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Teacher Training: The Effectiveness of Workshops in English Language Teaching

تكوين الأساتذة: نجاعة الورشات في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية

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In-service teacher training is necessary for teachers to be more professionals and innovators through regional and national meetings. Workshops, the corner stone in teacher education, promote language teaching and provide helpful strategies to cope with the neck breaking changes in our classes. Based on the fact that English language instruction lacks creativity at the level of secondary schools in Mascara, this paper explores the effectiveness of workshops in refining the teaching learning process. Qualitative as well as quantitative approaches were used to collect data and to ensure triangulation by using an observation, an English inspectors' questionnaire, and FGD (Focused Group discussion) with novice student- teachers. An analysis was then conducted to pull out the findings of the study which showed that even though inspectors organize seminars, systematic workshops are no longer administered to help adapt and improve teaching. As a result, the researcher provides a set of procedures the leaders should follow to achieve the intended objectives of a given workshop. The use of a computer mediated communication is suggested to avoid time constraints as well as to promote collaboration among teachers.

ملخص**الكلمات المفتاحية:**

يعد التكوين المستمر للأساتذة ضرورياً حتى يرفعوا من مستوى خبرتهم و إبداعهم، وذلك من خلال الندوات الداخلية والوطنية. تعمل ورشات العمل - وهي حجر الزاوية في تكوين الأساتذة - على تعزيز تدريس اللغة وتقديم استراتيجيات معدة خصيصاً للأساتذة قصد التعامل مع التغييرات الحادة في الأقسام الدراسية. وإذا ما أخذنا بعين الاعتبار أن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في مستوى التعليم الثانوي في ولاية معسكر يفتقر عادة إلى الإبداع، نحاول في هذا البحث استكشاف فعالية ورشات العمل في تحسين العملية التعليمية. ولقد تم استخدام المناهج النوعية والكمية لجمع البيانات وتوضيف الملاحظة، فضلاً عن استبيان موجه لمفتشي اللغة الإنجليزية، ومناقشات موضوعاتية بين الأساتذة. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الندوات التي ينظمها المفتشون في شكلها ومضمونها الحاليين لم تعد تعطي نتائج فعالة في مجال تحسين كفاءة الأساتذة. ومن أجل ذلك، يقدم الباحث مجموعة من الإجراءات التي يجب على المؤطرين إتباعها لتحقيق الأهداف المرجوة من ورشات عمل معينة. كما تم اقتراح التواصل عن بعد لاختصار الوقت وتعزيز التعاون بين الأساتذة.

اللغة الانجليزية

تكوين الأساتذة

الورشات

التعليم

التعلم.

1. Introduction

Imparting knowledge and skills from teachers to students is one of the ever difficult processes. It encompasses all the activities and experiences of instruction that have a great effect on shaping learner's mind and character. To quote Cohen, (1988 cited in Labaree, 2000: 1) "teaching is a practice of human improvement". In other words, the teacher plays a significant role in any educational programme since he leads from darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. For this, the urgent need for teachers' preparation and education should be focused and highlighted.

Teacher education is a plan intended to improve instructor's proficiency and competence so that he can meet the requirements of his work. It is, therefore, targeted to help teachers function in a variety of intimidating conditions that set off unintended list of will and eagerness into the heart of the teaching-learning process.

Generally speaking teachers are called up to meet the needs of a huge number and diverse types of learners. The current paper, thus, will tackle the issue of teacher education and more particularly the design of effective workshops to aid teachers adopt and adapt certain techniques in the teaching of the English language. Sharing experiences among experts in the field is the corner stone in any workshop, yet, it still needs further consideration on the Algerian ELT (English Language Teaching) landscape. The way workshops are administered in Mascara for instance rely on a linear process where the inspector is the sole director of the information being transferred and the interactions as well. This is the traditional procedure that is no more useful within the quick changes and the technological improvements that call for a more collaborative and creative atmosphere.

We, in this paper, try to answer the following research question

To what extent do the designed workshops meet the objectives of language teaching in the Algerian

institutions?

