

Improving EFL Teacher Training

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1-Introduction:

In any teaching-learning situation success depends on giving proper consideration to both human elements, such as the role of the teacher, the nature of the learners, and also to non-human elements like the textbook, the syllabus, the number of hours allotted to the subject study and the like.

With the education reform, teaching foreign languages is the core of many debates and the agenda of almost all discussions. Thus, many questions on the subject are posed: should we teach scientific subjects in French or in English? Should we introduce both of them in primary schools? At what level? But the true questions are hardly raised like the ones concerning the teacher, his qualifications and his training. Let us make no mistake about it, any tentative reform, and whatever its actions are, could not be achieved without prior action of teachers ; they are the cornerstone and the secret of any successful educational system, for they contribute to a large extent in the achievement of all objectives. Therefore, priority should be given to teachers - how to prepare them to changes, innovations and reforms that are likely to happen-.

2-Problem Identification :

The present communication aims at pointing at the educational policy of training. First, the suppression of « I.T.E » and « Ecoles Normales » has left a gap in the field of training ; second, the social peace requirements have imposed temporary solutions for real problems, such as heavy recruitment of graduate students which has shown its limits and that has led in one way or another to a deficit of a pedagogical character and later professional in addition to the reduction of

the training practice duration and the insufficient mastery of needs planning.

3-The Present Training context

With the suppression of «I .T. E » and « Ecoles Normales» most universities, to some extent, have taken in charge the training of teachers. I would consider a very important problem concerning the EFL (PES) in some Algerian universities. I do not mean to assess their training because, and I must apologize for that, no assessment tools, nor was scientific evaluation of the curriculum used. However, teaching in a secondary school for two decades, supervising trainees, being a member of the CAPES commission may help to have more or less objective evaluation of the EFL teacher training. The diagnosis is unfortunately severe and negative: the departments of English in some universities do not train efficient teachers of EFL neither do they train competent “speakers” of English.

The training sessions and the great deal of conversation with the trainees have revealed some deficiencies in their initial training. The article will look into the two types of training the university is supposed to provide in order to produce teachers of EFL ready to face their pupils in the secondary school classrooms. We will attempt to detect the deficiencies and the causes that have engendered them

4-The Linguistic Training.

The linguistic deficiencies are linked to the main modules which constitute the curriculum of the licence, and concern the language practice.

4-1- Oral and written Expression

The trainees seemed to understand perfectly conversations about teaching, pupils, methodology university life; they could also express themselves with some kind of fluency. However, some deficiencies could be noticed in intonation, speech delivery, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The trainees' writing skills could not be accurately evaluated through the teaching unit plans they designed because these consisted of short sentences such as instructions and the formulation of aims, but part of the preparation of their lessons they were advised to

write the final written composition to predict their pupils' language problems and needs, and what they wrote contained many flaws as far as coherence, punctuation and even capitalization were concerned.

4-2- Knowledge of the Language Structure.

Here it seemed that the students had acquired rules of grammar and phonetics but were unable to put them in practice when it came to teaching. Methodology was certainly lacking but they also seemed not being able to understand the function and the nature of some rules.

As for the causes which have engendered these deficiencies, they can be traced through the way and the methods these modules are taught. Both oral and written expression are very important modules for a future teacher of English, but what is noticed is that they are the most neglected: they are taught by inexperienced teachers without any programmes a methodology or assigned objectives. Phonetics and grammar are often taught more theoretically and we could not see any impact of the acquired phonetic rules on the students' oral expression, and no impact of what had been learnt in grammar on their oral and written expression

5-The Pedagogical/Professional Training

This is done or supposed to be done in a form of some theoretical modules such as: TEFL, Psycho-pedagogy, and Psycho-linguistics, and training period (of about five weeks) in a secondary school in the third term of the fourth year. Most of the students do not see the difference between these modules because they deal with some theoretical aspects of teaching/learning process and some of the well-known approaches to language teaching, but this remains abstract and the trainees cannot figure out their application in real classroom; for instance many trainees confessed that have never been taught what a teaching or a thematic unit is, what its different phases are: Listening, Reading, Language Manipulation and Writing, they had never received the proper training to design teaching unit plans nor even lessons, nor even methods of evaluating pupils' learning and their teaching.

