

Teacher Development: A Necessity in the Algerian Middle School

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Abstract

Teacher development did not receive sufficient attention in the Algerian middle school. However, it has become a necessity nowadays because of the reform in both middle and secondary school and which consists of the new lunched approach 'the competency-based approach, which is learner centered and thought to better fit globalization. This article aims to show how important is teacher development in the middle school, been the basis of teaching English in the Algerian context. It also intends to highlight the rational for teacher development and how it can be beneficial for the improvement of English teaching.

1. Teacher Development

Brown (1994:425) claims that one of the most interesting things about teaching is that you never stop learning. The teacher needs to undertake a self-life long learning; this can be achieved by observing colleagues, reading academic journals, attending conferences and other professional projects. Thus, teacher development should include self-training but also pre-service and effective in-service training. Pettis also insists that allteachers should embark on a life long journey developing professional competence. It is their professional responsibility to continuously undertake a wide range of activities to improve their teaching. In order to be professionally competent, teachers:

- Must upgrade their knowledge and have an understanding of language and language learning. This can be done by the teachers themselves and the organization of various seminars in order to enable teachers to develop their theoretical background.
- The theoretical knowledge acquired as stated previously needs to be put in practice. This is what is required. After having increased their knowledge of the approach, methods and techniques that can be used under the competency-based approach. These require to be applied by the teacher based on lessons presented in

seminars and also thanks to coordination between teachers in the same school and also in the same area.

- Teacher' professional interest and needs should change over time.

Summing up, teacher development requires the involvement of the teacher, the inspectors in organizing beneficial seminars and the coordination and contribution of colleagues to improve and innovate their way of teaching according to learners' needs and those of globalization, requiring competent learners able to compete in the labour market.

2. The Rationale for Teacher Development

The need for teacher development arises from the inadequacy of training and the lack of information about the theoretical side and the complexity of shifting from theory to practice. This due to the inadequacy of in-service training and also the absence of pre-service training for novice teachers. The graduate of English are recruited in either middle or secondary school without having been previously trained to teach. We can also add that even senior teachers continue teachers similarly as the beginning of their career without trying adapting their teaching according to the new demands of life. Some questions need to be asked:

1. How is it possible for both novice and other teachers shift from theory to practice?
2. How much does it take them to gain experience?
3. Is not it better to train both of them before implementing a new approach?

These questions need to be investigated in order to find solutions to this problem.

Another factor is that most of the middle school teachers do not hold a university degree; therefore, they find difficulties in applying those new and heavy programmes because most of them have no knowledge of some disciplines such phonetics (transcription, stress...) and civilization. The extent of the difficulty depends from one area to another according to the available means and teachers' qualification.

It is recognised that the teacher's role is multifaceted which means that it is fundamental and pivotal in that it facilitates the students' communicative development defined as the ability to communicate and understand language across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Thus, teachers are committed to reaching a certain standard of performance. And they need to be aware of their responsibilities towards their learners. Their commitment to professional development should be ongoing and personal. Teacher development along with training

becomes a real necessity for EFL middle school teachers in Algeria in order to develop their proficiency (a professional is someone whose work involves performing a certain function with some degree of expertise). This will give teachers the opportunity to reflect on classroom practice and to gain insights into teaching experience and view education as a long process in order to be able to deal with change and divergence.

3. Inadequate Teacher Development

The concept of teacher development is quite new in Algeria. Some of the teachers express their wish to learn the things they do not know such as linguistics, phonetics, civilization and psycho-pedagogy. Others have the same wish, but they are much reluctant because they find the courses set by the authorities exhausting. The heavy workload (21 to 27 hours per week) and life constraints constitute a challenge to the quality of teacher development and the improvement of the teaching quality.

We also note that the planned course for teacher development may not be as efficient as they are intended to be because of some reasons such as having the course centralised in towns; the thing which compels teachers who do not live there to shift twice a week to neighbouring towns to study in addition to the heavy workload as stated previously. Other factors may also hinder the operation like the absence of means in terms of teachers and material (audio-visual: listening comprehension required by many teachers). So,

- Are middle school teachers really going to benefit from this opportunity?
- What should be done to make it more effective?

4. Suggestions

It is true that the government has invested a lot in teacher development in addition to the reform undertaken in middle and secondary education seeking improvement to catch up with the economic boom; however,, some factors need to be taken into account, among them:

- Organizing in-service development in the form of seminars and workshops which could provide teachers with the opportunity to be informed of the new approach, methods and techniques which can be applied under such an approach.
- Planning courses not during the academic year, but during the holidays to reinforce teachers' knowledge in certain disciplines to enable them to cope with the new programmes.

- Overcrowded classes hinder both effective teaching and learning, therefore, the number of students should not exceed 25 in the same class, because the purpose of teaching is to enable learners to establish good human relations with one another and the world to be able to communicate,; the thing which is not really evident in large classes.
- All the people in the field of teaching agree that a tired teacher would not be able to effectively teach, thus, the heavy workload to middle school teachers is a challenge to teacher development as well as the quality of teaching.
- Teachers trainers also need to be selected among the most experienced ones and qualified in addition to the required material.
- Different resources such as books, journals, audio-visual aids should be provided at schools because of lack or complete absence of in some remote areas.

Conclusion

If the purpose of the change in the Algerian syllabus of English as well as the intention of teacher development is to make ELT more effective, the suggestions stated before may contribute to the promotion of teacher development. This is important for teachers to reflect on their current teaching to identify problems and try to solve them. They need to know what should be change and what can be realistically be changed through what is called action research. Besides, pre-service and in-service training should be given importance because they can help teachers develop their teaching competence.