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SOMMAIRE:

Editorial.....i

DIDACTIQUE & LINGUISTIQUE 1

1. AHONNON, A. : TICE au service de l'ingénierie ... 3
2. BANKOLÉ-MINAFLINO, E.: Innovative approach to pre-service education... 11
3. BOKO, G. C.: Les langues de l'espace francophone ouest-africain ... 27
4. FANO, C. et al.: Critical and creative thinking ... 37
5. GANGUE, M. M.: Le yaka entre le kabyè, le lamba et le nawdm... 45
6. KOUTCHADE, I.: Decoding ideological features... 59
7. TOGNON, K. Y.-M.: Sprachpolitik unter der Einbeziehung von Lokalsprachen ... 73

HISTOIRE & GEOGRAPHIE 2

1. ADJA, K. : Zur Analyse der Willkür und des Missbrauchs der Amtsgewalt ... 83
2. AJAVON, A. Y. C. et al.: Importances socio-économiques et environnementales ... 93
3. GUEZO, A.: The enslavement of the Africans ... 103
4. HOUNDEFO, V. M.: Caractéristiques et évolution des cultures africaines ... 115
5. ODJOUBERE, J. et al.: Efficacité des structures de cogestion ... 121
6. TCHIBOZO, R.: Les nouveaux lieux de négociation de l'art ... 133

LITTÉRATURE 3

1. AMOUSSOU, Y. C.: Discourse Tenor, Context and Character ... 143
2. AROUNA, C.: Voyage à Rodrigues de J. M.G. Le Clézio ... 159
3. GBAGUIDI, C. : A search for a better living in the city... 169
4. WEKENON T., M.: Reisen im Märchen... 177

PHILOSOPHIE & SOCIÉTÉ 4

1. ADANHOUNME, E. R. K.: Considérations sur la démocratie consensuelle... 189
2. AHODEKON, S. C.C. et al.: Les effets de la mortalité maternelle ... 199
3. ATABAVIKPO, V. : Lügen und Höflichkeit als Medium idealen Dialogs...? 213
4. DAAVO, C. Z.: L'intégration socioculturelle des femmes réfugiées togolaises au Bénin 221
5. NANTOB, M. M.: Du religieux en mutation sociale entre ruralité et urbanité... 231
6. ODOULAMI, J. A.: La gratuité de l'enseignement au Bénin à la lumière des faits 239
7. OUASSA KOUARO, M. et al.: Les mass media face au défi du développement local ... 253
8. TCHABLE, B. : La fréquentation préscolaire ... 263

ANNONCES 5

Abonnement.....page 3 couverture

Notes aux auteurs.....page 4 couverture

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INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EFL TEACHERS IN “ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE” IN BENIN

By Bankolé – Minaflinou Estelle.

Résumé

La formation initiale des enseignants constitue un des maillons importants pour le développement d'un pays. Les autorités en charge de l'éducation au Benin l'ont compris en ouvrant de nouveau les portes de L'Ecole Normale Supérieure de Porto-Novo. A la sortie du premier contingent de professeurs formés pendant trois années, une évaluation s'avère nécessaire.

Le but de cet article est de jeter un regard critique sur tout le programme de formation des professeurs d'Anglais en particulier, et de faire des amendements pertinents afin que la mission assignée à cette langue, qui est celle de l'utiliser comme un instrument de développement soit atteinte.

Mots clefs : *cours en ligne, TIC, cours magistral, formation des professeurs d'Anglais, approche innovatrice*

Introduction

Behind any educational activity and therefore behind any scheme for training teachers, there are always some broad assumptions. Though often implicit, they shape both the content and the methodology of the training activity. These assumptions lead to the planning of the learning system which entails the teacher trainee's professional needs, his present and future expectations, his skills and the abilities he will need in the classroom situation. These needs will then determine the overall learning objective of the course; especially in terms of content and behaviour to be expected as a result of the learning process.

In Benin, the growing awareness of the need to improve English language teaching has recently resulted in the provision of initial training. But unless appropriate objectives are clearly stated, careful planning and adequate method catered for, it runs the risk of failing to yield the expected fruit and as a result, to be counter-productive. Obviously, different governments have dedicated considerable financial and human resources to training, for school education systems to count on the expertise and fresh ideas of new teachers emerging from initial training.

The aim of this article is firstly to analyse and evaluate the current pre-service training programme of the higher training institution named “Ecole Normale Supérieure de Porto-Novo” in Benin. A questionnaire and an interview schedule will be used for this purpose.

Secondly, an innovative approach will be suggested in the design of a new course, to amend the current one which seems not to match with the real needs of the country which is to teach and learn English as a tool for development. Finally, strategies for its implementation will also be provided.

1 Overview of the Current Teacher Training Provision in Benin

To have a clear idea about the current teacher training provision, it would be useful to give some brief background information. In fact, the first secondary school teachers of English graduated from French universities and did not undergo any proper training before they occupied teaching positions. With the Independence of 1960 and later with the Reform Act and the democratization of the school, secondary schools were created throughout the country, increasing at the same time student attendance rate and teacher shortage. To deal with the problem, the educational authorities recruited students from university seeking jobs after their “Licence” or “Maitrise” to teach. More student-teachers were enrolled on the same basis until with the creation of the teacher training institution called “Ecole Normale Supérieure”. That is why the training provision in Benin started with in-service and not pre-service training.

1. 2 Pre-service training provision

The first pre-service institution “Ecole Normale Supérieure” (ENS) was created in 1978 to train level two teachers that is graduate qualified secondary school teachers. It was later extended to level one teachers in 1981.

encouraged quite a large number of qualified teachers into the profession to satisfy the growing need of secondary school education. At the beginning, it was a two-year training course and few students were willing to join the profession because of its low status and lack of financial opportunities. Some measures such as substantial scholarship granted to all applicants and their confirmation in the profession at the end of the training, attracted young job-seekers.

