

TRAINING AND PREPARING OF THE IRAQI TEACHERS OF ENGLISH: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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1.Introduction

Investigating the present situation of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in intermediate and secondary schools, the observer may notice that some of the newly-graduated teachers of English do not possess the appropriate qualifications which entitle them to be successful. This point of view may be heard here and there from different people.

One of the features of this phenomenon is the reciprocal charge between the teachers and the learners. Complaints are always evoked by them repeatedly. The

teachers claim that their efforts are in vain with such learners who are not willing to acquire any skill in English. The learners, on their part, protest that their teachers do not teach them on sound techniques to help them have a good command of English.

The main aim of this paper is to concentrate on the pedagogical aspects setting aside other complexities and variables. Therefore, as an endeavour to trace the roots of the problem, it would be appropriate to shed light on the situation of TEFL at the College of Education of the University of Basrah because it is the educational institution where teachers of English have studied, been trained and given the licence to teach English after graduation. The teaching materials and subjects of the four- year course offered by Department of English at the College would be investigated so as to check their adequacy to help graduate successful and prospective teachers of English

2.Language Teaching

Traditionally, the teaching process has three components: the teacher, the learner and the textbook. Each component has specific qualities. The learners have their own

"different educational backgrounds" which are connected with their social and economic environment and their willingness or unwillingness to learn a Foreign language (FL). At the same time, the teachers may or may not possess a control over their own or their learners' conditions and therefore their choice of a certain textbook is outside their province. This means that teachers have to be aware of areas of control inside and outside their domain (Ashworth, 1985: 68- 9).

For the sake of shedding more light on the factors that affect teaching, McArthur (1983: 83) summarizes them as follows: Nothing that is taught can be isolated from the sociocultural matrix in which it occurs.

National policies, cultural attitudes, political disputes, class tensions, economic differences- all of these and other factors walk into the classroom with the students and the teacher, stay there throughout the lesson, and go out again with them at the end.

This is of teaching in general, i.e. of languages and other subjects. Now, it would be appropriate to focus on language teaching in particular.

In language teaching, the existence of a method is inevitable. Catford (1959: 142- 3) states that the method falls into three terms: "selection", "grading" and "presentation". It is incredible to teach everything at the same time, therefore, there is a need to select what has to be postulated later on. The teaching materials have to be sequenced step by step in both quality and quantity. Then, the selected and graded materials have to be offered to the learners with appropriate techniques. These three processes include the aspects and activities of the language.

Language teaching has witnessed many changes in methods and approaches. The starting point was with the grammar- translation method, which dates back to 2000 years ago. Then, it was substituted by modern approaches such as: the direct method which emerged 100 years ago, the audio-lingual approach 50 years ago, the situational approach 25 years ago and the communicative approach 10 years ago (McArthur, 1983: 98).

To show the significance of the sound employment of the appropriate teaching methods or approaches, Widdowson (1979: 117) explicates that in the developing countries, the learners

who have studied English for a long time on the basis of the structural approaches of language teaching do not show a good ability to use the language in practice or in real communication. That can be applied on the two productive levels of the language, i.e. the oral and the written forms. He makes it clear that "secondary school teachers do not do their job properly" and such teachers do not follow the approach they have been taught when they were students in colleges.

In this regard, there is a need to adopt modern and recent approaches of language teaching because the traditional ones seem to have failed in helping the learners use the language they have studied. Rivers (1981: 187) state that classical approaches assisted the learners to know much of the vocabulary items, the sound system, the spelling and the grammatical structures of the FL without giving them the opportunity to practice and use it.

3- The Teacher of the FL and the Pre- Service Course

Language teaching is not an easy job. Thus, any person who wants to be a teacher of a FL must possess, first of all, good aptitude, education and training to cope with the job's requirements.

The teacher must be aware of the sound system, the morphological, syntactic and semantic features of the FL. The teacher has already practiced the four basic skills of the FL. The teacher's education must include knowledge of the FL literature and culture which requires the teacher's acceptable ability to read and write written forms of the FL. Finally, the teacher has to be acquainted with the appropriate techniques of teaching the FL with constant practice (Lado, 1964: 8- 100).

