Implementing Roadmaps for Foreign Language Students

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Abstract: When teaching foreign language students, the main objective is to help them reach the key educational results. These skills are a high level of foreign language competence and the ability to speak the language fluently; skills to search information, carefully analyse it and synthesize it; managing time wisely for learning and self-development. It takes teachers a lot of effort to implement all of the things mentioned above. They use innovative methods, tools and educational technologies. However, the teaching community pays little attention to educational roadmaps for foreign language students. Developed by the teacher and delivered to students, roadmaps might prove to be a great teaching tool for achieving goals.

1 INTRODUCTION

When it comes to achieving the necessary objectives in the teaching-learning process, teachers use a variety of methods, tools and educational technologies. Roadmaps for students who study English as their second language become one of a kind. Designed by teachers and delivered to their students, roadmaps might ease students' understanding of what is expected of them, as well as improve the whole teaching-learning process.

Wanting to know how deeply the issue was described, we turned to literature resources. First, we consulted the online dictionary and found out that 'this is a plan for how to achieve something' (Cambridge dictionary online, 2023). It implies that there is a set of activities and actions to follow.

Second, according to scientific articles, there is significant interest to this topic and fruitful practices are presented. In some articles the focus is given to learning roadmaps for higher education (Oliveira et al, 2007). Such roadmaps provide organized but independent learning and self-learning. The teacher manages the whole process and stimulates it without active participation. Roadmaps stimulate the organization and management of the course materials.

According to some authors (Pak et al, 2015), roadmaps for students are an individual learning track and a tool for personalizing learning. It is stated that roadmaps can be a useful tool to achieve necessary objectives. We like the message in the article that roadmaps for students might be an efficient tool for distant learning.

Some valuable thoughts and opinions by M. Nursalim et al (Nursalim et al, 2021) are introduced. The researchers remark that roadmaps designed for students' needs help them organize and implement educational science research. These educational research roadmaps guide students and serve as a reference book for the entire academic community. As a result of their clear approach, roadmaps can develop educational science.

There are different kinds of roadmaps (Konoplyansky, 2016). Our research focuses on two types of roadmaps: event roadmaps and skill roadmaps.

At last, we studied a variety of blogs on different subjects and found out that roadmaps are used to create digital lessons for students (Gallemore, 2019), to predict technology development (Lidin, 2022), to enhance teaching skills (Rogers, 2022), to start a

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project (Shestak, 2022; Martins, 2022), to create a product (Leonard, 2023) etc.

Looking at all the resources, we would like to conclude that roadmaps can be presented in a variety of formats (tables, diagrams, timelines, infographics, etc.) and can also be presented as printed templates or as e-tools.

To summarise this part we want to say that roadmaps are: 1) designed for different spheres, as well as education; 2) a plan, an instruction, a set of activities/actions, a track, itinerary etc. to demonstrate how something works or can be achieved; 3) presented through minimal steps to ease forward motion; 4) created to achieve necessary results without active teacher presence in the process. But there is a practical question: 'How to organize work with students to be roadmaps an efficient and effective teaching tool?'

So, this paper answers this question. We would like to share our experience of how to implement various roadmaps for students who study English as their second language.

2 METHODOLOGY

This part of the paper will highlight two things. First, we will show how to implement event and skill roadmaps. For visual assistance, see the picture below (Fig. 1). Second, we will focus on our own experience of using both kinds of roadmaps for foreign language students.

