

The Effectiveness of “Training Course for English Teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan” and Improving Teachers’ Confidence

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the “Training Course for English Teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan” and to show its positive and negative sides. Also tries to show the suggestions and recommendations toward the variability of the course to assess the suitable design in providing future courses. For this purpose, a questionnaire which contains of two parts was designed in this study: First part consists of seven open-ended questions regarding demographic data and teachers’ experiences in teaching English language, to show attenders’ attitudes and their reactions towards the course. And second part is requesting participants to answer 8+2 questions which show perceives (satisfy/dissatisfy) into course. A part from that, three of the participants (who were in first part of the questionnaire responded that will not participate in similar courses) were interviewed and requested to answer three questions about effectiveness, weaknesses of the course and their recommendations. The significant findings of the study is that, this course is momentous for training teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, as they are teaching new curriculum (Sunrise, since 2007, which was changed from the old one in governmental decision) in secondary and high schools. Besides, the study investigated that more training courses must be administrated to familiarize the teachers with the curriculum and techniques for teaching it.

Keywords: Effectiveness, teachers’ training course, English teaching needs, Curriculum.

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Recently, English language has become a worldwide language used by millions of peoples as a mean of communicative all around the world. However, Asian countries generally have responds to the improving necessity to fester communicative movements in English language as a foreign language; so, students in Iraqi Kurdistan have still serious problems in language communicatively at secondary and high schools. In fact some processes have already started, students in Iraqi Kurdistan should learn English language specifically speaking skills because they need speaking to communicate, interact and give and receive data. In this context the regional government in Kurdistan decided to create a new curriculum of English language which is called (Sunrise) for secondary and high schools concerning; witting, reading, listening and speaking skills.

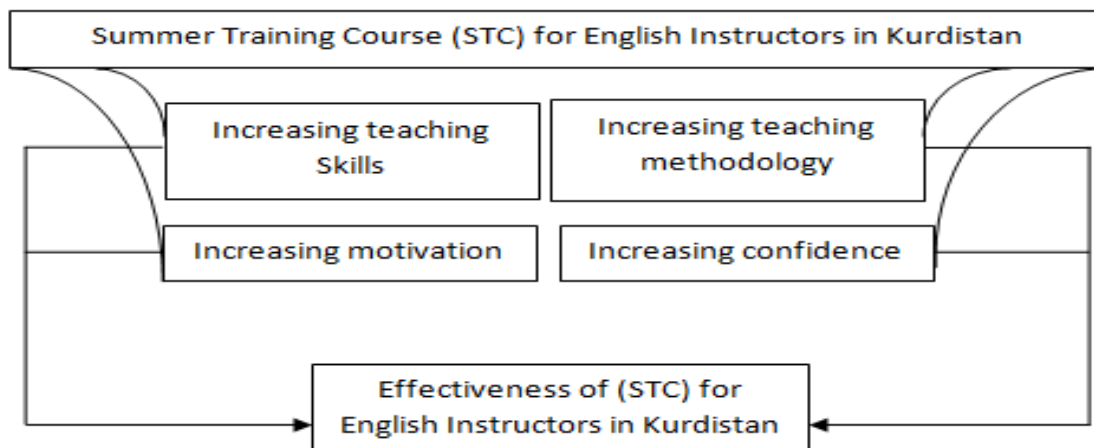
Official website of Sunrise for Kurdistan defines the new curriculum as; a complete English course written especially for primary and secondary school students. The course has a communicative approach, integrating listening, speaking, reading and writing, with a clear focus on grammar structures. It achieves development of English through a fun approach to learning, using motivational topic-based units, adventure stories that introduce new language, and a variety of activities including role plays and guided writing tasks. (Sunrise for Kurdistan)

One of the teachers of English curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan stated that, “ As a teacher I have experiences in the schools, most of the teachers used old traditional grammarian rules as a means of teaching since 1972”, that teacher who has been interviewed during this study added “ It was deductive teaching they only focused teaching grammar. Therefor a new curriculum for English as a whole has been designed which is (Sunrise)”.

Education is the significant thing for the future of country. And the heart of education is curriculum as it is the content of learning and its organization, the acquisition of learning and assessment techniques (Karatazia-Staviliot & Alahiotis, 2007). Change in curriculum is one of the important things in the process of learning. According to Huberman (1973), change in education may occur in three ways; hardware, that is, additions to school equipment, such a new classroom, teaching machines, books or playgrounds; software, usually in the content and range of the curriculum, or in the methods of delivery and reception; and as subcategory of software, which is interpersonal relations, changes in the roles and relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and administrators or teachers and teachers.

