

Effectiveness of Teaching Approaches of In-service Training Courses for EFL Teachers in Jordanian Schools

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the impact of the organization of teaching approaches on the effectiveness of training for Jordanian EFL teachers. The sample for this study is drawn from all government schools in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The study uses a mixed-method approach whereby findings are triangulated throughout (in interviews, observations, and questionnaires). The study finds that most of the in-service training courses for EFL teachers are not properly organized. Moreover, taking into account different approaches, this study shows that a serious problem hinders the effectiveness of the in-service training courses.

Keywords: In-service Training, Approach, EFL, Performance

1. Introduction

Neglect of education has become a serious issue in Arab countries. Generally, Arab countries experience shortcomings in developing an integrated vision for education and on how to implement its objectives (Yamani, 2006). In fact, until 1963, there was very little of what could be called educational planning in Jordan. Then, the Jordanian authorities realized that educational development, which entails educational planning in an organized manner, could support economic development (Salman, 1986). The late 1980s saw the adoption of a nationwide reform plan called FOE, which is targeted at reforming the teaching methodology of the English language. Basically, the EFL context in Jordan has been influenced by international developments in the methodology of teaching a foreign language. Before 1962, EFL teaching in Jordan was marked by the use of a mixture of traditional methods and the lack of a systematic approach. By 1971, the EFL field used a modified structural approach. It was not until 1984 when the communicative approach was officially adopted in the country (Kailani, 2004). The Jordanian Ministry of Education is responsible for planning, implementing, upgrading, and evaluating all educational components of public education for students, teachers, and staff, including curricula, facilities, literacy centers, and the like. Generally, the acquisition of English by Jordanian students is seen by the Jordanian Ministry of Education to be integral to educational and economic development. For this reason, in 1999, the teaching of English was mandated by royal decree in all Jordanian public and private schools (JMOE, 1999). His Majesty, King Abdullah II, has provided a vision for Jordan's development.

"The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has quality competitive human resource systems that provide all people with lifelong learning experiences relevant to their current and future needs in order to respond to and stimulate sustained economic development through an educated population and a skilled workforce" (Ministry of Education, 2002:6). The vision of his Majesty King Abdullah II draws the lines for the vision of Jordanian education which is encapsulated in Figure (1).

Currently, the Ministry of Education in Jordan is concerned about improving the quality of basic education. In line with this objective, it has been proclaimed that the 20th Century is devoted to improving the quality of education (Karsou, 2005). As such, teacher education and training have been given due emphasis in the national plan for education reform. The plan was launched in two phases: the first (1989-1995) during the rule of King Hussein, who aimed at developing "teacher training, general examinations, new curricula, educational technology, school buildings, restructuring the educational system, and vocational education and training" (Ministry of Education, 1996:6). The second phase of the plan (1996-2000), implemented after King Abdullah II succeeded his father, was designed to accomplish educational reform in the areas of staff development, assessment, school-based innovations, technical and vocational training, pre-school education, and non-formal education (JMOE, 1996). Accordingly, the Jordanian Ministry of Education considers teachers to be the "most important" element in the educational process (Ministry of

Education, 1999: 20). It has thus conferred extra attention to developing quality teacher training programs to enhance performance of teachers, and thus to achieve its goals (Zughoul, 2003).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate and examine the effectiveness and the extent to which the in-service training courses influence performance of EFL teachers, and to determine the needs of EFL teachers in relation to these courses. Based on the evaluation, designers may decide to further develop and implement or disseminate the in-service training courses, or to adapt and improve it if it is not yet meeting the goal of advancing performance of EFL teachers. This article will mainly focus on the effectiveness of the approaches of in-service training courses for EFL teachers in Jordanian schools.

