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Pre-Service Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Competence in Writing a Lesson Plan

Helen Funmilola Okunade
Department of Social Science Education
Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado - Ekiti, Nigeria
engineersam2003@gmail.com

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Abstract: *This paper critically reviews pre-service teachers' knowledge and competence in lesson planning, with a focus on the disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Lesson planning is defined as a multifaceted cognitive and professional skill involving the integration of content knowledge, pedagogy, awareness of learners and assessment. Leveraging recent literature, the research shows that although pre-service teachers may have knowledge of lesson planning elements, they often struggle to align teaching and learning objectives with teaching, learning and assessment strategies. One of the key observations is the ongoing mismatch between self-reported and actual competence, where pre-service teachers' self-confidence often outstrips their instructional ability. Moreover, the study underscores the growing relevance of technological competence in lesson planning, with varying levels of pre-service teachers' competence to incorporate technology in lesson planning. Furthermore, factors such as insufficient teaching experiences, lack of mentoring and contextual factors, especially in developing countries, play a major role in competence development. This paper concludes that lesson planning competence is dependent on the interplay of cognitive, technological, experiential and contextual factors. It concludes that to improve teacher education, there needs to be an emphasis on moving from a knowledge-focused to a competence-focused approach, with a focus on experience, reflection and digital integration to enhance teaching.*

Keywords: pre-service teachers, lesson planning competence, perceived knowledge, teacher education, digital pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Lesson planning is acknowledged as a critical teacher competency in the context of teacher education, and a link between theory and practice. It offers a framework for teachers to define learning goals, plan teaching strategies and assessment tasks to support the teaching and learning process. For aspiring teachers, the process of designing effective and coherent lesson plans is not just a mechanical process but a cognitive skill that showcases their knowledge of content, pedagogy and learners' needs (Süral, 2019). Recently, there has been a growing emphasis on exploring the knowledge and skills pre-service teachers have when it comes to designing lesson plans. This is especially critical with the changing

educational requirements such as incorporating digital technologies, student-centered pedagogies and competency-based learning (Aleksieva, 2025). As a result, teacher preparation programs are required to provide pre-service teachers with not only basic teaching skills but also more advanced skills that are in line with the demands of 21st century learning.

Research evidence suggests that while pre-service teachers may have basic knowledge of lesson planning, their skills in applying lesson planning principles vary. For example, Cuñado and Abocejo (2019) reported pre-service teachers were able to describe the components of a lesson, but had difficulties in aligning the goals of instruction with assessment methods. Similarly, Widiasih et al. (2017) found pre-service teachers' lesson planning competence was constrained by a lack of problem solving and pedagogical skills. A significant aspect of this debate is the perceived and real competence. Perceived competence, as gauged by self-reporting, refers to individuals' self-perceptions of their abilities whereas actual competence is assessed through their performance. Studies indicate that pre-service teachers often perceive their competence level to be higher than it actually is, resulting in a disconnection between perceived and actual teaching competence (Matjašič & Vogrinc, 2025). This gap is crucial for teacher training, as overestimations of abilities may prevent pre-service teachers from recognising their own learning needs and stunting their professional development (Matjašič & Vogrinc, 2025).

Lesson planning is also becoming more complex with the inclusion of digital competence. As digital technologies increasingly become embedded in education, pre-service teachers need to integrate technology into lesson planning. But research shows a range of digital preparedness, with some pre-service teachers not having the necessary digital skills to incorporate technology into their lesson plans (Göltl et al, 2024). This situation highlights the need for an emphasis on digital pedagogy in teacher education. In Nigeria, issues of teacher readiness, lack of resources and access to professional development training opportunities compound these challenges. Ifarajimi et al. (2025) discuss the importance of mentoring in developing teachers' professional competence, underscoring the need for mentoring programs to support teacher preparation. This can hinder pre-service teachers' ability to effectively apply their knowledge in the classroom.

In this context, this paper seeks to critique pre-service teachers' perceived knowledge and competence in writing lesson plans through an analysis of recent literature to determine factors, issues and implications for teacher education. Through the synthesis of evidence from multiple contexts, the research adds to the discussion around how to enhance teacher preparation quality and effectiveness of teaching.