IMO – IRIKISI Vol.5, N°1 & 2, 1er & 2e Semestres 2013, FLASH - UAC

The training was later extended to three years including a probationary year of teaching practice and was subjected to an entry examination.

The academic component of the training in ENS was overloaded with English, American and Anglophone literatures and Civilisations, Phonetics, Translation and Grammar. The professional part of two or four hours of English specific pedagogy, consists in giving the trainees some knowledge about various approaches, theories and methodologies of ELT. As for the teaching staff, it was composed of university lecturers, most of them have followed a

'traditional' English literature course, or are simply linguistics specialists. Unfortunately, in 1987 due to a nationwide financial crisis the whole scheme went to a standstill. The training institution stopped training teachers at its usual large scale to train only foreign teachers and some few graduates who can afford to pay their training fees. As a result, thousands of young men were ushered into the teaching profession without any training. This unfortunately went on until year 2010 when a political decision was taken to reopen the institution, one in Porto-Novo that is supposed to train language, history and geography, and philosophy teachers; and one in Parakou that trains science teachers. The entry requirement is Baccalauréat and success in an entry test. The course duration is three years for BAPES (first level qualification) and five years for CAPES (second level qualification). So, after many years young people are being given initial training before they start the teaching job. The first batch of trainees named "Renaissance" has just completed their BAPES training. There is need to evaluate the course for appropriate readjustment to be made on time.

2 Current initial training provision in the "Ecole Normale Supérieure" of Porto-Novo

As defined by the Ministry of Education¹ and specifically in the English programme, the aims and objectives of the current scheme of training which started in September 2010, are as follows:

2.1 Aims

Training teachers for BAPES or "Licence Professionnelle" and CAPES or "Master professionnel" to teach the English language so as to foster the full development, the skills, the competencies, the attitudes and interests the secondary school students need to build their own appropriate knowledge.

2.2 Objectives

At the end of the course the teacher trainee is expected to:

1 Memorandum N°A38 – 2010/ENS/UAC/MESRS: 30th September 2010

1-communicate relevant, up-to date and scientifically valid information to his/her learners;

2- help learners build their own knowledge, manage their learning and develop different skills by themselves;

3-organize his/her teaching taking into account the learners' interests, learning styles, pace, and their bio-psychological characteristics;

4-prepare his/her teaching according to the programme being implemented which fosters students' learning through the development of their knowledge, competencies and attitudes;

5-teach through learning strategies that favour natural communication, creativity and the development of socio-affective capacities in an interactive classroom atmosphere;

6-prepare written and oral formative and summative evaluation and use the results to regulate learning;

7-advise students on personal or professional issues;

8- participate in staff meetings, educational conferences, teacher training workshops, invigilation, and mentor activities such as English clubs and students' associations etc. 2 (*My own translation*)

2.3 The syllabus

A syllabus, as defined by Dubin, F. and E. Olstain (1986) is the vehicle through which policy-makers convey information to teachers, textbook writers, examination committees and learners. It is also used as the basis for planning courses of various kinds. It generally describes:

- ❖ what the learners are expected to know at the end of the course, or the course objectives in operational terms;
- ❖ what is to be taught and learned during the course, in the form of an inventory of items;
- ❖ when it is to be taught and at what rate of progress, relating to the inventory of items to the different levels and stages as well as to the time constraints of the course;
- ❖ how it is to be taught, suggesting procedures, techniques and materials;
- ❖ how it is to be evaluated, suggesting testing and evaluating mechanisms.

In the context of the newly- opened teacher training institution where I happen to be one of the trainer, there is a sketchy syllabus which lists subjects and contents to be taught or more exactly to be transmitted. No mention is made of the training methods to be used, available

2 Memorandum N°A38 – 2010/ENS/UAC/MESRS: 30th September 2010

materials and resources, let alone testing and evaluation mechanisms to evaluate the training for subsequent readjustments.

The current syllabus is structured around two levels: a theoretical side which includes academic courses and professional and practical sides.

- i) The theoretical courses include: phonetics and oral communication; literatures (African, American, British); civilisations (African, American, British); commercial English; grammar and written communication; methodology of English studies, translation and linguistics.

ii) The practical side includes professional courses: Communication & Teaching; Technology & Teaching; General Pedagogy; Psychology & Education; Society & Education; Research in Education; Specific Didactics; Teaching Practice; and linguistic immersion in an English speaking country.

As for the content of these components, the programme gives a very sketchy idea. It is up to each trainer to struggle his/her way through it, find the materials he/she finds suitable and use any method he/she feels comfortable with.

2. 4 Methods in the Teacher Training Institution

The academic part of the training is handled through lectures and reading assignments. The methodology components are supposed to be trainee- centered. Actually, the trainees are given a theme to work on individually or in groups and present it to the whole class. It is followed by debates and exchange of views. The trainer “rounds off” with his/her own views and experience and a summary of different points raised during the exploitation of the theme. The practical side is made up of teaching practice mentored by a tutor.

The assessment of the training is continuous and is done through course work spread over the three years. A final inspection and the writing and defense of a dissertation come last along the line. The trainees are submitted to tests generally meant to measure their knowledge about language forms and in different trends in methodology.

The most evident shortcoming is that, firstly by handling a good proportion of the course through lectures and reading assignments, the trainees are passive receivers of information, and their own perceptions and experience are rarely engaged or strengthened. Secondly, the theoretical and practical sides of the training are kept apart. As a result, teachers-to-be are trained to use particular procedures and teaching techniques without being required to

BANKOLÉ-MINAFLINO, E.: Innovative approach to pre-service education...

13

understand the rationale behind them. Moreover, they cannot see the relevance of the theories they have been absorbing to their teaching practice.