Because TEFL cannot be separated from the environment, the teacher's education should not be based on linguistic and literary books only. The school libraries should include different books of knowledge of science, history, mathematics, geography, art and music (Bright and McGregor, 1970: 6).

Concerning the training course at the pre- service stage, Elliot (1968:93- 4) mentions that the basis of the course is formed on three principal subjects. At the beginning, the subjects to be studied are of basic English, i.e., the sound system, the structures, vocabulary and theoretical background in linguistics. Then, the approaches and techniques of TEFL are highly needed with the use of audio- visual aids. Here, also the real practice in teaching English in schools with the aid of

supervisors is included. Finally, studying English literature is to broaden the learners' horizons in the language variations of culture.

In sum, Ashworth (1985: 73) mentions the topics of the course as follow:

- Theories of first and second language acquisition
- Linguistics
- Sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics
- Methods of teaching second languages
- Classroom techniques and procedures
- Testing and evaluation
- Curriculum and syllabus design
- Materials evaluation
- Program planning
- Observation and practice teaching.

4.The Place of Literature in the Pre- Service Course

Teaching Literature aims at reinforcing the learners' ability in the four basic skills, i.e, listening, speaking, reading and writing, increasing the learners' social knowledge which, ultimately, is necessary for performing communication,

expanding the learners' imagination and providing linguistic competence for the learners(Brumfit, 1980: 21).

In spite of the above objectives which contribute positively to the teaching of the FL, there are some arguments against teaching literature. In this regard, McKay(1986: 191) sums up the arguments by pointing out that teachers of English do their best to reinforce the learners' acquaintance with the grammatical structures. Because English literature possesses its own special difficulty of the structures, thus literature cannot be regarded as a vital contributor, namely in the grammar. Besides, some teachers think that learners study English to meet their "academic and/or occupational" needs and the study of literature does nothing in this specific goal. Also, the cultural connotations of literature may represent points of difficulty for the FL learners.

Coinciding with the above, Pattison (1969: 105) tries to separate between language and literature. The former can be taught and the latter cannot. Due to his standpoint, the learner plays the role of an actor in case of being taught, i.e, he can interact with the spoken and the written forms of the language. On the other hand, the learner is a mere spectator in case of listening to or reading a literary work. The sole guidance to be

offered to the learner "is to help him see what is happening clearly".

Over and above, Harrison (1973: 51), with a clear agreement of "so distinguished poet as Robert Graves" stipulates that teaching literature requires a good command of language. Otherwise, it is completely useless. Lado (1972: 160) emphasizes that literary critics have to be well educated and conversant with literature and criticism more than other people. Thus, he concludes that:

to demand that a person learning a second language acquires the technical knowledge of a literary critic is not justified. But to demand a degree of understanding of major literary works is justified.

In spite of most of the criticism leveled at the teaching of literature, both literature and language are indispensable as subjects.

But a pre- service course which aims at graduating teachers of English, priority should be given to linguistic subjects and not to literature per se.

5- The Pre- Service Training in the Department of English/College of Education

5.1. The Questionnaire

In order to get a clear picture of the actual situation of the four- year college course in the Department of English/ College of Education/ University of Basrah, a simple questionnaire has been administered to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- Finding out the students' willingness to be teachers of English in their future careers.
- 2- Shedding light on the teaching materials actually taught to the students and exploring the adequacy of the materials to graduate teachers of English for the Iraqi intermediate and secondary schools.
- 3- Evaluating the students' skill in expressing their own ideas throughout writing as question (2) requires that student have to answer why they like or dislike being teachers of English in future.

The questionnaire is composed of four questions. In the first question, the student have to state the years of their study. The second question investigates the students' attitudes towards being teachers of English in future. The third one seeks to give a comprehensive survey of all the subjects in English taught to

them all through the four years. Finally, the last question is to find out whether there are hours devoted to training in the Department, i.e, through demonstration lessons, discussions, etc. (See Appendix A). The students have already been told to write freely and state all their ideas concerning question (2) which requires giving reasons. The questionnaire was submitted to (80) students. Twenty students were chosen at random from each stage and from both sexes.