How can we inform the ways workshops are actually administered?

The objectives of the study are as follow

- To find out whether teachers organize regularly workshops to meet the continuous innovations that call for change in the educational system.
- To look for some recommendations that suit better the Algerian context, the Mascarian one in particular.

2. Teacher education

Although the changing dogmas in education encourage learner centeredness, the teacher is still considered as the heart of the educational system. He always struggles to aid the little learners construct a strong identity and behave well in a given cultural context. Etim (1989: 2) noted that

"in the educational system the academic performance of students is seen as purely dependent in a large part on the quality of the teacher, his teaching and facilities available which in turn depends on both the education and motivation of the teacher"

Teacher education is an important motive in the molding of enthusiastic, gifted and skillful educators who unquestionably ensure quality and thereby successful apprenticeship. It is by and large agreed upon the central role a well trained teacher plays in the improvement of a respectful and a qualified community.

According to the Greenwood Dictionary of education (2003) teacher education means

"the intentional and unintentional curricula, instructional settings, and experiences that enable teachers to promote learning and change in others."

Subsequently, teacher education is meant initially to bring teachers accompanied by different levels of experience, expertise, skills, and knowledge in the profession by providing pedagogical as well as psychological techniques. These help teachers work creatively with the constantly changing moods of

the learners. Teacher education, thus, has to cover teaching as well as professional skills.

Teacher training and professional development are imperative objectives in the teacher education process. Training, according to Richards and Farrell (2005:03), refers to,

“activities directly focused on a teacher’s present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals. Often it is seen as preparation for instruction into a first teaching position or as preparation to take on a new teaching assignment or responsibility.”

Teacher training calls for an urgent consideration of the fundamental concepts and principles as prerequisite for applying them to teaching and to demonstrate them in the classroom.

“Teacher training also involves trying out new strategies in the classroom, usually with supervision, and monitoring and getting feedback from others on one’s practice. The content of training is usually determined by experts and is often available in standard training formats or through prescriptions in methodology books.” (Richards and Farrell, *ibid*: 03)

Teacher training is directed towards novice teachers who need additional practice on how to deal with students and the subject matter to be taught. It is mainly restricted to a short period of time when these instructors are evaluated. Richards and Farrell (2005) further highlight the goals of any training programme which include:

1. Teaching instructors how to effectively start a lesson;
2. Attaining the different techniques of textbook adaptation to meet students’ needs;
3. Learning how to involve students in a collaborative work during a course;
4. Designing well structured and focused questions;
5. Using authentic aids and resources;

6. Learning how to assess learners’ achievement.

Contrary to what has been stated, the latter is broader and targeted towards lifelong learning and growth of teacher’s awareness during his career. Teacher development therefore requires a long journey in the direction of improving such an activity i.e. teaching. Richards and Farrell (*ibid*) further identify a set of the major goals that might be achieved during the process. These include:

1. To understand the process of foreign language development;
2. To identify the various teacher role e changing associated with the type of learners in a given context;
3. To decide what to do when teaching a particular lesson;
4. To reconsider our understanding of the principle of language teaching;
5. To understand different styles of teaching;
6. To find out how learners perceive the classroom activities.

3. Types of Professional Development

Different types of professional development have been identified and professional development programs can be available at the disposal of teachers. In terms of professional development types, Richards and Farrell (2005) differentiate, for instance, between two types of professional development: the individual professional development and the institutional professional development. Another example comes from Pelochino (2014), who identifies five major types of teachers’ professional development. These well-spread types can be used by teachers in order to improve their teaching and have a continuous professional development in their teaching career.

a. In-House Professional Development

This kind of training can be offered at schools. each week, a PD session takes place and one of the personnel including the teachers and the principal in

a given school is in charge of that. The continuous arrangement of different sessions enables all teachers in the school to participate.

