

EDU WORLD 2018
The 8th International Conference

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUOUS
TRAINING OF ENGLISH TEACHERS**

Andreea Mihaela Stoian (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) University of Craiova, 13 A.I. Cuza,, Craiova 200285, Romania, andreea_nedelcut@yahoo.com

Abstract

Teachers have to, permanently, update their information and invest in their professional development. My article focuses on the challenges that English teachers face when teaching such a popular foreign language. These challenges are the same for the English teachers who are non-native speakers of English and teach English as a foreign language as well as for the English teachers who are native English. To know English does not necessary mean you can teach it to others. The teaching process is a complex one and every English teacher should update and improve his/ her teaching methods periodically. This entire ongoing teacher learning process is meant to help English teachers keep up with certain factors that may influence the students' needs and expectations from an English class/ course. These factors can be: multicultural social environments, volatile job market and the evolution of technology. Teaching English as a foreign language is an interesting career because it gives teachers the possibility to prepare future generations for a world in which English language seems to have gained its supremacy. This career is suited for those who are willing to test and apply interactive teaching methods as well as for those who are aware of the fact that professional development and continuous training and study represent an important aspect.

© 2019 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.UK

Keywords: Teaching process, English teachers, professional development, continuous training, innovation.



1. Introduction

1.1. The teaching process – definition and characteristics

The teaching process dates back to Antiquity and it has evolved until the present time in order to prepare children, students or adult learners for different domains of activity. Teaching is a job that is permanently evolving because it requires many hours of continuous study and certain skills that help teachers find the appropriate way to transmit information to their audience. The teacher needs a regular and ongoing professional development in order to keep up with the changes that occur in education and in the technology field. He has to constantly research for new, efficient and adequate materials and to introduce them in his classroom with the help of emerging technology tools. The ability to evaluate students' needs and to understand their diverse experiences, interests and cultural backgrounds will help the teacher obtain a successful and productive class/ course.

Michael Uljens (researcher in the Department of Teacher Education at Abo Akademi in Vasa, Finland) has explained the meaning of the teaching process. *To teach* means “to show someone something through signs or symbolic; to use signs or symbols to evoke responses about events, persons, observations, findings, and so forth. The conclusion drawn above points to teaching as a symbolic communicative process” (Uljens, 2005, p. 9)

Therefore, even if in the teaching process, the teacher is the one who transmits information and the students are the receivers, communication between these two parts is crucial. The teacher should be prepared to receive an objective feedback from his students and to change his methodological approach whenever necessary.

Moreover, when we refer to English teachers and their classes, communication is essential because it is a direct way to prepare students for the working environment in which they will perform. In a constantly evolving work environment that becomes more and more multicultural, the English teachers should focus on extending and developing their English knowledge and skills in order to properly guide their students. The fact that the present working environment is a linguistically mixed one and people from different parts of the world have to find a way to communicate makes language choice” one of the most sensitive issues” (Crystal, 2003, p.12).

For most multinational companies, English language has become the tool of communication between foreign employers and employees who have to communicate for business purposes. Students who attend English courses have to receive the appropriate English information that gradually incorporates new ideas and materials. Such processes require a lot of time and study from behalf of English teachers who have to explore for ne teaching methods as well as to develop their English knowledge.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Objective of the research:

2.1.1. How important is professional development and continuous training for English teachers?

The objective of this research is to help English teachers identify the ways that will ensure their professional development in order to improve their English knowledge according to the latest means of class-communication.

Looking for professional development opportunities will help the English teacher stay active and connected to the changes and updates that occur in the English vocabulary. No matter if we speak about new English teachers or about experienced ones, professional development should be encouraged for both categories. In fact: “Evaluating progress toward the goals of professional development and the impact on student learning is the accountability measure that gives credibility to the importance of continuous professional development” (Speck, 2005, p. 17).

English teachers can learn and develop professionally in formal and informal settings as well as during work and outside work. They can improve and update their English knowledge in formal educational gatherings as well as in their spare time- in an informal way. The informal ways of professional development for English teachers include:

- To read and to research professional materials for personal projects, articles or course books
- To access and include web-related materials in their classes
- To test new teaching strategies
- To share their class experiences with other colleagues.

All these activities are meant to guide and to support their teaching career.

Continuous training and study is important for English teachers because in this way they can improve classroom practices in order to obtain better student outcomes.

Moreover, English is a flexible and changing language. For example in the third edition of the Oxford English Dictionary dated from 2010 it is stated that:” more than 2,000 new words, senses and phrases have been added, and key areas of vocabulary have been reanalysed, reviewed and revised” (Stevenson, 2010, p.vii)

In the latest update from the official website (dated October 2018) for the same English dictionary, the English language has enriched its vocabulary with “more than 1.400 new words, senses, and subentries” (OED, 2018, para.2) All these updates and new entries in the English vocabulary certify the importance of continuous training and study for all English teachers.

2.2. Hypotheses of the research:

There is a significant correlation between the professional development of English teachers and the way in which they succeed in making students understand better and accumulate faster the necessary English language.

There is a significant difference between the students who benefit of the guidance of English teachers who use new teaching methods and students who are guided by teachers who are not interested in improving their teaching methods.

3. Research Questions

The first question served as an introduction and respondents were asked to explain what professional development and continuous training represent for them. This was my way of familiarizing the respondents with the topic of my research.

The following 5 questions from my questionnaire were:

1. Do you think there is a connection between your own professional development and your activity during English courses? Please include at least 3 changes that you noticed related to this connection.
2. Do you consider that continuous training is essential for the teaching career?
3. Did your Erasmus experience in several European countries improve your teaching activity?
4. How often do you attend conferences/ seminars/ workshops/ summer schools?
5. Are you satisfied with the conferences/ seminars/ workshops/ summer schools provided by the Romanian educational system?

