

EVALUATING B. ED. PROGRAM OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS AT COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN YEMEN

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Abstract

It is observed that a majority of Yemeni teachers of English, in spite of graduating from Colleges of Education, tend to use a generous amount of L1 (Arabic) and traditional methods in teaching English (teacher-centered). They spend most of the class time on teaching grammar and vocabulary and almost ignoring the productive skills. This in turn affects their students who, after studying English for ten years at school level and college level, cannot speak English properly and communicate effectively in real-life situations. This observation led to the assumption that something is inadequate in the course of preparing Yemeni student-teachers at Colleges of Education to be well qualified teachers of English. Thus, the present study is in response to the immense need for professional English teachers in Yemen. This study mainly examines the effectiveness and appropriacy of the syllabuses used. It also tries to shed some light on the valid reasons beyond the weakness of Yemeni teachers of English. The instruments used include analysis of the syllabuses used in teaching at Departments of English and a questionnaire. For this to be achieved, the contents of B.Ed. Program of the English Departments at Colleges of Education in six governmental universities have been analyzed and evaluated. In analyzing and evaluating the syllabuses, criteria adopted from Morrow (1977), Sheldon (1988), Cunningsworth (1984), Skierso (1991), Candlin and Breen (1980) has been used. In analyzing the questionnaires, the responses were classified into categories according to their frequency of occurrence. Then, a percentage was given to each category. It emerges from the study that there is a fatal flaw in the B.Ed. program.

Keywords: Student-teacher, Craft model, Curricula, Syllabus, Evaluation criteria

Introduction

English in Yemen has no official status for administrative purposes within the country. It is learnt as a foreign language. At the school level English is taught from Grade 7 to Grade 12(3rd secondary class) in the government schools and from Grade 4 in the private schools. At university level, students are required to take two English courses, i.e. E. 101 and E. 102. The government encourages the private sector initiative to be involved in the enterprise of teaching English. As a matter of fact, English is considered as a foreign language and its use is confined to the classroom. The majority of students learn English because it is a subject put in the curriculum and they have to learn it to pass examination. A large number of students who join English departments do so only to get jobs. Only very few have strong motivation for learning English for advancement or culture. Learning and teaching strategies and methods play a vital role in the context of Yemeni learners of English.

One of the major problems faced by Ministry of Education in Yemen was lack of English teachers. For this reason, teachers from different Arab countries were brought and appointed for a long time and many are still teaching in some places in Yemen. The increase in the number of students and the spread of schools, forced the government to adapt different strategies to deal with the new situation. Students who have completed the 12th grade could join higher institutes for two years to become teachers of English in basic education or join departments of English at Colleges of Education for four years. Unfortunately, the process of teacher preparation in this way was not planned so the growth was quantitative rather than qualitative. In a situation like this, it was supposed to conduct pre-service training programs like many other countries in which prospective teachers should have the required training beforehand or should undergo training immediately after taking up a teaching job. Nevertheless, there were rare teacher training programs though emphasized by people concerned. However, it is only in 2002 the project 'In-Service Teacher Training in Yemen' started (Ministry of Education, 2008). The first phase of the project was implemented in 2005, while the second phase was implemented in 2007 and 2008. It aimed at providing in-service training to Basic Education teachers in Yemen. This was done to develop their basic competencies, both academically and professionally Ghanim and Al-Hidabi (2005). In spite of that, both of pre-service and in-service training programs proved to have certain limitations and defects. Bose (2002) rightly remarks: " though the government has been doing everything possible to improve the teacher preparation in the country, there seems to be imbalance in the teacher preparation courses.... and the Faculties of Education need to revise their curricula to remove this imbalance".

The study

Though Yemeni teachers learn English for six years at school level and for four years at university level, in case of those who join English departments, a majority of them cannot speak properly and teach effectively. It is observed that a majority of the Yemeni student-teachers, though having a good knowledge of grammar and a wide vocabulary, find it difficult to teach in English or use up-to-date methods of teaching. This study is based on the hypothesis that the failure of the Yemeni teachers of English is essentially due to the syllabuses taught in Colleges of Education and inefficient learning and teaching strategies/methods in the pre-service teacher preparation courses. This study tries to answer these questions:

- 1) Are the syllabuses used in English Departments adequate for qualifying Yemeni teachers of English?
- 2) What are the other shortcomings of the B.Ed. program?

To examine the hypothesis and answer the questions, the syllabuses used in teaching at English Departments in six governmental universities have been analyzed in the light of the objectives of teaching the course. The aim of doing so was to see whether the contents are adequate or not and to have an idea of the topics and relate them to what is prescribed in the syllabus. In other words, to test the hypothesis that the major cause of teachers' failure in teaching English is due to the syllabuses used throughout the program. In addition to that, a questionnaire was designed to find out information related to teaching methods, educational policy, staff related issues, and other influencing factors. The questionnaire has been sent to 60 teachers and 300 students but the number of respondents was 40 teachers and 227 students from the selected universities all together. The universities selected for the study are Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Tamar, Al-Baida, and Amran. As a result of using different instruments in this study, different criteria were used to analyze the data. In analyzing and evaluating the syllabuses, criteria adopted from Morrow (1977), Sheldon (1988), Cunningsworth (1984), Skierso (1991), Candlin and Breen (1980) has been used. In analyzing the questionnaire, the responses were classified into categories according to their frequency of occurrence. Then, a percentage was given to each category.