b. District-wide or Organizational-wide Professional Development

This type of teachers' professional development calls for collaboration among the participants in different sites, according to the appointed leader of each session. It can be pre-programmed along determined periods. It can be performed half-days, full-days or even multiple days. In this way, teachers will have the opportunity to receive a kind of collaborative professional development to learn something in common since they are from the same district and can meet in such occasions. Such educational procedures usually require the presence of a guest speaker, most often a specialized in the field, to present the data or to lead the meeting.

c. Institution-Based Professional Development

The institution-based professional development is a long term process that turns around a given theme, assessment or teaching methods. Such a type of professional developments is targeted towards universities, non-profit organizations or research institutions. The organized conferences are financed and teachers may obtain an income for both time and participation.

d. Professional enquiry groups

This form of professional development is intended to gather teachers in groups to learn about something of interest. Long term formats and protocols of such meetings are designed regularly for teachers to collaborate, learn and share new teaching practices.

e. Coaching

On-site coaches or district coaches are organized to support teachers in different ways to reach the pre-set goals. Newly recruited teachers should also have a new teacher coach whose task is to help them acquire the necessary qualifications that enable them face the challenges they will meet when teaching.

The following diagram suggested by BOWERS (1987) depicts clearly the process of teacher education and the stages through which students go to reach the advanced training.

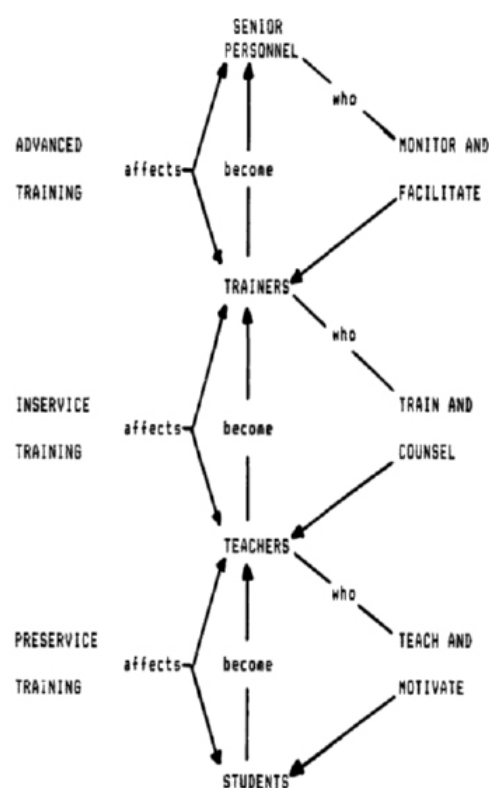


Figure 1: An Integrated System of Teacher Education

An integrated system of teacher education adopted from BOWERS (1987: 6)

The diagram shows the procedure through which the heads facilitate and monitor the teaching strategies to the trainers who train and counsel teachers who subsequently teach and motivate their students i.e. the future teachers. All these require a three stage teacher education including a pre-service, in-service, and finally an advanced training.

The objectives of this line of interest can be achieved through the regular design of the effective workshops where teachers can meet to exchange thoughts, perceptions and real experiences.

4. What is a workshop

The workshop is defined in the Greenwood Dictionary of Education (2003: 384) as

"An educational program designed to bring together persons interested in a specific field, for cooperative

participation in educational experiences, to provide new knowledge and skills, develop plans and programs, and reassess attitudes. The major work in developing learning experience is provided by the participants themselves."

To state it differently, workshops are primarily meant to bridge the gap between practice and theory. They provide linguistic as well as sound pedagogical knowledge in the course of sharing teaching experiences and creative ideas in a collaborative work to improve the worthiness and quality of instruction.

It is by and large agreed that workshops play a crucial role in refining teaching. One can present a range of aims a workshop leader has to achieve. Richards and Farrell (ibid: 24) provide a list of benefits that includes:

4.1. Input from experts

Workshops constitute one of the most valuable meetings to experts in education. In a collaborative work, teachers help each other to find out important outcomes on how to deal with students, how to evaluate their progress, and how to assess themselves through well established procedures.

