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SYSTEMATIZING THE STAGES OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE DESIGN FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Writing clear learning objectives is one of the most important skills for secondary school English language teachers. However, many teachers find this task difficult in everyday practice. They often write objectives that are too general, too narrow, or not connected to assessment. This article presents a seven-stage framework that helps teachers design lesson objectives in a clear and ordered way. The framework is based on classroom observation notes, teacher reflections, and a review of pedagogical literature. The seven stages are: curricular alignment, learner-needs analysis, language-skill specification, cognitive demand calibration, formulation of measurable outcomes, integration with assessment, and reflective revision. Each stage is explained with examples from secondary school English classrooms. The framework helps both new and experienced teachers. It also gives school methodologists and supervisors a shared tool for lesson observation and teacher development. The article discusses how the framework can be used in teacher training, lesson planning, and school-level methodological work.

Keywords: learning objectives, lesson planning, English language teaching, secondary school, teacher development, EFL pedagogy

1. Introduction

The objectives of a lesson play a key role in language teaching. They tell the teacher and the students what the lesson is for. They also guide the choice of activities and the kind of assessment the teacher will use. When objectives are clear, the lesson has a clear direction. When they are unclear, even good activities can feel disconnected.

Writing good objectives is especially difficult for secondary school English language teachers. These teachers must think about many things at the same time. They must follow the national curriculum. They must consider the language level of their students. They must remember that teenagers learn differently from younger children. And they must do all of this within the limits of one lesson period. Because of these challenges, many teachers write objectives in a hurry or copy them from textbooks. As a result, the objectives often do not guide the lesson well.

Most secondary school English teachers learn about learning outcomes during their initial training. However, they usually receive little practical help on how to write lesson objectives in a clear and step-by-step way. This is the main problem this article tries to solve. Many teachers know that objectives are important. They also know general categories of outcomes. What they often lack is a clear procedure—a fixed order of steps to follow when writing objectives for a real lesson.

This article proposes a seven-stage framework for writing lesson objectives. The framework is designed for the daily working conditions of secondary school English teachers. It does not replace existing models of learning outcomes such as Bloom's taxonomy. Instead, it shows teachers how to

use these models step by step in lesson planning. The framework supports new teachers, who need a clear map to follow. It also helps experienced teachers, who can use it to check and improve their habits. School methodologists and supervisors can use it as a shared reference during lesson observation and feedback.

The article answers three main questions. First, what difficulties do secondary school English teachers face when they write learning objectives? Second, what stages should they follow to design objectives that are clear, realistic, and well connected to assessment? Third, how can these stages be shown through simple classroom examples?

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on objective design and English language teaching. Section 3 explains the methods used in the study. Section 4 presents the seven-stage framework with examples. Section 5 discusses the meaning of the framework and its limits. Section 6 gives a short conclusion and ideas for future work.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Role of Learning Objectives in Lesson Design

Learning objectives have been at the center of lesson planning for many decades. Tyler (1949) argued that teachers should first decide what learners are expected to achieve, and then choose activities and assessments that match these expectations. Bloom (1956) developed this idea by creating a taxonomy of educational objectives. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) later updated the taxonomy. They gave teachers a shared language for talking about cognitive demand, that is, how complex the thinking required by an objective is.

In daily teaching, objectives serve four main functions. First, they help the teacher choose suitable activities during planning. Second, they tell students what to focus on, so that students can study more effectively. Third, they shape assessment by showing what should be measured. Fourth, they support reflection: after the lesson, the teacher can compare the result with the objective and judge if the lesson was successful. When any of these functions is weak, the lesson loses some of its coherence.

2.2 Special Demands of English Language Teaching

English language teaching at the secondary school level has its own special demands. First, English teaching covers four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each skill can be developed at different levels of difficulty. For example, a reading objective for finding the main idea is much simpler than one for understanding the writer's opinion. The teacher should clearly state which skill is targeted and at what level.

Second, language learning is cumulative and recursive. New words and grammar do not stand alone. They become useful only when they are combined with what learners have already studied. A good lesson objective should consider how the new content connects to earlier lessons and how it will appear again in future lessons. This makes language teaching different from subjects with a more linear structure.