The pedagogical training in secondary schools planned by the Algerian official texts has been unfortunately either cancelled in some parts of the country or neglected. First it is done in a very short period (4 to 5 weeks) -. Second, the trainees are supposed to be supervised by their university teachers, inspectors and trainers (professeurs d'application) in the secondary school. Yet it is this period where the gap between the university and the secondary school should be bridged, that it is widening, because the university teachers do not follow their students in the schools, inspectors are not even informed of the operation and the trainees go to any available teacher because the "Direction of Education" does not do its job.

The trainees find it an interesting experience and although they have not enough time to observe, to learn and apply what they have learnt, they acknowledge that they learn more about the art of teaching in a classroom than at the university. This has been proved to be true in the "CAPES" exams; most of the trainees improved not only their teaching but also their linguistic competence. This means that their training is not done on the job which also means that the university does not fully contribute to the training of a "PES", and does not even meet the needs of the secondary schools in Algeria.

In sum, all the modules that are taught during the four years are supposed to offer programmes that provide perspectives on language learning -teaching, and to strengthen the teacher language skills. However, some teachers of English comment that there is no indication of increase; most of them agree that the present training practice offers little if not anything new because it is not well-thought and achieved in non-appropriate norms.

6-The Teacher Training:

Teacher training should focus its attention on classroom practice, and should have as its primary goal the improvement of teacher's practical efforts to bring about effective learning on the part of learners. Experiences have shown that teacher development should be fostered not only in in-service training but also in initial training. The teacher training involves giving

novice and experienced teachers alike readymade answers as opposed to allowing them to discover their own alternatives (Lucas, 1988:42).

For Freeman (1989:39), he defines training as a strategy for direct intervention by the collaborator in the teacher's teaching. The intervention is focused on specific outcomes achieved through a sequence of steps within a specific period of time. It is based on the assumption that through mastery of discrete skills teachers will be effective in the classroom.

However, for Davis and Plumb (1988:40), training entails a "pre-planned" agenda set by the workplace or syllabus as opposed to an "impromptu flexible agenda set by groups", "needs of workplace" as opposed to "personal needs" "qualification" as opposed to career development and "standardization" as opposed to "innovation".

7- A Suggested Plan for the Future Training

The rapid changes happening in the world and our society are urging our educational system to quickly change, if not, it will be obsolete and non-efficient because as Rivers said:

"With the passing of time, new situations arise for a nation and its people, or for a district and its school, and these establish priorities of objectives of the teachers of other languages who must be constantly aware of such changes if their teaching is to be appropriate to the generation before them." (Rivers, 1981:7-8)

For our university, the changes are occurring quickly and at a larger scale; the new situations are imposing urgent objectives for the teaching of English. So the mission of the Department of English should be clearly stated and not wrongly interpreted as limited to the production of teachers of English for secondary schools.

From clearly stated objectives, the curriculum and the assignment methods will be reformed to train efficiently motivated students willing to become teachers of English in the Algerian schools and other university departments, and competent graduates who will use English in their work. This

means, for instance, that a module of ESP must be introduced at a certain stage of the training period.

The training for a “licence” could be planned in two stages: the first stage would be a two-year study which would re-enforce would the linguistic competence acquired at the secondary school level; the students would develop their linguistic skills and be introduced to ESP in case they leave the department of English for another one to prepare for other careers like: journalism, management, tourism etc.. The plan of the first two-year study will look like:

Year	Modules	Sub-Modules	Objectives
First Year	Language practice	-Written -Oral -Reading - Phonetics - Grammar	-To achieve communication in its various forms and dimensions. -To speak fluently English respecting the rules of grammar and phonology. To write correctly respecting the rules of syntax and mechanics of writing. -To understand oral messages linked to everyday activities and on various cultural, scientific and technical themes. -To understand and tackle different types of texts.
Second year	Language practice		-To master accurately the rules of grammar and phonetics transcription. -To recognize the different registers and types of discourse and to be able to use them.
	ESP		-To exploit document related to specific fields.
	British and American civilization		-To know about the history of Great Britain and the United States of America and the Commonwealth Countries, their cultures and their institutions.