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. The purpose of my research on the importance of professional development and continuous training for English teachers

Although the English language is one of the most popular foreign languages which is learnt throughout the globe, many of its learners find it tricky and sometimes even difficult to understand especially when it comes to its grammar rules. The English teachers have the role to make the learning process accessible for every category of learners. The purpose of the English class/ course is to make the learner acquire a grammatically accurate English language. Therefore the teaching – learning process of the English language needs to be updated and adjusted to the requirements of the educational system and of the job/ career opportunities. The English teachers should be very well-prepared and they should continue to develop and improve their teaching methods.

In other words enough is not enough when teaching a foreign language. Every English teacher should acknowledge the fact that English is an evolving language and it requires an active involvement in any manifestation, conference, workshop or seminar that may improve and update the English teacher's knowledge. Through my research I wanted to obtain an objective point of view related to the importance of professional development and continuous training from Romanian teachers who teach English for Specific Purposes at the University of Craiova.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Methodology and research

In order to find out how important is the professional development and continuous training for the English teachers I decided to make up a questionnaire because this type of research is accurate and highly practical. The results/ answers from the questionnaire can be rapidly quantified and they provide a clear image of the topic that is placed under research. I also chose this mean of research because the “questionnaire is the medium of communication between the researcher and the subject... In the questionnaire, the researcher articulates the questions to which he or she wants to know the answers, and through the questionnaire, the subjects' answers are conveyed back to the researcher” (Brace, 2018, p.5).

I distributed my questionnaire among my work-colleagues from the Department of Applied Modern Languages – the University of Craiova. This questionnaire contained key questions that were meant to provide an inside view related to the importance of continuous training when teaching a foreign language. The questionnaire had 6 open-ended questions with no pre-determined responses. I chose this type of questions because they give the respondents the opportunity to answer freely and to express and share their

thoughts related to the importance of professional development and continuous training for English teachers.

6. Findings

For the question: *Do you think there is a connection between your own professional development and your activity during English courses? Please include at least 3 changes that you noticed related to this connection.* Most of my colleagues from the Department of Applied Modern Languages – University of Craiova said:

- They obtained a better course management.
- They used the latest means of communication within their English courses (e.g. the internet, the laptop, the video-projector, the interactive board)
- They improved their teaching methods during their English courses

For the question: *Do you consider that a continuous training is essential for the teaching career?*

All the answers unanimously agreed that continuous training is essential for the teaching. My colleagues also mentioned that they are very interested in developing their professional career and enriching their teaching experience.

For the question: Did your Erasmus experience in several European countries improve your teaching activity?

A part of my colleagues from the Department of Applied Modern Languages visited other universities and attended English classes or seminars within Erasmus programs for teachers. This experience has helped them deal with:

- multicultural English courses (students from different countries decide to come and study at the University of Craiova)
- Students who become more and more aware of their needs and more pragmatic when it comes to their expectations from the English course.
- New, interactive methods of teaching English in order to prepare students for a job interview in English and a career in which English “remains a massively dominant language of global relations” (Pennycook, 2017, p.viii).

For the question: *How often do you attend conferences/ seminars/ workshops/ summer schools?*

The majority of my colleagues from the Department of Applied Foreign Languages mentioned in their questionnaires that they have at least one attendance per year at these kind of activities. They also coordinate and organise different educational activities for their students in which all foreign languages are involved including English.

For the question: *Are you satisfied with the conferences/ seminars/ workshops/ summer schools provided by the Romanian educational system?*

All questionnaires have detected a common issue that, sometimes, slows down or even blocks the process of professional development. This issue has been exposed by my colleagues and it is related to the financial resources. The financial resources are important for a smooth and continuous professional development and in some cases they are insufficient.

My colleagues from the Department of Applied Modern Languages mentioned the financial support in the context of international conferences that are very well quoted but also very expensive. In these particular situations the participation fee is quite consistent and all the costs involved in attending international conferences are also very high (accommodation, means of transport, meals).

Finally, the questionnaires revealed that professional development and continuous training are important. English teachers should focus on improving the areas in which they feel less secure as well as to develop their acquired skills even further. This continuous training can be enabled by an active attendance at national and international conferences, seminars, workshops or summer schools.

7. Conclusion

Education and knowledge in professions (in this case English teachers) have “acquired increasing expectations from the public that include:

- Keeping pace with rapidly evolving knowledge bases
- Developing skills and attitudes appropriate for good practice
- Sustaining public confidence.” (Mc Kee&Eraut, 2012, p.1)

Therefore, English teachers have to personalize their professional development and to dedicate their time to research, write, select and attend conferences, seminars or workshops in order to enrich their knowledge and to keep-up-to-date with the changes from the English language.

References

- Brace, I., (2018). *Questionnaire Design, how to plan, structure and write survey material for effective market research*, 4thEdition. United Kingdom: Kogan Page Limited.
- Crystal, D., (2003). *English as a global language - Second Edition*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Mc Kee, A., & Eraut, M., (2012). *Learning Trajectories: Innovation and Identity for Professional Development*. Germany: Springer Science + Business Media B.V.
- Oxford English Dictionary, The definitive record of the English language; retrieved from <https://public.oed.com/updates>
- Pennycook, A., (2017). *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. United Kingdom: Routledge Linguistics Classics.
- Speck. M., & Knipe, C., (2005). *Why can't we get it right? Designing High-Quality Professional Development for Standards-Based Schools*, California: Corwin Press.
- Stevenson, A. (2010). *Oxford Dictionary of English, Third Edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Uljens, M., (2005). *School Didactics and Learning Psychology*, United Kingdom: Psychology Press a member of the Taylor & Francis Group.