2. Previous Research

Many different methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of language have come and gone, each with its own fundamental theoretical basis (Griffiths and Parr, 2001). Currently, teachers the world over have been recommended to use the communicative approach for its emphasis on the use of the foreign language in the classroom (Mangubhai et al., 2005). In fact, English language teaching has dominated the communicative approach as it has become one of the most implemented approaches worldwide. Accordingly, the purpose of language is communicative competence, and therefore communicative meanings and ideas set in meaningful contexts are an essential aspect of the equation (Jarvis and Atsilarat, 2004). Moreover, it is evident that the communicative approach has succeeded to foster communication between teachers and students in which traditional methods failed to achieve (Li, 1998; Yu, 2001). In this light, the different approaches for language teaching should be highlighted and explained in training courses for teachers in terms of their implementation in the classroom (Carrier, 2003).

Teachers gain from training courses if the benefits of reflective approaches, in which the views and feelings of learners play a main role in the success of second language acquisition pedagogy, and student-teacher relationships are highlighted (Saito and Ebsworth, 2004). Improvements in different EFL contexts, which are developed without taking into consideration the principals of communicative language teaching, have faced major challenges (Cheng, 2002; Li, 1998; Nunan, 1993; and Yano, Matsuura, and Ogata, 2003). These challenges involve the teacher, the students, the educational system, and the communicative language teaching approach itself (Li, 1998). There have been many attempts to develop the communicative approach in which some of the scholars, such as Bax (2003), have argued that the communicative language teaching approach has a negative effect on learning due to the absence of an explanation of what the teacher should do while dealing with this approach. Taking these drawbacks into account, Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) propose an alternative model that focuses on the importance of context and placing context on top of everything else as it is exemplified in 2 below.

Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) argue that since the communicative approach has proven to be a useful model worldwide, the C-bA option needs to be based on it. However, English has been viewed as foreign or second language in most of the countries all over the world. Teacher education and student development has come to provide new approaches targeted to modify the existing approaches to achieve global innovation (Jarvis and Atsilarat, 2004).

The main question is how to get teachers to use these approaches, especially the communicative approach. Reflecting the commitment to adopting the communicative approach, all state education authorities and teacher educators at both pre-service and in-service levels have made strenuous effort to initiate the use of this approach among practicing and prospective teachers (Mangubhai et al., 2005).

3. Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent are the approaches of in-service training courses for Jordanian EFL teachers organized to enhance the performance of these teachers?
- 2) What are the needs of EFL teachers in relation to their in-service training courses?

4. Research Method

In this part of the article, the researchers outline the design of the research employed in this study. In addition, the research sample, research method, and research instrument are presented. The targeted audience of this research is the Jordanian EFL teachers who attended and are attending in-service training courses. Both the qualitative and quantitative approaches are used as research methods for this study.

To achieve the objectives of the study and to answer the research questions, two research tools are implemented on the target samples, namely, questionnaire and interviews. Moreover, quantitative data are obtained from the questionnaires distributed among the teachers. The deployment of quantitative techniques entails the use of questionnaires distributed among EFL teachers to ensure objectivity and generalizability. The methods lead to

generation of quantifiable and reliable data concerning the perceptions of EFL teachers towards the effectiveness of their in-service training course approaches and the impact of these approaches on the performance of EFL teachers. The questionnaire is structured according to the research questions. It is 11-page long with 102 Likert-scale questions and one essay-type question.

In contrast, the qualitative research method entails the use of interviews with the EFL teachers in an attempt to provide the research with these perspectives on the efficacy of the in-service training courses for EFL teachers and their motivation in undergoing these courses, and the impact of these courses on the performance of EFL teachers. This technique indulges the researcher into direct interaction with the sample of the study to understand the condition of training for EFL teachers using their own words.

4.1 Responses of EFL Teachers

The sample comprises of 798 EFL teachers, of whom 331 (41.5%) are males and 467 (58.5%) are females. This indicates that female teachers outnumber the males. In terms of experience, 77 (9.6%) of EFL teachers (males and females) had less than three years of teaching experience, while 721 (90.4%) of them (males and females) had more than three years of teaching experience. In terms of educational level, 27 EFL teachers (3.4%) possessed a diploma in English, 735 EFL teachers (92.1%) had a B.A. degree in English, 25 (3.1%) had higher diploma in English, and 11 (1.4%) possessed an M.A. degree in English. In short, the sample is a cross-section representing the EFL teachers in Jordan.