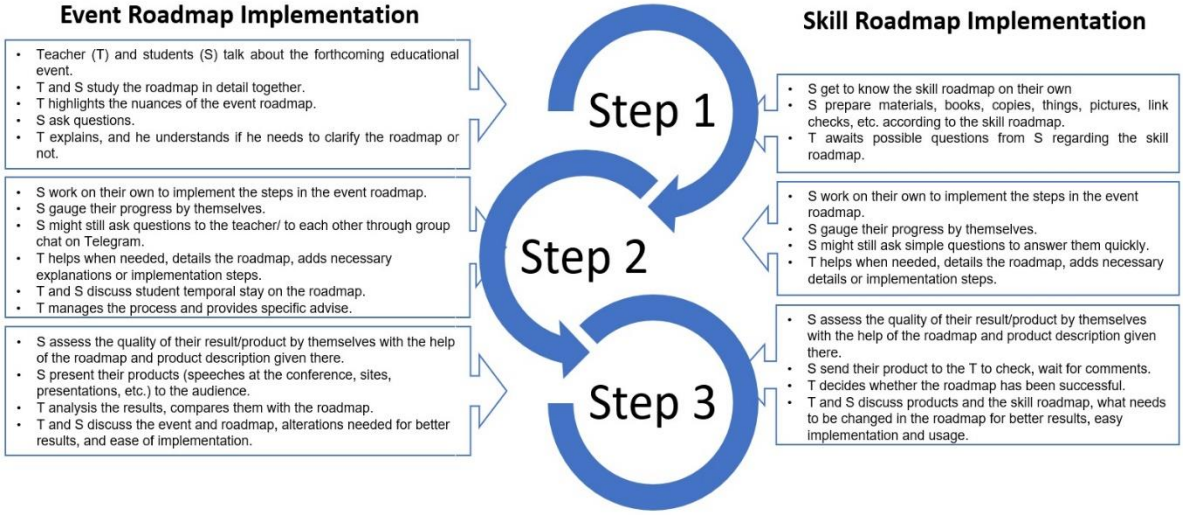

Figure 1: Roadmap implementation for English learners.

As shown in the picture, there are 3 steps to implement roadmaps.

Step 1, so-called Preparation, is the step when both the teacher and students talk about the upcoming educational event. The teacher proposes the event roadmap to students. They study and look at the roadmap together. This step is of vital importance to the teacher and students. The better the teacher dwells upon the details and highlights the most important aspects of the event roadmap, the better it is for students to understand what is needed to get better results with less effort. It is quite appropriate for students to ask questions. Answering all the students' questions, the teacher will understand the extent of immersion into the topic, their comprehension, fears and worries before they start working. Also, the teacher will see if he needs to alter the event roadmap, to refine some steps to make it clearer and more transparent to students.

Step 1 for skill roadmap implementation for English learners requires the students to work on their own. Students do all the necessary preparations described in the roadmap, such as books, colored pencils, printed and electronic documents, etc. They also check all the links, audio and video files. If there are difficulties, students should ask for the teacher's help. The teacher in return waits for possible questions and does what is required: provides supplementary materials, fixes the links, etc.

After preparation is completed, it is time to move on to the next step of implementing the roadmap.

Step 2 – Action – is the most intense for students. The event and skill roadmaps encourage independent student work. Students gauge their success for themselves. They might still ask their teachers

questions when implementing the steps in the roadmap. It is all right to communicate with each other on the issue through e-mails, blogs, group chat on Telegram, etc.

For further usage of the roadmaps, we should distinguish between the activities in the event roadmap and the skill roadmap. So, when students put both types of roadmaps into operation, they might face some issues and would want to clarify them. For the first type of roadmaps – event roadmaps – the teacher has enough time and can do that. This is because the implementation of the event roadmaps is prolonged and lasts for about a month, till the event is in preparation. Alternatively, the teacher can speak to students. On the one hand, this is an easy, unobtrusive method for the teacher to control the implementation process of the event roadmap. On the other hand, he might want to manage the process. The teacher might give recommendations to students at this stage.

By contrast with the skill roadmaps, which suggest that students should only ask simple questions. The teacher does not have to spend a great deal of time or effort on these questions. It is because of the limited time available. Students then continue working independently. There is no other or further work to be done for this second step of the skill roadmap.

In step 3 – we call it Assessment – students measure the product and compare it to what is given in the roadmap result description. As part of the event roadmap, students present their product in the form of a 5-minute monologue at a conference or website presentation. The role of the teacher at this stage is to measure the quality of materials, give comments and recommendations about how good/dreadful the product was, how it might be improved, what other things should be done in future to get better results. It is significant to ask students to give feedback on the event and, what is more important for the roadmap implementation process, the roadmap itself. The teacher should have a clear vision for future usage of the roadmap in this or other variants.

Concerning the skill roadmap, we emphasize that students assess the results and send them to their teacher. They might be documents with homework, Google slides, voice messages, essays, etc. As a result of the educator's pleasant/unpleasant feelings, he/she recreates the roadmap, refines it, adds steps, removes ambiguous ones, and adjust it accordingly. There might be a talk in the classroom about the results and the roadmap. The teacher should be able to understand what needs to be done to ensure a smooth student journey through the roadmap.

Now we are going to describe our own experience gained through implementing event and skill roadmaps. First, we should say that in the link (https://clck.ru/33aSYX) there are roadmap samples of both kinds: one event roadmap sample (how students prepare for the students' conference called the EDU Conference) and three examples of skill roadmaps (first: 2 lesson roadmaps, second: essay roadmap). Second, we will describe how to use them.

