

Teacher Professional Development: For a Mediating Process

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Résumé

Les différents changements que le monde est entrain de subir ont affecté le rôle de l'enseignant qui a changé d'un transmetteur du savoir à un inspirateur de ses apprenants, les aider à s'identifier et identifier leurs compétences. Mais comment peut-on identifier celles de l'enseignant ? Cette étude porte sur l'identification des défaillances qui existent dans certains départements où l'Anglais est enseigné pour des besoins spécifiques. Les résultats obtenus révèlent que les enseignants d'Anglais au département de sociologie à l'Université d'Oran ne sont pas formés pour enseigner l'Anglais pour objectifs spécifiques et manquent les compétences nécessaires pour l'élaboration des cours pour les étudiants de sociologie. La médiation pour améliorer le développement professionnel de l'enseignant reste l'ultime résolution pour le perfectionnement des compétences des enseignants pour l'enseignement de l'anglais pour objectifs spécifiques.

Mots clés : l'enseignant-médiation- référentiel de compétence -développement professionnel

Abstract

With the improvements the whole world is witnessing, the role of the teacher has changed from being the transmitter of knowledge to an inspiring one; helping his learners to identify themselves and their competencies. Yet, how can we identify the teacher's ones, i.e. his competencies? The present paper highlights the deficiencies existing in some departments where English is taught for specific purposes. The findings obtained revealed that teachers of English in the department of sociology were not trained to teaching ESP and lack the competencies in designing courses for sociology students. Mediation for improving the teacher's professional development remains the ultimate solution for the betterment of the teacher's competencies for teaching ESP¹.

Key words: teacher mediation-repository of competence-professional development

1. Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing amazing changes all over the world and at all levels. As a result, all fields are being affected by those changes, be them political, economical, industrial, social, or educational, since education cannot be dissociated from the other domains. As far as foreign language learning is concerned, the use of English is not limited to the paper and pencil use but rather the practice of English in real life situations. Besides, we have to adapt and modify our behaviours according to everyday changes. (Davis *et al* 2003:3)

Education, like all other domains is affected by those changes and affecting them. Consequently renovation and change are a must in order to understand the intricacies of the contemporary societies. For such reasons, the conventional teaching methodologies which viewed learners as empty vessels that needed to be filled, had to be reexamined and updated in order to make those learners actively participate

¹ ESP :acronym used for English for Specific Purposes

in the construction of their knowledge and become part of the society and the whole world in an international alliance as posited by the (United Nations,2006:3).Nonetheless, that alliance of civilizations would not be possible without the mastery of an international language; English that helps those different and controversial civilizations meet and interact.

Algeria, like all the other nations concerned with those worldwide revolutions, has modified its educational system. The transition from the classical teaching to the LMD² has witnessed a reconsideration of the learning outcomes. These outcomes which are based on mobility provide qualified individuals the opportunity either to pursue their studies overseas or get jobs there. Besides, historical colonial heritage made Algerian leaders aware of the importance of literacy to overcome the economic and industrial difficulties. The 1980s was the start of a series of reforms at different levels. Accordingly, the educational system has witnessed a boom in teacher recruitment. This need to teachers was a result to an urgent and necessary overhaul in the nationalization policy. Teachers were recruited after completing their secondary school education and sometimes without passing their baccalaureate examination. Yet, in order to enroll for a teaching career, a two-year training was crucial in order to be qualified as a teacher. Trainees in different teaching subjects had to learn various subjects in addition to the ones they would teach. As far as foreign language is concerned, trainees studied several subjects, including, phonetics, British and American civilizations, TEFL, Arabic, and educational psychology. After passing the first year, trainees had to attend classes and observe real learning. Later on, they had to put in practice what they acquired during their lectures.

In spite of the fact that training institutes have disappeared there are still some like ENS³ where learners are trained to be teachers, at the secondary school or the middle school. In addition to learning the science of teaching, the trainees experience a limited period of time allowing them to be confronted to the challenges of the classroom. Unfortunately, the number of those trainees is limited and does not satisfy the needs in terms of teachers' needs in the educational market. Nonetheless, students who specialize in other disciplines may teach although they have never been trained to. Similarly, University teachers are parachuted into classrooms without any experience in teaching. They enroll at the university after they obtain a magister, or sometimes a master degree in some universities where there is a shortage of teachers. They are not trained to lecturing, to tutorials, or to be confronted to the colossal responsibility they hold.

