

Teacher Training: a Multifaceted Framework in Language Learning

Oscar Molina Márquez, M.A.

Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó

ABSTRACT

Training in-service language teachers in the national context has to respond to very particular needs—Psychological, linguistic, and cultural—both of the teacher and his/her language learners. The teacher must not be thought of in terms of mastering the language itself, but he/she is supposed to be open and eclectic in the roles he/she should play in the EFL setting, that is why, he/she must be regarded as a supporter, an advisor, a guide, an assistant, a friend, a social worker, a psychologist, a model, as well, not only a language teacher.

EFL teacher-training-in-service programs should emphasize other fields and areas of knowledge which 'prepare' and 'provide' elementary teachers with tools that facilitate their teaching practice, and in so doing, guarantee their language learners' learning. They include and emphasize several types of knowledge: of language, about the language, of linguistics, of psychology, of methodology and methods, and of language research, among others.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents some matters dealing with teacher training, and its implications on the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. Therefore, questions and concerns of diverse type and depth, addressing such an issue, will be covered. In the first place, I will draw a distinction between *teacher training* and *teacher development*, as well as the goals and

objectives within the *teacher training program*. Then, issues dealing with who should be trained and on what aspects, will also be addressed. Later, I will emphasize the *importance teacher training has on language learning*. Next, the roles the *EFL teacher should play in the national context* will be mentioned and analyzed. Later on, aspects *dealing with classroom observation practices* will let the language teacher be aware of the stages involved in a supervisory program. Finally, I will provide language teachers with some *questions dealing with teacher training*, so that they may become reflective individuals of their own pedagogical practice.

1. *Teacher training or teacher development?*

Teacher training, also known as teacher education, refers to the '*preparation and professional development of teachers*'. Teacher education draws a distinction between teacher training and teacher development (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992)

According to Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) teacher training has to do with '*basic teaching skills and techniques*' typically used and explored for novice students, that is, in a '*preservice education programme*'. Teaching skills refer to the techniques, strategies, and activities used to 'teach' and explore the four language skills communicatively, in their logical order or sequence of presentation: listening, speaking, reading and writing. And the techniques themselves refer to those used in the language classroom and involve aspects related to

classroom management, lesson planning, teacher speech, testing and evaluation procedures, etc. *Initial training*, the term used by Strevens (1987) for teacher training, allows the unexperienced language teacher to be in contact with the 'nature of profession.' For Lukas (1988) teacher training has to do with 'ready-made answers' the teacher trainer provides to his/her unexperienced and experienced language teachers the use and application in their language classrooms, so that language learning may be effective, meaningful, and lasting.

Teacher development, on the other hand, as Richards, Platt and Platt put it, makes reference to 'the *on-going professional development of teachers, particularly in inservice education programmes.*' Teacher development, then, is a much more oriented practice that the language teacher does concerning his/her performance both in the language and the methodology used, the teacher's role is a reflective one, he/she evaluates and assesses his/her competence and performance in the language. According to Richards and Nunan (1990) 'the professional teacher needs to develop theories, awareness of options, and decision-making abilities'. Lastly, teacher development also makes emphasis on areas related to classroom research, that is, action research, which provides him/her with insights about his/her learner's motivations, attitudes and interests toward the language. *Further training*, term used by Strevens (1987) makes reference to what other linguists call *teacher development* or *inservice teacher training*. Sithamparam and Damotharam (1992) simply define *teacher development* as a continuous process which starts with preservice teacher training programs, and advances as the language teacher prepares in the teaching of the language and reflects on it, as many times as it is necessary.

It is worth mentioning, on the other hand,

that it is of paramount importance both for preservice and inservice language teachers to have a clear understanding of concepts which could be misleading for the language teacher: unexperienced or not, they are: a) to know about the language, b) to know the language, c) to know through the language.

Knowing about the language involves those aspects of language dealing with the internal systems of a language: phonology, phonetics, syntax, semantics, etc., and methodologies, methods, techniques, strategies, activities, used by the language teacher to facilitate language learning.

Knowing the language refers to how well he/she uses the language system in natural settings in which the language is primarily used as a communicative, and cultural means of respect, assistance and cooperation among peoples who use a common language system. Language is also used as a tool to establish, keep and develop social relationships among its users.