14 summary, the methods in force in this training course are too prescriptive and trainer-centered, leaving little room for trainees’ attitudes change and development, judgments and decision-making.

2.5 Materials and Resources

With regard to materials, it is fortunate that there are no prescribed books, to be studied insensitively throughout the years. The choice is left to the trainer to select books, including

simplified versions according to the trainees' needs and interests. Unfortunately, the institution lacks up-to date library facilities in the form of methodology books, literature books, graded readers dictionaries, grammar books, textbooks, cassettes, etc. The training staff is composed of university lecturers, inspectors, teaching advisers, senior retired teachers, teachers, etc.

2. 6 Evaluation of the Training Programme

The training college scheme has been running now for three years and the first generation of trainees is completing the BAPES course. I do not think that it premature to attempt a serious and objective evaluation even after so short a period of its existence, considering the current challenges. Various factors may have contributed to the situation. The educational authorities in their rush to search remedy for the ELT critical situation due to the large majority of untrained teachers struggling and groping to teach, failed to design a programme capable of breathing new life into the training strategies, for any change to be expected. As no mention is made of the training methodology, it seems as if knowing the content of a training programme can provide for itself its effectiveness. In fact, teacher education does not involve only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but it also entails attitudes, awareness and development. Doff (1987) has this to point out about the issue:

A significant factor affecting teacher training is the attitude of teachers towards teaching and learning, since this will influence not only the content and design of the training, but also the overall effectiveness of the training programme. (p.19)

The course can only be beneficial and meet the aim assigned to it, if it creates opportunities to consider new ideas and procedures, to develop critical insights into language teaching issues.

This exposure is more likely to lead to convictions, change, innovation and thereby making

In *IMO – IRIKISI Vol.5, N°1 & 2, 1er & 2e Semestres 2013, FLASH - UAC*

room for development. Keeping a gap between the theoretical and practical components of the training and basing the practical side on only a set of textbooks can develop into a handicap when the teaching situation is no longer the same. Moreover, it can hardly give trainees a chance to be equipped professionally and emotionally to handle modern materials which leave a considerable amount of decision-making to the teacher. Therefore, there is need to develop in the trainees professional skills that will survive the harsh environment of real classrooms and the temptation to take the 'traditional' easy way-out.

In the light of the various problems encountered in the implementation of the training programme, it is clear that some attempts should be made to remedy the glaring deficiencies.

Before I go any further, let us have a look at a few current models on initial training in some parts of the world.

3. Current Models of Pre-Service Programmes

The justification for innovation in training programmes is the enhancement of learning capacity and achievement in the subjects the innovation is addressed to. The agents of innovation are the teachers who are supposed to benefit from it with the knowledge and experience they bring to the task and teacher trainers whose job is to orientate the teachers to the task. The students are the ones who investigate their role in the innovation process with certain attitudes that derive from previous learning experience, and finally the environment in which the innovation takes place also matters.

In this section light will be shed on some innovative current models of pre-service training in some parts of the continent in order to up-date and refine the one being implemented in Benin.

3.1 Providing the 'park' for Reflection from a Digital Platform for Pre-service E. F. L Teachers in U.K.

Dr Kurtoglu- Hooton, N. in Julian Edge and Steve Mann (2013) a lecturer and a programme director of M.A in TESOL studies in Aston, a U.K university reported a model of pre-service he developed which requires the student teachers to undertake supervised teaching practice. As part of such practice, they plan their teaching units in groups of three to four, as well as individually and then they teach them while being observed by their peers and the supervising tutor. Then they receive feedback on their lesson in the form of oral feedback held in groups, followed by a written one given individually. During the oral feedback interaction, the

BANKOLÉ-MINAFLINO, E.: Innovative approach to pre-service education...

15

student-teachers are expected to reflect back on their own teaching as well as their peers' lessons. More importantly they are involved in building an e.portfolio while studying on the teaching practice module. In fact, this programme created an environment for the student-teachers to receive formative feedback on their portfolio tasks from tutors. In other words, Kurtoglu-Hooton (2013) provides an example of how a particular web-based tool called "Pebblepad" can provide flexibility in course design. In this case, the innovation concerns using this tool to facilitate reflection outside the traditional face-to- face seminar.

In this model, the e-portfolio-based system provides a dialogic teaching space which enables the teacher educator and student-teachers to have reflective conversations individually and

with one another, sharing information with one another using the platform to reflect on their teaching experiences.

Let us shed light on another model.

3.2 An Institutional Approach to Pre and Early-Service Teacher Development called “Immerse” in Peru

Leonardo Mercado in Julian Edge and Steve Mann (2013), an American EFL teacher, a teacher trainer and programme administrator has worked in Peru’s public school system and has developed an adaptable and versatile training model named “Immerse”. He conducted a needs analysis and then tailored a development programme to reflect the needs of the teachers and that of the training organisation as well with goals and objectives.

For “Immerse”, autonomy for teachers is an important factor. Therefore, they should receive extensive assistance, but this should diminish gradually as they develop their ability to learn from themselves through reflective practice, assuming primary responsibility for and taking an active role in their own learning and professional growth, consistent with common held views on ESL/EFL teacher development.

This model proves to be a comprehensive and highly diverse in its offerings for professional development. Julian Edge and Steve Mann (2013) found that the initiatives are gradually phased in and carefully sequenced so as to avoid the possibility of overwhelming new teachers and thus contributing to their leaving the field before they can get a full sense of what a professional career in English language teaching has to offer.

A third model will help shed light on another type of pre-service training programme.