Table 1 :First stage

At the second stage the students who obtain certain mark will be allowed to carry on the training to prepare for a career of teachers in the intermediate, secondary schools, and even at the university. The suggested plan would be as follows:

Year	Modules	Sub-Modules	Objectives
Third Year	Language practice	-Written -Oral	-To be able to use the language appropriately and meaningfully and spontaneously in an authentic communicative situation, be it verbal or graphic.
	Knowledge of language	Grammar-Linguistics -Phonetics -Phonology	-To master the theoretical and practical aspects of the English language and the rules that govern it to apply them in the teaching process.
	<i>Civilization</i>	-British civilization -American civilization	
	Literature	British literature -American literature	-To know about the literary works and movements in the English literature.
Fourth year	Psycho-pedagogy -TEFL -Scientific knowledge of the language		-To know about the different approaches, methods to the teaching of F.L, psychological aspects of the learning that play a role in the learning process. -To apply what has been acquired theoretically in a real classroom situation.

Table 2: Second Stage

In the light of these training principles, and in addition to the theoretical lectures in “TEFL” and Psycho-pedagogy I believe that weekly sessions should be devoted for training practice not only to co-ordinate and associate theory with practice, but discover the classroom reality as well :some discipline problems, lack of basic equipments and audio-visual teaching aids and the like. As far as the time allotment is concerned, four hours a week could be sufficient, but right from

the beginning of the academic year. The training practice could be planned as follows:

7.1 –The Observation Stage :

In this stage trainees passively undergo a period of conditioning during which the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” of classroom practice are inculcated, a stage that obviously involves classroom visits. The student teachers are asked to produce elaborate step-by-step rigid plans –or a number of questions to answer. Special meetings between the trainees and the trainer are advisable to discuss the observed lessons. The observation stage lasts for about a month, duration sufficient enough for trainees to attend the different phases of a teaching unit–Listening, Reading, Language Manipulation and Writing.

7.2- The Demonstration Stage :

The trainees are rarely given a chance to perform and try out before the blocked training period. The demonstration stage is a vital element to imitate some ritual teaching behaviour. Discussion sessions are always necessary to assess trainees’ performances; it is preferable to have such sessions right after the lesson practice for adjustments, additions and refinements.

7.3 – The Blocked/Long practice Stage :

A stage that lasts for about four weeks, and in which student teachers do not study at the university but respect the trainer’s time table. They are supposed to plan classroom tasks and/or activities appropriate to learners and with respect to the teaching programmes and objectives and apply them in a genuine leaning context. This is the vital stage of the training process, the pivot on which all else hinges –without application there is no training.

8-The Trainer:

There is no doubt that the role of the trainer in such operation is of a paramount importance, therefore the choice should be based on rigorous criteria. These teachers should be experienced, skilful and competent enough to ensure the training practice. The inspector general of English , for instance , may provide a list of trainers able to offer their experience and help for trainees .This is possible only if there is a true co-

ordination between the university , particularly the department of English and the local Direction of Education.

The trainer should focus on the trainee as a person. Like pupils, the trainee teachers have individual needs, strengths, weaknesses, varying degrees of knowledge and experience. His role as a facilitator is indispensable, he remains a full partner in the education process; he should co-ordinate with trainees in lesson planning. He has to demonstrate his patience and understanding to trainees, and encourage them by pointing out the good points, and suggesting other alternatives for less successful ones .He should also view their mistakes as a sign of learning and points to discuss in the post performance sessions, so that he can help improve or eliminate certain behaviour: lack of confidence, shyness, anxiety or an air of superiority which has negative effect of reducing rapport between the teacher and learners. The trainer teacher needs to be put at the heart the training process; he is the sole agent of effective behavioural improvement because he helps the trainees to be independent decision maker at all times.

9-Conclusion:

The heart of any successful learning programme is the informed classroom teacher. Human being is the instrument and the finality of any development. The educational system has to aim at developing mental operations that are: observation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. We are in the twenty first century; our school should be, then, oriented towards the future. And if educating, instructing, socializing and preparing the child to acquire knowledge and a qualification constitute the essential duties of today's school, we wonder how we can achieve these goals without adequate training for teachers.

We have, then, to re-organize the training practice by establishing competitive examinations, extend the training duration, apply more strict criteria for trainers, and to motivate students the university may offer working contracts for the ten or twenty best of them.

All societies, nowadays, are entering the Internationalization Era that urges future teachers, who should have to guide our

children and develop their learning desires, to have a high knowledge level and competence. Tomorrow's world relies on the real mastery and the well use of «learning»; the grey matter constitutes the plain and true richness of any country. It is up to these teachers to develop this grey matter, then. The training practice should provide the future teacher with so many qualities that can be reflected in the teaching process, and the rapport with learners. It is said that the power of the teacher can change the world, and good teachers are not born they are made.

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