Once we stated that learning roadmaps are an effective recourse to achieve necessary learning results, so we decided to try them. Event roadmaps are usually designed for students who study English as their second language to help them prepare for the big educational event in their target language. This event is the student conference which is held every year. This conference is based on the TED conferences but has undergone some changes to meet students' needs. We choose the topic for the conference and offer students 5-6 subtopics. They select one of those subtopics and start working. To help them work easily and understand what to do step by step, the teacher demonstrate the event roadmap. The roadmap is carefully studied, commented on and discussed by the teacher and students. The latter raises questions, the educator answers them, and details the steps in the roadmap. Regular conversations with students about their progress give the teacher a better understanding of the preparation process. The teacher asks students simple but meaningful questions: 'Is it difficult to move through the roadmap?', 'Do you find it easier than it was before?', 'Do you think the event roadmap is detailed enough?', etc. By asking these questions, the teacher can come to quick and clear conclusions. Meanwhile, the educator can assess the students' difficulties and offer help to motivate them to move forward.

At the time of the event, the teacher is fully aware of each student's potential and firmly anticipates what will happen. Then, there are 2 types of feedback after the conference: 1) content and 2) organization. We will focus on the second type of feedback for our topic. The purpose is to have a conversation with students or a confidential questionnaire uploaded to Google so that the teacher can determine what needs to be changed to improve conference organization. This is the exact moment where we discuss event roadmaps and ask them: 'Can the event roadmap be used in this form/type?'

Now let us explain the usage of skill roadmaps for foreign language students. This type of roadmap is typically in need when students are absent. They might be ill or participate in some other educational events, such as conferences, student theatre

performances, sport competitions, etc. We also use them when we have periods of distant learning.

In these circumstances they use the teacher's educational blog or educational website (https://institut74.blogspot.com/p/2_28.html), which is updated and provided with relevant information for student needs daily. Educators and students always have one unbreakable rule: the necessity of continually contributing to self-development. The right way to do it is to acquire some skills systematically on the topic. By using skill roadmaps, they can do that without active teacher involvement but with the effect of his presence nearby. Then they send exercises done, voice messages with text retellings or sentence readings recorded in the group chats (we usually use Telegram), etc., the teacher checks them and gives marks.

It is noteworthy that skill roadmaps are used when students write essays. The teacher chooses different types of essays and structures within each essay. Essays are not just a piece of writing. It is something much more significant. Our students finish every topic with an essay. They embed in their essay vocabulary learnt, topic grammar structures studied, quotes, idioms and phrasal verbs discussed, facts from supplementary materials on the issue. English learners spend much time organizing the content in the right way. To help our students structure their essays successfully, to make sure they do not miss anything important, we provide them with skill roadmaps.

3 RESULTS

Implementing event and skill roadmaps in the teaching-learning process of students who study English as their second language brought into focus groups of achievements. We identified 3 groups: 1) teaching-learning process organization, 2) student English language competence, 3) attitude and social relations. Let us consider the first group of results.

Teaching-learning process organization outcomes deal with the content and organization of the learning process. Students pointed out that preparation for the event and skill acquisition has become much easier due to the detailed roadmaps. Because the roadmap divides the prep-process into small steps and logical units, students find it simple to implement. Thus, students can bring to life any event or master skills since they are provided with roadmaps which show the entire path towards the goal: from the starting point (where students do not have anything except the roadmap itself) to the final one (where students get their products and are ready to present them in their target language). Due to the detailed event/skill roadmap, the teachers do not have to actively participate in assessing the students.

Definitely, the teacher is not isolated from the process of student roadmap implementation and usage. Instead, he controls and manages the process by asking questions, discussing the progress, refining the roadmap a bit, etc. But the idea of students implementing roadmaps themselves remains. This is an ideal opportunity for the teacher to step back and reflect, look for new teaching methods and create more effective values.

Also, the roadmaps help to avoid feeling stressed and overwhelmed with academic material in limited time. Using the roadmap, students organize their time in a comfortable manner, meeting their individual needs, and according to their own schedule. Roadmaps are a perfect way to make the student learning process more individualized and to make the teacher develop in this approach (study the needs of his students, reveal the student potential, seek for effective methods and tools to let his students develop themselves on their own, etc.).