4.1.1 Questionnaires for the EFL Teachers

This section looks at the responses of EFL teachers to the items in the questionnaires. The questionnaires contain several questions designed to get the answers to the research questions. It should be noted that the sample responses included the following options: I strongly agree, I agree, not sure, I disagree, and I strongly disagree

Perceptions by EFL Teachers of the Approach of their In-Service Training Courses

The EFL teachers have negative perceptions towards most of the stated items in the approach category. Of the items in the approach category, the communicative functions of language (with a mean rating of 2.65) are highlighted. In contrast, the usage of varied teaching approaches, which leads to the desired outcomes (mean rating of 3.96), is not highlighted. Similarly, ELT approaches (mean rating of 3.78) are neglected, according to the teachers.

Moreover, a high mean rating of 4.04 seems to imply that the courses do not involve educational research related to English-language teaching approaches. It should be noted that one of the main reasons for conducting in-service training courses for EFL teachers is to highlight the approaches that the teachers should be equipped with while handling the curriculum.

Unfortunately, how to implement these approaches in such a way that results in the desired outcomes is not clear. This fact is shown by the perceptions of EFL teachers towards the implementation of the different approaches that have a mean rating of (3.89). Adding up, the EFL teachers perceive that the courses do not clarify the usage of the task-based approach, which has a mean rating of (3.46). Collectively, all these responses seem to indicate that while the current in-service training courses focus on the communicative function of the language, it somehow neglects other issues that could enhance the performance of EFL teachers. The responses of the teachers to item (7) indicates that the time allotted for discussion is not sufficient, implying that the EFL teachers do not fully understand the issues discussed in the approach category, which has a mean rating of 4.14.

Thus, the in-service training courses should engage NNS teachers in discussions of not only how, but, more importantly, of whether various methods and assumptions about language learning can be applied in the classroom. Moreover, sufficient time should be allotted to discuss the use and implementation of these methods and approaches. Teachers and curriculum developers will benefit from a well organized approach, which takes into consideration the idea that approach is a basic for learning and teaching. It can be said, in terms of the approach category, that the developers of in-service training courses have not taken into consideration that inappropriate, unplanned, and un-clarified teaching approaches negatively influence performance of non-native speakers.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the in-service training courses for EFL teachers as perceived by the teachers has neglected the approach category as an important component towards the effectiveness of the in-service training courses. The EFL teachers are not satisfied with most of the approach category issues, as this fact is reflected throughout their responses on the approach category items. The results indicate the fact that the approach category is not actively implemented to supplement the objectives of the in-service training courses in enhancing the performance of EFL teachers. The finding of the study in this domain is supported by the findings of Alruba'e (1999) that courses for teachers do not effectively clarify the approach category.

4.1.2 The Results of Interviews with EFL teachers

This section presents the results and analysis of qualitative data gathered during the face-to-face individual interviews. The teachers selected for the interviews are interviewed on an individual basis to supplement the quantitative data gathered through distribution of questionnaires. To get specific details on participants and to obtain quality responses, face-to-face interviews are conducted. In addition, the interviews consist of questions on investigating and cross-validating data from the questionnaire. The interview questions consist of open-response questions that grant the interviewees the latitude to provide any response they deem appropriate. By analyzing responses of teachers during face-to-face individual interviews, the researcher is able to cross-validate quantitative data on the teachers obtained through the questionnaires.

Responses of teachers obtained from the face-to-face interviews are recorded according to the following order of description: gender (Male = M or Female = F), experience (More than three years = M3 or Less than (3) years = L3), and Qualification (Diploma = D or B.A = B or Higher Diploma = H or M.A = A). It should be noted that a selection of representative responses of teachers is stated in this chapter, in which repeated responses of teachers are not stated.

