenting and evaluating the presentations, as well as other important points to observe while the demo lessons were taught. This second observation offered the following results: The two observers noticed an improvement in the students' presentations and in the teacher's conduction of the class and in how he gave feedback to the students. The two observers coincided in their points of view. They considered that the teacher had implemented most of their recommendations and suggestions and that he had improved his teaching skills. Finally, the 26 students who participated in the study were interviewed. The interview results expressed a feeling of satisfaction with the demo lessons. The students said that they had learned and developed their teaching competencies through the demo lessons.

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

1   INTRODUCTION

The student teachers of the ELT training program at the National University of Education of Ecuador (UNAE) need to develop linguistic and methodological competencies for teaching English to achieve the requirements contained in their exit profile.

As part of their professional development, they need to take the subject *Didactics of English* in the third semester of their studies. Planning lessons to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) and teaching them is one of the main competencies that the student teachers must develop in the ELT program at UNAE. This requires the study of ELT methods such as TPR, PPP among others, and the CLT approach that they study in this subject.

To plan and teach demo lessons using these methods, the students use Jeremy Harmers' adapted lesson plan, Harmer, J (2010, p.161) [1] to plan the lessons and they conduct the demo lessons, teaching their classmates in English. These assume the roles of senior and junior school students. When some student teachers teach, others 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 demo lessons offer student teachers the possibility to create and use didactic techniques and strategies from the ELT methods that they are studying which facilitate the target language learning process in junior and senior high schools in the Ecuadorian country. This is an essential competency to be developed by student teachers so that they can accomplish what is mandated in the 2016 EFL Ecuadorian macro curriculum.

Therefore, this paper is linked to a specific strand of an overarching research project at UNAE: *Management of innovative and creative didactic techniques that facilitate the teaching-learning processes of English in the students of basic education and high school* (PINE Major Project, 2018) [3]

To investigate the research problem described above, that is the gap between the exit profile requirements and the lack of detail in the syllabus for the subject *Didactics of English*, the author decided that observing demo lessons may be an appropriate strategy because it could contribute to the student teachers' learning and the class teacher's way of facilitating that learning in an area that combines language learning and pedagogical knowledge.

Consequently, the following overall aim has been set for the AR project: To illustrate how **demo lessons** can contribute to the development of professional competence in the exit profile of student teachers accomplishing their ELT training program at UNAE, the author began his research by reviewing the essential literature about the main categories in the overall aim of the study and of the AR process conducted.

Since this AR process investigates two forms of peer observation (a teacher colleague and a senior student observing a class teacher, and student teachers observing each other), the literature review referring to these two categories was treated separately. First, the literature related to teachers (or senior colleagues) observing each other and second peer observation and feedback by student teachers.

Richards and Farrell (2005, p.83) [4] explained that "observation can be a part of the process of teacher development rather than [...] a component of appraisal".

On the other hand, Kamimura and Takiwaza (2012, p.18) [5], who use the terms 'teaching demonstration' (to peers) and 'microteaching' interchangeably, investigated the effects of peer feedback on student teachers' teaching demonstrations. They concluded that: a) student teachers found feedback provided by their peers helpful; b) student teachers were also able to incorporate the comments made by their peers in the second round of their teaching demonstrations leading to "marked improvements in their performance".

As in this context the demo classes were mostly given by pairs of student teachers, Yan and He, C (2017, p.209-215) [6] research on pair microteaching at a teacher education university in central China is especially pertinent. Pair microteaching was employed owing to a necessity, namely, time constraints and the large number of student teachers attending the English teaching methodology course. However, the university's course tutors also intended to develop collaboration by creating "a platform for student teachers to experiment collaboratively with the educational philosophies and pedagogies promoted in the methodology course". Ultimately, even though the majority of the 30 student teachers provided positive feedback on microteaching in general, two-thirds of the participants were of the opinion that pair microteaching is 'idealistic' because co-teaching does not exist in China. The authors stressed that "the skepticism about the feasibility of pair microteaching [...] seems to reflect the students' pragmatic aspirations to acquire teaching skills which could be directly applied in the real teaching context".