5.2. Data Analysis

The responses to question (2) show that slightly more than a quarter, i.e, (22) of the respondents reject the idea of getting their future job as teachers of English. This is apparent in Table 1 below:

Table 1

The Students' Willingness to Be Teachers of English

The Year of Study	Likes	Dislikes
First	17	

		3
Second	16	4
Third	14	6
Fourth	11	9
Total	58	22

Also, the question has another track in that it requires the students to state their own reasons for their willingness or unwillingness to be teachers of English in future. Eleven students give their reasons in Arabic, whereas the others use English. The English sentences are, in general, incomperhensible because they lack grammatical accuracy and correct spelling (See Appendix B). But, in spite of that, it can be recognized from their answers that some of them like the job because it is suitable for women, an expected response from a female. Others like English language but they do not like

teaching it. The respondents who dislike their future job as teachers of English state that:

- 1- the job grants low financial rewards,
- 2- it is not highly respected by society and
- 3- it is a hard work for them to do in future.

As responses to question (3) are concerned, Table (2) below summarizes the subjects of the programme and the teaching hours for each.

Table 2
The Subjects Taught in English
in the Dept. of English/College of Education*

The Year of Study	The Subjects	The Teaching Hours

First	Conversation	2
	Grammar	3
	Phonetics	3
	Composition	2
	Comprehension	2
Second	Introduction to Literature	2
	Phonetics & phonology	3
	Composition	3
	Grammar	3
	Poetry	2
	Conversation	2
	Short Story	3
Third	Grammar	
	Novel	
	Drama	
	Essay and Research Writing	
	Conversation	
	Poetry	
	Methods and Approaches of Teaching	
	Linguistics(1)	

Fourth	Linguistics(2) Transformational Grammar Translation Analysis of Textbook Testing Teaching Practice Novel Drama Poetry	

*The students' responses are checked in collaboration with some members of the teaching staff of the Department.

The above table shows that the subjects of literature occupy (22) hours of the programme, whereas the total number of the teaching hours of the subjects pertinent to TEFL is (11) hours only. They are: (4) hours for "Linguistics 1& 2", (2) hours for "methods and Approaches of Teaching English", (2) hours for "Testing", (1) hour for "Textbook Analysis" and (2) hours for "Teaching Practice".

Responses to question (4) reveal that most students of the first and second years misunderstand what is meant by

training. They thought that it could be found in the practical hour of the subjects as: "Phonetics" and " Conversation". The students of the third and fourth years show more understanding in this regard. They state that their programme does not include any training in the methods and techniques of TEFL at the Department. Also, (4) students in the fourth year misunderstand the idea because, due to their answers, they think that subjects such as: "Testing", "Textbook Analysis" and "Methods and Approaches of Teaching" represent training.

5.3. The Books Relevant to TEFL

To check the books of TEFL in particular, we interviewed some members of the staff. That has been done for the sake of reviewing the books' content. We found that:

1- For the subject "linguistics 1", the selected book is What is Linguistics (by David Crystal, Edward Arnold, 1974). Because the book is specialized in general linguistics, it explicitly gives detailed theoretical background of the relevant and irrelevant areas to the scientific study of language. Specifically in chapter (3), when the author introduces the uses of linguistics, there are

references to applied linguistics and necessarily to the teaching and learning of languages.

2- For the subject "linguistics2", the students are taught the book Linguistics (by David Crystal, Penguin Book, 1971). The book starts with introducing the significance of studying the language because it is the key to the understanding of human behaviour. It includes bulky information about the traditional approaches to language study, the phonological, morphological and syntactic features of the language.

3- For the subject "Analysis of Textbooks", the prescribed book is A Survey of English Textbook in Primary and Secondary Schools (by khalil I. Al- Hamash, IDELTI, 1978). Due to the audio- lingual approach, the book imparts the readers detailed knowledge about the basic assumptions and the objectives of teaching the series 'The New English Course for Iraq' (NECI). The series lasts for eight years as follows: two years in the primary schools, three years in the intermediate schools and three years in the secondary ones. Also, the book refers to the teaching periods devoted to teaching language activities of each textbook (1to8). To show the content analysis, horizontal and vertical structures of the textbook and of the manuals of

handwriting have been achieved. Finally, the book includes an analysis of English textbooks in vocational (industrial & commercial) schools.