Knowing through the language implies that the language learner uses the language as a means to get information, become knowledgeable, explore the world and try to deal with it accordingly, that is, based on his/her linguistic, psychological, and cultural needs, interests, and problems. Language is a system through which he/she establishes links with others that use the same code as a means of communication, and cultural understanding.

2. Goals and objectives of teacher training.

For Gaies and Bowers (1990) the goal of "the supervisory process is to help teachers reduce their discrepancy between actual teaching behavior and ideal teacher behavior". Teacher training is directly linked to teacher supervision in the

sense that the latter observes, registers, analyzes the trainee teacher's performance in a language classroom situation and then directs, guides, and advises his/her trainee teacher, depending on his/her performance, in aspects related to language instruction, methodology, motivation, teacher-learner interaction, evaluation techniques, etc.

As Gebhard (1990) points out, traditionally the roles language supervisors have played within this process have been 'a) to prescribe the best way to teach, b) to direct the teacher's teaching and c) to evaluate progress'. It is the language supervisor who is responsible for these roles rather than his/her trainee teacher, his/her role is a passive one.

But now these roles have shifted dramatically, in the sense that it is the trainee teacher who has changed and adopted a more active role in his/her pedagogical practice, language supervision, then, from this perspective, is meant: 'a) to provide the means for teachers to reflect on and work through problems in their teaching, b) to furnish opportunities for teachers to explore new teaching possibilities, c) to afford teachers chances to acquire knowledge about teaching, and to develop their own theory of teaching.

Therefore, the trainee teacher can make thoughtful decisions about which best fits his/her language learner's communicative needs in the foreign language. Any position can be taken, the language supervisor must act objectively, ethically, and independently, in his/her appreciations, based on the analyses and outcomes resulting from a very conscious work.

3. Who should be trained-unexperienced or experienced teachers? Why?

Either the experienced or unexperienced

language teacher, once in a while, should be a reflective individual of his/her pedagogical practice. The former, being in the field for a while, is supposed to evaluate and assess all of his/her background knowledge concerning the language, psychological principles, teaching and learning theories, which have been the focus of his/her teaching situation. Then, he/she is responsible for any change, adaptation or adoption resulting from those teacher training practices he/she has been exposed to, affecting his/her role as a foreign language teacher, which at the end benefits or hinders his/her learner competence and performance of the language. The latter, on the other hand, should be committed to having an active participation in the study, analysis, and reflection of the new trends and proposals made and offered in teacher training courses, so that he/she may begin worrying about his/her role he/she is expected to play affecting both his/her language 'teaching' performance and his/her learner's expectations, and outcomes.

4. On what aspects should the language teacher be trained? Why?

There are a number of aspects on which foreign language teachers should be trained, so that their pedagogical practice should be reviewed, analyzed, and if necessary, improved. Teacher training also contributes to their language learner's outcomes, in terms of quality and quantity.

Language quality in the foreign language classroom is valued and assessed taking into account how real it is and how close it is to the language spoken by native speakers in culturally-oriented and authentic settings. *Language input* (Krashen, 1981), and *language intake* (Corder, 1967) are linked to language quality, in terms of language comprehension and language production. *Language input* has to do with

the type of sources the language learner is exposed to, and *language intake* deals with how selective the language learner is once he/she is exposed to, that is to say, he/she selects those sources: teacher, classmates, family, friends, the written press, radio, television, direct contact with native speakers, music, internet, and the like, which better contribute to his/her grammatical or linguistic competence of the foreign language.

Language quantity refers to the amount of language the foreign language learner receives either through formal instruction or in informal settings in which the foreign language is used for business, or communicative purposes. It is the foreign language teacher who, most of the time, determines what to teach, in which order, the type of textbook to use, the type of activities to use and the methodology to apply, following the parameters and guidelines from above, that is, from his/her language program coordinator or someone else, but there should be a shift in this regard, that is, goals, objectives, curriculum design, methodology, evaluation and assessment techniques should be in accordance with the learner's learning styles, pace of learning, linguistic, emotional, attitudinal, and psychological needs and traits of the language learner.

Then, the language teacher must be familiar with the type of audience he/she is going to be dealing with, and its personal, social, cultural, educational, and psychological traits, and in so doing, he/she must plan a program or syllabus responding to his/her learner's communicative and effective needs, interests, and problems. The language teacher must have a sound knowledge of areas involving the following fields: psychology, methodology, linguistics, culture, and arts. So, teacher training

courses should be planned, designed and developed according to the areas of interest previously mentioned.

