



An ICT Enhanced Application in Initial Teacher Education

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Abstract

The current applications of ITE (Initial Teacher Education) have many extensions to ICT use if the instructor favours to utilize the fashion of technology. The application suggested in this paper includes the incorporation of technology into ITE programs for a safe transition from faculty programs to the status of being a novice teacher. It is a fact that unless the gap between the ITE and INSET programs is bridged, the novice is sure to suffer from such challenges as lesson planning, lesson delivery and classroom management [1]. Moreover, the teachers without ICT literacy find it a disadvantage in terms of the separation of information [2]. The application mentioned in this paper is carried out for the candidate teachers of ELT Department at Mersin University in the course named, ITE Teaching Language Skills. In this course, candidate teachers are asked to use technology in their preparations and presentations, and they are recorded on the video both for the self-evaluation and peer evaluation on the basis of the fact that it provides a tool to construct their own point of view regarding their teaching practices [3] as well as for the reliability of the assessment by the instructor. At the end of the course period, the candidate teachers are asked to write their reflections on ICT use and teaching language skills.

1. Introduction

English has been the most popular foreign language in Turkey since the 1950's and English language teacher education has always been a hot issue in terms of both quantity and quality for the Ministry of Education, the academicians and the trainers at the Turkish universities [4]. With the new policy of teacher education in 1982, English language teachers started to receive initial teacher education at Education Faculties [5, 6]. With the education reform in 1997, English became the compulsory foreign language and took its place in the primary school curriculum. This implementation caused both the need for new curriculum designs and more effective professionals [7]. In order to meet the demand for English teachers who will be able to work effectively for the contemporary needs of the learners, the Education Faculties made necessary changes in ITE (Initial Teacher Education) programs. In the light of these changes, the departments of English Language Teaching in Education Faculties offer several professional courses such as "ELT Methodology", "Teaching Language Skills", "Teaching English to Young Learners", "Literature and Language Teaching", "Linguistics and Language Teaching" and "Classroom Management" in two semesters in the third year. These courses help candidates to develop their teaching skills since each course concentrates on different aspects of teaching, and hence at the end of the third year, they feel confident and ready enough for the new challenges in the courses called "School Experience" and "Teaching Practice" before they complete their Initial Teacher Education and start their profession as novice teachers.

"Teaching Language Skills I-II" course, given in two semesters, focuses on building language awareness and teaching skills through a detailed study of techniques and principles of teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Throughout the course, candidate teachers are expected to design and perform individual micro-teaching activities to teach above mentioned skills to learners at various ages and different proficiency levels by using the technology. Micro-teaching as a technique is employed as it develops candidate teachers' experiential knowledge of professional action in a controlled and progressive way and when it is done with the peers, it gives insight into learning problems by putting the candidates in the learners' shoes [8]. Beside micro-teaching the peers, another issue which is taken into consideration in the course is to support candidate teachers to be equipped with ICT literacy. The incorporation of today's technology into ITE is essential for addressing the needs of today's learners and teachers. Such incorporation also provides a safe transition from faculty programs to the status of being a novice teacher. It is a fact that unless the gap between the ITE and INSET (In-service Teacher Education) is bridged, the novice teacher is sure to suffer from such challenges as lesson planning, lesson delivery



and classroom management [1]. In addition, the teachers without ICT literacy find it a disadvantage in terms of the separation of information [2].

2. The Course Procedure

The steps of the ICT enhanced course procedure are as follows:

-As the first step, the course starts with a close look at a wide range of reading texts to establish the theoretical background and to activate their knowledge on methods and approaches in language teaching. Candidates are given a reading list including related books and articles. Their own search for reaching more sources on how to teach language skills is also encouraged and appreciated. The theoretical topic of the week is discussed in the class. During the discussion session, candidate teachers are also asked to think back to their own learning experiences as learners. In this way, they are supported to synthesize classroom application alternatives or possibilities of the related teaching unit. Individual contributions or group discussions at this step shed light on the preparations for the coming tasks or activities. The optional component of this step is to watch the 4th year candidates' micro-teaching videos, and discuss the techniques and ways used while teaching language skills.

