An Investigation into Teachers' Use of AI Platforms to Design PPP Lesson Plans for Young EFL Learners

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Abstract: *Designing a comprehensive PPP (Presentation – Practice – Production) lesson plan for young EFL learners might be a challenge since the activities for young EFL learners' classes need to be engaging enough to attract their attention. Thanks to the advancement of AI (Artificial Intelligence) platforms, lesson planning might no longer be such a hardship. This study highlighted common problems teachers at an English language center faced when planning PPP lessons and explored how they used AI to tackle these problems. The findings from this study might offer valuable insights for educators and researchers seeking to optimize lesson planning processes using AI platforms, not only within young EFL learners' classes but also in the broader EFL context.*

Keywords: *PPP lesson plan, AI platforms, young EFL learners*

1. Introduction

According to Ellis (2014), young EFL learners include those ranging from the ages of 2 to 14. The general characteristic of this age group is that they are highly motivated when the English lessons are enjoyable (Cakir, 2004). Due to the scope of this article, the focus is on young EFL learners who are between 11-14 years old because the English language center under study (the research site) only enrolls learners in this age group for its English courses.

At the site under scrutiny, lessons for young EFL learners put an emphasis on vocabulary and grammar teaching, which makes using PPP lesson plans ideal for teachers. Although the PPP paradigm is relatively easy to adopt and helps to provide a clear and logical lesson structure, what makes the participating teachers struggle with is how to design interesting activities for each stage of this paradigm.

Even though participating teachers are aware that there are several online resources offering different teaching activities for PPP lesson plans, they fear that once these resources are used up, looking for new activities may be challenging. Fortunately, with the use of AI, the potential for designing creative activities for PPP lesson plans is limitless (Osama, 2023). In order to investigate how teachers at the research site use AI to design PPP lesson plans, two research questions are proposed as follows: (1) What problems do teachers encounter when designing PPP lesson plans for young EFL learners with non-AI online resources? and (2) How do teachers use AI platforms to design PPP lesson plans for young EFL learners?

2. Literature review

2.1 The PPP approach

The "Presentation – Practice – Production" (PPP) approach is initiated to build learners' communicative abilities. When planning a lesson which adopts the PPP paradigm, there are three distinct stages that teachers must follow. First, in the presentation stage, language items such as grammar points or vocabulary are explicitly presented. Next, in the practice stage, controlled practice is used to familiarize learners with the language items. Following the practice stage, learners are supposed to apply the language items in freer or free practice, with activities that require learners to produce the target language, either in oral or written form, using the language items from the lesson.

The PPP approach is appropriate for low-level EFL learners. In fact, it is widely used in young EFL learners' classes to teach grammar and vocabulary since it facilitates teachers in designing a well-organized lesson structure with three stages "Presentation – Practice – Production", from which EFL young learners can learn new language items logically (Ellis, 2018). Even though the PPP approach receives some criticism regarding how linear and rigid it is, some researchers have found out that a lot of EFL teachers manage to better their PPP lesson plans in different ways. Newton and Bui

(2021) observed that EFL teachers had tried to add interactive activities to the presentation stage to make it less "teacher-focused". Besides, Newton and Bui (2021) also revealed that EFL teachers did make an effort in modifying the sequences of the three stages "Presentation – Practice – Production" in their lesson plans so that the teaching activities are more enjoyable and interactive.

2.2 Using non-AI online resources in lesson planning

Non-AI online resources are traditional online platforms which do not incorporate artificial intelligence. These resources do not hold the ability to "interact" with users. According to Thanuskodi (2018), traditional online resources are defined as pages and documents on the internet that offer useful information sought by the internet users.

Thanks to non-AI online resources, teachers could have access to different activities for EFL young learners' classes. Despite the variety of teaching activities provided by non-AI online resources, there exist some major problems. Among these, there are two widely reported problems. First, these resources are static and some of them are outdated. Second, many of them waste a lot of EFL teachers' time in revising and adapting (Nguyen, 2008). As a result, teachers find it necessary to look for other resources that are regularly updated and that can be easily customized, enabling them to create efficient lesson plans and to save their lesson planning time.

2.3 Using AI platforms in lesson planning

Unlike non-AI online resources, AI platforms are described as systems that "use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve kinds of problems now reserved for humans and improve themselves." Clarifying what AI is, Nilsson (2010) states that "Artificial intelligence is that activity devoted to making machines intelligent, and intelligence is that quality that enables an entity to function appropriately and with foresight in its environment" (p. 13). Overall, AI can be described as the internet-based platforms which can interact with users either under verbal or written forms (i.e. through messages users type in the chat box in AI platforms).

Regarding the benefits of AI platforms in ELT, the first advantage is that they can help tailor different individual learning experiences in terms of the learners' needs and learning paces (Al-khresheh, 2024). With the aid of AI, teachers' workloads, especially in the lesson planning process, have

significantly reduced (Sharifuddin & Hashim, 2024). Additionally, Edmett et al. (2024) claim that AI can support teachers in adopting various ELT approaches in their lesson plans to meet students' needs.

2.4. Findings

In order to have a comprehensive view of how teachers at the research site used AI to design PPP lesson plans for young EFL learners, the qualitative approach was employed. Regarding the research tool, an open-ended questionnaire with five questions was used. Responses to these questions from the participating teachers were then collected and analyzed thematically.