In addition, the results of the interviews support data obtained from the questionnaires for the EFL teachers in different domains: As (M-L3-B) argues, different approaches are included in the courses and in the teaching processes, but are rarely applied; it's an ink on paper. Moreover, some interviewed teachers feel that they do not know which approach should be adopted since the course instructors do not highlight why, when, and how to apply these approaches. Moreover, a (F-L3-B) notes that the organization of the in-service training courses is not goal-oriented, as it does not meet the requirements of the target.

It can be concluded from the qualitative data that the interviewed teachers in the current study expressed negative perceptions towards the in-service training courses in terms of organization of the approaches. They also highlighted other needs that are helpful in filling the gap in the current in-service training courses. After analyzing the qualitative data, the results of analysis revealed the following findings:

The interviewed teachers express their dissatisfaction towards the approach activation in the in-service training courses they had attended or currently attending. In this regard, the qualitative data support the quantitative data taken from the questionnaires, which are distributed among EFL teachers in different aspects such as:

- 1) The in-service training courses were not fruitful. As the EFL teachers did not feel that they gained any new knowledge from the in-service training courses they attend that may enhance their performance. Their performance remained the same; nothing new was presented at these courses.
- 2) The courses did not highlight the means by which proper approaches could be implemented in the target martial.
- 3) The in-service training courses did not implement activities under the communicative approach and other related approaches. The findings in this domain do not support the findings of responses of EFL teachers on the approach category: The teachers perceive that the in-service courses highlight communicative function of language item 2, which had a mean rating of 2.65. Despite that, the courses highlight the communicative approach but responses of teachers to item 7 shows that the time allotted for discussion is not sufficient, thus resulting in a lack of understanding in the issues related to the communicative approach category.

5. Summary and Concluding Remarks

The combination of research methods postulates clearly that performance of Jordanian EFL teachers is affected by the different teaching approaches adopted in the in-service training courses. It is evident from the findings of the study that Jordanian EFL teachers face many difficulties in their in-service training courses in terms of implementation of the different teaching approaches. However, this problem, which is one of the causes of poor performance of Jordanian EFL teachers, is rarely discussed in professional journals or published books in applied linguistics. The relevant literature indicates that there is a lack of specific studies on the impact of implementation of teaching approaches on the performance of EFL teachers.

In sum, it can be concluded that the in-service training courses for EFL teachers are not organized adequately, such as in a manner that takes into consideration the effective role of different teaching approaches, thus negatively influencing the effectiveness of the in-service training courses. The EFL teachers value the usage of varied teaching approaches, which lead to the desired outcomes, ELT approaches, conduct of educational research related to the English language teaching approaches, explanation of the implementation of the different approaches, and clarification of the usage of task-based approach. This fact is highlighted throughout the negative perceptions of teachers towards the course organization category in terms of approach, which has mean ratings ranging from 3.46 to 4.14. Responses of EFL teachers during the interview sessions, as (M-L3-B) expresses, show that the courses are not fruitful due to many reasons. One of these reasons is the presence of many courses held with many titles and

discussing different teaching approaches and materials; there is a mismatch between the titles of the courses and their actual implementation.

Thus, the in-service-training courses should engage NNS teachers in discussing not only how but, more importantly, whether various methods and assumptions about language learning can be applied to classroom teaching situations. Moreover, there should be ample time to discuss the use and implementation of these methods and approaches. Accordingly, teachers and curriculum developers will benefit from a well organized approach, which is an approach that takes into consideration the idea that approach is basic for language learning and teaching. It can be said that in terms of the approach category that the in-service training courses developers in Jordan do not take into consideration that the inappropriate, unplanned, and unclear teaching approaches addressed to non-native speakers negatively influence their performance. In addition, lack of experience, in specific contexts, negatively influences its delivery.