4- The selected book for the subject "Testing" is Testing English as a Second Language (by David P. Harris, McGraw – Hill, Inc, 1969). At the outset, the book gives teachers of English the purposes behind teaching the language and the methods of doing so. The requirements of the test and the best techniques implemented to test all the components of the language are shown deliberately. The book is full of samples of tests conducted to the oral and written forms of the language. Finally, the book refers to the statistical reliability of the test procedures used by the teachers.

5- The subject "Teaching Practice" is taught without a book. The instructor in charge of teaching the subject says that he depends on the book Teaching Foreign Language Skills (by Wilga M. Rivers, The University of Chicago Press, 1968) to provide the students with the necessary theoretical background and the teaching techniques of each language activity.

6- The discussion

The students' responses and the brief review of the TEFL books reveal that the current pre- service course devoted to the student teachers at the Department of English/College of Education is not well adequate to graduate teachers of English who are highly conversant with TEFL.

One of the most important qualifications of any teachers of English is that he must have an interest in his job so as to undertake the job's burdens and problems he may encounter. Although the responses have shown that only a quarter of the respondents disapprove the idea of being teachers of English in future, the number is influential. As Table (1) shows, the number of the students increases when they upgrade from one year of study to another (3- 4- 6- 9 respectively), whereas the number of the students who approve the idea decreases on the same above basis (17- 16- 14- 11). This trend may represent a serious problem if we take into account the total number of students in the Department. Over and above, the students who disapprove the idea justify that by the low financial rewards, social reasons and their inability to encounter the difficulties of the teaching process in future.

The department's objective, as it is stated before, is to graduate teachers of English for the intermediate and secondary schools in Iraq. This presupposes that most of the teaching materials have to be selected to meet the future needs of the students. The teaching materials should provide the students with the recent developments in the field of linguistics and TEFL.

An analytic view of table (2) would show that the programme of the pre- service course, in the Department, is arranged to provide the students with subjects of basic English such as: phonetics, grammar, composition, conversation, comprehension, essay and research writing. Such subjects are so significant to the learners of English whether the course is dedicated for graduating teachers of English or for any other purpose. Also, the course includes subjects pertinent to TEFL, which occupy only (11) hours, whereas subjects that fall within the scope of English literature occupy (22) hours of the programme. Here, we may say that the supremacy, in the programme, is to subjects of English literature. Clearly, that is contradictory to the department's objective.

As Table (2) shows, the pre- service course at the Department lacks subjects to help the students be acquainted with the English history, social fabric and civilization. The students may encounter some linguistic and cultural difficulties in comprehending literature. In this regard, Catford (1959: 145) suggests that teaching literary texts require linguistic and cultural gradation. He states an example of a Shakesperian play which is comprehensible to the native speakers of English and the foreigners because it manipulates common "human vaules and situations" in spite of its probable linguistic difficulty for both of them. He compares the above play to a literary work of Galsworthy which represents a highly cultural difficulty because it indulges in deep "English cultural matrix".

The purpose of this paper is not to investigate or analyze the literary materials taught in the Department of English/College of Education. Rather, it aims at raising the question. "Are the materials of literature well selected and graded to correspond to the linguistic and cultural appropriateness?"

Following the same line of argument, an analytic view of the content of the current books relevant to TEFL in the Department shows that they provide the student- teacher with:

- 1- theoretical background in linguistics,
- 2- comprehensive analysis of the current NECI textbooks in the Iraqi intermediate and secondary schools,
- 3- techniques of testing the pupils' oral and written achievement in the FL and
- 4- a limited theoretical background in the approaches and techniques of TEFL .

Although the theoretical background in linguistics is very necessary, the present books are not the modern and comprehensive ones in the field of linguistics. The focus on the NECI textbook which are based on the audio- lingual approach seems to shed light on the subjects specialized in the approaches of TEFL and the analysis of textbooks. The modern developments in TEFL are, however, directed to adopt the communicative approach.