Third, secondary school classes are usually mixed in level. Students of the same age often have very different English skills. This may be because of earlier teaching, exposure outside school, or motivation. An objective that fits the average student may be too easy for some and too hard for others. The teacher's task is to write an objective that holds the class together around a shared goal, while leaving room for differentiation in support and activities.

2.3 Common Difficulties in Writing Objectives

Several difficulties appear again and again in lesson plans and classroom observations. The first is mixing activities with outcomes. Teachers often write objectives such as students will read the text or students will discuss the topic. These statements describe what students will do during

the lesson. They do not describe what students will be able to do as a result of the lesson. This is a small but important difference. An activity is not the same as a learning outcome.

The second difficulty is the wrong level of generality. Some objectives are too broad: students will improve their English. This is a hope, not a guide for action. Other objectives are too narrow and break learning into small, disconnected pieces. The first kind gives no direction. The second kind makes the lesson feel like a list of tiny items rather than a meaningful learning experience.

The third difficulty is the gap between the objective and the assessment. A lesson plan may say: students will be able to express their opinion in English. But the only assessment is a multiple-choice exercise on vocabulary. In this case, the objective and the assessment do not match. When this happens often, the objective becomes decorative—it appears in the plan but does not influence the lesson. The fourth difficulty is the absence of revision. Many objectives are written once and used for years without being checked again.

2.4 Toward a Step by Step Framework

These difficulties suggest that what teachers need most is not more theory, but a procedure. A taxonomy gives categories. A procedure gives a sequence of decisions. The principle of constructive alignment, developed by Biggs and Tang (2011), states that objectives, activities, and assessment must fit together. This principle is widely accepted, but it works only when teachers know how to apply it through a clear set of steps. The framework in this article was created to fill exactly this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Type of Study

This study is conceptual and design-oriented. Its main goal is not to test a hypothesis with statistics. Instead, the goal is to build a clear, useful framework for everyday teaching. The study follows the tradition of design-based pedagogical research. In this tradition, the main result is a well-built tool—in this case, a stage-based framework—supported by classroom evidence and educational theory.

3.2 Sources of Evidence

The framework was built using three main sources. The first source was published literature on objective design, lesson planning, and English language teaching. This literature provided the theoretical base for the stages. The second source was a set of classroom observation notes and lesson plans. These materials were collected during regular professional development activities at secondary schools. They helped to identify common difficulties in writing objectives. The third source was teacher self-reports and reflective comments. These were collected informally during methodological seminars and post-lesson discussions. They showed how teachers themselves describe the problems they face.

3.3 How the Framework Was Built

The framework was developed in three steps. In the first step, common planning difficulties were identified from observation notes and teacher comments. They were grouped into themes. In the second step, possible stages were drafted to address these themes. Each stage was checked against the literature to make sure it was theoretically sound. In the third step, the stages were arranged in a logical order. For example, curricular alignment must come before learner-needs analysis, because the curriculum sets the framework within which learner needs are interpreted. The final framework was then reviewed by experienced English teachers and methodologists. Their comments helped to clarify the wording and the examples.

3.4 Scope and Limits

Two points about the methodology are important. First, the framework is a structured proposal. It is not yet an empirically tested intervention. Its effects on lesson quality and student learning need to be tested in future studies. Second, the framework is designed for typical secondary school English classes. Some stages may also be useful in primary school English teaching or other school subjects. However, the examples in Section 4 are taken from secondary school English teaching to keep them clear and immediately useful.

4. The Seven-Stage Framework

This section presents the framework as a sequence of seven stages. Each stage has a clear purpose and a guiding question. Each stage is also illustrated with a classroom example from secondary school English teaching. The stages are arranged in a logical order, but they are also iterative. This means that ideas from a later stage often lead to changes in earlier stages. Table 1 gives an overview before each stage is explained in detail.

Stage	Focus	Guiding Question
1	Curricular alignment	How does this lesson fit into the wider curricular goals for the year?
2	Learner-needs analysis	What can the students do now, and what is the next step for them?
3	Language-skill specification	Which language skills and sub-skills will the lesson develop?
4	Cognitive demand calibration	How complex should the thinking in this lesson be?
5	Formulation of measurable outcomes	How can the goal be written as a clear, observable performance?
6	Integration with assessment	What evidence will show that students have reached the objective?
7	Reflective revision	After the lesson, how should the objective be improved for next time?