In the same line of thought, attrition of ESP teachers is witnessed in most if not all institutes and departments where specific English is needed. In fact, Algeria has implemented a reform in its educational system and has introduced English in almost all disciplines but has not thought of training teachers for specific purposes. Hence, a 'laissez-aller' situation is witnessed in those departments where English is needed for specific purposes, like the department of sociology in the University of Oran. The absence of the teaching material and the ambiguity of the learning objectives make teaching difficult and sometimes hazardous. English teachers, each one on his own initiative, (when he exists), trying to cope with the teaching conditions, adapting and mainly adopting the content of the course to those existing conditions. Yet, the validity of the teaching remains questionable. That is, the quality of the teaching methodology has to be carefully examined.

Research questions and Hypotheses:

The present paper was guided by two main questions:

- 1-What qualifications do ESP teachers possess and ?
- 2-How can General English teachers improve their competencies to meet ESP learners' needs?

To answer the aforementioned questions, we hypothesize that:

- 1-ESP teachers are not qualified to teach specific learners.
- 2-We also hypothesize that General English teachers may improve their competencies under mediation from more qualified and specialized teachers.

² LMD acronym for Licence (BA), Master, Doctorat

³ ENS : acronym for Ecole Nationale Supérieure

2. Data collection and Findings

The survey concerns teaching English in the department of sociology in the University of Oran. The backbone of the present survey consists of a combination of two tools; a structured observation and a questionnaire for three English teachers. Obtained data revealed the teachers' profiles; the three teachers are part-time teachers who teach at the secondary school. Besides, they avowed not having been trained to teaching ESP learners. That is, needs analysis, course design and material selection making teaching rather ponderous and hazardous. The results also demonstrate that such deficiencies not only affect learning but the students' attitudes, as well. The students' attitudes are reflected through their lack of attendance and participation, affecting both teaching and learning.

3. Mediation for Teacher Training

Along decades of restless investigations in pedagogy, researchers have come to a common conclusion that effective teaching is the result of the genuine ability to combine science with art for effective teaching. In fact, teaching, like driving a car; the mastery of the mechanisms of the vehicle makes practice easier and artistic with time. Similarly, ignorance of the theoretical background of teaching makes the practical phase difficult if not impossible. Hedgock (2009) describes the acquisition of professional competence as two interrelated and interacting stages in the same process whereby the trainee acquires the necessary knowledge and experience in the development of his career. Indeed, the practices within the classroom reveal the teachers' beliefs concerning the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the teacher's competence is a set of systematic considerations; his prior knowledge and assumptions of the teaching profession constitute the science and the theories upon which each decision relies. Existing knowledge, in addition to updated one and ongoing reflection make the ground to successful teaching practice. Yet, knowledge is ineffective without an awareness of its implementation. In fact, like preparing their students for the 'know-how' to be, teachers should be trained for a 'know-how' to teach within the classroom. That is, emphasis in training should be directed towards the *how* more than the *what*. (Carr, 2006:40)

It is important then, that future teachers and more specifically ESP ones, have some knowledge of the profession they want to practise. This existing knowledge will be the foundation to a new one. These two constitute the science of teaching which is crucial in any teaching training. Yet, knowledge alone is not sufficient to make effective teaching; a combination of knowledge and practice are essential in the construction of professional competence which is undoubtedly the goal of teacher training. It is our major concern then, as foreign language teachers to effectively think of appropriate decisions for the betterment of our teaching. Our mission, in fact, consists of sharing an overall aim with other institutions, which consist of training our learners to become 'good' global citizens.