Conceptualising Lesson Planning Knowledge among Pre-Service Teachers

Lesson planning knowledge is a multifaceted concept which refers to pre-service teachers' conceptualisation of principles, structures and processes in lesson planning for effective teaching. It transcends merely filling out lesson plan templates and represents the mental ability to structure content, align teaching goals with learning outcomes, and take into account students' needs in a framework of planning for teaching and learning. In the teacher education literature, lesson planning knowledge is typically described as a combination of declarative knowledge (knowing what), procedural knowledge (knowing how) and conditional knowledge (knowing when and why) in lesson planning.

Fundamentally, lesson planning knowledge encompasses knowledge of the key elements of a lesson plan such as learning objectives, resources, teaching and learning strategies, classroom activities and assessment tasks. But this knowledge of the components does not necessarily lead to good planning. Research indicates many pre-service teachers often have a surface-level grasp, with an emphasis on adhering to template formats, rather than effective lesson design (Süral, 2019). This suggests that lesson planning knowledge needs to be defined not just in terms of knowledge of components, but also of their integration to achieve learning goals.

An important component of lesson planning knowledge is alignment. This involves the inter-relationship between learning objectives, activities and assessment. Research indicates that pre-service teachers have difficulties achieving this, resulting in disjointed lesson plans which do not promote learning (Cuñado & Abocejo, 2019). For example, learning objectives may be focused on higher-level thinking skills, but teaching activities are low-level and focused on rote memorisation. This haphazardness shows lack of conceptualisation and requires a greater understanding of principles of instruction. A further crucial aspect is organisation and sequencing of content. Organising and sequencing material is an essential component of lesson planning as it facilitates progressive learning, from simple to complex materials and ensuring connectedness. Widiasih et al. (2017) noted pre-service teachers often struggle with the ability to organise content, and often teach in a piecemeal way. This inhibits learners' knowledge construction and implies that lesson planning knowledge needs to be based on knowledge of cognitive processes.

Additionally, lesson planning knowledge includes being able to predict learners' diversity and to plan accordingly. This includes awareness of learners' different levels of prior knowledge, learning styles and abilities. But research shows pre-service teachers tend to have a "one size fits all" approach, with little integration of differentiation strategies in their lesson plans (Taylan, 2018). This underscores the importance of thinking about lesson planning knowledge in an inclusive and responsive, rather than rigid and monolithic, manner. Another key element in this construct is the designing of assessment within lesson plans. Lesson plans that include formative and summative assessment that matches the objectives are key to successful teaching. However, many pre-service teachers lack knowledge of how to design assessments, and tend to view assessment as a separate rather than an integrated component of teaching (Süral, 2019). This creates gaps in the effectiveness of lesson planning and opportunities to assess and improve student learning.

In today's classrooms, knowledge of digital competence is a growing component of lesson planning knowledge. Knowledge of how to use digital tools and resources in lesson plans is now recognised as vital for teaching. Göltl et al. (2024) stress that although pre-service teachers are familiar with digital technologies, their pedagogical knowledge of how to use these technologies is varied. This points to the need for lesson planning knowledge to expand to incorporate digital literacy. Moreover, contextual knowledge is crucial in developing lesson planning knowledge. In this sense, pre-service teachers need to be aware of the educational context in which they find themselves - the curriculum, institutional policy and socio-cultural factors. In a developing country like Nigeria, other contexts such as lack of resources and high pupil-teacher ratio add complexity to lesson planning. Ifarajimi et al. (2025) highlight that an understanding of the context is crucial for lesson plans to be both theoretical and practical.

In conclusion, pre-service teachers' knowledge of lesson planning is multifaceted and dynamic, going beyond technical skills. It encompasses the alignment of teaching and learning, curriculum and content

organisation, responsiveness to learners, assessment, digital technology integration and context. While critical, research indicates pre-service teachers frequently have disconnected and superficial knowledge, suggesting that there is a need for more sophisticated approaches to training to encourage conceptual and practical knowledge and skill.

Conceptualising Competence in Lesson Plan Development among Pre-Service Teachers

Competence in lesson plan development is the operationalisation of lesson planning knowledge, and refers to the practical skills to apply conceptual knowledge in lesson plan design, implementation and evaluation. Competence is not just cognitive but also practical, and manifests as skills, behaviours or dispositions of pre-service teachers in the process of lesson planning. It is thus a multifaceted construct, which combines cognitive, technical and reflective skills. Central to the competence of lesson planning is translating knowledge into planning strategies. Pre-service teachers might know the parts of a lesson plan, but it is through the competence of their ability to create coherent, engaging and effective lessons that align to learning goals that they demonstrate competence. Studies show that this knowledge translation is often complex and many pre-service teachers have difficulties in translating knowledge into practice (Dragnić-Cindrić & Anderson, 2025). This implies that competence involves more than knowledge - it involves skill and experience.

