

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: AN IMPORTANT ISSUE

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ABSTRACT:

This study tries to reveal the approaches of English teachers in our country to the concept of 'teacher development'. It is assumed that most of the English teachers in our country become mechanical in their teaching as years pass and their English classes become monotonous and not rewarding. It is believed that such a monotony can be got rid of through a continuing professional development. A questionnaire has been designed to reveal the approaches of the teachers and the factors they believe would contribute to their development mostly. At the end, some suggestions are made.

Key Words:

Teacher Development, In-service Training Programs

ÖZET:

Bu çalışma, ülkemizdeki İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki gelişmeleri ile ilgili görüşlerini belirlemek ve kendilerini geliştirmek için ne/ler yaptıklarını ortaya koymak için hazırlanmış bir anketin sonuçlarını ve yorumlarını sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Mesleki Gelişim, Hizmetiçi Eğitim Programları

I. INTRODUCTION

Language teaching, like many other professions, is such a profession that if you do not follow the recent developments, you fall behind the novel ideas, methods, and techniques which might contribute a lot to your teaching and make your teaching more effective and beneficial for your learners. Therefore, there is always a need for a continuing professional development of the language teachers. That means, a language teacher would aim at updating her/his knowledge about the field skills as a teacher and new materials that could be used in the classroom. However, most of the English language teachers in our country, I believe, as soon as they graduate from the faculty, think that they had acquired all the required knowledge and skills to teach the English language and can manage the teaching of it most effectively in the following years. But, of course, it is not the case; to be more effective and successful in

teaching English as a foreign language one has to follow the recent developments in the field so that s/he can make some necessary changes in her/his teaching. There is also the danger of becoming stale and mechanical in teaching as years pass. When this is the case, neither the teachers nor their learners enjoy English classes and everything becomes monotonous and not rewarding. Therefore, continuing professional development is required. Teacher development has become a very popular theme in TEFL in recent years. Then, what is 'teacher development'?

Several ideas have been put forward by several scholars in the literature about teacher development. For example, M. Finocchiaro [1] states that

- (1) teachers should grow throughout their lifetime in the awareness of their own strengths and perhaps weaknesses (which can be overcome);
- (2) more positive attitudes toward themselves, their students, their colleagues and supervisors, their communities, the needs of their country and of other countries;
- (3) their deeper knowledge of the social and personality factors of their students that can influence learning, of the content of their discipline, as well as the culture and literature of English-speaking countries;
- (4) the enhancement of skills needed to present, practice, and appreciate the language system, literature, and culture of the target language with enthusiasm and clarity while instilling social, moral, ethical, and cultural values in the learners.

Frank Bell [2] talks about two important aspects of teacher development:

1. How to help teachers to become more effective.
2. How to make their jobs more rewarding to them personally, so that their work, far from becoming a mere means of earning a livelihood, grows into an increasingly rich element in their lives.

Marks [3] suggests that in the process, the ESL teacher should become more aware of his or her role as a teacher-facilitator; of the processes of teaching and learning; of choice made in the domains of methodology, material, interaction, and so on, enabling self-propelled and self-monitored further development.

All these views gather around one central topic: learning and improving one's self does not stop when you finish your education; development process continues throughout one's life.

2. PROBLEM

This study presents the approaches of English language teachers in our country to teacher development. We believe that most of the English teachers in our country, due to several factors, do not or cannot update their knowledge and skills in TEFL. In order to discover the factors that inhibit their development and the factors they believe would contribute to their development, we designed a questionnaire.

3. METHOD

3.1. Data Collection

This study has been based on a questionnaire given to 100 teachers of English at more than 10 different State High Schools in Ankara. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out what our language teachers do to improve themselves and to keep informed about the novel methods and techniques in teaching English. A second aim was to point out the factors which hindered teachers from reaching the above-mentioned aims.

150 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to State High School teachers and of those 119 who returned the forms, the first 100 were evaluated. The questionnaire was written in Turkish in order to avoid any misunderstanding and any difficulty which could hinder teachers from answering.

