

The Provision of Teacher Development in an Expanding University – a Case Study from Turkey

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Context

There is an ever-growing body of literature concerning the need for teacher development, teacher training and teacher education in English language teaching. Possibly because ELT is primarily a private sector enterprise, or possibly because teaching language is a more complex process than teaching a content-based subject, training methodology has lagged behind classroom methodology in a way which is not paralleled by the basic pedagogic training of subject teachers in the state sector, at least throughout the European Union.

Notwithstanding the problematic nature of language teaching, various training methodologies have emerged. ELT has recognised the existing limitations of its professional structure and the consequent need for ongoing training and development, particularly in light of the minimal initial training which most native-speaker English language teachers receive.

The majority of literature on training methodology comes from experienced and enlightened teachers and trainers, often working in training establishments or independently, free from economic and institutional constraints. The best training, it would appear, takes place in dynamic, informed 'learning schools', which, one suspects, are few and far between in reality.

'A school culture in which the entire staff is encouraged to engage in personal learning which feeds organisational transformation, and vice-versa.' (The Learning School - Adrian Underhill)

The School of Foreign Languages at the Izmir University of Economics, located on the Aegean coast of Turkey, is an example of an institution where the development of teacher support and education and the development of the organisation are, it may be argued, not always at a point of congruence. There are a number of possible reasons for this imbalance:

- Rate of growth of the institution
- Diversity of teacher needs
- Cultural factors, both in teacher expectations and management attitudes
- The relationship between economics, ease and quality

Growth

The Izmir University of Economics (IUE) is a private English-medium university, now in its sixth year. Over this brief period the student population has expanded to over 5000, Over one thousand students each year are required to take an intensive foundation year in English, while the School of Foreign Languages also services support courses in the faculties and second foreign language courses. Over the same

period, the number of instructors in the School of Foreign Languages has grown to nearly 200, including some 50 teachers of languages other than English, and around 40 native-speakers of English. Meanwhile, the Teacher Development Unit has grown from a single trainer to a core of five, with the potential for assistance from a few experienced teachers and coordinators.

In Turkey, English language teaching has lagged behind the mainstream for some time, clinging to traditional approaches and rote learning techniques. Many local teachers tend to be married women seeking to earn a second family income. A minority has graduated from faculties of education, while others have taken a one-year postgraduate teaching qualification. Few are aware of the possibilities of in-service training. Similarly, school and university administrations in general have a somewhat limited notion of what teacher development actually involves. In the private sector, the well-established and prestigious Bilkent University in Ankara has a flourishing training unit, founded on overseas expertise, and other universities have replicated the model. Meanwhile, native-speaker teachers are employed both for their knowledge and as a marketing tool and are utilised in a variety of capacities such as running ‘conversation’ classes. Minimum standards in terms of recruitment are loosely defined.

Diversity of needs and policy

The consequence is a huge variety of needs in terms of language competence, pre-service training, orientation for foreign staff, qualifications and motivation levels, leaving teacher educators with a plethora of options in terms of the provision of opportunities for in-service training and development. The composition of the teaching community at IUE is not atypical:

	L1 (foreign)	L2 (local)
Qualifications	DELTA (rare), Masters	DELTA (rare), Masters
	CELTA or equivalent	CELTA or ICELT (rare)
	Other subject qualifications	Language / Literature graduates
	Other ELT qualifications	One year postgraduate training
	No ELT qualifications	Education faculty graduates
Experience	University / High School / Language School	
	Substantial	
	Some	
	Minimal	
	None	

Under these circumstances, the Teacher Development Unit at IUE has adopted an umbrella policy. Stated simply:

To provide in-service support and development to enable teachers to achieve their full potential.

Similarly, the objectives of the unit are limited, but encompass both internal and external training possibilities, and considerations of the needs of both teachers and the institution:

- To manage the effective development of the Teacher Development Unit in cooperation with the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) management.
- To ensure that staff induction and orientation meet the requirements of teachers with increasingly varied interests, needs and experience, and the requirements of the institution.
- To develop and expand a range of short courses available to teachers.
- To meet the needs of all teachers through the development of a range of internationally validated courses.
- To develop an observation program within the SFL.
- To deliver a program of workshops and seminars on a variety of curriculum and materials related topics, and to invite guest speakers, including members of staff, to contribute to the program.
- To organise, in cooperation with SFL management, ELT events that promote IUE as a centre of excellence in foreign language teaching in the region.