Planning skills are a key element of competence in teaching. Such skills include choosing suitable teaching strategies, creating interactive learning tasks and incorporating resources. Knowledgeable pre-service teachers are flexible and adaptable, and adapt their teaching methods to match the learning goals. But research suggests that pre-service teachers tend to use more traditional, teacher-centered teaching methods, suggesting a lack of competence in lesson planning for interactive and student-centered experiences (Christodoulou & Papanikolaou, 2023). The other key aspect is planning for classroom management. Lesson plans should be designed to account for possible classroom situations and strategies to keep the classroom in order and students engaged. According to Moradi (2019), effective lesson plans play a key role in classroom management by offering guidance on the flow and interaction in the classroom. When pre-service teachers are not competent in this aspect, they may struggle with classroom management, affecting student learning.

Lesson planning competence includes reflective practice. Pre-service teachers with high levels of competence reflect on their lesson plans, analysing their effectiveness and making improvements. This helps improve teaching and enhance their professional development. Sonsupap et al. (2025) note that collaborative learning strategies, like lesson study and communities of practice, enhance reflection competence, allowing pre-service teachers to develop their planning skills with the help of feedback and discussions. Lesson planning competence is also enhanced by digital competence in today's digital world. Lesson planning competence now includes the skill of planning for the use of technology in lessons, especially in digital learning spaces. Veyis and Ciğerci (2025) show that pre-service teachers with greater digital competence are more successful in creating innovative lessons. But inequities in access to technology and training can hinder the development of this competence, especially in disadvantaged contexts.

Personal self-efficacy also impacts competence. Preservice teachers who believe in their own capabilities are more likely to take risks and try new approaches in teaching, even in challenging situations. In contrast, low self-efficacy can be a barrier to competence through decreased engagement and motivation. Matjašič and Vogrinc (2025) report that to increase self-efficacy, it's important to create a positive learning environment and opportunities for success and feedback. Lesson planning

competence is enhanced by mentoring and practicum experiences. Hands-on experience enables pre-service teachers to put their knowledge into practice in classroom environments, providing a real-life learning experience. Ifarajimi et al. (2025) highlight the importance of mentoring, which offers support, feedback and mentorship, ultimately boosting competence. Without mentoring, skill deficits and poor teaching practice can occur.

Additionally, lesson planning competence is shaped by contextual elements such as institutional, curriculum and socio-cultural. Pre-service teachers need to consider these factors to develop effective and contextually appropriate lesson plans. This involves flexibility and critical thinking, key aspects of competence. Overall, pre-service teachers' competence in lesson plan development is a complex concept that includes skills in instructional design, planning for classroom management, reflection, integration of digital technologies, self-efficacy and adaptability to various contexts. Although pre-service teachers might have the basic knowledge, competence is cultivated through practice, feedback and a positive learning experience. Enhancing competence is crucial to enhance teaching quality and promote effective learning in a range of teaching contexts.

Empirical Evidence on Pre-Service Teachers' Lesson Planning Knowledge and Competence

In recent years, empirical studies of pre-service teachers' lesson planning have grown in number, reflecting the concerns about teacher quality and its impact on teaching and learning. Across a wide range of settings, research explores three interdependent areas: (i) the knowledge pre-service teachers have about lesson planning, (ii) their competence in applying this knowledge to practice and (iii) the contextual and institutional factors that influence knowledge and competence. The findings point to a fundamental issue - despite frequently reporting moderate to high perceived knowledge, empirical tests of pre-service teachers' performance often show significant deficiencies in their competence, especially in terms of alignment of instruction with learning outcomes, learner-centredness and use of digital media.

There is considerable empirical research on the relationship between perceived and actual competence. Matjašič and Vogrinc (2025) offer strong evidence that pre-service teachers overestimate their knowledge and skills in research, teaching and lesson planning. The authors show that self-reported competence is not always in line with performance measures, implying that using self-report instruments may mask actual shortcomings. Likewise, Podgornik et al. (2026) found both pre-service and in-service teachers tend to be confident in their teaching abilities, but falter when put to the test in practical performance assessments. This disconnect is significant as over-confidence may reduce receptivity to feedback and inhibit development.