-In the second step, candidates are asked to prepare their micro-teaching. They are required to follow a lesson plan, which is also used in the other professional courses mentioned above. The lesson plan includes level, topic, method, techniques, materials and technological tools to be used, learners' and teacher's roles, behavioral objectives, presentation, practice and production stages. They choose one topic, identify learners' age group and proficiency level in accordance with the Common European Framework and design their mini teaching sessions which usually last about 15 or 20 minutes. In this preparation stage, they all are busy with planning activities, adapting or developing relevant materials and choosing the right technology. While preparing, they usually share their ideas or concerns with their classmates and/or the instructor.

-Individual presentations take place in the third step. The volunteer candidate teacher submits his/her lesson plan to the instructor, installs the technological device, distributes activity papers to the classmates, explains or defines the level and target group of the lesson and finally starts his/her presentation. The peers and the instructor take part in the lesson as if they were real students and observe the candidate without interruption. The instructor uses a checklist with the items parallel to lesson plan and may take extra notes on classroom management and materials while observing. Meanwhile, the performing candidate is video-recorded from the beginning to the end.

When the presentation is over, it is time for the comments and contributions. First, the peers express their opinions on the micro-teaching session; make comments on the weak or strong parts of the lesson including its objectives, types of activities and tasks, materials chosen, homework, voice or body language of the teacher. Some of the candidate teachers' comments are given below:

"I think it would be more appealing for your learners to use real objects instead of pictures?"

"You could write the titles they found on the board, and then ask them to vote for the best one."

"The game played at the production stage was really fun."

"The instruction you gave before the pair work was too long, I think."

"If I were you, I would let them listen to the song in chunks."

As they share their experiences, they become open to the others' suggestions in a stress-free atmosphere. Such an interaction between the performing candidate teacher and the peers can lead to more effective future presentations. When the discussions start to fade, the instructor asks about the candidate's feelings during the performance and encourages him or her to self-evaluate before she gives feedback. The questions below may help initiate a good deal of talk:

"How do you feel? Did you like the lesson you did?"

"If you had another chance, would you do the same lesson or change any part of it?"

"Which part(s) would you change and why?"

After the instructor's feedback, the candidate teacher is asked to watch his/her video recording. Each recording is also kept by the trainer for the reliability of the final assessment. The video records enable candidates to watch themselves whenever they want, and hence they have the opportunity to analyze and evaluate their professional skills.

-As a last step, candidate teachers are asked to write their reflections on their teaching experience and ICT use. Toward the end of the term, they submit their files of reflections to the instructor. Their reflections inform the instructor about the change in their views, self-expectations, fears, or



frustrations, difficulties and joys they have experienced. Some sample entries written at different times of the terms are given below:

“Actually I was very scared at the beginning. Teaching before the classmates and the teacher was really challenging. Anyway, after I watched my video on vocabulary teaching, I understood that I could do it.”

“Next time, I won’t stand in front of the board all the time.”

“I am afraid I talked too much. There should be more talking time for the students.”

“The board was really a mess; I must use the board neatly.”

“I should give clear and short instructions.”

“Asking them to make guesses for the blanks is a good choice here.”

“When I watched my third video, I saw how much I had improved myself since the beginning of the academic year.”

3. Conclusion

This application in the department of ELT at Mersin University gives candidate teachers the chance of being in the center of their own learning and teaching since they are encouraged to create their own lessons, learn from each other, and develop a critical look toward both their own and others’ performances. Unlike the ones in the traditional teacher education models, this application derives its roots from reflective model identified by Wallace [8]. According to the reflective teacher education model, candidates reflect upon their practice. Their reflections lead to evaluation of self and then adaptations or changes in their teaching, which is reinterpreting and reframing their experiences from a different perspective as pointed out by Munby and Russell [9].

Besides employing the reflective model, using ICT at all the steps of the course is a contemporary requirement since it has been giving great opportunities to both learners and teachers. Video-recording, for instance, is a valuable tool for both the instructor and the candidate to monitor and assess the process. According to Struyk and McCoy (1993, as cited in Lee et al. [10]) “the use of video-based self-evaluation in a teacher preparation program can provide specific information on teaching performances and allows pre-service teachers to evaluate their performance as often as they wish, and simultaneously monitor their personal growth” It is expected that following such a course procedure can help the candidates take the responsibility of their personal and professional development.

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