Research Article

The integration of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of Teacher Training Courses

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Abstract

This paper is concerned on studying various types of education and training on the ability of teachers to promote student achievement. Previous studies on the subject have been hampered by inadequate measures of teacher training and difficulties addressing the non-random selection of teachers to students and of teachers to training. We address these issues by estimating models that include detailed measures of pre-service and in-service training, a rich set of time-varying covariates, and student, teacher, and school fixed effects. Our results suggest that only two of the forms of teacher training we study influence productivity. First, content-focused teacher professional development is positively associated with productivity in middle and high school math. Second, more experienced teachers appear more effective in teaching elementary math and reading and middle school math. There is no evidence that either pre-service (undergraduate) training or the scholastic aptitude of teachers influences their ability to increase student achievement. It is quite obvious that a teacher and a teacher trainer aren't the same and there is a huge difference between them. Consequently, aims, design, materials, methodology and evaluation of teacher training and trainer training programs should be approached methodically based on logical understanding of the nature and the scope of each. This paper examines a one-month trainer training course, arguing that its purpose is compromised due to its resemblance to a teacher training program. It provides suggestions for remedying this situation. First, it sets the scene. Then, it lists the program's gaps, and provides ways of bridging them.

Key words: Teacher training, pre-service training, in-service training, content-focused.

1-Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that promoting teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education in the United States. Indeed, one of the primary goals of the *No Child Left Behind* law is to have a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom. Despite decades of research, however, there is no consensus on what factors enhance, or even signal, teacher quality. We focus here on the relationship between teacher productivity and teacher training, including formal pre-service university education, in-service professional development, and informal training acquired through on-the-job experience. Previous research on teacher training has yielded highly inconsistent results and has fueled a wide range of policy prescriptions. Some studies find that formal education is important and these have been interpreted as support for strengthening existing teacher preparation programs in universities and increased expenditures on post-college training. Equally common, however, is the finding that formal education is irrelevant, leading others to argue for the elimination of colleges of education.

One reason for the uncertainty regarding the effects of teacher training is that past studies have been unable to overcome three methodological challenges in estimating the effects of training on teacher quality. First, it is difficult to isolate productivity, especially in teaching where a student's own ability, the influences of a student's peers, and other characteristics of schools also affect measured outcomes. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that assignment of students and teachers to classrooms is usually not random, leading to possible correlations between observed teacher attributes and unobserved student characteristics. Teaching involves the use of a wide body of knowledge about the subject being taught, and another set of knowledge about the most effective ways to teach that subject to different kinds of learner; it therefore requires teachers to undertake a complex set of tasks every minute. Many teachers experience their first years in the profession as stressful. The proportion of teachers who either do not enter the profession after completing initial training, or who leave the profession after their first teaching post, is high. A distinction is sometimes made between inducting a teacher into a new school (explaining the school's vision, procedures etc.), and inducting a new teacher into the teaching profession (providing the support necessary to help the beginning teacher develop a professional identity, and to further develop the basic competences that were acquired in college.). One of the fundamental steps in every language teaching and learning context is to consider the qualities of successful language teachers and the functions they perform in the process of language teaching and learning (Brown, 2001; Mohamed, 2006; and Awenowicz, 2009). Williams and Burden (1997) identified four key factors which influence this process that are teachers, learners, tasks, and contexts. They asserted that none of these factors exists in isolation and all of them influence learning process simultaneously. However, to understand teacher's roles in language teaching,

the researchers have to focus on teacher role in isolation. Tsui (2003) classified teachers' knowledge or beliefs into four categories: teachers' knowledge as reflective practice, teachers' knowledge as personal practical knowledge, teachers' knowledge as suited knowledge, and teachers 'knowledge as content knowledge. Because the world that teachers are preparing young people to enter is changing so rapidly, and because the teaching skills required are evolving likewise, no initial course of teacher education can be sufficient to prepare a teacher for a career of 30 or 40 years. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is the process by which teachers (like other professionals) reflect upon their competencies, keep them up to date, and develop them further. There are 2 different types of teacher training programs. One is the traditional program where you attend a college or university, obtain an undergraduate degree in education and then apply for your teaching certificate. The other is a nontraditional approach or alternate route to certification. In this approach you get a degree in something other than education, obtain a teaching position, and then take the required education classes while teaching.