There are empirical studies that target the structure of lesson plans, which show a consistent lack of coherence and alignment in lesson plan structures. Cuñado and Abocejo (2019) reported that while pre-service teachers were able to identify the components of a lesson plan (such as objective, activity and assessment), they often lacked the ability to connect these components. As a consequence, their lesson plans are technically complete but ineffective teaching designs. This is backed up by Süral (2019), who found pre-service teachers may be proficient in filling in the lesson plan formats but they are not well prepared for designing effective learning experiences. This is supported by the work of Widiasih et al. (2017), who found pre-service teachers' lesson planning was limited by poor problem solving skills, thus failing to produce well-connected and well sequenced lessons.

Another key empirical theme relates to the influence of pedagogical content knowledge on lesson planning ability. Dragnić-Cindrić and Anderson (2025) explored the case of pre-service science teachers and reported that lack of pedagogical content knowledge limited pre-service teachers' lesson planning skills. The pre-service teachers had difficulties converting their understanding of the content into teachable material, including anticipating students' misconceptions and difficulties. Similarly, Namder and Kucuk (2018) showed that although pre-service teachers were able to evaluate lesson plans, their skills in improving lesson plans were weak, suggesting a deficit in practical pedagogical reasoning skills. This is also supported by Taylan (2018) who demonstrated that pre-service teachers fail to take into account students' thinking processes in lesson plans, which negatively impacts the success of teaching strategies.

Research provides empirical evidence of the impact of teaching and learning strategies and pedagogical beliefs. In Christodoulou and Papanikolaou (2023), for example, pre-service teachers with higher critical thinking skills were more inclined to develop learner-centred lesson plans that engage students in critical thinking and higher order thinking. But the study found that many pre-service teachers are more inclined to adhere to traditional teacher-centred approaches due to which their ability to adopt constructivist pedagogies is constrained. Similarly, Koçulu (2025) observed that pre-service teachers may fail to incorporate new pedagogical approaches, such as education for sustainable development, into their lesson plans although they may see the need to do so.

Teachers' digital skills are crucial for effective lesson planning in the modern world. Göltl et al. (2024) offer empirical evidence that pre-service teachers vary in their digital competence, and have often learned on their own. Although the participants were familiar with various digital tools, they showed varying degrees of digital competence when integrating digital tools in lesson planning. Veyis and Ciğerci (2025) build on this evidence by demonstrating that pre-service teachers with higher digital competence achieve better teaching outcomes, as well as planning more effective lessons. But the research also shows that digital competence, on its own, does not lead to effective teaching; it requires integration with pedagogy and content knowledge to have a positive effect on teaching. Aleksieva (2025) also stresses the importance of digital transformation in teacher education, with a need for university support to ensure pre-service teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge for effective technology-enhanced lesson planning.

Research also highlights the role of self-efficacy and confidence in developing lesson planning competence. Sonsupap et al. (2025) report that engagement in communities of practice and lesson study leads to pre-service teachers' increased self-efficacy and better lesson planning. This research shows that community learning contexts offer opportunities for feedback, reflection and problem-solving, critical to the development of competence. Sørensen and Lagestad (2026) also report the positive impact of student-centred teaching strategies on pre-service teachers' knowledge, indicating that experiential learning strategies are successful in translating theory into practice.

Another key focus of empirical studies is mentoring and practicum experiences. In Nigeria, Ifarajimi et al. (2025) discuss the importance of mentoring in the development of teachers' knowledge. This research shows that formal mentoring programs positively impact lesson planning by offering support, feedback and insights. But the study also points to the potential barriers, such as variability in mentoring quality and a lack of mentors, which may adversely affect competence. This research echoes other evidence that the quality of practicum experiences plays a crucial role in pre-service teachers' preparedness for practice.

Evidence from research in developing countries also identify the effects of systemic and contextual factors on lesson planning competence. For example, Ayinde (2018) shows that teacher competence in Nigeria is shaped by factors such as availability of resources, institutional and professional development programs. Systemic barriers such as limited resources for pre-service teachers to access resources and technology to support lesson planning often hamper their competence. Likewise, Pratiwi et al. (2020) show that technology tools can be used to improve lesson planning competence, but the infrastructure and training of users is crucial. This indicates the importance of taking context into account when assessing pre-service teachers' competence.