IMO – IRIKISI Vol.5, N°1 & 2, 1er & 2e Semestres 2013, FLASH - UAC

16

3.3 Communicative Skills: a Blended Approach for Pre-service Teachers in Singapore

Mary M. Hamington and Mary Ellis in Julian Edge and Steve Mann (2013) reported a project they set up to transform a traditionally delivered course for pre-service teachers in Singapore into a blended-learning one. Blended refers to courses that combine online components with traditional face-to-face components. This blended learning course has the particularity to give opportunity to participants to choose their individual “blend” according to their personal learning styles and needs. The National Institute of Education (NIE) (2009:26) in Singapore has this to declare about the project.

The exponential growth of knowledge and the advancement of technology have changed the needs of students in the 21st century, teachers need to develop students to be knowledge-driven, collaborative and technologically savvy learners. (NIE, 2009:26)

The innovation here lies in the fact that to best meet course participants' diverse needs and deliver a useful learning experience and at the same time respond to institutional imperatives by familiarising teachers with advances in technology for learning, all the materials are available online and participants are free to self-select components to make up a personalised blended course. The concept of personalisation in education has been researched and discussed for some years in the country. The conclusion has been that information and communication technology (ICT) is seen as a key enabler in personalising learning. By giving their pre-service teachers the opportunity to personalise their own learning through a blended programme, it is hoped that they will use similar approaches with their own students. The project was given an opportunity to receive and revise the current materials with local examples being included, so that the course remains pedagogically sound and relevant and appropriate kinds of interactivity available were introduced through web.

The new materials had to fulfill two sets of criteria. They have to perform the same role as previous print materials in helping participants in face-to-face tutorial sessions and they have effectively to support those who chose to study the complete module online without attending tutorials. Online face-to-face feedback was integrated into the course through tutors' responses to participants' blogs and oral questions.

The project evaluation revealed that participants in the course rated high the face-to-face sessions for they provided for more opportunities for interactions and co-operation with peers and instant feedback from tutors, making communication skills play a vital role.

All the models are concerned with particular activities or tools that encourage and support

17 BANKOLÉ-MINAFLINO, E.: Innovative approach to pre-service education

reflection. Mann and Wabsla (2011) argue that reflection can be a vague and rather flabby concept for pre-service teachers if it is not operationalised in a systematic way. Moreover, all the recent models according to Edge and Mann (2013) feature projects that include the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and multi-media more prominently. As a result, pre-service teachers have become more digitally savvy but, like paper-based material, they need careful selection, trialling and evaluation.

Before any course design is proposed, I think it is appropriate to investigate into the current programme by collecting down-to earth and reliable data from the staff and the beneficiaries of the training scheme: the trainees.

4. The Research Methodology

The research population is the first batch of the twenty-one (21) trainees who have just completed their BAPES. A questionnaire was designed and issued to the whole group. Eighteen questionnaire sheets were returned. So the return rate is 85.71 percent.

An interview schedule was also designed as well to collect reliable information from four academic trainers and four teaching practice tutors from the population of twenty four trainers and eighteen tutors involved in the training.

4. 1 Research questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of five questions and three tables to fill in by the trainees. The first question sought to find out the trainees' objective in choosing to be a teacher of English. The second question gave the trainees the opportunity to mention whether the course has helped reach their objective or has fallen short of their expectations and how. In the third question they were asked to mention the challenges they have come across during the training course. Opportunity was given to them in the fourth question to comment on the theoretical and practical components sides of the training. In the last part, space was given to the trainees to raise any aspect of the training they think is worth of reflection.

The first table is about the different course components [see Table 1] and the trainees were asked to rate them according to their content usefulness, interest, clarity, level and the time allotted to each of them.

The second table deals with the various resources available for the training [see Table 2]. Trainees were to rate them from 'excellent', 'good' 'adequate' to 'poor'.

The last table sheds light on the teaching and learning methods used on the course [see Table 3]. The trainees were to rate them from 'very effective', 'fairly effective', 'minimally effective' to 'not at all'.

... Space was provided in each table to make any comment if they wish.

4.2 The interview schedule

The interview to trainers is composed of four questions to probe more into the effectiveness of the training. Four academic trainers and four classroom supervisors were interviewed. The questions are as follows:

❖ As a trainer on this course, thinking back about the past three years, what appreciation can you make of the training content and the training methods you used on this course?

- ❖ What do you think of the resources made available on the course?
- ❖ What particular challenges have you met with in the delivery of your course and why?
- ❖ Have your expectations been met as a trainer (or supervisor) on this course and why?

4.3. The Results

4.3.1 The Presentation and Interpretation of Questionnaire Results

Table 1: Course components

Total = 18 trainees

Course components	Content usefulness	Interest focus	Clarity	Level difficulty	Time allocation
Communication & Teaching	12/18	15/18	15/18	10/18	14/18
Technology & Teaching	15/18	14/18	14/18	13/18	16/18
General Pedagogy	16/18	16/18	14/18	16/18	15/18
Psychology & Education	17/18	16/18	12/18	15/18	14/18
Society & Education	14/18	13/18	08/18	12/21	09/18
Research in Education	12/18	15/18	17/18	13/18	12/18
Specific Didactics	17/18	14/18	15/18	15/18	16/18
Academic subjects	16/18	13/18	13/18	13/18	11/18
Teaching Practice	12/18	11/18	15/18	09/18	11/18
Linguistic Immersion	18/18	18/18	15/18	12/18	02/18

The results in table 1 show that most trainees have appreciated the course components. They found that the content was very useful, the interest quite interesting, the content very clear, the level just right and the time allocated to each component just right. These input sessions are not nothing but a concentration on dissemination of information, with trainees playing passive roles. They are not encouraged most of the time to develop critical awareness that could provoke a more engaging and critical process. Moreover, no feedback is required from trainees. Feedback on such courses shows what the theoretical components have made them

think about what they have never thought about before, to find out how useful or beneficial the modules are for teaching practice.