The terminology applied to a classroom event when a student teacher gives a lesson (or part of a lesson) to their peers is inconsistent. It is often referred to as microteaching, but in the context of the present study, it is more aptly called a demo (demonstration) lesson. Microteaching is usually perceived as a 'scaled-down' teaching situation in terms of class size, teaching time, and teaching task. Bell (2007, p.24) [7] defined microteaching as "the common practice of having students in educational methods courses "teach" a lesson to their peers in to gain experience with lesson planning and delivery". In our context, the 'demo classes' at the university in question are longer than the standard microteaching sessions and are delivered by pairs of student teachers,

who teach their peers for the duration of an average school class (40 minutes). These extended microteaching sessions, or demo lessons, appear to have the same advantages and disadvantages as those that are usually mentioned about microteaching.

The usefulness of microteaching as a widespread training exercise to learn effective teaching practices has been proven by several studies. Takkaç Tulgar (219, p.17) [8] stressed that one of the advantages of microteaching arises from the fact that "it offers a controlled setting in which pre-service teachers can have practical experience". She underlined that "in the simulated environments […] pre-service teachers can sense the identity of being teachers and understand the responsibilities and requirements of the profession".

2   METHODOLOGY

The paradigm of this project was constructivist; Widari & Jazadi (2019, p.58) [9] describe it as "a learning paradigm that argues that humans build the meaning of the various structures of knowledge that exist in themselves. The constructivist paradigm explains how knowledge is internalized by the learner". Previous experiences were used to create new ones based on the interactions of our participants; as a result, student teachers' competencies in planning and teaching demo lessons.

An exploratory action research process (AR) according to Smith & Rebolledo (2018, p.20) [10], "is a way to explore, understand and improve our practice as teachers" was used to carry out this study.

The AR process was developed in a natural context to collect accurate data. It allowed the researcher to study and to understand our condition better and take measures for improvement, as well as collect accurate data by analyzing actual behavior in a natural context.

The AR process conducted consists of two cycles and the used techniques are the survey, participant observation, and interview.

To begin the research, the first thing that was done was to survey the 36 teachers of English at UNAE to obtain their informed consent.

This AR process is organized in two cycles. In cycle 1, the observation is conducted when the students taught the demo lesson that they had planned using TPR. In the second cycle, the class observed when the students are taught the lesson using PPP and applying the principles of CLT. The observed participant was the teacher of 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 AR process taught the different ELT methods as part in 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 lesson. Then, the other ELT teacher and the senior student participating in the AR process observed how the teacher of Didactics discussed the lesson plan that each of the students had created, and the way 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 was designed by the researchers and validated by the research group and it was used for classroom observation.

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

3   RESULTS

3.1   Survey results

The survey applied to 36 English teachers at UNAE 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 AR 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).

3.2 Observations and Peflection process

In cycle 1 of the action research process, the observation took place when teams of two or three student teachers made demo lesson presentations using the TPR. In each team, one of the students presented the lesson plan and the other(s) taught the demo lesson. At the same time, another team of student teachers made the peer observation and evaluation of the presented activity. Once presenters finished teaching, the peer evaluators provided the feedback. After that, the observed teacher also gave feedback to the presenter student teachers on the demo lesson they had planned and taught using the TPR method.

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

The observers pointed out that the presenter students did not use many of the TPR strategies and techniques. They used the traditional techniques that they had learned in the previously studied ELT methods and they did not show the physical posture required for an EFL teacher when teaching (e.g., pulling shoulders back, keeping eye contact with the audience, avoiding turning their back to the audience). Observers also told the observed teacher that he had given the feedback to the presenters only orally and it might be better to give it in writing so that the students store the comments in their long-term memory. They also commented that the quality of the presenters' slides was not good enough. They also noticed that not all the students acting as peer observers and evaluators spoke for the same amount of time. Only one of them gave feedback to the presenters and 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 were speaking 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, and visual contact (overthought this was highlighted by the evaluator students).
- To give students 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.
- To give the students the chance to reflect on how some activities presenters did were related to the TPR method (not just to repeat the sentences teachers wrote on the whiteboard but also, for example, use the "broken phone" strategy).

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

- The teacher should guarantee that students do not speak Spanish while working on activities in small groups
- 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 observers 1 and 2 coincided, these were discussed and analyzed with the observed teacher.

In cycle 2, the observation process was similar to the first cycle, however, students planned and taught a demo lesson using PPP. The teacher of Didactics incorporated the recommendations made by the observers in the first cycle. The objective of the observers 1 and 2 was to check 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:

The observed teacher started the lesson by highlighting the importance of incorporating the teaching techniques, and strategies derived from the teaching method under study, namely the PPP methodology in this demo lesson. Hence, student teachers presenting the demo lesson should illustrate what to do in the Presentation, Practice, and Production stages of their lesson. He also emphasized on the constant use of English both by the student teachers teaching the demo lesson and by the ones acting as senior or high school students when doing pair or group work. In this sense, he warned all the student teacher that he would give a red card to anyone who spoke Spanish and then, at the end of the lesson, he would deduct a point from their systematic evaluation.