4.2. Teachers' practical classroom applications

It is generally acknowledged that a workshop is primarily meant to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Both in-service and pre-service teachers find very useful applications when sharing personal ideas and experiences.

4.3. Teachers' motivation

Workshops help fuel the dying fires of motivation since teachers from different schools meet and share problems encountered in their classrooms. This upholds the instructor's enthusiasm and zeal to overcome all the difficulties to gain the predetermined goals.

4.4. Support Innovations

Since they rekindle enthusiasm and passion, workshops help teachers to cope with any change occurring during their journey towards improving attainment through an exchange of ideas and the continuum exposure to any innovation that revolutionizes the teaching learning process. This process is in constant

improvement and change due to its nature as a human science.

5. Methodology

In the current research, we made use of a case study that involves an in-depth and detailed examination of a particular case i.e. the Mascarian secondary education, more particularly the group of novice English language teachers in Mascara (an Algerian town). The participants are a group of novice teachers aging between 25 and 32 years old as well as five inspectors who contributed to the provision of some hindrances and suggestions to help improve the process of workshops administration.

6. Discussion and analysis of the findings

6.1. The observation

A set of self reflection questions are always asked after each workshop to fetch opportunities for improvement. A major question is whether we worked collaboratively and were observed critically so as a constructive feedback is to be afforded. All what concern our contributions as novice teachers, including descriptions of our own experiences, what skills and knowledge is actually being acquired, in what ways certain assignments are being practiced, and who the main participants are, must be considered.

According to the observation, the workshops organized by teachers still lack the real procedures so as teachers and more particularly the newly recruited ones can attain the suitable technique to cope with the constant challenges they face when teaching. One seminar or workshop per term, where the number of the participants exceeds thirty is not enough to meet all the needs and to find solutions to the problems encountered in the English classes.

6.2. The questionnaire

The questionnaire that were distributed to five inspectors consists of six items divided into two sections each has a specific objective. The first part is targeted towards finding out the teachers' perceptions about teacher education. The second section is devoted to gauging the importance of workshops according to our participants and their effectiveness in improving the teaching process.

6.2.1. The importance of pre-service training to student-teachers

According to our participants, Pre-service training is very important for it allows the future teachers to get prepared for their profession.

6.2.2. In-service training

The respondents agreed upon the need of In-service training especially to exchange experiences, opinions and communication in order to enrich their knowledge through regional meetings and national conferences.

6.2.3. The ways workshops improves the teachers' skill so as they can meet the challenge in their

All of the inspectors agreed that workshops help teachers improve and attain necessary skills to meet the challenges in their classrooms by bringing them in conferences, training workshops, seminars, publishing newsletters, teaching documents, and materials to assist teachers in their career development.

6.2.4. The effectiveness of workshops in building up innovation and motivation

They believe that workshops create an atmosphere of communication and coordination between teachers and inspectors in developing curricula and methods of teaching English as a foreign language in order to progress in this field and discover the weaknesses, and challenges experienced when teaching this language.

6.2.5. The procedures a workshop leader has to follow.

When the respondents were asked about the procedures followed so as to meet the technological changes and the any innovations in the ELT context, they assert that the leaders should inform all those interested in this field about the latest innovations in teaching English via the Internet and social networking.

Moreover, and owing to the remarkable development the teaching of English language is witnessing a throughout the world, and due to the use of modern technology, it becomes imperative to reconsider the curricula and teaching methods which still depend on the dumping of the learner's mind by grammar rules. These methods are rejected among modern learners and teachers who want to invent modern ways and techniques.

Thereby and to achieve these goals we must make efforts as teachers, educational professors, researchers and inspectors to find ways and alternative frameworks.

Special workshops, intensive classes, training sessions for teachers as well as students who have chosen the profession of teaching this language should be organized.

Educationalists have to exchange experiences, opinions and promote communication among teachers in order to enrich their knowledge through regional meetings and national conferences.

