

**Teacher Training and
English
Language Learning**

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Introduction

This paper reports the results of an investigation which solicited teachers of English at the university of Annaba – department of English – to assess the value of the LMD project in general and obtain qualitative information relating to significant issues associated with the reform and which relate to teacher training , teacher's qualifications and teaching difficulties.

Needless to say that good teachers are made ,not born and with the right training, teachers can develop in themselves the characteristics of superior teachers. Moreover, the principal actors in any reform are the teachers who are responsible for its application.

The investigation method

Nor can we deny the fact that practising teachers are a useful source of data for program development and there is ample evidence in the research literature to support their use as informants about program effectiveness..

Our interest in undertaking this study is not primarily to quantify teacher's reactions but rather to seek information of a qualitative nature by enabling the teachers to offer their own conceptualisations of the issues they identified as problematic. For

this purpose, the investigation was carried out in a questionnaire survey which was used in order to obtain an overall description of teachers' experiences and opinions about the new reform of the university as well as information on teachers' tasks and teaching conditions.

The sample

The respondents to the questionnaire were teachers in the department of English.

- Badji Mokhtar - Annaba University - We should note that the questionnaire was distributed to all teachers of the department ,but only twenty three teachers answered. Furthermore, teachers do vary as far as age , subject specialisation and number of years teaching.

The instruments

The questionnaire survey was used . Sixteen questions were included in the questionnaire and the variables were classified under five categories : teachers' background experience, teaching methods and course content , teaching practices and problems, teaching tasks and teaching conditions, the reform project. Some questions sought factual information while the remaining ones were opinion questions in which teachers were free to express themselves and make suggestions.

Analysis of the questionnaire and results

1. Number of years teaching at the university and qualifications

The respondents varied as for the the number of years they spent teaching at the university ,and are therefore divided into two groups: those who taught up to twenty eight years and others who have been teaching for two, four or six years.

As for their qualifications, they also vary because few of them have a ph.D degree, the majority has a Master degree and the last group has a B.A degree.

2 . Teaching and professional training

The respondents were asked to specify the reasons which led them choose to become a teacher and here again the answers were very different as some chose the profession because they like teaching , others think that teaching at the university involves less hours of work, others chose to teach because they did not find another job and only one respondent likes teaching because it gives him the opportunity to be in constant contact with scientific research and findings.

It is important to mention that all teachers in the survey answered negatively as far as teacher training is concerned. They claimed that they haven't had any training before teaching at the university , and they got the job mainly because of their qualifications and not their previous experience in teaching.

Furthermore , most teachers described the courses they have attended at the graduate and postgraduate levels as a set of theories systematically presented through the lecture method with lectures sometimes simply dictating notes.

So, there was too much to be learned and teachers argued that they were not given the opportunity to interact with the material presented and express their own views and attitudes.

Teachers also noted that besides too many unadapted theories, their courses did not deal with problems specific to the Algerian context. They reported that they have never been trained or introduced to methodologies of teaching specific subjects. Thus, very often, they found that the methodology they chose not always suitable for all students.

3. Subject versus pedagogical training

When they were asked to rate the comparative importance of subject versus pedagogical training, virtually all of them expressed the strong belief that subject specialisation and pedagogical training are equally important because they felt that having a sound knowledge of subject constitutes the most important asset of a teacher and it is perceived as an essential factor in acquiring self-confidence in teaching.

Similarly, pedagogical knowledge was said to be important and teachers were of the opinion that having a sound knowledge of subjects without pedagogical skills is like an "empty frame".

4. Teaching methods and different tasks performed

Teachers answered differently as for the amount of time spent in teaching which varies from six hours to twenty hours a week. As for the teaching methods and tasks, a great number prefer giving lectures and organising practical workshops where students are required to research a topic in groups and then present it to the class for discussion.

With regard to teaching tasks, teachers were asked to describe the tasks in which they normally engaged in the course of their activity. The information gathered indicated that teachers' tasks essentially involve the interpretation of the syllabus and the day to day executive functions of teaching.

5. Teaching difficulties

Teaching conditions are but common knowledge to most teachers. Consequently, there was no need for extensive investigation of this

issue. Teachers revealed that they faced difficulties organising activities because of the big number of students in one group, the lack of teaching materials, the lack of means in order to extend their personal knowledge.