Table 2: Available resources Total = 18 trainees

Resources	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Essential books	00/0%	08/44.44%	09/50%	01/5.55%
Recommended books	00/0%	07/38.88%	07/38.88%	04/22.22%
Access to staff for individual work	00/0%	08/44.44%	03/16.66%	07/38.88%
Hand-outs	00/0%	05/27.77%	08/44.44%	05/27.77%
Access & quality of library facilities	00/0%	00/0%	02/11.11%	16/88.88%
Access to audio-visual materials	00/0%	00/0%	00/0%	18/100%
Relationship with teaching practice tutors	00/0%	05/27.77%	03/16.66%	10/55.55%

Table 2 shows the resources available to the trainees on this course. The collected data show that access to essential and recommended books, audio visual materials, access to staff for individual work even in teaching practice and to quality library facilities are very poor. How can such a promising initiative thrive in such a material desert? It is unfortunate that the educational decision-makers in their rush to re-open the training institution failed to care for one of the main support which is the material resource. As a result, the whole scheme is crippled or simply nipped in the bud.

Table 3: Training and learning methods Total = 18 trainees

Training & learning methods	Very effective	Fairly effective	Minimally effective	Not at all
Lectures	01/5.55%	05/27.77%	10/55.55%	02/11.11%

Pair& group work	02/11.11%	12/66.66%	04/22.22%	00/0%
Individual work/assignments	10/55.55%	07/38.88%	01/5.55%	00/0%
Peer teaching	–	–	–	–
Micro-teaching	–	–	–	–
Exams	10/55.55%	05/27.77%	03/16.66%	00/0%
Teaching practice	03/16.66%	08/44.44%	07/38.88%	00/0%

Table 3 reveals the training and learning methods on this course. It is conspicuously revealing that no peer or micro-teaching has been used on this course. It is unfortunate that so much emphasis is put on the theoretical components to the detriment of the practical side. In fact by handling a good proportion of the course through lectures and reading assignments, the trainees are passive receivers of information, and their own perceptions and experience as learners are rarely engaged and tapped. As a result, they are trained to use particular procedures and teaching techniques without being required to understand the rationale behind them. That is probably why the teaching practice is not highly rated by the novice teachers and proved rather fairly effective. Pair and group work, lectures and individual assignments are scored to be fairly and minimally effective. In fact, group activities on a training course should be carefully directed and controlled with clear and explicit task instructions and feedback and should not be too long. They can be counter-productive if misuse or badly handled.

The four questions to the novice teachers revealed that nine of the eighteen of them choose to embark on the teaching job because they love it but have fallen short of their expectations because of the way the training is organized. Most of the trainees blamed the lack of the resources to be one of the main challenges they have been struggling with, followed by the discrepancy between the two main components. It is surprising that very few respondents

ventured some comments in the space provided for it. Disappointment? Hopelessness? Or lack of vision?

4.3.2 The Presentation and Discussions of the results of the training staff's interview

The interview of the four academic trainers revealed the following:

They all found that the re-opening of this initial training institution is a very good decision that put an end to sending untrained teachers to classroom. But they found that unfortunately the whole training scheme was hastily and as a result sketchily elaborated. Basic facilities such as a modern well- equipped library are conspicuously missing and for the three past years, the training staff has not met once. No trainer knows what the other trainer is teaching. Therefore, they voiced many challenges: inadequacy between the objectives assigned to the training and the resources available, lack of serious planning, a dichotomy between the academic and practical components, etc.

The four teaching practice tutors interviewed are senior teachers in classroom situation. They were rather enthusiastic to have been chosen to pass their knowledge and experience on to the younger generation. Their only complaint is that the trainees were more concerned about the assessment grades they are supposed to give at the end of the teaching practice rather than their professional grounding.

What is revealing from the interview to these two groups of trainers is that none of them seems to have been associated with the design and organisation of the training scheme. Top-down approaches seem to have been used and the bitter consequences are glaring. Moreover, the programme is not tailored to reflect the mission assigned to the teaching /learning of English in a Competency –based Approach context that is a development tool in a globalised world. As a result, the collaborative thread that should normally link all the stakeholders and ‘oil’ the whole scheme has been unfortunately missing.

The success or failure of such a programme is determined by its implementation and the notion of commitment that could establish a long-lasting professional relationship. As for the teaching practice tutors, they prove to be the traditional master practitioners, happy to pass knowledge on, instead of giving them assistance that could develop a great sense of professional pride and shared purpose. This is unfortunate because firstly we are living in a world where teachers are expected to develop critical awareness, to learn from one another through reflective practice, assuming responsibility for and taking an active role in their own learning and professional growth [Mann 2005:104]. Secondly how can novice teachers be

trained in such a non-collaborative work plan and be expected to teach effectively in the context of Competency-based Approach being implemented in the country?

5 The proposed initial training programme

5.1 Overview of the proposed training programme

We need to go beyond a short-term goal model and see the whole programme as part of a wider process of teacher education which can affect the whole system if not it runs the risk of being short-lived if carried out in the usual traditional framework. Kelly (1980) suggests that, for an innovation to be viewed favourably, there must be initial dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. The greater the dissatisfaction, the more likely the participants will be to seek solutions to their problems. This obviously refers to all parties in the system and leads to the problem of support, for unless those involved accept there is a problem and agree on its nature, the innovation is unlikely to succeed. In the case of this initial training institution, though the dissatisfaction seems general, it would be unrealistic to eliminate the question of resistance inherent to any change. So, the innovation should take into account a matching process between the working context in the institution and the nature of the change.

Bolitho, R. (2012) contending on the same issue points out "... the key starting points for change initiatives in education remain largely the same as ever: the curriculum, methodology, assessment and materials." According to Mann and Edge (2013) a new idea is not an innovation. They claim that "Innovation demands concentration on process; it demands that we pay as much attention to how we teach or train as to which topics get covered along the way, or the tools that we employ." p.43? The importance of the setting, the time, the place, the norms and expectations should be emphasised. Their third criterion is a commitment to practising what one preaches.

