

AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER TRAINING IN ENGLISH PREPARATORY PROGRAMS: A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION

Yildiray Cevik (PhD)

Isa SPAHIU (PhD)

International Balkan University - Skopje

Received: 2012-11-30 Accepted: 2012-12-10 Published: 2012-12-20

Abstract

Teacher education has always been the main concern in English Language Teaching (ELT) domain. However, being able to learn the ultimate techniques and approaches along with the theories does not necessarily mean that they were internalized properly up to the desired level to actualize them in the classroom atmosphere of a newly graduate. The term “sustainable continuous learning” comes into mind, and, therefore, should be part of a teacher’s life. “Sustainable continuous learning” takes form in several ways. It can either be through in-service training or special courses which are held by the worldwide recognized institutions. In both ways the teachers can benefit and keep themselves up-to-date in the ever changing ELT world. “Continuous learning” becomes so predominant that teachers are obligated keep abreast of the latest developments in ELT world either from journals or forums. In this study qualitative research is conducted through a questionnaire circulated on teacher training (TT) perception. The questionnaire and the results of their analysis are presented in this study to reinforce the significance of continuous learning in teacher training.

Keywords: Teacher education, continuous learning, autonomous learning, in-service-training.

1. Introduction

In the world of English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers often feel the need of refreshing themselves with the new teaching techniques and approaches to make the most of their teaching for their learners. In today’s ELT world it seems almost impossible to stick with one approach or technique for every kind of learner. The innovations are vast, and keeping up with them is thus sheer hard work, if teachers do not have the notion of how to benchmark and implement new ideas and teaching approaches into their classrooms and teaching philosophies. To make the teachers of English have the relevant notion and to raise awareness in them is the fundamental concept to achieve the aim of approaching the concept of ELT in an eclectic way both for teachers and curriculum designers alike. A language teacher is required not only to be proficient in using the target language, but also to be knowledgeable about the rules and conventions that govern its use in an authentically communicative context. Furthermore, a teacher who is not aware of how learners acquire referents of the meta-knowledge of the target language, the learning does not efficiently take place. In this context, it is rightly put forth that professional development on what to teach when teaching a foreign language should be the main focus (Liyanage&Bartlett 2008).

1.1 Teacher Development (TD)

Teacher Development (TD) as a whole is considered to be one of the main goals in ELT domain. “Much of the impetus for change in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods. For this reason, the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of many teachers and applied linguists throughout the twentieth century” (Richards & Rodgers 2001). Therefore, to train creative and eclectic type

of teachers in this world of ELT, a lifelong process of TD is needed in order for better outcomes in terms of teaching at different environments. Teachers should be willing to evaluate and reform their form of teaching under the concept of TD. TD is crucial in regard to following latest innovations in their domain, designing and evaluating their curriculum, and finally being a reflective type of educator. This is the reason why being a “reflective” and creative teacher is the desired outcome of the teacher training programs (TTP). The answer on a quest for one’s own personal and integrated understanding of how people learn a second language is eclectic. In a clear manner, “there is no single theory or hypothesis which will provide a magic formula for all learners in all contexts. Teacher will be urged to be as critical as he can in considering the merits of various models and theories and research findings” (Brown 2000). However, as Brown suggests “the problem of raising capable teachers who are creative enough to tailor their lessons according to their learner needs still remains unsolved”. Teachers learn as pedagogic content knowledge at university programs may not be readily viable in the actual teaching world (Liyanage&Bartlett 2008). At this point, a well-designed TTP to suit the needs of the teachers holds a vitally important role. For this reason, a teacher can only attain the creativity in teaching when he internalizes the habit of asking the right questions while planning a lesson. Brown within the first phase of questions raises the issue of qualities of learners that must be considered by the teacher during the planning process. Brown takes the issue into the cognitive learning process which must equally be taken into the consideration by the teacher during planning process. “Continuous learning” in a sustainable environment, as Brown coins, takes form in several ways. It can either be through in-service training or special courses which are held by the worldwide recognized institutions. The process of continuing to develop professional expertise as a teacher is sometimes difficult to manage alone. In a similar point of view, Brandl (2000) states that “having a second method course would further support the notion that becoming a teacher is a long-term process that requires ongoing training and that it constantly changes according to trainees’ developmental stages.” The challenges of teaching in a rapidly changing profession almost necessitate collaboration with other teachers in order to stay on the cutting edge (Brown 2001). Brown (2001) also suggests five forms of collaboration of teachers learning from each other. These are: *peer coaching, team teaching, action research, collaborative curriculum development and revision*. Growing, dynamic language programs are a product of an ongoing creative dialogue between teachers and among teachers and those that are assigned to compile curricula (Brown 2001). As it is seen the key term is collaboration and sharing the ideas among peers to arrive at variations of teaching approach in the pursuit of getting better student outcomes, which can be achieved in TDs and TTPs in a mentality of continuous learning.