Unlike other teaching contexts, teaching English as a secondary/tertiary subject requires more consciousness, not only from the teacher and his learners but from the whole institution, as well. Being aware of the requirements of the educational market cannot be dissociated from the social one. Moreover, it is the social market which determines the learning needs. Thus, politicians, economists, educationists, and all the constituents of the society share the responsibility for the identification of the requirements of the society as a whole, and learners specifically, allowing educationists and curriculum designers to identify the learning needs and outcomes. (Long, 2009:4)

Technological improvements are making the whole world in constant mutation. Accordingly, the educational domain is affected by such mutations. The reforms in the Algerian educational system have helped to some extent, to move from conventional and archaic teaching methodologies to more developed and updated ones, taking into account technological means as major features of such transition. Unfortunately, our educational institutions are still witnessing a high rate of failure since introducing technology only in the classroom does not guarantee success. Besides, assessing teaching is not an easy matter because "*demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency is often difficult.*" (Long, 2009:4)

Thus, serious reflection on appropriate teaching methodologies, adapted to our classrooms and our culture, have to be carried out in order to achieve successful learning. Specialists in the domain relate school failure to different variables; the big number of the pupils in the classroom, unsuitable teaching material, and unqualified teachers. Moreover, the teacher, the main actor in such system is pointed out as being the "weakest stitch" that is responsible of academic failure.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess the teachers' competence or incompetence. Besides, it is important to delimit the characteristics of the people who are qualified for measuring the teacher's competence/incompetence. Obviously, teachers' incompetence in foreign language learning pertains to their poor training or unreadiness to face the challenges of the classroom. In fact, the majority of our teachers are not trained; they are generally launched into a classroom without being aware of the hidden parameters of such environment. 50% of school failure in Algeria is due to the lack of teacher training, (Meziane, 2013). In fact, teachers at the primary, middle, and secondary schools, are employed just after they obtain their BA, or MA degrees, without any preparation to meet youngsters, generally, adolescents, who are in a critical period which needs professionals aware of their behaviours and unexpected reactions.

In the same nutshell, emphasis should be put upon the continuum of the dichotomy of theory and practice in teaching. These two constitute "*the two sides of the same coin*" (Jourdenais, 2009:652). That is, teachers would not perform well if they did not master the science of teaching. Anderson (2009:4) summarizes the qualities of effective teachers into three main criteria; knowledge, ability and personality. He draws the three paradigms in a triangle, explaining the features of each paradigm.

➤ **Knowledge:**

Although the teacher is no more the only source of knowledge, he remains a model for his learners, affecting them positively or negatively. Therefore, any teacher should have a thorough knowledge of the subject he teaches. A mastery of the subject provides the teacher with self confidence which is transmitted to learners who feel this strength in mastering the subject. If it is not the case, learners will demonstrate a rejection and a negative attitude towards the teacher and consequently towards learning.

An alarming phenomenon is observed related to the enrolment of teachers at different educational levels. Young qualified people start teaching without being qualified. That is, their degree does prepare them for the classroom because they are not outfitted to face the challenges of the classroom. In fact, the majority of them not only lacks that inborn capacity of teaching but do not master the science, as well.

➤ **Ability:**

Ability is one of the main distinctive features of a teacher. Teacher's ability lies first, in his capacity in mastering the classroom. An authoritative teacher is trustworthy, demonstrating a capacity to control the class and the subject he teaches. Besides, he demonstrates an indisputable ability to unleash the students' motivation, allowing space for learners' autonomy, encouraging interaction and cooperation in an environment that is free from fear and stress. The teacher's ability, then lies in his genuine capacity in creating the suitable learning conditions. "Ability" according to Anderson, lies in the teachers' capacity in having both leadership and instructional skills.

On the one hand, planning, a leadership criterion is crucial for any formal learning setting. Indeed, course planning facilitates teaching and enhances learning. Moreover, a course which is not planned or not well-planned is quickly felt by learners who demonstrate once again a negative attitude towards learning the target language. Thus, planning requires time, effort, and reflection on the part of the teacher. Successful planning, though effortful and demanding, certainly provides the teacher with self satisfaction, confidence, and enhances learning. On the other hand, 'instructional', as named by Anderson lies in the teacher's capacity in imparting knowledge appropriately and effectively. It is important that the teacher knows how to put in practice the knowledge he presents to his learners.

Leadership is another quality of an effective teacher. This latter should show some features in leading the classroom towards the learning process. In fact, one of the difficulties is to attract learner's attention and make them interact with you and with their classmates, responding to your instructions when needed; releasing authority which should be respected by everyone in the classroom, even the teacher himself.