In Benin, most teacher training whether initial or in-service has been characterised by content-oriented training objectives, by academic input modes of training and by a complete lack of material support and supportive follow-up. As a result, teachers once in their classroom develop feelings of inadequacy, confusion, insecurity and lack of confidence and conviction. In fact, one of the major flaws of the current pre-service training programme, is to keep theoretical and practical components apart; a traditional apprenticeship model that encourages the trainees to implement blindly 'recipes'. In this institution, theory is seen as just a subject taught in training sessions with no relevance to practice in real classrooms. So, what link and what balance can be appropriate? Taylor (1985) has an answer to suggest.

How can language teachers and teacher trainees be

brought to see this overall theoretical framework and develop this integrated way of looking at things which they need to make sense of in their activities...? The answer lies in the suggestion offered earlier, that theory comes out of practice, therefore there must be no separation of the two. We should perhaps not talk about theory And practice but theory Of practice. (p. 24)

Another view of the same issue is that of Stern (1983:25). He points out that: *“Theory is implicit in the practice of language teaching. It reveals itself in the assumptions underlying practice in the planning of a course of study, in the routines of the classroom, in value judgment about language teaching and in the decisions the language teacher has to make day to day.”*

The two views give a clear idea of the role of these two components in language teacher training. The problem in Benin is that, years of experience is regarded as valuable and sufficient reference, and if something seems to work in the classroom then this is justification enough for its adoption without any need to delve into the whys and wherefores. Widdowson (1984:89) points out that *“The phrase ‘it works’ should mark the beginning of enquiry not its conclusion.”* Still, in EFL situations like the one in Benin, the question remains to know what theory is relevant to the classroom practitioner. Stern (1983:25) has his views about what good theory is. He claims that: *“If then, we wish to discover or develop good theories of language teaching we begin by asking ourselves what a good theory is like and by trying to develop criteria which can serve as a guide for establishing one”.* (p.25)

To sum up, one can say that any serious endeavour to integrate theoretical and practical components in a programme of teacher training must first consider the value of this theory in the light of criteria as a framework within which this integration can be elaborated.

However, it is unfortunate that a training being delivered in the 21st century takes no account of the use of information and communication technology. Weis et al (2002:153) found out that new digital technologies and multi-media are transforming classrooms from spaces of delivery to spaces of active inquiry and authorship. But we have to be careful as Hughes (2008:438) observes: *“Technology without the pedagogy can be a fetishised and empty learning and teaching experience”.* Hanington and Ellis (2013) advise the optimal use of both face-to face and virtual environments opportunities available in today’s world as far pre-service contexts are concerned. They however, mention that viable and meaningful learning

with technologies is something that teachers should be increasingly expected to be comfortable with in their future classrooms, as they will need to integrate network-based learning into their language class. They further show how practitioners need to continue to devise and revise an approach in order to make it usable by pre-service teachers. Therefore, the effectiveness of the training in Benin will depend on the ability of the trainers to adapt instructions to the needs of the learners the trainees are supposed to teach. In fact, today youth is very comfortable with technology – computers, the Internet, cell phones, video games etc. - and as a result they see information technology as an integrate part of their lives. So, training materials and methods should be modified, combining traditional face-to face components with online components for future teachers. In other words, the innovation will lie in responding to the diverse needs of the trainees by familiarising them with advances in technology for personalised learning, using humanistic communicative approach in the training sessions. Moreover, the use of portfolio which enables trainees to record their experiences of teaching during the course and which encourages them to monitor their progress, to collaborate and interact as they select materials for classroom, plan lessons, team-teach and exchange visits for observations and feedback, seems appropriate. Gradually, an e. portfolio will be introduced in the programme with Power-point presentations, Word documents and audio-files. In such an online environment, the instructor takes a back seat and learners are empowered to learn on their own. Online courses prompt more quality discussions. The objective is to improve self-esteem, to develop positive thinking, to increase self-understanding and build a greater closeness among trainees. Kassop, M. (2003) providing ten ways online education matches or surpasses face-to face learning because they are geared to life-long learning contends:

One of the roles that we need to perform as educators then, is to teach students to find and learn information on their own or in concert with their colleagues. The online environment fosters self-motivated education. Students direct their own use of internet links, search engines, discussion boards, chats, e-mail and other media. (p.2)

Obviously, the thinking, planning and research effort that go into constructing and teaching online courses are undeniably much more work than teaching in a traditional classroom. Nonetheless, contemporary education cannot do without online education as our students are becoming more and more digitally savvy and more importantly the internet offers enormous potentials to tap from.

This blended programme stands the chance to give the teachers to-be opportunity to use similar approaches with their own students, for as Blum cited in Lunenberg et al (2007:588) observed “Teachers teach as they are taught and not as they are taught to teach”.

5.2 Content of the proposed Initial service programme

5.2.1 Aims and objectives

In training it is highly desirable to know exactly what one is hoping to achieve. The content-oriented objectives for specific and narrow purposes being currently implemented are not likely to set trainees on the path of self-development. That is why the objectives of the suggested training focuses on the teacher- trainees to:

Help future teachers gain confidence and fluency as users and teachers of English language;

Stimulate teachers to develop valuable affective and intellectual qualities they need as EFL teachers;

Help teachers develop enthusiasm, creativity, imagination and independence;

Help teachers benefit from self-learning and self-improvement through the new technologies of information and communication throughout their careers;

Help teachers develop a theoretical base to TEFL.