1.2 What is Teacher Training? (TT)

Teacher training (TT) refers to the preparation of teachers for professional practice through formal courses, usually university or college based, with results in accreditation. TT is based on a set of syllabus and has a course structure and system of assessment. In TT programs teaching/learning is based on a transmission model which the trainer informs, models and advises and the trainees to take on board the information and skills they are taught. TT underlies the cognitive development of trainees and their knowledge and skills as professionals (Wallace, 1990). TT programs take form of one-off courses, beginning and ending at predetermined times and taking place at pre-set locations. Unlike TD they are not flexible or continuous. As Bowen (2010) perceives, “TT programs as the process of equipping an individual with the means to carry out the job of teaching”. This is done by a trainer that presents the individual with the series of skills that meet

the requirements of different aspects of teaching. In the specific field of ELT, these are the skills and techniques to teach grammar, lexis, pronunciation, reading, writing, listening and speaking and classroom management. TD has other advantages. It gives teachers the choice of what and how to study and thereby ensures the learning of meaningful and relevant content; it also stresses the importance of reflection on experience, and the ongoing, cumulative nature of professional pride and confidence (Richards&Nunan 1990). The distinction today has outlived its usefulness. The issue is not the difference between the two but rather their integration. A model needs to be evolved which combines the best of both in order to design optimally effective professional courses, both initial and continuing. When it comes to combining these two, “Continuous Professional Development” (CPD) comes to mind. CPD implies both the commitment of the individual and the commitment of the institution. In this case TD can be regarded as more or less a voluntary activity but CPD is much more a requirement for all employees of a given organization. Thus, the aim of this is to benefit not only the individual but also the organisation and ultimately the profession as a whole (Bowen 2010). Concrete examples of such development can be attending workshops, seminars, conferences or following a specialized course. Another outcome of this particular aspect is the teacher efficacy which is of vital importance. “Professional interest was found out to be the most important factor due to its ability in predicting teachers’ efficacy perceptions. The more activities an EFL teacher got involved in, the more efficacious they felt” (Yavuz 2005). This finding points out the positive correlation between teacher efficacy and openness to professional development revealed by earlier research conducted by Guskey and Smylie (1988) and it seems quite reasonable as teachers would naturally be expected to grow greater efficacy as they take part in more activities in professional development, learn and share with their colleagues. Another advantage of TTPs can be counted as the occasion of getting together with the field professionals since FL teachers feel the feeling of isolation due to the lack of colleagues teaching the same subject. Finally, FL teachers must find ways of creating good teaching and learning environments and creating a good learning environment through tasks is the major concern of TTPs (Borg, 2006). All in all, TTPs, if designed according to the principle of fit-for-purpose, may well contribute a lot to the development of ELT professionals. Teacher training (TT), briefly expressed, is keeping hold of track in the ever-changing methodologies, techniques and approaches in the world of ELT. The main purpose of TT is to analyze the needs of the professionals in a certain teaching atmosphere, and determine the skills needed to be cultivated, and design a course accordingly to enable the maximum effectiveness that student-teachers can benefit to the full. “Benefiting to the full” means that, after the TT sessions, how much of that abstract knowledge turns into the concrete forms of teaching in the actual teaching environment. The major objectives of TTPs are to create awareness in instructors so that they can feel interested in the latest learning and teaching developments in their domain.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Question

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher training programs. This study, in particular intends to investigate how much teachers of English as a foreign language benefit from these trainings, and in which direction their perception improves in accordance with the relevance of these trainings. The study, therefore, seeks to find answers to the following question: Do the instructors who have attended teacher training programs (TTPs) feel that they have benefited from these programs?

2.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprises 106 English Language Instructors (all non-natives) selected from 11 private and public University Preparatory Schools in Macedonia and Serbia. Convenience sampling method was used to choose the appropriate sample for the current study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. 66.7% of the foreign language instructors are female and 33.3% of them are male. While 57.2% of the instructors are graduated from a Faculty of Education, 42.8% of the instructors are from a Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Participants of the study work between 4 to 30 hours weekly with a mean of 17 hour.