There is a vast literature on the professionalism of teachers, including debates on weather teaching is best regarded as a profession or a craft; how it compares to other professions; the role of teachers and students in relation to knowledge (Bash, 2005; Goodson, 2003). Allen (2007) argued that training is highly important in building the teachers’ self-confidence and improving the employee’s performance. Training will give confidence in teachers or workers to learn an important skills, as Impact Measurement Center (2005) expresses that, English as a foreign

language training program can change a school or company's culture for the better and it can show how much is the improvement after training.



Healy (2008) had investigated about training in developing country. For him, training is a central feature of most social sector development efforts, He found that training can make public sector personal seek out professional development opportunities that will enhance their job performance, ensure that what they learn is actually utilized on behalf of better work applying, the impact will be of minimal value to the sector it was intended to improve. From this context and to train English teachers in Kurdistan for developing their abilities in teaching new curriculum (Sunrise), the Ministry of Education in Kurdistan Regional Government – KRG decided to organize and design training courses which is called (Training Course For English Teachers - TCET), and all graduates of English colleges (who are instructing in schools) require to attend these courses.

Finally it has been argued that serious courses for training teachers effect on changes of teacher's beliefs and teachers' professional development, because great teachers help create great students. And the aims of this study is to shed light on the issue of the training course; also aims to explore how teachers or trainees of the course perceive the course's effectiveness.

Method

Participants

In this study, an availability of differences in teachers interesting in the course was observed in terms of confidence and motivation amongst attenders of "Training Course for English Teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan".

The participants of this study were the secondary and high school teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan; this study takes 25 English teachers from 25 schools in Iraqi Kurdistan (one teacher per school) who teach in Arbil, Sulaimaniyah, Halabja and Duhok provinces in Kurdistan. Those teachers have attended training course. The training attended by English teacher was short and long term

training (one week – five week training). The course provides teachers to prepare them to teach English, whereas all of them graduated from university (language and education colleges). The participants of the study were classified according to; gender (males and females), teaching experiences (one to three years, three to five years and five to approximate years) and class levels (Secondary and High Schools).

The course aimed to give teachers; teaching skills, methodology, and increase their knowledge in student-centered skills and motivate them to become an active and successful teacher.

Table 1: shows participants demographic and teaching experiences

	Participants	
Gender	Male	14
	Female	9
Teaching experiences	1-3 Years	12
	3-5 years	8
	5+ Years	5
Class level	Secondary School	10
	High School	15
Total		25

In this study, and in the first part; questionnaire will be used as the instrument of data collection. There are three sections, and the sections divided according to questions of the research:

- First: Demographic and experiences
- Second: Course effectiveness in teaching skills (overall effectiveness)
- Third: Motivation questionnaires

The data collection in second part was conducted in an interview with three of the teachers who attended the course and the interview audio-recorded via Viber and Facebook (Voice-message). A general frame of questions was constructed for the interview in this study which each of the three participants had to share their opinions on: (a) the content of the course (b) weaknesses of the course (c) participants suggestion for other training courses.

In this study the data was elicited from the interview and questionnaire. The responses of participants of the study were examined according to the results and data analyzed manually. Meanwhile for the interview section, each data of interview transcript then it was read for more than times to gain important themes of the interviews.

Results

From the first section of the study which is information or demographic data, 14 (n=25) which means more than half of participants were male teachers and 9 (n=25) of them were female teachers. And according to teaching experiences; (1 to 3 years) 12 (n=25) teachers, (3 to 5 years)

8 (n=25) and (5 to approximate) 5 (n=25) teachers participated. Also in this section in terms of class levels 10 (n=25) teachers teach in secondary schools and 15 (n=25) teachers teach in high schools were responded to questionnaire of this study.

Although there are not limit days for training courses, but most of the teachers were attended in long training courses (i.e., 40 days) and some of them were attended only one week.

Quantitative Results

The questionnaire analysis was applied to the questionnaire data gathered which contains in two sections; Section (A) consist of eight questions about; teaching skills, linguistic skills, student-centered, inter-personal skills, management and organizational skills, knowledge about educational theory and teaching methodology and practice. Section (B) consists of two questions; course motivation to become an active and successful teacher and finding their job less-challenging as a teacher.

Table 2: Overall effectiveness of the English teachers training course:

Items	SA	A	Neut.	D	SD
My teaching has improved	8	15	1	1	-
My teaching is more student-centered now	9	13	-	3	-
I have become interested in linguistic skills	2	2	1	17	3
I have become interested in teaching skills	8	14	1	1	1
I have become interested in management and organizational skills	14	10	1	-	-
I have become interested in inter-personal skills	9	14	-	2	-
My linguistic knowledge has increased	1	3	1	16	4
My knowledge about educational theory and teaching methodology and practice has increased	10	13	1	1	-

According to the results which were conducted the study, investigated that in section (A) attenders of the training course were highly agree with the courses' effectiveness.

