

An overview of ELT formative ways in Spain

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Abstract:

Spain is currently a hot spot for English language teaching due not only to the legal educational changes and publisher's efforts to improve the Spanish students' competence but also because of the increasing interest of educational authorities and general teachers in action research and optimizing the teaching standards. To achieve these purposes, the teachers demand more training and the educational regional boards organize teacher training courses. Additionally, some publishers also organize one day workshops or two day conferences open to all teachers. This paper reviews the different types of teacher training in Spain. In doing so, the paper addresses three different aspects of teacher training: 1) the description of the three most common ways of training in-service teachers; 2) the presentation of the guidelines of each one of these ways; and 3) the current deficiencies and proposals to improve the current situation.

An analytical overview of ELT formative ways in Spain:

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Most ELT teachers in the United Kingdom and other English speaking countries would agree that Spain is currently a “hot spot” for English Language Teaching due not only to the immense effort that publishers make to cope with the local market demand but also to the increasing interest in research and, overall, in the number of job positions offered every year. Along with these openings ELT instructors know well that Spain offers other opportunities available to professional of different fields who can qualify as good English language instructors. However, as opposed to the past, in the last few years most schools, including language schools are becoming more and more demanding about the type and quality of the skills required of their native speaking English teachers. This is also valid for Spanish instructors as well.

Initial training is, of course, the basic qualifying credential to access to any working position but continuous training is also becoming critical to a language teaching career. However, it is necessary to review other types of teacher training in Spain. Thus, the main goals of this paper are:

- 1- To describe the three main ways of training for in-service teachers,
- 2- To provide the guidelines presented in each one, and
- 3- To present current deficiencies and proposals to improve the current situation

Describing the three main ways of training for in-service teachers

As mentioned before teachers and language instructors in Spain are now usually required to have a university degree in languages. Spanish speakers are usually required an English Philology degree plus a teaching course (about 250 hours) for employment in High schools or a three-year

teaching degree (“*Magisterio*”) in order to teach in Primary schools. Most non-native speakers are required to have either the CELTA or the RSA plus another university diploma. However, these English credentials do not provide access to teaching in state institutions which are better paid than private ones. In private schools these teachers serve in positions where they are not permitted to make the final decision on grades and other official matters.

After this initial training, in-service teachers are encouraged to continue their language education. In general, there are three main ways to access this continuous education: institutional training, private trainings or commercial training

Institutional training is usually provided by two types of institutions: universities and regional Teachers’ Centers. Universities usually organize short 30-to-50-hours courses which are not part of larger university programs (such as a Master’s or PhD programs). They are recognized by the Ministry of Education but they cannot be counted as credit toward further studies. In general, they are neither offered in large number nor attended by many teacher-students. Quite different is the importance of regional Teachers’ Centers all over Spain. These centers offer courses that are generally free. Candidates are permitted to enroll with the following registration preference order: state teachers, private school teachers and, finally, the any other teachers who may qualify according to course pre-requisites. Most of these courses consist of 20 to 40 on-site hours plus a final paper. Overall, last year more than 900 seats were offered in over 30 courses only in the Valencian Community. Although it seems hard to obtain the total number of teachers attending these courses in Spain, this number could be estimated around 5000 nationwide.

Apart from these local courses, regional

Teachers' Centers are connected to the regional authorities which run the selection of candidates for Comenius courses which are usually offered in England and Ireland at well reputed training schools such as Concordy-Christ Church College (Canterbury), Hilderston College (Broadstairs) or Trinity College (Dublin), to mention a few. There are usually about 500 of these positions nationwide only available on a competitive basis

The second type of teacher trainer is offered by private institutions. Although there are a large number of institutions offering these courses, from the British Council or International House to small language schools, but only a few of them are, in fact, recognized by the Ministry. This paper will only address two sorts of course organizers: Official Professional Organizations (known as *Colegios Oficiales de Doctores y Licenciados*) and reputed para-academic institutions. These two types of institutions run very short courses (usually around 30 hours) with very broad goals in order to fit as many people as possible such as "ELT for primary teachers" or "computers in ELT" It is extremely difficult to account for the total number of teachers involved in this teacher training but although in the past they were very popular, practicing teachers do not seem to show the same interest in these courses today as they did ten years ago.

Publishers are a third major source of teacher training events. These events, meeting or conferences usually try to provide an even number of commercially oriented and informative talks. In some major cities or conventions the number of teachers attending the event can easily exceed of 600-800 teachers. Publishers such as Heinemann in Valencia or Heinemann and Oxford University Press in Madrid or Barcelona used to organize such enormous conferences (with up to 1,400 teachers in Valencia 2001) that they had to split the event into smaller conventions to fit the demand. Besides, these enormous meetings were usually accompanied by little presentations, drawings and complementary coffee and/or full lunch. Other publishers did not spend so much and usually held smaller conferences or talks at schools or Teachers' Centers. Naturally, publishers are reluctant to release the total number of attendees at their meetings and conferences but Heinemann usually organizes over 50 conferences a year, Oxford over 20 and Longman a smaller number. However as fun these events can be, they have become less popular in the last five years

due to the decreasing commercial interest of the publishers and the teachers for these events which usually are more of a chance to see colleagues than real learning opportunities. Apart from all this, reputed publishers such as Heinemann have created longitudinal work groups which include action research as well as teacher training modules.