➤ **Personality:**

In addition to knowledge and ability, effective teachers should have some other personal qualities. Obviously, being an effective teacher requires more than a degree; it requires inner capacities and external ones, as well. Thus, decision takers should be cautious and objective in the selection of teachers at the pre-service phase because it is easier to cure an illness at an early stage and before the disease spreads in the whole body; the society.

4. Teacher Development

Teaching EFL today is faced with increasing enrollments and a shortage of qualified teachers. In addition, a changing student population, nationwide education reform, and the development of national standards for foreign language learning are placing a number of new demands on foreign language teachers. In fact a big challenge is facing EFL teachers; making their learners proficient speakers and users of the foreign language at an international level. Therefore, EFL teachers, besides their academic competencies and their pedagogical ones, they should have extra skills necessary for facing those challenges; mainly interpersonal skills and technological ones. Similarly, ESP teachers must maintain proficiency in the target language and stay up to date on current issues related to the population they face. Regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess when they start teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process. ESP teachers must continue to accumulate pedagogical skill, in order to adapt their teaching to any new and unexpected situation in the classroom. This can be done through evening courses, summer seminars, lectures, or workshops offered by professional associations or universities. Indeed, educational reforms, a rapidly changing student clientele, technological development, and new views on assessment are just a few of the pressures today's foreign language teachers are encountering. If the foreign language profession is to provide first class instruction to its students while keeping up with a growing list of demands, support for high quality teacher preparation and continuing professional development must be given high priority.

Because the world as a whole and Algeria especially, is witnessing a recession in the educational system, it has become necessary to think about the weaknesses within the system that have led to such a disaster. Being recognized as a major actor in this system, the teacher, with other stakeholders, share the great responsibility of the quality of the learning outcomes. The dynamic mutation the world is witnessing in various fields certainly affected education. The purpose of teacher development is to find remedies to the problems that the educational domain encounters nowadays.

5. Teacher Proficiency/Learner Competency

Proficiency and competency have long been subject to numerous discussions. Although, the two words are sometimes used interchangeably, they differ in meaning. Proficiency refers to the highest level of attainment of a competency. Being proficient entails reaching a satisfactory and satisfying level in a given competency. Teaching competencies include content knowledge, managerial skills, values, material development and course design for specific purposes teaching.

In Algeria, teacher proficiency has long been questioned though not much research had been done in this domain because assessment of the teacher remains still a taboo subject to be discussed. The competency-based approach entails that teachers help and prepare learners achieve competencies that allow them face the challenges of everyday life. Nevertheless, in order to achieve that goal, teachers should themselves attain proficiency in different teaching skills. In fact, different levels of several competencies are to be attained, not necessarily at a high level but at least a medium one.

Research in teacher development has yielded amazing findings demonstrating that the recession in teaching relates to different paradigms. Firstly, the fact that our teachers are reticent to change and stick to the conventional methods in teaching has been recognized as the major pedagogical weakness on the part of the teachers. In fact, the teacher is categorized as being resistant to change and does not adapt to the requirements of the contemporary world. (Neufeld 2009:15, 16)

6. Conclusion

The teacher has always been recognized as a model and admired for the mission he undertakes. Unfortunately, that status has gone astray with the incessant problems encountered in the classroom. He has been, though not the only one, pointed out as the responsible for the decline of instruction. Undoubtedly, he shares the responsibility with the authorities, of the educational failures.

The overhaul in the Algerian educational system has provided new insights to instruction; technological means have been introduced and programs, books and curricula have been adapted to the requirements of the era. Unfortunately, not much consideration has been directed towards the teacher, the main protagonist of the whole system.

To help teachers improve professionally, training at different levels is decisive. In fact, and in addition to a degree, training is crucial to enable the future to be teacher carry out his responsibilities. Nonetheless, training should be guided by professionals who master both the science and art of teaching. That is, experienced teachers who have had a long and affluent experience in the teaching domain. Proficiency in teaching then, starts with improving teaching competencies. At the beginning of their teaching career, pre-service teachers have to be trained and equipped for improving the competencies they need to teach. In fact, learners' competencies reflect the teacher's proficiency.

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