

Unit I

Introduction

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1. The Preparation of the Foreign Language Teacher

It is not difficult to realize that the majority of our basic and secondary school students in Syria fail to reach a satisfactory level in English after learning English for six years or so. But why is it so?¹

It can be said that the most important factor which leads to students' failure relates to the insufficient training of the teacher of English. One can probably expect good results if we have well-trained teachers, for a trained teacher will be able to overcome or get round most of the problems....

- * A trained teacher will know how to get the best results from a crowded class.
- * He will be able to make the most of the worst textbooks: he becomes able to avoid their defects and add what is necessary.
- * In addition, he will be acquainted with various methods of teaching and will be able to choose the appropriate methods for his own students.

Thus, most of the problems, then, will be removed if we have well-trained teachers.

¹ A study carried out by the present author (Hasan, 1983) attempts to answer this question. The main reasons, as the study reports, are (1) wrong use of methods of teaching (2) inadequate textbooks (3) the teachers' dissatisfaction because of general problems pertinent to their jobs as teachers: their dissatisfaction with the conditions in the school and in particular, the large number of students in the classroom (4) the insufficient training of the teachers of English both in their academic studies and in service.

But before providing courses for teacher training, we should consider the criteria for selecting those teachers to be in the profession.¹

1.1. Characteristics of a good foreign language teacher

Eons (1982) presents the characteristics of a good teacher from the students' point of view. She records the students' observations at a Beirut school as follows:

- * A good teacher ought to know more than just what's in the book.
- * He shouldn't act superior and order us around like servants.
- * He has to keep control of the class.
- * His lessons should be organized and he should return our papers while we're still excited and care what's in them.
- * A good teacher should be young, or young at heart
- * He has to like teaching us. It's easy to tell if he doesn't, you know. (p. 344).

The students also requested

- * a variety within the lesson hour: "if we just do drills forever, I fall asleep. Why do we have to do idioms for a whole hour? It's nice when you have a little grammar, and then a dictation and then some reading or a discussion.
- * Many students seemed to feel they should be given the opportunity to participate in the lesson: "the teacher shouldn't do all the talking. I like it when the students go up to the board."
- * In addition, students mentioned the teacher's sense of humour, his preparation of the lesson, his willingness to have a sympathetic attitude and to "remember what it was like to be a student"!

¹ The selection must take into consideration those personal characteristics (such as patience, tolerance, warmth and love) which make good teachers.

- * The teacher should know each individual and treat them justly: “She only talks to the best students. Doesn’t she know I am trying?”.
- * The students praised teachers who seem to be self-confident and enjoy their profession: “If he does not know the answer, he is not afraid to say so, so you can trust him”.
- * Students also referred to the patience of the teacher who could be provoked to anger only in extreme cases.
- * They also mentioned that the teacher’s voice shouldn’t be monotonous, you have to hear him in the back row.”.
- * Few responses were concerned about the appearance of the teacher.

2. Rationale for Teacher Training:

The demand for the preparation of foreign language teachers is great. Teachers may lack not only the native ability to speak the language, but also a proficiency level in speaking. Apart from this serious deficiency in their academic training, teachers also lack fundamental knowledge of how language is learnt or taught.

It is true that practical work seems to be more rewarding to trainees than theoretical information, but trainees must be made aware of the theories behind the teaching – learning process; otherwise they may fail to understand the purposes for teaching the language.

Developing the communicative abilities of the students is a major aim at present in communicative language teaching. Yet many teachers fail to teach language as communication. Many young teachers tend to make their classes teacher – centred¹.

They need to be guided to make their classroom lessons students – centred².

¹ They dominate the classroom interaction and deprive their students of opportunities to use the language in the classroom

² e.g. greater chance is given for the students to participate informally in classroom activities.

Finally, teachers with little or no training in teaching English know little about how to design a lesson plan. Therefore, after presenting a theoretical background and several methods used in teaching English, it seems sensible to then provide our student – teachers of English with directions on how to plan their lessons.

It is the aim of this book to acquaint the inexperienced teachers of English with all these issues and examine them in more detail. We do hope that student – teachers of English will find the book not only useful for their classroom teaching but also interesting.