The extent to which education authorities support this process varies, as does the effectiveness of the different approaches. A growing research base suggests that to be most effective, CPD activities should:

- be spread over time

- be collaborative

- use active learning

- be delivered to groups of teachers

- include periods of practice, coaching, and follow-up

- promote reflective practice

- encourage experimentation, and

- respond to teachers' needs

Although ideally it should be conceived of, and organized as, a seamless continuum, teacher education is often divided into these stages:

- Initial teacher training / education (a pre-service course before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher);

- Induction (the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school);

- Teacher development or continuing professional development (CPD) (an in-service process for practicing teachers).

1-1.The importance of continuous teacher training

1-1-1.Challenges in the Classroom

Teachers are often faced with the challenge of instructing students at various levels of academic progress. Knowing how to connect with all students regardless of their aptitude level is critical to ensuring that the educational material is effectively disseminated to each student, on each level. Ongoing teacher training can be a vital tool in ensuring their success.

1-1-2.Maintaining Academic Standards

Armed with the knowledge of how to instruct students with different capacities for learning, teachers can more readily maintain academic requirements necessary to comply with district and state standards. The resources available at TexasLearn.com can help teachers implement techniques to ensure that less advanced students keep up with the tempo of the class. This results in a more uniform performance and allows schools to uphold their academic integrity.

1-1-3.Advantages for Students

While it's important not to overlook the needs of students who may be lagging behind, it is also important that students who excel are not held back from reaching their full potential. Achieving this balance in the classroom can help teachers become more effective at fostering the academic progress of their students.

TexasLearn.com is a resource committed to helping teachers overcome these and other obstacles. Here teachers can gain valuable training on how to help their students succeed, while enhancing their own professional development.

The question of what knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills teachers should possess is the subject of much debate in many cultures. This is understandable, as teachers are entrusted with the transmission to learners of society's beliefs, attitudes and deontology, as well as of information, advice and wisdom, and with facilitating learners' acquisition of the key knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that they will need to be active in society and the economy.

Generally, Teacher Education curricula can be broken down into four major areas:

- foundational knowledge in education-related aspects of philosophy of education, history of education, educational psychology, and sociology of education.

- skills in assessing student learning, supporting English Language learners, using technology to improve teaching and learning, and supporting students with special needs.

- Content-area and methods knowledge and skills—often also including ways of teaching and assessing a specific subject, in which case this area may overlap with the first ("foundational") area. There is increasing debate about this aspect; because it is no longer possible to know in advance what kinds of knowledge and skill pupils will need when they enter adult life, it becomes harder to know what kinds of knowledge and skill teachers should have. Increasingly, emphasis is placed upon 'transversal' or 'horizontal' skills (such as 'learning to learn' or 'social competences', which cut across traditional subject boundaries, and therefore call into question traditional ways of designing the Teacher Education curriculum (and traditional school curricula and ways of working in the classroom).

- Practice at classroom teaching or at some other form of educational practice—usually supervised and supported in some way, though not always. Practice can take the form of field observations, student teaching,

Quality in education relates to the quality of the work undertaken by a teacher, which has significant effects upon his or her pupils or students. Further, those who pay teachers' salaries, whether through taxes or through school fees, wish to be assured that they are receiving value for money. Ways to measure the quality of work of individual teachers, of schools, or of education systems as a whole, are therefore often sought. There is a longstanding and ongoing debate about the most appropriate term to describe these activities. The term 'teacher training' (which may give the impression that the activity involves training staff to undertake relatively routine tasks) seems to be losing ground, at least in the U.S., to 'teacher education' (with its connotation of preparing staff for a professional role as a reflective practitioner). A teacher trainer (teacher educator) has considerable responsibilities in training the next generation of teachers. It is a demanding role. The trainer's job is multidimensional, involving the mastering of aspects of the subject matter, methodology and materials development and understanding how this adds to the knowledge, skills and practices of a good teacher educator. But this is not sufficient in itself.

A teacher trainer also has to be able to motivate, guide and facilitate participants' learning; observe classes and give constructive feedback to enable participants to grow by reflecting upon themselves and their classrooms – in other words, the trainer needs to understand the human dimension of their work and deal with trainees' affective factors and belief systems to enable them to find their own unique ways of teaching.