With reference to the first research question "What problems do teachers encounter when designing PPP lesson plans for young EFL learners with non-AI online resources?", the participating teachers claimed that concerning the presentation stage, the activities found from the non-AI online resources are mainly teacher-focused rather than learner-focused, which led to the lack of students' engagement. These responses from the participating teachers agree with what has been acknowledged from Sanako Blog (2022). With the practice stage, it is troublesome for the participating teachers to find controlled activities beyond those that are repeatedly used, such as drilling, multiple-choice or gap-filling tasks. Regarding the production stage, the primary obstacle is to find the activities that suit the young learners' levels in terms of complexity. Therefore, the participating teachers must invest a great amount of time adjusting these to guarantee that they are neither too difficult nor too easy for their learners. This, in fact, aligns with the findings of Nguyen (2008).

Alternating non-AI online resources, AI has been used in planning lessons for young EFL learners at the research site. To gain an insight into how AI platforms were used by the participating teachers, the second research question "How do teachers use AI platforms to design PPP lesson plans for young EFL learners?" was raised. Concerning this issue, teachers at the research site said that two of their favorite AI platforms for lesson planning are ChatGPT and Copilot. Between these two AI platforms, the participating teachers mentioned that they would use Chat GPT if they did not need to use images in their lesson. Otherwise, they would opt for Copilot if they needed to create AI pictures. Below are the steps most participating teachers follow when using these two platforms to design PPP lesson plans.
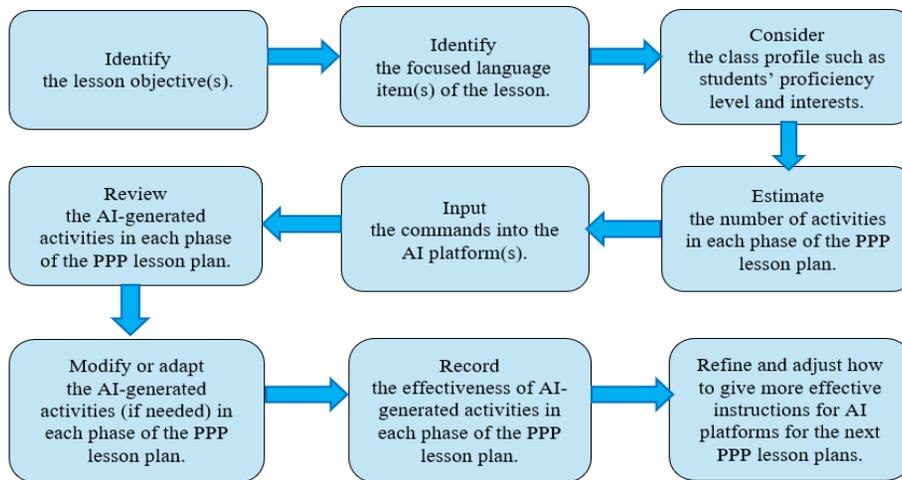
Figure 1. Process of designing PPP lesson plan using AI platforms

They shared that using AI platforms facilitates the process of planning PPP lessons in different ways. First, these AI platforms allow teachers to create lesson plans in which all the activities match with specific lesson objectives. The second benefit of the AI platforms is that they help teachers save a lot of time in searching for appropriate activities for each phase of the PPP approach. With the correct commands or requirements typed in the chat box of the AI platforms, a list of activities was listed instantly along with detailed information on how to carry out these activities. All of these positive responses reggarding the use of AI in designing lesson plans are consistent with the findings of Al-khresheh (2024), Sharifuddin & Hashim (2024) as well as Edmett et al. (2024).

Apart from the merits of AI platforms, there are certain challenges when using them to design PPP lesson plans. First, the participating teachers pointed out that they sometimes felt overly dependent on the AI-generated content. They noticed that without the aid of AI, their creativity in coming up with ideas for the activities in each phase of the PPP lesson plan was diminished. Second, the participating teachers also reported that the generated-AI teaching met their requirements only when they typed as detailed instructions or commands as possible in the chat box of the AI platform. This process was occasionally time-consuming as they had to retype the commands multiple times to interact with AI to ensure that it produced suitable activities which met the participating teachers' needs.

3. Conclusion

Due to the advancement of AI platforms, the PPP lesson planning process has become much more streamlined. AI platforms facilitate lesson planning in terms of saving teachers' planning time and being able to design the lessons that match the lesson objectives. Yet, notable drawbacks of using AI in lesson planning are the sense of overreliance of the teachers on AI and the time spent on retyping the instructions into the chat box or message box of the AI platforms.

Despite the fact that AI can create a wide range of interesting activities in each phase of the PPP lesson plan, the roles of the teachers remain crucial. When using AI to design PPP lesson plans, teachers act as the navigators responsible for guiding the AI by inputting accurate instructions into the AI platforms. Moreover, teachers also act as the assessors who review whether the AI-generated activities align with the lesson's objectives and the class profiles. Therefore, when using AI to design PPP lesson plans or lesson plans in general, teachers should effectively fulfill the roles both as the navigators and assessors so that their lesson plans can be successfully implemented in the classroom.

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