As for the second type of results, we noticed that students tend to logically organize their speech when having lessons of speech practice and when presenting their monologues on the issue. If they are working in pairs or groups, they get started quickly, knowing what and how to do what is needed. Students allocate resources and distribute responsibilities between participants.

It is interesting to note that our students are used to consciously dividing the whole activity into small operations or steps, naming these steps and determining ways to accomplish. Academic progress increased, as well as English exam results. We can judge about this based on the chart of student academic performance.

As a result, they are more likely to begin new activities that are to them (such as interpreting for the theater community or tutoring). All of these are possible because they are able to use the English language more confidently. In addition, they know how to take a start as they have designed the roadmap.

Speculating on the last type of results, we propose the following: roadmaps are noteworthy. Through mutual assistance, trust, and positive attitude towards each other and the learning process, they were able to succeed. They say they are quite satisfied with the event and skill roadmaps. They are capable of starting, continuing, and finishing while remaining calm, focused and motivated.

4 DISCUSSION

There is ongoing debate in the teaching world over the negative effect of roadmaps on students. They restrict creative thinking since they are explicit algorithms. The roadmap ties students to written consistency with action implementation, so students have a hard time thinking on their own.

We could partially agree with this idea of negative influence. There are some reasons why. Firstly, with the roadmap it is easier to explain what is needed from students to prepare for the educational event or to master skills and knowledge on their own.

Secondly, a roadmap might also encourage people to think creatively while preparing for an event or writing an essay, for example. Students select resources to work with, work out the speech structure for the performance, etc. When they write the essay, they choose vocabulary, quotes, idioms and other supportive elements carefully and at their discretion. A quick glance at the activities in the roadmap immediately gives them a sense of how things work and what they are trying to accomplish.

Thirdly, students usually do not know where to start. As a result, they feel confused, cannot get started, and keep delaying it. But if students start at the end, they can lose the right track in the process and waste time trying to find the right way. Thus, the roadmap is a good point of departure for their decision-making and implementation.

We have described positive effects on the use of the roadmap, but teachers still face some challenges. To create the roadmap the educator needs time and effort to decompose the educational event or lesson plan into smaller parts. Analytical abilities are required for him to be able to penetrate the essence of any complex phenomenon. This raises the central question of professional development for teachers.

We have to point out some perspectives concerning roadmaps for foreign language students. There are 3 possible ways: 1) give them a chance to edit the ready-made roadmaps, to detail them and add missing steps in the roadmap (it will teach them to see logic in the process, prioritize actions, etc.); 2) design event roadmaps together with students, giving them an opportunity to share brave ideas, make creative solutions (we think it might help them unite, think creatively, brainstorm, etc.); 3) create roadmaps completely independently from the very start (we suggest that it might teach students to deepen into the process, to develop creative abilities, to improve students' mental activity, prioritize actions, etc.).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The authors have turned their scientific interest into a powerful teaching tool called roadmaps. The roadmaps are aimed at students studying English as a second language. The essence of all roadmaps is to present a set of actions and activities on what to do and how to do something.

In this article we highlight two kinds of such roadmaps. The first type is event roadmaps which we typically create for our students to prepare for forthcoming significant events: such as student conferences and a variety of projects. The second type of roadmap is skill roadmaps. We design them for each lesson of speech practice and place them on the teacher's website/blog. Whenever the student is absent (illness, participation in university educational activities, etc.), he works on his own using the skill roadmap. Following that, the student can catch up with the group and feel confident afterwards.

We showed the way to implement event and skill roadmaps in the teaching-learning process, highlighting the 3 core steps: preparation (the aim is to provide students with the roadmap, discuss it if necessary and answer their questions), action (the purpose is to give students freedom in implementing the roadmap, but be ready to assess help and edit the roadmap), assessment (the key goal is to measure the students' results, discuss their products and the roadmap content for future usage).

After using roadmaps with foreign language students in the course of oral and written speech practice, we have identified groups of outcomes. They are teaching-learning process organization (it is easier to provide teaching-learning process due to the detailed roadmaps which show the entire itinerary from the start till its end), student English language competence (students always have something to say because they know how to structure their speech and flow logically), attitude and social relations (students notice confidence in themselves about the results and the language learning process).

The benefits of roadmaps are debated because they restrain creative thinking, but we contend that roadmaps are efficient, helpful, and successful in reaching the key learning objectives. As part of our effective practices, we intend to expand the types of student roadmaps, as well as the mechanisms by which they can be used.

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