In many ways, the above is a realistic attempt to establish a base level of methodological knowledge and other standards which may not have been established during the planning stage of the university. It is also far removed from the ideals of the ‘learning organisation’ in which teachers are assumed to need to:

- Engage in self-reflection and evaluation
- Develop specialised knowledge and skills
- Expand and update their knowledge of theory and issues in teaching
- Take on new roles and responsibilities
- Develop collaborative relationships

Constraints

In their recent book ‘*Professional Development for Language Teachers*’, Richards and Farrell list eleven recognised modes of teacher development (adapted):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Self-monitoring • Teacher support groups • Keeping a journal • Peer observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching portfolios • Case studies • Mentoring • Peer coaching • Team teaching • Action research
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The above list makes major assumptions about the existing state of teacher development, motivation levels and basic standards within an institution, and for IUE and many other institutions the implementation of such a set of strategies would be a clear case of running before walking. The major characteristic of the list is that all the action points, with the exception of workshops, depend on teacher initiative and are merely facilitated by teacher educators. Such motivation is not always an intrinsic characteristic. Motivation for learning in the classroom is high when manageable tasks are set, and in the same way, motivation for development can only be present if the job in hand is also perceived to be manageable. Given the demands of the curriculum, a time schedule dominated by regular testing, and little obvious/apparent reward in the way of communicative competence from their learners, teachers have

limited time or motivation to indulge in self actualisation. Meanwhile, the institution, largely proficiency orientated and content with internal success, remains unaware of its role in providing extrinsic motivation to satisfy psychological needs. Borrowing from Maslow's hierarchy, these might include challenging projects, opportunities for innovation and creativity, learning at a high level, important projects, recognition of strengths and intelligence, prestige and status. On a basic level, what is missing is the encouragement of initiative and reward for extra effort.

The role of the Teacher Development Unit, at this stage, has therefore evolved into one of ongoing training and facilitating. Teacher education is seen as two continua, those of training to development, and dependence to autonomy. The objectives of the unit are now seen as stages of these continua:

<i>training</i>	<i>development</i>	
Imposed (real or perceived)	Available and voluntary	Self-actuated but facilitated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations by coordinators • TDU observations & feedback • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short courses • Consultation and advice • Externally validated courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer observations • Journals and other forms of writing • Support groups • Action research
<i>dependence</i>	<i>autonomy</i>	

There might also be a third continuum; that between the necessary and the desirable. Cultural factors come into play here, since both teachers and coordinators place a high value on experience and performance, the outcome being that judgementalism is both expected and practised. Whilst observations carried out by the TDU are designed to be constructive and developmental, many teachers have come to view these, and attendance at regular workshops, as part of the assessment process.

Preconditions

The TDU is also responsible for providing support to teachers of languages other than English (French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Japanese). The context here is rather different, since these programs are much less intensive, and total numbers of both students and teachers are considerably lower, though class sizes are similar. Possibly as a consequence of these and other factors, 'take-up' for teacher development from this sector is high, as is teacher motivation and level of appreciation. Relative success in this area may provide indicators of circumstances conducive to more productive activity on a broader scale:

- Size of departments. The 'second language' departments are relatively small. Communication and diffusion of information is readily achieved.
- Organisation of departments. The second language departments have a simple hierarchy consisting of a coordinator/head and teachers. Information is imparted directly. The departments are compact in that each occupies a spatial unit. Distance is not an obstacle to face-to-face contact.

- Involvement of coordinators. Given that some of the second language departments are relatively new, and all are expanding, coordinators are seeking out avenues of development and assistance.
- Independence. The second language departments tend to operate relatively independently and are able to implement whatever seems to benefit both teachers and learners.
- Bilingual or multilingual trainer. The trainer needs to have a working knowledge of the target language to be able to follow lessons. Feedback is often conducted in a mixture of English, the target language and the host language, Turkish.
- Novelty and new experience. There is an appetite for new ideas. Many of the second language teachers have had solid general training but are unfamiliar with ELT methodology, which they find new and stimulating.
- Attitudes and enthusiasm. In smaller departments it is easier to strike a balance between youth and experience, a symbiosis which produces a combination of learning and enthusiasm.
- 'Take up'. This involves three stages of acceptance; willingness to participate, willingness to implement, and a desire for ongoing development. In smaller departments, there is a close conformity to Everett Rogers' model of the diffusion of innovation. The stages of diffusion - awareness, interest, trial, evaluation and adoption are seen to be in progress. The 'innovators' and 'early adopters' are easily identified and targeted, while teachers who are less receptive are few in number.

The future

The teacher trainers/developers/educators in this case study have recognised that in order to achieve teacher development targets, there need to be change which bring both teachers and the institution closer to the concept of the learning organisation. This realisation, in itself, has produced a change in the definition of the trainers' role which is now seen as combining both 'trainer-down' and 'trainer-up' strategies in an attempt to promote an 'educational ecosystem'. The development plan for the Teacher Development Unit now includes not only the existing array of activities, but also a set of macro-policies designed to allow change to occur at other levels:

- Foster collegial and self development
- Set minimum standards for recruitment
- Build in staff development time
- Restructure and reorganise (spatially)
- Expand / stabilise
- Encourage interdisciplinary cooperation
- Make recommendations to administration
- Encourage openness, both internally and externally

This case study is one of experience, experimentation, successes and failures, and a good deal of reflection. The product, while the mission of the Teacher Development unit still stands, is a philosophy towards development based on simple advice:

- Accept what is currently practicable

- Deliver what is necessary
- Recognise constraints
- Set manageable targets
- Aim for what is desirable in the long term
- Be flexible

By following this self-directed advice and by turning a philosophy into a practicable policy, and by endeavouring to affect change from within, it is hoped that the learning organisation may become more of an achievable reality than a purely idealistic notion.

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