3.2. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of mainly three parts, the first of which deals with the individuals' educational background and their ideas about teaching English. The six questions in the second part seek to learn about the importance teachers attribute to keeping informed about novel ideas in teaching English and the factors which affect their wishes to improve themselves. The third part mainly concentrates on what teachers believe is most essential in improving their knowledge and skills, and their comments about the subject in general.

3.3. Results of the Questionnaire

The answers given to the first question in the first part reveal that the ages of the teachers who have answered the questionnaire range from 23 to 50 and that they have a teaching experience of 5 months to

30 years. The second question which asks whether or not they now attend a certain educational program clearly brings into light that none of the teachers are in a PhD program while 10 are in an MA program and 68 are in various other programs. As an answer to the third question which inquires about their educational backgrounds teachers have stated that 64 of them have a BA, 5 of them have an MA, none has a PhD, and 23 have other certificates. The results of the fourth question show that their teaching load ranges from 3 to 30 hours per week. The fifth question which asks the teachers to define their opinions about teaching reveals that 34 feel energetic, 40 feel enthusiastic, 21 feel contented, 22 feel bored, and 10 feel unwilling. The last question in this part aims to find out the reasons behind how teachers feel about teaching, and 50 teachers marked the item 'students'; 20 marked 'classroom conditions'; 25 marked 'the course book' while 13 marked 'lack of supplementary material'; 11 marked 'the curriculum'; 13 marked 'teaching load'; and 13 marked the 'other factors' item as important in determining their present opinions.

In answering the first question in the second part 50 teachers claimed that they believe it is 'very important' to get new ideas about English language teaching techniques, while 42 found it 'important', 5 found it 'partially important' and none claimed it to have 'no importance'.

The second question of the second part of the questionnaire consisted of an open-ended question asking the teachers the factors that affect the importance of gaining novel ideas about English language teaching techniques. Below are the most commonly stated factors by the teachers:

1. to teach more effectively
2. to show the importance of learning English to our students
3. to make our teaching more enjoyable
4. to take the attention of our learners
5. to enrich our knowledge about teaching with the recent developments
6. to provide better opportunities for the new generations
7. to motivate the students better
8. to provide success for the teachers in their profession
9. to find a solution for over-crowded classrooms
10. to get rid of monotony in class and textbooks

11. to get novel ideas
12. to provide changes for the missing parts of the existing techniques
13. to provide opportunities for real language use

The answers of the subjects show that most of them are aware of the fact that teachers need to make some changes in their teaching according to new developments in the field of ELT; and they believe that only then can they make their teaching more enjoyable and more successful.

The third question in this second part asks how teachers keep informed about the novel developments in teaching English. 32 teachers stated that they make use of periodicals, 31 stated that other colleagues help them being informed; 31 marked 'conferences and seminars' while 46 marked 'theoretical books', 42 marked 'course books/ teacher's books' and 13 marked the 'others' item. As an answer to the fourth question, 22 teachers ticked the 'periodicals', 57 ticked the 'theoretical books', 20 ticked the 'conferences and seminars' items as the most important in contributing to their knowledge during the last school year. The fifth question which inquires about how often teachers make use of novel teaching techniques reveals that 29 of them make frequent use of them while 47 of them seldom apply these in classroom, 11 of them rarely engage themselves in using them and 7 of them never try them out. The last question in the second part aims at determining the factors which hinder teachers from trying the novel teaching techniques in class and reveals that 46 find 'the number of students', 10 find 'their teaching load', 41 find 'lack of materials', 25 find 'classroom conditions', 38 find 'the curriculum', 25 find 'the course book', and 4 find 'other factors' as important in keeping them from employing the new techniques in their classes.