In addition to these three formal types of teacher training, numerous conferences are organized almost everywhere in Spain. Indeed, their number increases every year. Some of these conferences, in fact, are mainly used as teacher training events. The following conferences² are held every year and are partially or completely oriented towards ELT teacher training:

- a) Total orientation: IESOL Spain, APAC (Barcelona), GRETA (Granada), TEA (Canary Islands), CETA (Córdoba), APIGA (Galicia).
- b) Partial orientation: AESLA, AELFE.

These conferences are organized by applied linguistics or teacher organizations but many publishers have a very influential role in their success because they provide the organization with speakers and materials or small gifts plus their on-site advertising. In fact, publishers often spend large amounts of money and human resources with little hope for new business. Despite the apparent decrease in teachers' motivation towards any of the three kinds of teacher training mentioned above conferences are not doing any better and organizers are very concerned about the future of some of them.

Main features of teacher training events in Spain

The previous section gave a brief summary of the different types of teacher training in Spain. However, to obtain a better picture it is necessary to elaborate on the main differences in content, topics, and intended audience. To do this, four examples of teacher training were chosen according to the previous types:

- a) Institutional: the Valencian Community Teachers' Centers (about 20 courses in 2004) (VCTC)
- b) Private: Universidad de Otoño 2004 del Colegio de Licenciados de Madrid (UOCDL)
- c) Publishers: Jornadas Heinemann de Valencia 2004 (JHV)

d) Conferences: APAC (Barcelona, February 2004) (APAC)

As for the features analysis, a modification of *the overview of training parameters* (Woodward, 1991: 164) is used. The results of the comparative study can be seen in table 1

Deficiencies and proposals to improve the current situation

One common element that most of the courses mentioned above share is their “*activity orientation*”. By activity orientation it is understood that their main focus is on practical tasks (activities) that can be immediately transferred from the training session into the classroom. A teacher I interviewed recently described them as aimed at “singing, dancing, moving, jumping and, whenever possible, learning English”. Despite the irony, many teachers in Spain currently feel the same about these short 30-50-hour courses. Many researchers in teacher training have also argued the validity of these courses in the long run. While Ferguson & Donno (2003) acknowledge the need of larger and more

theory founded courses, Horne (2003) replies that it is hard to ask for more when teachers are not properly rewarded (neither with personal time nor salary increase) When referring to this type of course Horne says: “In a climate where education is subordinate to commerce, there can be little motivation in such a course with its commensurately greater fees and the enormous investment of time required” (Horne, 2003: 396) As real as it may seem, there is no question that attending courses that are exclusively *activity oriented* can be tiring and, as many times few activities can be directly transferred into each teacher’s class. Thus, teachers are becoming more and more reluctant to enroll in such courses and conferences and hence, the attendance decreasing³.

It seems necessary to provide Spanish teachers with more founded courses that integrate “activities” with a “range of pedagogic choices to create the eclecticism expected of EL teachers in the communicative and post-communicative age”(Horne, 2003: 396). By seeking this in-depth approach teachers would be able to attain a better picture of the whole language teaching

Examples	Audience	Trainers	Methodology	Aims	Materials	Hours / Price
VCTC	Primary / secondary in-service teachers	Specialists from professional field or university	Task based Talks Debates CALL Practical workshops	Improving professional performance Discovering new teaching techniques	Photocopies provided others brought by attendees	20 + final paper Free
UOCDL	Open	Specialists from professional field or university	Talks	Discovering new teaching techniques Coping with current practice problems	All provided by the institution	25 + short final paper 180 Euro
JHV	Open	Materials writers or professional teacher trainers	Talks False workshops ¹	Promotional talks about books or CALL materials	All provided by publisher plus folders, bags and freebies	8 (4 X 2 hours) Free
APAC	Open	Open to all speakers	All above plus more	All above plus addressing general or particular teaching issues	Photocopies provided plus publishers provide with folders, bags and freebies	30 (in 1-2 hours short talks) 120-180 Euro

Table 1: Main features of teacher training events in Spain

and language acquisition process (Ferguson & Donno, 2003) as well as getting the best from the practical use of short 1-month courses as thought by Hycraft (1988). It also gives the opportunity to implement reflective experiential teaching within a personal framework created through in-class experience and theory knowledge (Johnson & Golombek: 2003; Bell, 2003).

Of course, these issues are in continuous change and this paper does not intend to be conclusive in its own. Instead, it intends to be a first approach to a more complicated matter that needs to be addressed in future studies. In that sense, it would be recommendable to study the effect of “activity based” courses on the daily activities, attitudes, motivation and changes on teacher practices over medium and long terms of time. If teachers and trainers considered serious changes in their current training practices it would certainly benefit all the people involved in ELT training in Spain.

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(Endnotes)

- ¹ I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Dr. Luis G. Bejarano and Raquel Adams from Valdosta State University (Georgia, US).
- ² The reader will find more information in the TESOL Spain website or www.tesol-spain.org.
- ³ See the last APAC report on their annual convention at http://www.apac.es/convention_present.html.