Teacher educators should also possess theoretical knowledge of different teaching and learning principles, concepts and processes; as well as training models; and be familiar with the academic literature that underpins their work. This linking of theory and practice is essential to producing well-prepared trainee teachers and informing their thought and practice about teaching.

This paper examines the trainer training program for teachers from different provinces in Iran. It argues that the course lacks the features of a true training program due to a number of gaps identified through a qualitative investigation into the program. The study provides suggestions on what the course components and processes should be; and how trainer training course organizers, designers, material producers, implementers and evaluators should collaborate to run appropriate trainer training courses.

The course is divided into three phases:

- The first phase consists of sessions on effective teaching and introduction to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); skills and sub- skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; grammar; vocabulary; classroom management, educational technology and assessment. The sessions are conducted daily from 10 am to 5 pm. After the sessions, participants work in groups (each group consisting of four or five participants) and plan and prepare lessons for peer/team teaching with the help of a supervisor.
- The second phase is peer teaching, where trainees teach sections of their prepared lessons to their fellow students who act as students. The lessons are observed by a trainer or guest observer; and are followed by a feedback session.
- The third phase is 'real teaching' where participants teach a lesson with a group of proficiency course learners, and the lessons are observed by a trainer and followed by a feedback session.

2- Methodology and Participants

In the case of the course under examination, twenty-four participants from different provinces in Iran attended a one-month trainer training. The participants came from Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Rasht, Semnan, Mazandaran and Boshehr (each province with three participants). The study was conducted in national school of language in Karaj, Iran. The participants were unaware of most of the current trends in English Language Teaching (ELT), and were heterogeneous in terms of their teaching experience. A few of them had participated in in-service teacher training courses in their countries, and knew quite a few classroom activities, but they were largely unaware of more advanced concepts and principles of teaching and learning methodology, materials development, course design, lesson/course planning, and monitoring and evaluation principles for example. The participants had varying levels of competency in English, due in part to levels of regular exposure to English other than in a formal learning environment. The majority of the participants had experienced and learned through grammar translation methods of teaching.

The course components listed above suggest that it was a short-term awareness-raising in-service teacher training program which was suitable for majority of this group. The content of the course was appropriate in that sense, since probably about 80 per cent of the course participants required teacher training, whereas only 20 per cent- were ready for a trainer training course (at the beginning of the course).

This methodology course was clearly an effective teacher training exercise where the participants carried out a variety of tasks as students, then discussed them as teachers analyzing different frameworks for teaching skills and sub-skills, lesson planning, classroom management techniques and forms of assessment for learning and teaching. However, there seemed to be a mismatch between the title of the course and its content, which leads me to suggest that it should not be called a trainer training program for the following reasons:

A)   In terms of competence:

- It did not mention the importance of awareness and levels of competence. As Knezedvic (2001:10) has pointed out, "We cannot develop unless we are aware who we are and what we do". According to him, developing awareness is a process of "reducing discrepancy" between what we do and what we think we should do (cited in Bailey 2006: 39). I believe this knowledge is compulsory for a trainer who deals with change and development.
- Its focus was on teaching knowledge and skills, with only a few attempts to help participants reflect by asking, 'What can you take with you to your classroom?'

- Participants' beliefs were not examined explicitly. This is essential in order to enable new trainer trainers to plan, teach and evaluatetheir lessons or courses independently based on prudent consideration when they go back to their classrooms.
- The importance of 'reflection' in a teacher's or trainer's growth required much more interrogation, to enable them to work autonomously through conscious and deliberate thought, search, action, and reflection using different reflective strategies/ practices. One of the goals of a training program is change in some aspect or other (assumptions, knowledge, skills or practices) and profound change can only happen through reflection.