The findings of this study have implications that might be well intended for in-service training courses for EFL teachers and which are of significance to educators and policymakers, as well as to researchers. Throughout the study, it is indicated that the perceptions of EFL teachers (obtained through questionnaires and interviews) have vital implications on the effectiveness of the in-service training courses for EFL teachers and performance of EFL teachers, as the researcher has validated that the EFL teachers self evaluation are valid, reliable, and stable. It also indicates that it influences performance of EFL teachers.

For the convenience of discussion, these implications are presented in two main aspects. One is the implication that arises directly from this study – the effectiveness of in-service training courses for EFL teachers in Jordan. The other is directions for future research in aspects of Jordanian EFL performance. Both implications have not been covered yet. A number of researchers specifically concerned about poor performance in the English language of EFL teachers and students have identified some of the problems influencing performance at Jordanian schools (Alkhaldeh, 2005; Ibrahim, 1975). It is evident from the copious research literature that EFL teachers face many difficulties while teaching the English language in Jordanian schools.

The relevant literature indicates that teachers require some support and assistance while helping their students in the learning process. There is a lack of sufficient specific effectual studies on the effectiveness of the in-service training courses and its role in supporting and assessing the EFL teachers at the Jordanian schools. There is also lack of study on the influence of perceptions of EFL teachers to perceive the reason why Jordanian EFL teachers face difficulties while teaching the English language. The findings of this evaluative study obtained from the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches identify the influence of the effectiveness of in-service training courses and of the language teaching approaches on performance of EFL teachers in Jordanian schools.

After investigating in-service training needs of EFL teachers, designers would be able to:

- Prepare a plan for the identification of current and future training needs
- Select and use information-gathering techniques effectively
- Analyze the information to prioritize training needs
- Produce a training plan showing solutions, priorities, and benefit projections.

The recommendations of the study could help concerned parties in Jordan improve in-service training courses for EFL teachers in terms of course language teaching approaches. In addition, this study contributes to the elimination of some of the obstacles confronting performance of EFL teachers and to the advancement of the English language teaching/learning in Jordan.

Based on the findings and results of the study, and in light of needs of teachers, the following recommendations and suggestions are formulated:

- The Ministry of Education should investigate the factors behind negative perceptions of EFL teachers towards the in-service training courses.
- The Ministry of Education should focus not only on the quantity but also on the quality of the in-service courses.
- The Ministry of Education should organize in-service training courses in a scientific manner, taking into consideration what approach should be discussed and how to discuss it in a way that gratifies EFL teachers and students.

Clearly, EFL teacher-supervisors relationship in Jordan is an important matter influenced by many factors. Unfortunately, little research has been done to investigate this matter. Further research is needed to investigate the

adopted materials, its effectiveness and influence on the achievement levels of EFL teachers and students, and to find other ways in which the material could be improved for better implementation.

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Table 1. Mean of the Teachers' Responses in the Approach Category

Approach		1	2	3	4	5	Mean
The in-service training courses discuss the following approaches:							
Degrees of teachers responses		Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	M
1	Using varied teaching approaches which lead to the desired outcomes.	38	120	37	239	364	3.9662
2	Highlighting communicative function of language.	138	351	24	218	67	2.6554
3	Using different approaches related to ELT.	16	133	28	448	173	3.7882
4	Conducting educational research related to English language teaching approaches.	50	125	24	141	458	4.0426
5	Clarifying the implementation of the different approaches.	79	68	77	208	366	3.8947
6	Using task-based approach.	147	65	111	219	256	3.4662
7	The time given for discussion is sufficient.	42	74	61	169	452	4.1466