2.3 Data Collection Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire with two main parts was designed to obtain data about university preparatory school instructors' attitudes towards teacher training programmes (TTP) at both public and private universities. In the questionnaire a 5 type likert scale was applied. The questionnaire is comprised of two parts: the part of subjects' academic and personal background and the one with 50 questions specifically designed to elicit relevant answers and their attitudes towards their TTPs. Mean scores of the items were found to be between 2.45 and 4.64.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

3.1 Discussions on the Results of Descriptive Statistics

Research Question: Do the instructors who have attended TTPs feel that they have benefited from these programs? Subjects evaluated highest mean value for the question of "the benefit from TTPs" with 3.98. Hence, it is seen that subjects consider themselves all the more adequate as the result of the TTPs they have received ($\bar{X} = 3.98$). As it is seen, after attending TTPs the instructors who took part in the study have a belief that they have benefited from the sessions. Subjects also developed a positive attitude towards reading skill with the mean of 3.84 as the result of the TTPs they have received. The effect of TTP towards reading was around "mostly agree/often". In a similar way, the subjects, according to the statistical analysis, developed a positive attitude towards listening with the mean of 3.84 as the result of the TTP they have received. The effect of TTP on listening was seen in or around "mostly agree/often". According to the responses given by the subjects in connection with their attitude towards speaking skill, it is seen that their attitude was around positive with the mean score of 3.79. The effect of TTP on speaking was seen at "mostly agree/often" level. Lastly, the responses of the subjects to the questions connected to the writing skill revealed that they developed a somewhat positive attitude towards TTP with the mean score of 3.44. It can be drawn from the analysis that the least positive effect was on writing among the other skills. This may bring the issue into mind that during writing sessions in TTPs the instructors who took part in the study could not find writing activities in line with their home contexts. This could be the result of why they claim that they have not much benefited from writing sessions. In a general perspective, it is seen that the general attitude of the subjects in the survey was positive; however, the attitude did not reveal the "totally agree" level. It can also be seen that at no sub-category "always/totally agree" response was not given. On the second thoughts this situation has a lot to say. To start with, this may stem from a lack of needs analysis to be carried out prior to designing the TTPs. Sessions should be relevant to the instructors' home context and also they need to be included in the

designing process unless the trainers or department heads want the training go over the instructors' head. As Borg (2003) summarizes in his study, teachers are less likely to be convinced with the knowledge which is irrelevant to their local context. They want it to be specific, contextualised, observable, and testable. This may recall that the TTPs that the instructors took part in the study did not pay attention to the concept of fit-for-purpose. As Liyanage&Bartlett (2008) nicely put forward as TTPs need to be trainee-centred and be "as close a bearing as possible on their teaching concerns and contexts". They conclude that English Teacher education should be designed to achieve contextually responsive outcomes. They carry on explaining as teacher educator should adopt a contextually teacher education. They also suggest that session goals and structure of activities in TTPs should be explicit in order to make a session coherent. He also concludes that trainees must be encouraged to make decisions about specific classroom practices and discussions during a session which must relate to trainees' working contexts. Liyanage & Bartlett (2008) also carries on to put forth that "course readings should be educational issues prevalent in the teacher-trainees' home countries and that course assignments ought to be flexible enough to allow trainees to produce content that is contextually responsive". It can be concluded from these remarks that TTPs should be trainee-centred as well as including discussions of teaching methods and their applicability in the trainees' teaching context. There are also other examples which were of no use for the trainees due to some fundamental differences to the Western world. In some non-English speaking countries implementation of teaching activities may be problematic even just because of generic differences in class size (Liyanage&Bartlett 2008). To conclude, a seriously conducted needs analysis is seen as an inescapable necessity along with the down to earth activities which should match the situation in their home context so as to get the desired outcome from TTPs. In the same study trainees referred to TTPs in a very positive way only when they were included in the course design process and they reported during their interviews practical implications and concrete examples of teaching to be most helpful. It can be drawn as another conclusion that TTPs should focus more on the practical side of the teaching rather than the theory on its own. On the other hand, a similar study conducted by Farrell (2008) surprisingly reveals that critical incident reported by trainees seemed to focus exclusively on negative rather than positive issues regarding learning and teaching English language. In another study Francis (1995) also discovered that trainees found it easier to recall negative incidents more quickly and spontaneously than to recall positive incidents. It may be evaluated from these findings that trainees may have recalled the negative aspects and implementations easily and that could be the reason why the general attitude was not at 'totally agree' level. This may also be due to the perfectionist attitudes of the instructors.

ITEMS	<i>X</i>	<i>ss</i>
1. I feel adequate in reading analysis	4,30	0,68
2. I feel competent in the conduct of reading in-class activities.	4,15	0,75
3. I give reading homework as follow-ups to be used in reading courses.	3,59	0,84
4. I utilize authentic materials in reading courses.	3,59	0,87
5. I do "warm-up" activities in reading courses.	4,47	0,75
6. I prefer audio-lingual method in grammar teaching.	3,14	1,13
7. I use teacher-centred approach in reading courses.	3,51	1,06