Table 1. Overview of the Seven-Stage Framework

4.1 Stage 1: Curricular Alignment

The framework starts with curricular alignment because every lesson objective must come from a wider plan. At this stage, the teacher looks at the curriculum and asks: how does this lesson contribute to the goals of the year, the term, and the unit? The aim is not to copy curricular statements into the lesson plan. The aim is to clearly see where this lesson fits in the bigger picture. Without this step, lessons can become a series of nice activities with no shared direction.

For example, in secondary school English, the teacher may notice that the current unit develops the broad skill of communicating about everyday topics. The present lesson focuses on one part of this: expressing personal preferences. So, Stage 1 does not yet produce a final objective. It produces a clear statement of curricular position—this lesson is one step in a larger sequence.

4.2 Stage 2: Learner-Needs Analysis

After the curricular position is clear, the teacher considers the actual students who will attend the lesson. The aim of Stage 2 is to make sure the objective fits the real class, not an ideal class. Useful information includes recent quizzes, written work, oral performance, observed difficulties, and the teacher's professional judgment. A short diagnostic activity at the start of the lesson can also be helpful.

In our example, the teacher may notice that students can already form simple sentences with I like and I don't like. However, they have difficulty giving reasons for their preferences. This observation makes the goal of the lesson more specific: the lesson should help students go from simple preference statements to preference statements supported by reasons. Stage 2 makes sure the objective is neither too easy nor too hard for the class.

4.3 Stage 3: Language-Skill Specification

English teaching covers four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—each with its own sub-skills. Stage 3 asks the teacher to choose which skill or skills the lesson focuses on, and which sub-skills are most important. This step prevents a common problem: writing an objective that seems to cover all four skills equally in one lesson. In reality, most lessons focus on one or two skills.

In our example, the teacher decides that the main skill is speaking. The targeted sub-skill is producing short, structured spoken statements. A reading or listening text may be used as input, but the goal of the lesson is to develop speaking. Stage 3 brings the objective closer to its final form by naming the specific skill area.

4.4 Stage 4: Cognitive Demand Calibration

Even within one sub-skill, lessons can have different levels of cognitive demand. A speaking lesson may ask students to repeat a memorized phrase, or to use a learned structure in a new situation, or to compare options, or to build a long argument. Stage 4 asks the teacher to choose the level of demand consciously. The goal is not to produce a strict taxonomy classification. The goal is to make sure the cognitive demand fits both the curriculum and the needs of the students.

In our example, the teacher decides that the right level is application: students should be able to use a learned structure (preference + reason) in a new content context. They are not just repeating memorized sentences. They are also not yet building a full argument. This decision will shape how the activity is designed and what counts as success in the lesson.

4.5 Stage 5: Formulation of Measurable Outcomes

Stage 5 brings together the decisions from the earlier stages. The teacher now writes a single, measurable objective. A good objective at this stage names the learner, describes an observable performance, and indicates the conditions or topic. Verbs that show observable performance—produce, explain, justify, identify, summarize—are better than verbs about internal states such as understand or know. Internal states cannot be observed directly.

In our example, the objective at this point may be: by the end of the lesson, students will be able to express at least three personal preferences in spoken English, each supported by a brief reason. This statement names the learner, an observable performance (express), the content (personal preferences), the structural element (each supported by a brief reason), and a minimum number (at least three). The objective is now ready for use in planning activities and assessment.

4.6 Stage 6: Integration with Assessment

An objective that is not connected to evidence is just decoration. Stage 6 asks the teacher to plan, before the lesson, what evidence will show that the objective has been reached. The form of evidence must match the cognitive demand and the skill area chosen earlier. A speaking objective

at the level of application needs evidence of speaking at that level. A written quiz on the same vocabulary cannot replace it.

In our example, the teacher may plan a short paired interaction near the end of the lesson. Each student will express three preferences with reasons. The teacher will monitor and use a short checklist. This activity is now both a learning task and the main evidence of objective achievement. Other activities in the lesson may give practice, but Stage 6 identifies one specific moment when evidence is collected.