The third and the last part of the questionnaire asks the teachers to state the importance they attribute to improving themselves in various fields. The results show that 9 of them find 'receiving new ideas on classroom activities' partially important, while 24 of them believe this is important, and 68 of them believe it is very important. More theoretical knowledge on language teaching is viewed as not important by 1, partially important by 12, important by 44, and very important by 25 teachers. Being able to evaluate one's own professional competence is marked as partially important by 17, important by 31, and very important by 48 teachers. Furthermore, 2 teachers stated that they found improving one's class management skills unimportant, while 25 found it partially important, 25 found it important, and 39 found it very important.

The last question of the final part was meant to attract the teachers' attention to the factors which would make their teaching more beneficial if they kept on improving themselves through new materials, methods, and techniques. The answers given by the teachers have proved that they are willing to take further steps to improve themselves in order to:

1. teach more successfully,
2. make students more active,
3. increase the quality of teaching/learning process.

4. CONCLUSION

As we have assumed, the results of the questionnaire made it clear that most of the English language teachers in our country are aware of the concept of teacher development but mention the difficulty and/or impossibility of keeping up with the recent developments in ELT.

It is clear that the majority of the teachers find 'theoretical books' the easiest to have access to. However, it is not always so easy to find the theoretical books that are recently published. Furthermore, theory alone will not enable the teachers to put it into practice. They may need to observe how practitioners apply what is present in theoretical books.

Therefore, we believe that our teachers would benefit more from periodicals which are both cheaper and which attribute more importance to application than theoretical books; and conferences and seminars which could be held frequently to provide them both with theory and practice. Another means of learning the recent developments in ELT might be to participate in some workshops held to observe the application of the theory and to exchange ideas about the application; the advantages and disadvantages of the new theory/technique. The last but not the least important way to contribute to what our teachers already know is a systematic in-service training program that would help them keep up with the recent developments.

Questionnaire

Aim: The aim of this questionnaire is to determine the means and methods teachers of English employ in order to improve themselves in their profession.

Part I.

1. How old are you and how many years have you been engaged in teaching English?

2. Are you enrolled in any of the following programs?
 - a. MA b. PhD c. others
3. Which of the following programs have you completed?
 - a. BA b. MA c. PhD d. others
4. How many hours per week do you teach?
5. Which of the following adjectives would you use in defining your present mood about teaching English?
 - a. energetic b. enthusiastic c. contented
 - d. bored e. unwilling f. others
6. Which of the following factors affect your answer/s to question 5?
 - a. students b. classroom conditions
 - c. coursebook d. lack of supplementary material
 - e. curriculum f. teaching load g. others

Part II.

1. How important is it to gain novel ideas about English language teaching techniques?
 - a. of no importance b. partially important
 - c. important d. very important
 - e. no idea
2. What are the factors that affect your answer to question 1? Please state below.
3. How do you keep informed about the novel developments about teaching English. (You can tick more than one item.)
 - a. periodicals
 - b. colleagues
 - c. conferences and seminars
 - d. theoretical books
 - e. coursebooks/teachers' books
 - f. others
4. During the last school year which of the following has/have contributed to your professional knowledge and skills?
 - a. periodicals b. theoretical books
 - c. conferences and seminars d. others
5. How often do you make use of novel language teaching techniques while teaching?
 - a. frequently b. seldom c. rarely d. never

6. What are the factors which hinder you from employing novel language teaching techniques?
 - a. number of students b. teaching load
 - c. lack of material d. classroom conditions
 - e. curriculum f. coursebook
 - g. others

Part III.

1. Which of the following item/s would you like to improve yourself? Mark the priority of your choice as
 - 0 (no idea)
 - 1 (of no importance/unimportant)
 - 2 (partially important)
 - 3 (important)
 - 4 (very important)
 - a. gaining new ideas about classroom techniques
0 1 2 3 4
 - b. gaining theoretical knowledge about language teaching 0 1 2 3 4
 - c. being able to evaluate one's own professional competence 0 1 2 3 4
 - d. improving one's class management 0 1 2 3 4
2. What do you think a teacher's renewing and developing herself/himself means? Please state your ideas below.

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