6. The reform at the university

Concerning this issue teachers were grouped into three categories: The first category is constituted of teachers who are for the reform in general and the LMD in particular.

The second category is constituted of a small number of teachers who are totally against the reform. They seem to be reluctant to changes and prefer to carry on with the old system.

The third category encompasses teachers who seem to be indifferent to the reform and who simply didn't give any opinion. When asked whether they agree with the contents as far as English is concerned, teachers who were for the reform put some reservations because they feel that some subjects should be reformulated, few of them think that the content is a "patch work" and therefore, teachers cannot work on "hazzy" and "hasty" propositions. Others argued that a reform should stand on solid foundations and feel that the content of the courses seem to be standard to all languages.

Most teachers pointed out that they will face difficulties putting into practice the program because they think that other factors should also be considered like material, ideological and pedagogical elements.

When teachers were asked whether they should have some training courses in order to be acquainted with the new orientations, all of them answered positively and stated that training is a necessity and

a prerequisite for the implementation of the new orientations. They felt sorry it is neglected at the university, and for that reason they suggested summer schools where the training is both theoretical and practical.

Discussion of the results

1. *Concerning teachers' qualifications and the number of years teaching at the university we have realised that teachers differ.*

We suggest that teachers who are teaching with a B.A should be encouraged to have higher qualifications. Moreover, those who teach four to six hours a week (vacataires & associés) should be carefully selected and supervised in order to be acquainted with the new reform and orientations.

2. *Subject versus pedagogical training*

With regard to this issue, teachers considered that they are equally important and this is evident as we cannot speak of the priority of subject knowledge over pedagogical training as was claimed by (Husen et al, 1978) : " A major focus of teacher training should be on the development of teacher knowledge and ability in specific subject areas."

3. *Teachers' tasks*

In the results concerning teachers' tasks we may observe that the tasks of teachers in the survey do not look much different from those of teachers elsewhere. Moreover , the findings made in this study may well indicate that it is not the intrinsic nature of teaching tasks which is different in different contexts but the

conditions under which they are performed and consequently the nature of the problems encountered in performing them.

4. Teacher training

As for teacher training all teachers answered negatively as they have never been trained to teach at the university. We should point out that teacher training must focus on classroom practice and have as its primary goal the improvement of the teachers' practical efforts to bring about effective learning on the part of his / her students.

However, this behavioural focus should not mean that there should be a lack of theory in a training program. Therefore, the teacher, needs to be put at the heart of the training process because he is the sole agent of effective behavioural improvement.

5. Teaching conditions

Teaching conditions need to be improved and not coped with. The observation noted in relation to this finding reveals the importance for teachers beyond the acquisition of any teaching skills to be sensitised to the ideological values of the system in which they are asked to operate.

6. The reform of the university and suggestions for the application of the LMD program.

Concerning the reform there was a big debate. Generally speaking, people are reluctant to changes and prefer to work with the old system. For that they mentioned some reasons related to their own knowledge of the subject they teach and think that it is insufficient. They even expressed the desire for more extensive training in Subject studies as well as opportunities for continued education

later in their professional life. Most teachers in the survey mentioned that they should be consulted about the aims, content and methods of the course.

They also wanted to know how their progress through the course will be evaluated. We should point out that changes must be made as a result of their suggestions and this will certainly increase the teachers' investment and commitment to the program.

Taking into consideration teachers' suggestions, we can make some propositions which – we think – could guarantee the success of the LMD project :

- carefully selected students;
- specially trained and qualified teachers;
- constant contact with teachers of English via regular meetings and summer schools;
- exchange between departments and universities inside and outside the country;
- pedagogical tools and availability of teaching facilities;
- reconsideration of the evaluation system;
- harmonizing training objectives and the socio-economic sector needs;

Conclusion

More work has been done on the good language learner recently than on the good language teacher. This reflects the current learner-centred orthodoxy many teachers subscribe to.

It is worth mentioning that the demands on the teacher are greater because we need to know more about what skills are required of a teacher who wishes to encourage good language learning. Moreover, there is no formula for good language learning. Needless to say that when we add more

incentives and recognize teachers for their efforts, we can boost participation in training programs and substantially increase teachers' commitment and learning.

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