Psychology helps the language teacher choose the model or theory which best fits his/her learner's mental and chronological ages, his/her motivations, attitudes, abilities, to learn the language in foreign language settings, which most of the time make its learning a hard endeavor both for the language teacher and his/her learner. Much time is devoted to planning and designing the best strategies or techniques to avoid that from happening again.

Methodology refers to those aspects which affect the foreign language learning in formal settings, that is, the language classroom. Everything that happens in it has to do with methodology. In other words, it deals with aspects concerning the teaching of the language, textbook selection, curriculum design, learning and teaching process, administration, lesson planning, classroom interactions, language evaluations and assessments, etc.

Linguistics is also an essential component of a foreign pre and inservice language teacher program. As Shridar (1996) suggests, 'core courses need to be incorporated in teacher training programs', they include subjects as *Methods and Materials for Teaching English, the Structure of English, Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis, and Language Testing*.

5. Importance of teacher training on language learning.

Teacher training has a direct role on the quality of language instruction, which, in turn, is reflected on language learning. That is to say, the more the language teacher is aware of the importance of

his/her professional development, the better his/her linguistic competence and linguistic performance will be, as well as his/her attitudes both toward the language and its speakers, and his/her language learner's competence and performance will be also affected greatly and positively.

Keeping a journal helps the language teacher to write down everything that goes on in the classroom: learner's attitudes and motivation towards the language, the teacher, and/or partners. The language teacher can also analyze his/her impressions based on his/her actual performance, be it linguistically or methodologically. Once they have been written down, he/she can refer to them as many times as he/she wants, or it is required. The language teacher can track down everything that takes place in the classroom, and make the necessary corrections, adaptations, or changes, based on the context of his/her teaching. (Fig.1).

6. *Roles the EFL teacher should play in the national context.*

According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992) the language teacher is expected to play a wide variety of roles both in and out the language classroom. These include the following: *information-gatherer, decision maker, motivator, facilitator of group dynamics, provider of large quantities of authentic English input and opportunities to use this input, provider of feedback, counselor and friend, provider of feedback, promoter of a multicultural perspective.*

For Prodromou (1991) the language teacher is characterized by any of the following roles: *He/she may be a manager, a monitor, a model, a counselor, a facilitator, a friend, an informant, and a social worker.*

But more than that, there are some other

responsibilities the language teacher should also be aware of, those include aspects dealing with sociological, affective and psychological traits of learners. The former is expected to be a supporter of his/her learner's competence and performance of the language, he/she must be thought of in terms of a provider of engaging and meaningful tasks for his/her learner to develop, he/she is also a supervisor, an observer, and a guide of the steps he/she is expected to go through, so that he/she may reach his/her goals and objectives, and not those of a program, a syllabus, or his/her teacher's.

The teacher's role is to facilitate his/her learner's progress from one level to the next (Feuerstein, 1997). In other words, what Feuerstein proposes is that the language teacher is expected to perform as a mediator in the learner's learning process of the foreign language. Feuerstein's mediation theory is best applied in the foreign language classroom if the language teacher provides his/her learners with the following: *A sense of competence, control of own behavior, goal-setting, challenge, awareness of change, a belief in positive outcomes, sharing, individually, a sense of belonging.*

7. *Aspects dealing with classroom observation practices.*

Some of the criteria used by a supervisor in the whole supervisory process involve three moments: *a) Pre-observation stage; b) Observation stage; c) Post-observation stage.*

During the *pre-observation stage*, both the trainee teacher and his/her language supervisor meet together to discuss what kind of language items are going to be used, what type of methodological strategies are going to be used, the type of activities to be developed, the pacing

devoted between one activity and the other, evaluation and assessment procedures, etc.

During the *observation stage* the teacher trainer's roles are to observe what goes on in the classroom, check the type of interaction and work used in the classroom, write down those aspects he/she considers to be highlighted later on, based on an observation chart previously developed and designed, where meaningful information is kept.