8. I use content-based teaching.	3,83	0,74
9. I give homework for writing as the follow-up of reading courses.	3,36	0,87
10. I do grammar-based activities in reading courses.	3,40	0,94
11. I hold "student-centred" teaching approach in reading courses.	3,80	0,78
12. I give homework for pre-reading activities.	3,10	1,15
13. I use grammar-translation method in grammar courses.	3,52	1,01
14. I conduct speaking activities as follow-ups in reading courses.	3,84	0,72
15. I practise "step-by-step" method in writing courses.	3,96	0,78
16. I do not consider the necessity of doing "schemata" in reading courses.	3,31	1,52
17. I do "warm-up" activities prior to reading courses.	4,28	0,85
18. I hold the necessity of "schemata" in listening courses.	4,40	0,77
19. I explain the rubrics in listening courses.	4,09	0,96
20. I give homework in the aftermath of reading courses.	3,21	0,91
21. I do not consider "student-centred" activities necessary in listening courses.	3,40	1,45
22. I hold the necessity of the activities for guessing meaning from context and vocabulary from context in reading courses.	4,64	0,59
23. I feel competent about the various activities learned to be used in listening courses.	3,84	0,82
24. I ask students to do synonym, antonym, vocabulary and phrasal words activities in reading courses.	4,03	0,76
25. I ask the students to do writing works during the writing courses.	2,97	0,95
26. I extend the post-listening activities into speaking and writing courses.	3,68	0,80
27. I utilize schemata activities in writing courses.	4,01	0,85
28. I believe in the necessity of Q&A, role plays and related in-class activities as a part of speaking courses.	4,29	0,85
29. I don't consider process-oriented approach as proper in writing courses.	3,46	1,52
30. I conduct activities for the improvement of essay-writing.	4,05	0,81
31. I conduct activities for sentence-construction in writing courses.	3,57	0,90
32. I consider that student studies be evaluated as "holistic" in writing courses.	2,45	1,04
33. I do not take "culture-gap" into consideration in speaking courses.	3,48	1,45
34. I think sentence-construction is enough for paragraph-making in writing courses.	3,61	1,24
35. I utilize adequate authentic materials in speaking courses.	3,45	0,80
36. I hold that students' studies be "analytically" corrected in writing courses.	3,87	0,77
37. I evaluate speaking course activities within pronunciation, fluency, word selection and content criteria.	3,85	0,87
38. I find the writing correction much time wasting.	2,79	1,32
39. I use error correction symbols in the control of students' writings.	3,63	1,16
40. I extend post-speaking activities into writing homework as follow-up.	3,56	0,94
41. I believe that writing skills learned in L1 could well be utilized in English writing practices.	3,53	1,05
42. I get students to do speaking practices in compliance with lexical competence.	3,68	0,78
43. I feel adequate in great variety of activities that I have learned through workshops, and/or on the job and in-service trainings.	3,99	0,81
44. I conduct student-centred approach in speaking courses.	4,04	0,76
45. I feel adequate in various activities that I have learned to utilize in speaking courses.	3,90	0,76

46. I have gained a creative teaching philosophy in the aftermath of TTPs that I have so far attended.	3,86	0,89
47. I can create a variety of activities, apart from those already learned, for speaking courses.	4,03	0,77
48. I am open to different activities even while I hold a student centred approach in writing courses.	4,32	0,77
49. I change the flow of the course, as I find necessary, to draw students' attention.	4,42	0,63
50. I believe that there has been development in my teaching philosophy as the result of TTPs.	4,11	0,98

References

1. Borg, S. (2003). Research Education as an objective for Teacher Learning. IATEFL, 41-48.
2. Bowen, T. (2010). Professional Development: Continous Professional Development. 1-3. Downloaded on July, 10, 2010 from http://www.onestopenglish.com/professional_development/continous_professional_development
3. Brandl, K, K. (2000). Foreign Language TA's Perceptions of Training Components: Do we Know How They Like to Be Trained? The Modern Language Journal, 84(3), 355-371.
4. Brown, D.H. (2000). Principles of Language Learning and Teaching. New York: Pearson Education. p.x, 2-5.
5. Davis, P. (1992). What is Teacher Development and is it Different to Teacher Training. Unpublished Paper.
6. Freeman, D. & Richards, J.C. (1996). Teacher Learning in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Freeman, L.D.(2000). Techniques and principles in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P.ix, x.
8. Kyriakides, L., Creemers, B.P.M., & Antoniou, P. (2009). Teacher Behaviour and student outcomes: Suggestions for research on teacher training and professional development. Teaching and Teacher Education, 25, 12-23.
9. Liyanage, I. & Barrett, J. B. (2008). Contextually Responsive Transfer: Perceptions of NNES on an ESL/EFL teacher training programme. Teaching and Teacher Education, 24, 1827-1836.
10. Richards, C, J. & Rodgers, S.T. (2001). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.viii, 1, 16.
11. Wallace, M.S. (1990). Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
12. Woodward, T. (1991). Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.