5.2.2 Course Principles

To achieve satisfactorily an integrated programme, some principles should be respected. For this to be possible, the attitude of the training staff, the administration of the course, the choice of the content, and the teaching procedures to be used, should demonstrate and reflect this concern. In this respect, Brumfit (1983) discovered seven principles that I found suitable to underlie this integration.

1 Openness of procedure

It means that as far as possible, it should be made clear to teacher-trainees, all aspects of the course, the necessary compromise made, time-tabling problems etc. all that contrasts with the opaqueness of the current course. This openness of procedure also entails an agreement among trainees to encourage regular formal and informal opportunities for feedback, collaboration in the evaluation and planning of parts of the course. But care should be taken to handle this openness not to create insecurity among the trainees and the staff.

2. Integration of planning

All the members of the training staff should know everything the other colleagues are doing, which is not the case with the present programme. This means all the planning should be scrutinized by all those who are involved, so as to integrate different parts of the course with practical work on the basis of direct and personal experience

3. Variety of teaching procedure

To make our trainees recognize the enormous variety of learning strategies that learners can use successfully, they must be aware of this variety and be willing to be self-conscious about the uses and abuses of many possible modes of class organization. So, some lectures, some workshops, some discussion groups, some online individualized learning, some library access work (visual and recorded), some peer and micro-teaching will be used. The demonstration of this range of teaching procedures coupled with their discussions will help trainees extend their experience of the educational possibilities available.

4. Emphasis on what the trainee does as a teacher

The practical goal of the training is to improve the trainees' teaching skills. This requires a predominant emphasis on classroom performance which also requires that teachers evaluate and adapt and supplement textbooks, plan lessons and schemes of work, watch each other teach, and talk about what they have seen, make and mark tests and so on. Another aspect of the integration of theory with practical work worth emphasising is the role of language studies. This must be integrated with practical teaching needs.

Flexibility

The principle of using a variety of learning strategies and teaching procedures will make trainees receive some experience of everything without feeling forced to operate through a particular mode of learning. Though there is a core component of the course to be covered by everybody, a range of options of self-access work can be pursued beyond the core. On the teaching practice, micro and peer-teaching sessions, trainees will be introduced to a variety of options available in techniques, methods and materials. The prime purpose of these activities is not for the trainer to decide if it is "good teaching" or not, but to provide data to work on.

Uncertainty

Though teachers need support and security, it would be unrealistic not to make them realize that teaching and training operate with uncertainty and there is no simple and final answer. Britten, D. (1988) pointing out this uncertainty in the framework of the continuing change, puts it this way: "ELT moves fast, and yesterday's orthodoxy is today's training heresy." The best appraisal of problems must be viewed, without providing false hopes or a passive desire

of survival, since we work in a world which necessarily changes and people's understanding also changes and improves.

As a whole, the main objectives of these principles are to provide a course which concentrates neither on theory nor practice but on the relationship between both. An effective teacher is not the one who has a vast range of techniques and methods, but cannot justify the principles underlying them and consequently does not have the ability to create new ones, nor can he adjust them to changing circumstances. He is not either the one who has learnt about principles without having experienced their application in the classroom. The teacher to be moulded on this course is the one, who from his own experience and what he has acquired from his training, can adapt, improve and apply principles to the classroom as a firm basis for his professional development.

5.2.3 Course components

The current course components can be slightly modified by being divided into four parts:

General professional training or educational studies;

Professional training;

Practical training;

Language improvement.

Though these four components seem to be separate parts, they must in fact be considered as a whole to allow their integration. The Educational Studies and the Professional Training (See Table 4) are the 'theoretical' part of the programme. But care must be taken to relate these theoretical information to the practical side of the training, through workshops for example.

As for 'Professional and Practical Training', they are interrelated and cannot be taught separately. Any trainer should be able to teach them as integrated units.

Table 4 Overall content of the suggested programme

Professional Training	Practical Training	Language improvement
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Block I	-Observation & Demonstration of lessons.	- Phonetics - Oral communication
-Language Teaching Methodology	-Observation in actual classes	- Literatures - Civilisations
-Research in education	-Practice in the preparation of lessons	Written communication
-Testing & evaluation	-Micro-teaching	- Grammar - Translation
-Communication & Teaching	-Peer-teaching	- Linguistics
-Technology & Teaching	-Teaching in real classes under supervision and self-evaluation	- Commercial English
-Second & Foreign language Acquisition	-Linguistic exposure (trips)	
-Material evaluation		
Block II		
-Network-based learning (e-portfolio-based system)		
-self-access online courses		

5.2.4 Course structure

Each area of the course is an independent unit which can be combined with others to form a whole structure. So the theory which provides the ‘why’ of language teaching is allied to the ‘what’ of the information component and the ‘how’ of the skills. But sometimes the information component will be taught separately through reading assignments, lectures or other techniques of the kind.

Course model

For an effective integration of the different parts of the course (see Table 4), the components should follow this framework adapted from Brian Tomlinson (1990), PKG training model.

Reflection on experience: the trainees are asked in small groups to reflect on their experience as learners and users of English.

New experience: They are given new experience(s) as learners of English at their linguistic and communicative competence.

Reflection on new experience: They reflect on their new experience (s) and discuss the objectives and methodology of the lesson they have participated in. They then evaluate their experiences and consider how they can apply the approach at their students' level.

Input: It is the theoretical part of the course where the trainer helps the trainees to understand, evaluate the theory underlying the approach and then consider the validity of its potential application. Different ways of presenting the input available may be interactive lectures, presentation of research data, jigsaw reading of articles etc.

Exemplification: The trainer may demonstrate examples of the approach at the trainees' level or just incorporate language studies at this stage.

Material preparation: The trainees prepare in groups teaching materials at different students' levels using possibly network-based materials.

Lesson planning: In groups they plan lessons using textbook materials in programme or downloaded material from the online courses.