4.7 Stage 7: Reflective Revision

The final stage closes the cycle. After the lesson, the teacher looks at the objective again and asks: was it clear? Was it possible to reach in the time available? Was it well connected to the assessment? Was it the right level of difficulty? The teacher's notes from this reflection inform the next lesson. Over many lessons, this practice supports the teacher's continuous professional development. Stage 7 also allows lessons that are repeated next year to be improved, not simply repeated.

In our example, the teacher may notice that students could express preferences fluently but had difficulty producing reasons. This shows that future objectives should pay more attention to the language of justification. This reflection feeds back into Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the next planning cycle. The framework is therefore iterative, not strictly linear.

5. Discussion.

5.1 What the Framework Adds to Existing Practice

The framework does not introduce ideas that are unfamiliar to professional English teachers. Instead, it organizes familiar considerations into a clear sequence. Many teachers already think about the curriculum, the students, and the assessment. They do this in some form. However, they often do it implicitly and unevenly. As a result, one element may receive too much attention while another is forgotten. The framework helps teachers give balanced attention to each element.

The framework also responds directly to the difficulties identified in Section 2.3. The mixing of activities with outcomes is reduced by Stages 4 and 5, which require explicit cognitive demand and observable performance. The problem of wrong generality is reduced by the gradual narrowing from Stage 1 to Stage 5. The disconnection between objectives and assessment is addressed by Stage 6, which makes assessment evidence part of planning, not improvisation. The absence of revision is addressed by Stage 7, which treats the objective as something that can be improved

5.2 Implications for Teacher Professional Development

The framework can shape in-service teacher training. Workshops can focus on one stage at a time. Teachers can practice that stage with their own lesson plans before integrating all stages into a complete planning routine. For example, a workshop on Stage 5 can use teachers' real lesson plans for collaborative editing. A workshop on Stage 6 can examine the relationship between stated objectives and actual assessment instruments. Such targeted, practice-based training tends to be more effective than general lectures on educational objectives The framework can also support school-level methodological work. Methodologists and supervisors can use the seven stages as a structured tool for lesson observation. Instead of giving general impressions, they can give feedback connected to specific stages. When several teachers in the same school use the framework, it becomes easier to coordinate planning across grade levels. It also becomes easier to discuss the quality of objectives in clear, comparable terms.

5.3 Implications for Lesson Plan Templates

Many secondary schools use standardized templates for lesson plans. The framework offers ideas for improving these templates. A template that includes fields for curricular position, learner-

needs evidence, targeted skill, cognitive demand level, formulated outcome, assessment evidence, and post-lesson reflection puts the framework into the document itself. Such a template does not need to be longer than the current ones. It only needs to redirect attention from administrative compliance to pedagogical reasoning.

5.4 Limitations

Three limitations of the framework should be mentioned. First, the framework is a structured proposal. It has not yet been tested experimentally. Future studies should examine its effects on lesson quality and student learning. Second, the framework assumes that the teacher has time, autonomy, and institutional support for thoughtful lesson preparation. In conditions where these are missing, even the best framework will be applied superficially. Third, the framework is calibrated for typical secondary school English classes. Adaptations may be needed for very large classes, very mixed-level groups, or technology-rich environments.

5.5 Future Directions

Three directions for future work are particularly useful. First, classroom-based studies can examine how teachers actually use the framework in everyday planning. Such studies can also show how the use of the framework develops with experience. Second, the framework can be extended through collections of annotated examples. These examples can show how the seven stages work across different topics, grade levels, and skill areas. Third, related tools can be developed for connected areas of practice. These include the design of assessment rubrics and the conduct of structured post-lesson reflection.

Conclusion

Designing learning objectives is a key skill of secondary school English language teachers. However, this skill is rarely supported by an explicit, ordered procedure. This article has argued that the difficulties teachers face are not mainly about knowledge. They are about process. Teachers need a structured way to coordinate the many considerations that come together in every lesson objective. The seven-stage framework presented here—curricular alignment, learner-needs analysis, language-skill specification, cognitive demand calibration, formulation of measurable outcomes, integration with assessment, and reflective revision—offers such a procedure. By organizing familiar pedagogical principles into a clear routine, the framework supports both new and experienced teachers, gives a structured base for in-service training, and provides a shared reference for school methodologists. The framework is offered as a starting point, not as a final prescription. It can be improved through classroom experience and continued professional dialogue.

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