Then, during the *post-observation stage* both the trainee teacher and his/her language supervisor meet together again to discuss aspects related to emotional, psychological, and developmental traits observed during the observation stage, both from the trainee teacher and his/her class. It is here, also where positive outcomes and suggestions are made depending on the actual performance of the trainee teacher and his/her learner's attitudes, motivations, toward his/her language class, and how well he/she could introduce, develop, conclude and evaluate all of his/her activities in a specific period of time. (Fig.2)

8. **Reflection on teacher training.**

The following questions may help you reflect on what your pedagogical practice has been and where it has been directed. Read and answer them based on your professional development, then share them with your colleagues.

a. Have you ever attended any teacher training course?

b. What is the goal or objective for attending teacher training courses?

c. When was the last time you attended them?

d. What kind of topics have been covered?

e. How have they contributed to your teacher development?

f. Have you gotten any positive outcomes? Of what kind?

g. On which areas of knowledge do you usually attend teacher training courses?

h. If in this paper there is no reference to the language teacher as *a tester*, why do language teachers continue applying traditional examinations to check above all their learner's grammatical competence of the foreign language?

i. So, how can you check your learner's competence and performance of the foreign language?

j. Which do you consider are the three most important roles the language teacher should play in today's national context?

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

Conclusions

Either *teacher training or teacher development*, the case may be, is supposed to be the panacea to all the possible problems which may arise in the foreign language setting, so that unexperienced or experienced language teachers may rely on its principles, goals, objectives, aspects, importance, and stages involved in the observation practices, and in so doing, they may become reflective teachers, responsible for their endeavors and actions.

But this is not always the case, there can be much training, but if teachers do not take it seriously, that is, if they consider

that their job is not that important, meaningful, and engaging, then, their learners' linguistic outcomes will be poor, affecting their language attitudes and motivations towards the foreign language.

The more the language teacher interacts with the information given and knowledge received from *teacher training programs*, the more he/she will become aware of his/her duties, both as a facilitator and mediator of the teaching/learning process in the child, adolescent, or adult. It is the teacher trainer who proposes a theory and methodology in language learning and teaching, but it is the trainee who decides, in the long run, what to do and how to do it. (Fig.3)

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TEACHER TRAINING AS A REFLECTIVE PROCESS