An examination of the B.Ed. syllabuses at Colleges of Education of the mentioned universities reveals that they represent "the craft model" of professional development Wallace (1991) because they concentrate on providing the candidates with knowledge ignoring their needs, attitudes and abilities. The candidates are heavily loaded with at least 12 courses each year. Though the program is designed to train the candidates to be teachers of English, it is a mixture of literature, linguistics, proficiency courses, and many required courses taught in Arabic. A sum of 13-17 courses taught in Arabic has to be studied throughout the four years. The teachers are the main source of knowledge and they have the freedom to decide what is to be taught and the power to add and delete. The syllabus only gives suggested outline of the course and lets them select the materials for teaching. As mentioned before, the syllabuses pay attention to grammar, literature, proficiency courses, and linguistics more than to the courses related to teaching. The philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations of education are taught in Arabic. In spite of the existence of courses like reading, writing, speaking that are taught to develop proficiency in English, there is no correspondence, to a great extent, between the aims stated by the syllabus and the topics in the texts used in teaching. Listening is totally ignored in all the syllabuses except one course in the syllabus of College of Education in Aden University.

The analysis also reveals that the courses related to the profession of teaching are limited in all the syllabuses except in that of Aden University. In Sana'a University, Tamar University, Al-Baida University, and Amran University, there are only two courses, i.e. Methods of Teaching I which provides the learners with the various methods/approaches to language teaching and Methods of Teaching II which provides them with the basic language teaching skills. In Taiz University, there are four courses, i.e. Curriculum I which enables the learners to understand different types of syllabuses in use, Curriculum II which introduces them to the concept of a course book and its relation to the syllabus and examine the exercises given in the course book and develop additional exercises, Methods of Teaching I which presents methods/approaches to language teaching, and Methods of Teaching II which deals with practical aspects of teaching. However, in Aden University there are many courses that train the learners to be effective teachers of English. The course Methodology provides the learners with a theoretical framework by introducing the various approaches and methods discussed in the literature. It also deals with language teaching techniques and classroom management. The course Teaching School Texts I introduces the learners to samples of the materials used in

general courses and then acquaint them with the books they will use for teaching in schools, how to teach them and how to write language tests. The course Teaching School Texts II discusses the methodology and approach that the learners used during teaching practice. The course Theory and Practice of Materials Production focuses on the principles of material production and presents the criteria for designing and evaluating language teaching materials. The course Language Testing gives an idea of testing related issues and the relationship between teaching and testing. The course Second Language Learning provides insights into second language learning process and the factors influencing it. Finally, the course English Curriculum Design aims at providing the learners with the theoretical background that helps them in the curriculum design task. Spoken English is taught for four semesters in all the universities except Aden University in which it is taught only for two semesters. In spite of teaching Spoken English for four semesters, the spoken English component in the syllabus is not adequately dealt with. This could be attributed to non-availability of expert teachers, the use of inappropriate teaching materials, emphasis on accuracy rather than fluency, and the way spoken English is tested.

The analysis of the questionnaire reveals that a significant number of the Yemeni student-teachers have only instrumental motivation to get a job and that they do not study the language for the sake of using the language. Consequently, this could affect their attitude towards English and their performance as well. The attitude of the society towards English plays a vital role in eliminating the use of English. The policy of admission is not strict to accept only students proficient in English in English departments: as per the rules, for students to join the English Departments in Yemeni universities they have to pass an entrance test. However, for several considerations a large number of those who do not pass the test are also accepted. The responses also reveal that the methods of teaching used are to a great extent teacher-centered and a little or no chance is given to students to express themselves, gain confidence and develop the essential skills. Another shortcoming revealed is that many teacher educators have Bachelor Degree in English from Colleges of Education. They have been teaching for only one or two years. It could be claimed that as Bachelors they are not qualified well to teach and this reflects itself in selecting teaching materials, teaching style, classroom management, and teacher-learner relationship.

To sum up, the findings obtained from the analysis of the syllabuses at the selected Colleges of Education and responses to the questionnaire revealed that the Yemeni student-teachers face numerous challenges in their attempt to be English teachers. Most important of all is that the findings mainly confirmed the hypothesis that one of the failures of Yemeni student-teachers is due to the syllabuses in use. Having explored the whole situation, could a change of the teaching styles, the materials used in teaching and taking care of the other findings lead to developing the B.Ed. program of Colleges of Education in Yemen. It is hoped so.

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