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

- ***When presenting***:
- Talk to your students, not to the board!
- Do not stand up in front of the board impeding your students to see what is written on it.
- Be enthusiastic, try to engage your audience so that they feel motivated, and pay attention to you!
- ***When evaluating***
- 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.
- Presenters' posture, tone of voice, and visual contact.

The teacher also explained and illustrated the use of CCQs and ICQs.

Then, during the demo lesson presentations, the class teacher took down notes of the mistakes made and gave the presenters written feedback on the digital platform.

The two observers noticed an improvement in the students' presentations in the teacher's conduction of the class and in 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. The two observers pointed out that:

The lesson began with more practical activities. 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 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 spoke Spanish while working in groups. In this class, the rubric that had been used in the previous cycle for the peer observation and evaluation was simplified to the third-semester students' needs and level. The researchers realized that the rubric was too demanding for the student's 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 ICQs so that the students could see their value in verifying the students' understanding of the e instructions. Each 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 class participation. The improvements in the methodology used by the observed teacher to guide and assess the students when planning and teaching the demo lessons during the observations in the two AR cycles proved to be effective. However, the researchers decided to 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.

3.3   Interview results

The interview was conducted with the 26 students who participated in the study. That is all the students in the class where the AR 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. 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 improve 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 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 to use ELT methods, activities, strategies and techniques.

*S*tudents' answers to questions 2 and 3: What challenges did you face when you had to plan and teach the demo lessons? How could you overcome the challenges from the previous question?

Thirteen students reported that the most common challenge they faced was the understanding of the lesson plan template. They also said that they overcame this challenge with the feedback they received. To the same question, nine students reported nervousness. Interestingly, four of them reported this was something they have not overcome yet.

Some answers to question 2 were: to apply the methodology according to the students' age, to teach the lesson, not to know if the lesson would be interesting for the audience, and to learn to accept the classmates' feedback.

4   CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the teacher of Didactics of English considers that he improved his teaching methodology to conduct the student teachers' lesson planning skills and demo lesson teaching competencies that they need to develop as an essential element of their exit profile. The recommendations made in the two observation processes allowed the teacher to improve his methodology to conduct the student teachers teaching the demo lessons as he incorporated the suggestions of the two observers for the betterment of his classes and student teachers' 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. The gathered and discussed data during the AR process supports this thinking.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

[1] J. Harmer, "*How to teach English*?" Essex, England. Pearson Education Limited, Second edition, 2010.

[2] Delta handbook for tutors and candidates. Retrieved from https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/181161-delta-handbook-for-tutors-and-candidatesdocument.pdf

[3] A. Orosz, "Demo Lessons and Peer Observation to Enhance Student Teachers' Competencies and Exit Profiles" International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research Vol, 22 no. 6 pp. 638 - pp. 658, 2023. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.6.32.

[4] J. C, Richards & T. Farrell "Professional development for language teachers: Strategies for teacher learning. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667237

[5] T. Kamimura & T. Takizawa "The effects of peer feedback on student teachers' teaching demonstrations in an EFL teacher-training course in Japan". CORE, pp.5 – pp.23, 2012. Retrieved from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71787981.pdf

[6] C. Yan & C. He "Pair microteaching: An unrealistic pedagogy in pre-service methodology courses?" *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol, *43* no. 2 pp. 206 – pp. 218, 2017. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2017.1286783

[7] N. D. Bell "Microteaching: What is it that is going on here?" *Linguistics and Education*, Vol, *18,* no.1 pp. 24 – pp. 40, 2007. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2007.04.002

[8] A. Takkaç Tulgar "The effects of microteaching practices on pre-service EFL teachers' professional self-efficacy development". *Erzincan Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol, *21 no.* 2 pp. 15 – pp. 29, 2019. Retrieved from   https://doi.org/10.17556/erziefd.519041

[9] I.Widari & Jazadi, I. "Constructivist learning paradigm in the introduction to education subject". Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn), Vol, 13 no.1 pp. 57 – pp. 65, 2019. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v13i1.10424

[10] R. Smith & Rebolledo, P. *"A handbook for exploratory action research".* London: British Council, 2018.