Widdowson (1990; 161) summarizes the current preference as follows:

The communicative approach seems not onl to be more natural and less contrived, bu also seems to have the added advantage of providing for the human rights of learners.

So on both pedagogic and democratic grounds it might seem self- evidently preferable to the structural approach.

In addition to that, it can be said that the audio- lingual approach would not last forever as the prescribed and recommended one. Presumably, if a decision has to be implemented to adopt the situational or the communicative approach, these teachers, in their future jobs, are in need to join many in- service courses to cope with the new developments.

Precisely, the present pre- service course lacks many subjects necessary for the training and preparing of teachers of English such as: applied linguistics, contrastive linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

In the Department, the practical training of teaching takes place only in the second semester of every academic year for the student of the fourth year. The students, under the supervision of some members of the staff, visit and probably practice teaching English in some intermediate and secondary

schools. That takes place without any prior experience of teaching English. In the Department, the students do not have essential demonstration lessons or discussions following them.

Finally, the students' answers to question (2) which requires that they have to state the reasons behind the willingness or unwillingness to be teachers of English in future are frustrating. It is noticed that some students give their answers in Arabic. The others who use English make numerous grammatical and spelling mistakes. Their answers show their inability to give detailed information. This may reflect a part of the students' standard in the English language.

7- Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings arrived at in the present study may help conclude that the present pre- service course offered to the student- teachers in the Department of English/College of Education/University of Basrah suffers from inadequacies. The inadequacies are apparent in the students' attitudes towards their future job, the contradiction between the objective of graduating teachers of English and the supremacy of literature and the limitation of the practical training of TEFL.

For the sake of improvement, it is recommended that:

- 1- The Department has to establish a system whereby the admittance of students is organized. In addition to the students' ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing English, the aptitude and willingness to their future job as teachers of English have to be taken into account and be checked in advance. That can be achieved either by testing or interviewing the applicants to be teachers of English.
- 2- For the sake of polarizing increasing numbers of students to be teachers of English, the department may embark on holding symposiums calling for raising the academic standard of students.
- 3- The Department has to decrease the number of the teaching hours devoted to literature and increases the number of hours allotted to TEFL so as to cope with the objective of graduating teachers of English.
- 4- The Department may select linguistically and culturally well graded literary materials. In this regard, several publishers provide readers of literature with masterpieces in simplified or abridged English.

5- The Department has to update the present books relevant to linguistics and TEFL by selecting new alternatives.

6- To compensate the lack incurred in the pre- service course, the Department has to offer subjects in applied linguistics, contrastive linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

7- The Department has to expand the area of the parctical training by increasing the field visits to the intermeriate and secondary schools through the four years of the study to help the student be acquainted with the actual teaching process inside the classroom. Also, the Department has to embark on demonstration lessons in TEFL and encourage the students to discuss the techniques.

Appendix A

A Questionnaire for the Students of English

Dept./college of Education/University of Basrah

Note: We need your answers for research purpose no more no less. Please answer all the questions.

Q1. What is the year of the study?

Q2. Do you really like or dislike your future job as a teacher of English in the Iraqi immediate and secondary schools?Why?

Q3.What are the subjects(in English) you study in this academic year? Mention the teaching hours of each subject.

Q4.Are there hours of training in the pre- service course to help you be accustomed to the approaches and techniques of teaching English as a foreign language? If available, specify.

Appendix B

Samples of the Students'

Answers to Question (2)

- Yes,it is interesting laguage.
- I like to be a teacher English language because I like this job and a like English language.
- I really dislike my future job as a teacher of English at the intermediate or secondary schools because it wasn't my ambition from the beginning to be a teacher.
- I dislike this job. Because I dislike this job also I think I can't do and bear it.
- No, because I don't choos this job in myself.
- Yes. Of course:- because it is very beaty and very nice to me.

- I like to study English but I don't like to teach it.
- a teacher of English at secondary school is better than any Job specially to the women.
- yes, because this my future.
- Yes, of course, because this is my wash.
- No, because I don't choos this job in myself.

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