Peer- teaching: One trainee in each group peer-teaches the lesson. A group of two or more 'trainee-observers' plus the trainer himself come together to give feedback at the end of the demonstration.

Review: It is the plenary session where the trainees review the whole unit and note down the main points they have learned, ask questions, give their reactions to the approach etc. Then the trainer summarises the main points of the unit:

Reinforcement: For follow-up, available articles and books, references from the internet are given to the trainees for more depth.

5.2.6 Course methodology

When the 'What' of the training is chosen, it remains to decide on the 'how' of the course. If we look back at the content,(Table 4) it appears that not all the components can be dealt with in the same way. The flexibility and variety principles opted for, enable the trainers to choose many ways of organising input. Informative and not prescriptive lectures combined with other suitable methods (use of visual display, use of handouts, pre-reading activities, use of questions, internet research, etc.) can have certain advantages for this course, for example the Educational Studies. Group activities that encourage trainees to learn from each other in the training sessions and also outside are one of the best ways of preparing teachers for using them in their classrooms. Another advantage, which is working with peers can build teachers

up and lessen the feeling of inadequacy and lack of confidence they often develop. But, even when all conditions are met, group work does not always satisfy the preferred learning style of all individuals, and sometimes creates frustration when some group members may be alienated by authoritarian floor-holding colleagues who in this way hinder the others' learning process. Care should then be taken not to use it as panacea for training or teaching. Therefore, some measures for individualised learning especially online courses should be catered for. Kassop, M. (2003:2) contending on the issue declared:

One of the roles that we need to perform as educators then, is to teach students to find and learn information on their own or in concert with their colleagues. The online environment fosters self-motivation education. Students direct their own use of internet links, search engines, discussion boards, chat e-mail and other media.(p.2)

The trainer can no longer be the only one in tight control, transmitting content and knowledge, selecting and directing activities as it is still today on this training course. Learning consisting in one diet for all will certainly not constitute a complete common and suitable diet for everybody. Of course, the thinking, planning, research and effort that go into constructing and teaching online courses are much more than training or teaching ordinary classes. It means inevitably a lot of hard work on the part of the trainers in terms of the change of attitude, approach and research works. This seems a bit difficult in Benin context if one knows that lack of resources is one the hurdles or challenges to overcome today by all means. The irony is that how can teachers be expected to teach in a competency – based approach context when they are being trained in the old traditional way?

Furthermore, observation works serving developmental purposes should start in micro and peer-teaching sessions where the prospective teachers are supposed to observe each other's teaching. They should develop their own observation instruments and give each other feedback. It should take the form of counselling sessions where trainers and trainees get together to question, to analyse, experience, evaluate and find ways of solving problems.

5.2.7 Strategies for Implementation

For a successful implementation of the programme some principles have to be followed and some conditions have to be met. Britten (1988) proposes an incremental approach to teacher

training with three stages that seem to match with my perception of initial training. He characterizes the three stages as (1) trainer-dependence; (2) group dependence and (3) self-reliance

To keep abreast of new trends, current developments and innovations in TEFL, trainers have to update themselves constantly. Their own training provides only a starting point on which other skills and the awareness which allows one to develop these skills are built. Contemporary education cannot do without online education as students are becoming more and more digitally savvy. Therefore, trainers and teachers should not be scared of the Internet because the potentials to tap from it are huge.

Moreover, as most teachers have been educated in a background where knowledge is not supposed to be examined, but to be passed on intact, trainers have to know when to keep a low profile and when to exercise control. That is why I would suggest regular trainers' meetings and an annual seminar for trainers and with visiting specialists. The seminar will involve concrete tasks which are more productive than general discussions. A few examples are: producing paper-based and network-based training materials (self-access modules, e-portfolio materials, etc.), devising checklists to be used in teaching practice observations, producing detailed syllabuses for specified training courses, etc. In fact, the research base on using portfolio in initial training is summarized by Marlowe and Page (2005) as (1)" constructing knowledge, not receiving it; (2) Thinking and analyzing, not accumulating and memorizing; (3) understanding and applying, not repeating back; and (4) being active, not passive." (p.7). This is nothing but the constructivist theories that support the Competency-based Approach being implemented in Benin today.

One of the shortcomings of the current initial training provision in Benin is a total lack of basic training facilities. A good library with private study provision, various reference books, subscription to ELT publications, periodicals, magazines, journals for the provision of authentic materials should be available. A computer room with the Internet facilities is a must. One of the realistic possibilities of the provision of any training is the availability of finance. Even sizeable goals to be achieved necessitate money which is one of the key factors in the development of education. Therefore, national policy should foster and keep education as a priority public concern. Educational authorities should assume the responsibility of providing the essential means that an initiative such as the one proposed in this article needs in order to thrive.

To improve the efficiency of this programme, it needs to be constantly reassessed. So, formative and summative evaluation should be part and parcel of it. It may take the form of

course meetings, self-reporting by trainees and staff, class observations, questionnaires, informal conversations, etc. The data will be collected, problem areas and sources of problems identified and dealt with. These could come from the course design, the course objectives, the training techniques, the testing procedures, etc. The information collated will serve as the basis for the course readjustment and improvement.

CONCLUSION

In planning any aspect of training, it is important in the first place to consider that it is essentially a means to an end and not an end in itself. The content of the programme can only be presented in broad terms. It means that it must be regularly adapted to suit the needs of individual trainees and the social context as well. Our world is constantly changing and circumstances change as well. Consequently, today's beliefs and practices will necessarily change. It is then essential to make the trainees understand that to cope with any professional change, they need flexibility to adapt, to communicate, to learn from others, to keep in pace with evolutions in ELT and to react to them in a challenging way.

However, the programme proposed in this article is just one step towards greater professionalism and better awareness for teacher education. The most important thing is to make a start in the right direction.

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