6.2.6. What suggestions do you provide to student-teachers and workshop leaders to improve the way workshops are actually being performed?

Our participants suggest organizing workshops for different teaching levels and sectors and choosing the appropriate time to reach most teachers, record them and make them available online, make a fruitful discussion about it.

6.3. The focused group discussions

When meeting with the novice teachers, all of them agreed upon the fact that there is always a communication gap between what to be taught in the workshops and what they actually encounter. The necessary techniques must be adapted to meet the needs of the learners as well as to consider the changing attitudes of the huge number of pupils that makes the mission more difficult. All of them call for an urgent reconsideration for the time allotted to the administered workshops and their frequency for the workshops in their exact meaning are no longer administered.

The results shows that neither the number of the participant nor the topic of the workshop are respected due to the number of the participants for they are not afforded equal chances to present their problems so as they can find the suitable solutions.

7. Result and discussions

The result reveals that a well designed workshop plays a crucial role in helping teachers and especially the novice ones. They provide a solid basis for a successful

teaching process. However and in an Algerian context, more particularly in Mascara, workshops are not well conducted to give equal chances for all teachers to expose their real experiences and understanding of the theoretical framework of language teaching.

The activities discussed in the workshops most often rely on the old fashioned methods such as the grammar translation method that shed a good deal of light on grammar and mechanical language issues, the reason why most teachers as well as students find difficulty when communicating thoughts pragmatically in creative activities.

Time constraints always hinder the workshop leaders from efficiently reaching the intended objectives. One seminar per term does never satisfy the needs of the teachers and consequently the needs of their learners so as to promote the teaching process in a country where English language is thought to be a foreign language in overcrowded classes. For this, a lack of total immersion and constructive coordination and collaboration would surely be reflected on the results.

8. Towards a pedagogical shift in teacher education

All innovation requires a kind of mediation that calls for a link between an idea and a given context, thoughts to actions, or hypotheses to realities, and teacher education is no exception (BOWERS, 1987). Informational technologies are increasingly improving and very prominent in the teaching process. As education revolutionizes due to the integration of technologies, teacher training must also be revolutionized (Starkey, 2019).

The use of digital libraries of classroom videos would surely enable the workshop leaders to avoid confusion with time constraints. The teachers therefore can identify the good practices and discuss them. This can also help the successful integration of technologies in schools for the teacher preparation affords a solid understanding for the different media that can be used in education and their main hindrance. In the case of workshops as an imperative element in the whole process, the urgent need for a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) would surely help reach the intended objectives set by the leaders. (charalambo and Mcisaac, 2010)

9. Procedures for planning effective workshops

In light of what has been stated, a short term and flexible workshops have to be well organized and managed. For this, Richards and Farrell (ibid: 25) identify a set of measures upon which leaders have to plan workshops and which can be illustrated as follow

9.1.Choosing an appropriate topic

This means that the choice of a more focused, limited, and narrowed topic that deals with a particular problem or issue may provide satisfying results since workshops are short term.

9.2.Limiting the number of participants

It is preferable that the number of teachers participating in a workshop should not surpass thirty so as to make sure that everyone has contributed. Otherwise they could not afford or attain fitting feedback on what has been identified i.e. the topic.

9.3.Identifying a suitable workshop leader

The choice of a skillful and qualified supervisor with special talents i.e. "Knowledgeable about the subject matter, Familiar with ways of conducting a workshop, Familiar with ways of teaching adult learners" Richards and Farrell (ibid: 27, 28) would help attain satisfactory achievements.

9.4. Plan appropriate sequence of activities

It is generally agreed that the selection of activities focus teachers' attention and organize their ideas to understand better what is to be taught. For this Watson et al (1998:161, 162) afford a set of useful activities the trainers use to aid conduct a significant workshop where all teachers can contribute to successfully obtain the desired objectives. These activities are as follow:

9.4.1. Unity building activities

These activities are introductory tricks designed specifically to grab participants' attention. A kind of ice breakers activities used to create a sense of unity amongst the teachers to get them accustomed to each other and to the workshop leader.