B) Based on professional development:

- The 'human side' of the training process also needs to be addressed.
- Managerial and psychological knowledge and skills in motivating, guiding and facilitating learning; observing classes and giving constructive feedback; managing group dynamics and conflict; interpersonal skills (the ability to communicate, listen, see, and read non-verbal signals) are all essential skills that the teacher trainer requires to guide new teachers and enable them to facilitate learning effectively.
- An appropriate focus for a trainer training program would be to distinguish clearly between the theoretical concepts of teaching and learning processes that apply to teaching and to training, and also where they overlap. This needs to be underpinned by a thorough examination of educational theories; basic models of supervision, counseling, coaching and mentoring, and the principles of adult learning. This could include the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978); Bloom's taxonomy (1956 in Anderson & Krathwohl 2001); and principles of experiential and reflective learning.
- A focus on instructional design models and principles would also have been appropriate so that participants would have some insight into planning and delivering programs of professional development for new or inexperienced teachers in their home situation. This would require them to develop knowledge and skill in materials development and the construction of tasks; the nature and effect of various types of inputs; the purposes of tasks at different stages of a training course, and so on.

3-Results and Analysis

Including all of these above in a short course would be neither realistic nor feasible. However, I would argue they form the fundamental knowledge base to function effectively as a teacher educator and as such they are subtly different from the content of a teacher training course.

Therefore, awareness of these areas will help stakeholders to collaborate to plan, run and evaluate the trainer training courses.

Based on the experience of observing the training course in question, the following would seem to be important considerations to factor into the planning and design of future training courses.

- Eligibility criteria for entering 'trainer training' program should be established, including:
  • Teaching experience of not less than 4-5 years
  • Previous participation in awareness-raising in-service teacher training courses

- The design of teacher educator programs should be cognizant of the experience of the trainees and build on it in the following way by factoring in:
  • Proficiency building components to raise awareness and encourage reflection on the participants' knowledge and experience. This would enable important discussions to take place: on the differences between teacher training and trainer training; how good training techniques can be modeled in the way the sessions are delivered; how to design tasks to stimulate reflection and discussion of teaching and learning issues; as well as how best to address issues in the teaching of vocabulary or grammar, for example.
  • Professional competence/development components dealing with training the trainer, the human or affective elements of the educator's role; understanding and utilizing learning and teaching theory; how to use frameworks such as the ADDIE instructional design model (see below and Figure 1); and analyzing elements of both the training and teaching practicum, amongst other topics.

Analyzing the effectiveness of a training program using the ADDIE instructional model (Analysis of the target group's needs, Design/blueprint of the course, Development of course materials, Implementation/delivery of the course, and Evaluation (both formative and summative) of the program) enables us to appreciate the areas that might require attention to sharpen the focus of future courses including management issues and a lack of collaboration in the design and delivery of each phase, and enhanced formative and summative evaluation of the course.

3-1 Tips to Bridge the Gaps between Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

In cases when a course is run in a third country, all the stakeholders responsible for selection of participants from different countries need to cooperate before, during, and after the course is over. This will help to assess whether the course has been effective or not. Such collaboration can be achieved by using the ADDIE model as the basis for shared planning and understanding going forward. It means that needs analysts, designers, materials developers, trainers and evaluators work together in order to run an effective trainer training program.

3-2 ADDIE Model (diagram adapted from Steven J. McGriff, Instructional Systems, College of Education)

The ADDIE model's focus on formative evaluation of the course will help to build in immediate remedies during the course. However, to understand the longer- term actual impact of the training, Kirkpatrick's model for evaluating training (which consists of 4 levels: 1. React, 2. Learn, 3. Change, and 4. Impact) can be adapted. It implies that the concerned stakeholders and the course participants should continue to work together after the course is over. One could argue, using Kirkpatrick's model, that any given training course can be assessed for effectiveness by examining the extent to which all four of the levels are present and well-integrated in the design, delivery and monitoring and evaluation of the training

4- Conclusion

Understanding the nature of teacher- and trainer- training is crucial for designing cost-effective programs which address the target groups' needs. Establishing a clear understanding of the role of the trainer and how they deploy the skills of facilitation of learning is not straightforward. It needs to build on the basics of teacher training methodology but at the same time go a stage further so that the experienced teacher wishing to become a trainer reflects on their own teaching experience and practices to make sense of what is required to train a new cohort of teachers. In the trainer training room, the teacher has to put him/ herself once again in the position of student to understand how to model concepts and practices of trainer training, reflect on what they think they already know, appreciate and anticipate the kinds of problems that new teachers face and put in front of trainees a range of possible solutions to experiment with.

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