There is also evidence of the impact of structured instructional approaches and models. For instance, Traga Philippakos and Sipitanos (2025) explored the effects of genre-based strategy instruction on pre-service teachers' competence in teaching writing, and found structured teaching models were found to enhance lesson planning competence. The participants showed improved lesson planning ability in terms of designing coherent, focused lesson plans with targeted learning activities following a series of design-based research cycles. This indicates that structured pedagogic models can enable the development of advanced lesson planning.

Moreover, empirical research suggests the need to incorporate sustainability and interdisciplinary approaches in lesson plans. Vidal and Kuckuck (2025) point out that pre-service teachers' action competence in education for sustainable development is dependent on their skills in planning lessons that tackle real-life problems. But the study also shows that pre-service teachers are struggling with their competence to integrate sustainability issues into their lesson plans. This is supported by Koçulu (2025), who stresses the importance of training to develop competences in sustainable education.

Another new research trend in the empirical literature is how lesson planning competence relates to overall professional development. Matjašič and Vogrinc (2025) suggest that by fostering research competence in pre-service teachers, they become better in lesson planning because they are able to critically analyse teaching and learning strategies and apply them in the context. Likewise, Podgornik et al. (2026) emphasise the need to link research and practice in teacher education, and suggest that pre-service teachers who adopt a research-informed practice approach are more competent.

While empirical research is increasing, there are a number of areas where research is needed. Firstly, numerous studies are based on self-reported measures, which might not reflect real competence. Second, few studies have focused on the development of lesson planning competence over time. Third, we know little about the impact of context, especially in developing nations, and the transferability of lessons learned. These areas need to be addressed to gain a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' lesson planning competence.

To conclude, empirical studies suggest that although pre-service teachers have the general knowledge about lesson planning, considerable gaps lie in their lesson planning competence. These competency gaps are shaped by various factors such as pedagogical and digital knowledge, self-efficacy, mentoring and situational factors. The research highlights the importance for teacher education to take an integrated and eminently practical approach to knowledge and competence building. These approaches should focus on experiential learning, mentoring and the integration of digital and pedagogical skills to improve the quality of lesson planning of pre-service teachers.

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DISCUSSION

The integration of the theoretical and empirical literature highlights a complex and inter-related nexus between pre-service teachers' knowledge, competence and the contextual factors that influence lesson planning skills. One prominent and consistent theme is the ongoing gap between pre-service teachers' self-reported confidence and their actual lesson planning skills. Pre-service teachers often express moderate to high self-perceived confidence in their lesson planning skills, but empirical assessments consistently reveal gaps in lesson planning in terms of pedagogic alignment, reasoning and classroom application (Matjašič & Vogrinc, 2025; Süral, 2019). This misalignment is not simply a matter of measurement but a pedagogical problem - teacher education is likely to be quite effective in imparting theoretical knowledge, but not as effective in supporting pre-service teachers to internalise and apply knowledge in practice.

Such misperception of skill has implications for teaching quality. Overconfidence in pre-service teachers can reduce their willingness to seek and use feedback or engage in processes of reflection for improvement. Podgornik et al. (2026) postulate that in the absence of processes through which performance can be evaluated and processes for reflection can be guided, these perceptions can carry on to early teaching experiences and impact classroom practice. As such, the focus is not only on improving knowledge acquisition, but the processes involved in the development of competence.

A further key consideration that emerges from the literature is the competence of using digital media in lesson planning. The digitalisation of education has shifted lesson planning from a traditional to a digital process. Research evidence shows that although pre-service teachers are familiar with digital tools, their digital competence is not consistent in integrating digital tools in pedagogical practice (Göltl et al., 2024). Moreover, Veyis and Ciğerci (2025) show that digital competence has a positive impact on the quality of the lesson design, but uneven access, training and support from educational institutions result in varying digital competence among pre-service teachers. The digital competence imbalance indicates the need to consider it not as an elective but as an integral part of lesson planning competence to be explicitly taught in teacher education programs.

Practical learning is a key factor in the development of competence. Lesson study, micro-teaching and practicum experiences offer opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice and experiment with applying their knowledge in real or simulated classroom environments. Sonsupap et al. (2025) note that engagement in collaborative learning communities is a critical element in enhancing self-efficacy and teaching quality by providing feedback and opportunities for peer support and refinement of teaching plans. Likewise, Sørensen and Lagestad (2026) show that students' perceived knowledge and performance increase with student-centred teaching interventions, which implies that practical experiences promote cognitive and practical growth.