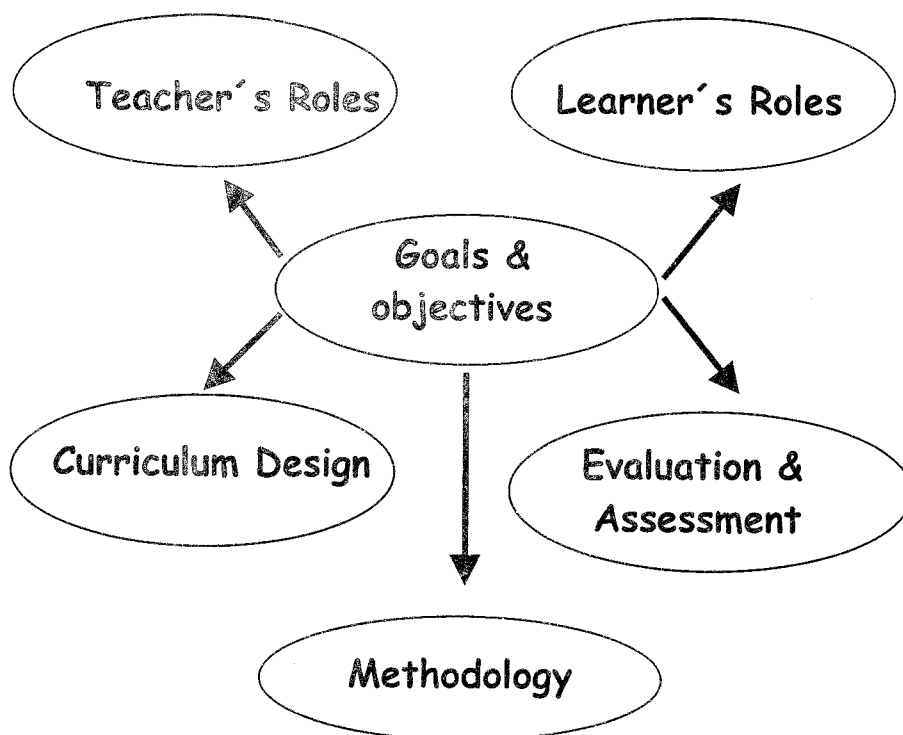


Fig. 1

STAGES OF A TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

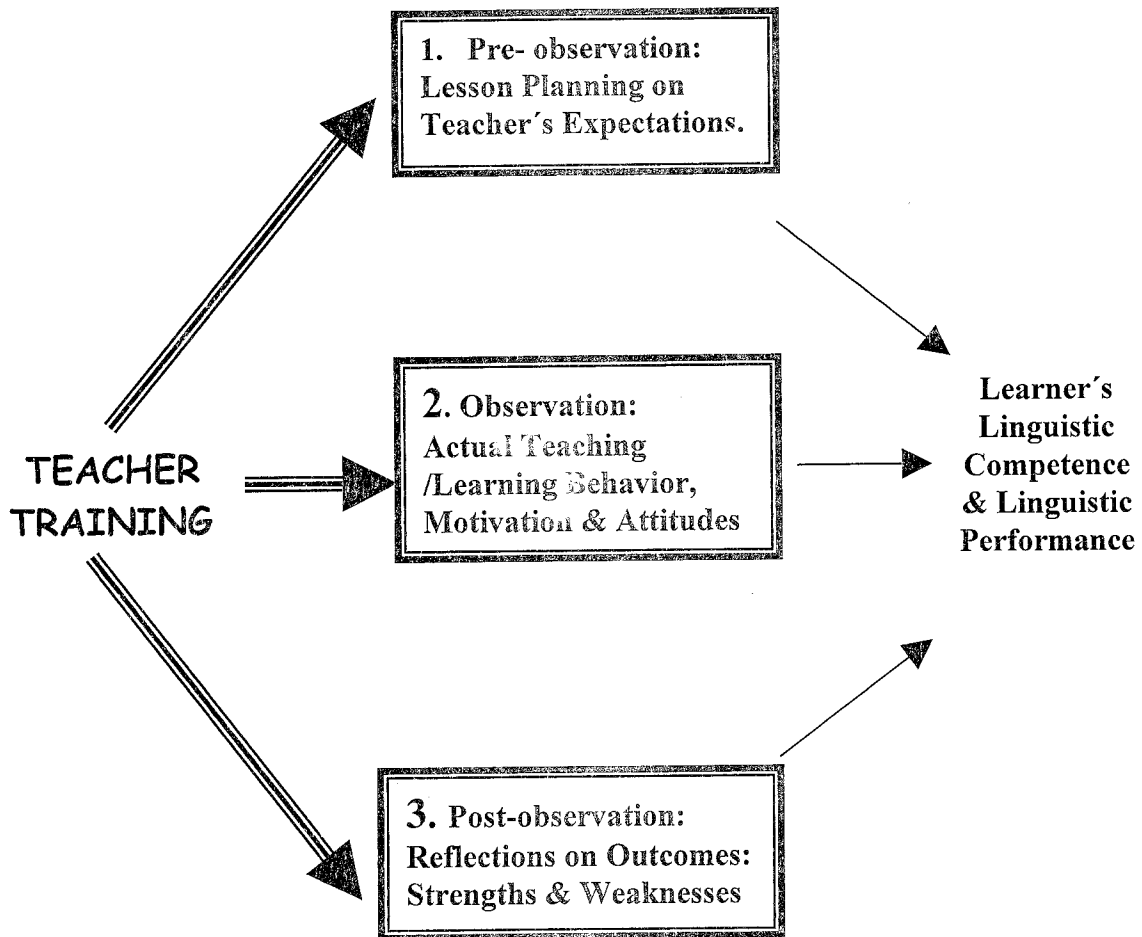


Fig. 2

COMPONENTS OF A SUPERVISION PROGRAM

1. Goals & objectives to be reached.
2. Chronological & mental ages of learners.
3. Lesson Planning: Teaching → Learning.
4. Methodology, Methods, Techniques, Strategies & Activities used.
5. Appropriate selection and use of Learning Material.
6. Type of teacher and learner's roles played.
7. Quality & Quantity of Language Used.
8. Type of classroom interaction held.
9. Integration & Relatedness of areas of the curriculum.
10. Type of classwork assigned.
11. Evaluation & Assessment Techniques.
12. Remarks, comments and suggestions: teacher trainee and teacher trainer.

Fig. 3