9.4.2. Direct instruction presentation

Provide theoretical insights into what to be trained. This can set the yardsticks for a well conducted

workshop where all the participants are called up to respect the themes to be presented and reconsider their prior understanding of the teaching methods to be tackled.

9.4.3. *Partner work*

It is determined to create a cooperative participation. Usually pair-work discussions increase motivation especially by sharing experiences with different types of learners from different areas of the district.

9.4.4. *Small group discussions*

A group-work discussion about the efficacy of a given method and how it can be actually applied would significantly reduce confusion and thereby raise motivation. As confidence is built up when taught what to do at each stage, teachers can deal with areas of uncertainty either in the small group discussions or the role play sessions. (Bowers, 1987)

9.4.5. *Role play sessions*

The strategic use of role play sessions focuses on reducing anxiety and nervousness among the participants. *“Role playing is best when it is Icebreaking, Shared Experiences, Modeling, Acting, and Debriefing”* (LEKHI and NUSSBAUM, 2015: 59). The actual use and practice of particular techniques and procedures acknowledges the challenges faced and thereby creates a sense of collegiality among the facilitators and the participants in the workshop.

9.4.6. *Co-planning activities*

They are intended to improve one's motivation and proficiency in supportive circumstances. Co-planning activities support equitable learning opportunities. Equity according to Sears et al (2018: 77) includes

“the fair distribution of material and human resources; intellectuality challenging curricula; educational experiences that build on students' cultures, languages, home experiences, and identities; and pedagogies that enable students to engage in critical thought and democratic participation in society”.

9.4.7. *Reflection time*

It is important to allocate time for reflection so as to rewire the brains and see the things that have never been seen or known. In short, this measure is planned

to evaluate what has been presented and discussed in a given workshop. It consists of a set of procedures determined by Richards and Farrell (ibid).

a. **Look for opportunities for follow-up:**

Workshops should provide opportunities for creativity and continuation i.e. all what has been presented theoretically has to be applied in a well managed plan. Teachers have to meet according to a well administered schedule to treat consecutively the educational ills.

b. **Include evaluation:**

The evaluation is important to gauge a workshop so that to determine if the predetermined objectives have been achieved. For this reason, each single step in a workshop has to be measured. In other words, participants have to test the efficacy of what has been presented in terms of what has been provided by Farrell and Richards (ibid) i.e. the aims.

10. **Conclusion**

A well-designed professional development (PD) programme serves to extend and promote teachers' savoir faire and broaden and improve their teaching practices. However, professional development programs often fail to achieve sustained change in teacher practices and improvement in student learning. The efficacy of teacher training and development is basically built on the effectiveness of workshops. The systematic use of Workshops based on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) help avoid the confusions that encounter their value, mainly time constraints and lack of effective collaboration and interaction. Because they are required to afford opportunities for lifelong learning and lasting outcomes, workshops have to provide valuable insights as well as reasonable applications to improve the teaching of languages, in particular English language teaching.

Conflict of Interest

I declare that I have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to investigate the importance of workshops in improving the teaching-learning process. The researcher will be grateful if you agree to answer the following questions.

1. What do you think of pre-service training and to what extent does it help student-teachers?
.....
2. What about in-service training?
.....
3. Do you think that workshops help teachers improve and attain the necessary skills to meet the challenge in their

classrooms? How?

.....
.....

4. Do you think that they build up innovation and motivation? How?

.....
.....

5. What procedures do you think a workshop leader has to follow?

.....

6. What suggestions do you provide to student-teachers and workshop leaders to improve the way workshops are actually being performed?

.....

Appendix 2

Question asked in the FGD

1. What do you think of the workshops that are actually administered?
2. What do you think of the number of the participants in these workshops?
3. Do they meet the challenges you encounter in your classes?
4. Do they consider the improvements in language teaching?
5. Is the time allotted for these workshops sufficient to tackle all the issues related to English language teaching in Algerian schools?

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