Additionally, the conversation highlights the role of contextual factors, especially in resource-limited contexts like Nigeria. Access to resources like teaching materials and mentoring, and institutional support, can limit the development of lesson planning competence, despite pre-service teachers' knowledge (Ifarajimi et al., 2025; Ayinde, 2018). Such contextual realities suggest the need for flexible and responsive teacher education approaches that consider contextual realities and pedagogical demands. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that pre-service teachers' lesson planning competence is not merely an outcome of knowledge, but is influenced by a myriad of cognitive, technological,

experiential and contextual factors. To overcome the identified challenges, a shift from content-focused to competence-based teacher education with a focus on practice, reflection and contextualisation is needed.

Implications for Teacher Education

This study has important implications for the design and provision of teacher education, especially in terms of ensuring pre-service teachers' strong lesson planning competence. The findings of a knowledge-practice gap indicate a need for a more integrated and experiential approach to teaching and learning, which includes a balance between theoretical knowledge, practical experience and technological skills.

First, enhancing practicum experiences is crucial. Practicum is the key platform for pre-service teachers to apply their theoretical learning in teaching practice. Yet, research evidence shows that practicum is often poorly structured or lacks support, impacting effectiveness (Ifarajimi et al., 2025). Therefore, teacher preparation programs should focus on the provision of long-term and supported practicum experiences, including guided observation, feedback on lesson planning and on-going feedback. Inclusion of reflective journals and performance tasks during practicum can also enhance learning experiences by promoting self-reflection.

Second, incorporating digital pedagogy instruction is becoming essential. With the increasing technology-driven nature of the classroom, pre-service teachers need to learn how to develop technology-enhanced lesson plans. This means that pre-service teachers must not only be digitally literate, but also pedagogically digitally competent, using technology to enhance teaching and learning (Göltl et al., 2024; Veyis & Ciğerci, 2025). Teacher preparation programs should thus offer technology integration courses, with practical training and access to technology.

Third, collaborative learning should be promoted for competence development. Research shows that collaborative learning strategies like lesson study, peer teaching and communities of practice play an important role in strengthening lesson planning and teaching skills and building teacher confidence (Sonsupap et al., 2025). These promote learning together, feedback sharing and problem solving, all of which contribute to the development of lesson planning skills. Collaborative approaches should be institutionalised in teacher education as opposed to being seen as extracurricular activities.

Fourth, improving mentoring is crucial. Mentoring offers pre-service teachers support, development and professional insights to support the move from theory to practice. But there are variations in the quality of mentoring, especially in developing countries (Ifarajimi et al., 2025). Structured mentoring programs, mentor training and strong mentor-mentee interactions contribute to enhancing lesson planning skills.

Moreover, teacher education should also adopt a competence-based approach in their assessment. Conventional assessment approaches (theory-based) should be complemented by practical assessments (lesson planning competence). This will help bridge the gap between self-reported and actual competence. In summary, these recommendations suggest the need for fundamental reform in teacher education in the areas of integration, practice and context. A more integrated approach by teacher education can equip pre-service teachers with the skills to develop effective lesson plans and effectively teach their classes.

CONCLUSION

Lesson planning knowledge and competence continues to be a key factor of teaching quality and a core goal of teacher education. This paper has explored pre-service teachers' perceived knowledge and competence with regard to lesson planning, based on conceptual and empirical research literature to provide an overview of trends and problems. A key message is that there remains a disconnect between perceived and actual lesson planning competence, suggesting that perceived knowledge and competence cannot be assumed.

The research indicates that although pre-service teachers have essential knowledge of lesson planning, they lack the skills to effectively use this knowledge. Factors such as poor alignment of learning intentions, lack of learner-centred practices and low digital literacy of teachers continue to adversely impact lesson planning. These challenges are exacerbated by contextual factors, such as lack of mentoring and practicum experiences, and limited resources, especially in developing countries.

To overcome these issues, teacher education needs to be reformed. A shift in focus from knowledge to competence, and more opportunities for experiential learning, reflection and technology integration are needed. Practical experiences, peer learning and mentoring are critical to bridging the theory-practice gap. Finally, boosting pre-service teachers' competence in lesson planning is pedagogically important and a key strategy to enhance learning outcomes. Through a contextual, integrated approach to teacher preparation, universities can ensure pre-service teachers are well equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to plan and implement quality teaching practices in a changing world.

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