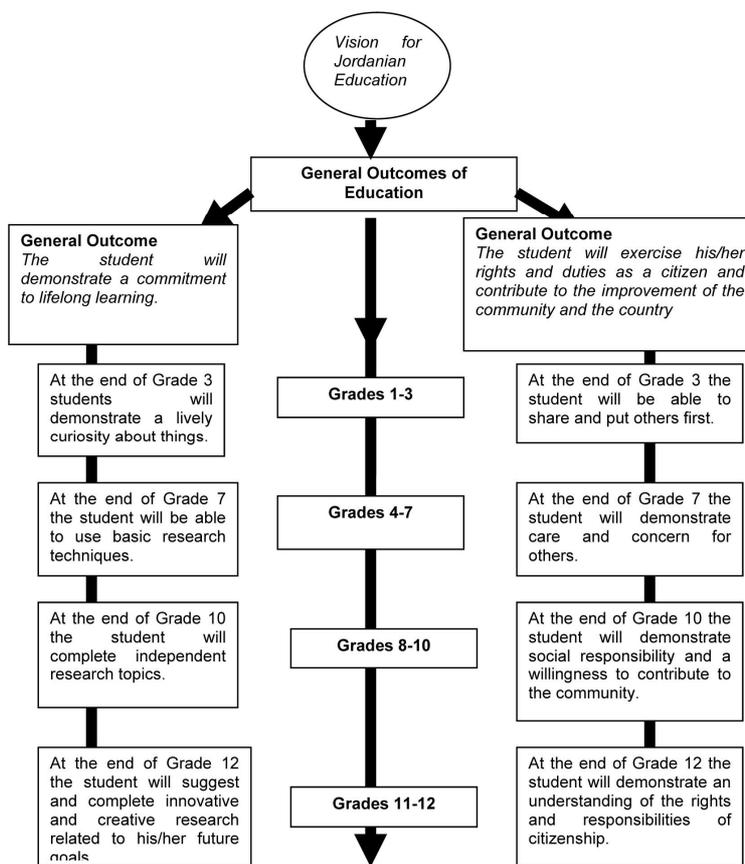


Figure 1. The Vision of Jordanian Education (Ministry of Education, 2002).

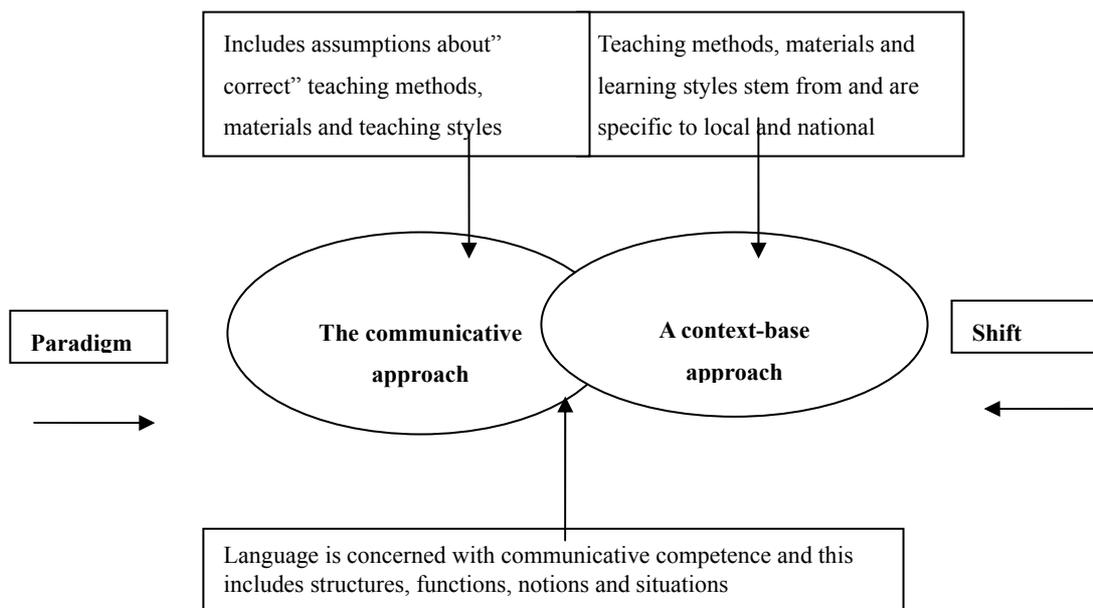


Figure 2. The Replacement of a CA with a C-bA (Jarvis and Atsilarat, 2004)