In question number (1); "my teaching has improved", 23 (n=25) teachers agreed (strongly agree and agree) with the course, while just 1 (n=25) teacher disagreed with the course, in the same time 1 (n=25) teacher neutrally perceived the effectiveness of the course.

In question number (2); “*my teaching is more student-centered now*”, 22 (n=25) teachers who attended the course agreed (agree and strongly agree) that course had effectiveness for them. In contrast, only 3 (n=25) teachers disagreed with the course.

In question number (4); “*I have become interested in teaching skills*”, most of the attenders satisfied with the course; 22 (n=25) attenders of the course agreed (strongly agree and agree) that course had effectiveness for them in teaching skills, while, 3 (n=25) participants of the study who attended the course disagreed (disagree and strongly disagree), it meant they believe that course had no effectiveness for their teaching.

According to the study, in question number (5); “*I have become interested in management and organizational skills*”, most of the participants 24 (n=25) agreed (agree and strongly agree) that they were interested in the course in terms of management and organizational skills, and another 1 (n=25) teacher neutrally responded.

In question number (6); “*I have become interested in inter-personal skills*”, 24 (n=25) participants agreed (strongly agree and agree) that they become interested in interpersonal skills. On the other hand, 2 (n=25) participants dissatisfied with the course.

In the last question of this section, great numbers of participants amongst the study who answered the question; “*my knowledge about educational theory and teaching methodology and practice has increased*”, agreed; 23(n=25) of participants agreed (strongly agree and agree) with the effectiveness of the course for them as English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan. While only 1 (n=25) participant disagreed and another participant 1 (n=25) neutrally responded to the questionnaire of the study.

With this effectiveness of the training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, the study investigated that the course has already had weaknesses. According to questions number (3) and (7) of this section, most of the teachers who attended the course dissatisfied with the course in terms of linguistic skills, in these question; “*I have become interested in linguistic skills*” and “*My linguistic knowledge has increased*”, 20 (n=25) participants disagreed (disagree and strongly disagree) with the course and only 4 (n=25) participant agreed (agree and strongly agree) with the course and another participant 1 (n=25) neutrally responded to the questions. In section (B), the study shows that high percentage of the questionnaire responds declared that training course motivated them to become an active and successful teacher and after the course they found their teaching less-challenging.

	SA	A	Neut.	D	SD
N D The course motivated me to become an active and successful teacher	7	16	2	-	-
After the course, I find my job less-challenging as a teacher	12	12	-	1	-

From the results of this section the teachers were requested to identify two items of the questionnaire. Which can be seen in the table.2 above, in the question number (1); “The course motivated me to become an active and successful teacher”, 23 (n=25) participants agreed that course motivated them to become successful teacher, and other 2 (n=25) participants also neutrally responded to the questionnaire. And in the question number (2); “After the course, I find my job less-challenging as a teacher”, high percentage of the participants 24 (n=25) agreed (agree and strongly agree) that after attending the course they found their teaching less-challenging, while only 1 (n=25) participant disagreed.

Qualitative Results

With the demographic section of the questionnaire, attenders were requested to answer three open-ended questions regarding the course, (1). *Which strategies and techniques do you follow in your teaching?* (2). *would you like to attend a similar course again? Why/ Why not?* (3). *Are there any specific issues that you would like to learn about in the future teacher-training courses? Please list them here.*

According to the results, 17 (n=25) participants were responded to these questions and other 8 (n=25) participants did not pay attention to this section. The responded were analyzed manually and from results participants recommended some points for the future of these courses.

In question number (1); ‘*Which strategies and techniques do you follow in your teaching?*’ participants of the study generally shared serious strategies and techniques that they used in teaching such as; *Group work and pair work, role-playing, inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, using scrambled sentences, authentic materials, language games, pictures and posters, repetition drill, chain drill and using flash cards.* All of the participants of this study were attended training course for English teachers, from the results the study investigated that the course had effectiveness in improving their teaching methodology. In question number (2); *would you like to attend a similar course again? Why/ Why not?* 12 (n=17) participants responded (YES), they would like to attend similar course, and 5 (n=17) participants responded (NO), it means they don’t like to attend similar courses (their reasons were recorded in interview section of the study). And last question; *Are there any specific issues that you would like to learn about in the future teacher-training courses?* Participants of the study shared general suggestions regarding setting (time and place) of the course.

In the second part of qualitative data collection of the study, three teachers who in previous section responded that they don’t like to attend similar courses were interviewed to share their opinions about the course. The teachers were involved in the interview to share their opinions on these three items; (a) the content of the course (b) weaknesses of the course (c) participants’ suggestion for other training courses. The responses of participants of the study were examined according to the results and data analyzed manually. Meanwhile for the interview section, each data of interview transcript then it was read for more than times to gain important themes of the interviews.

Below are statements of participants about the content of the training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan (question a):

(Teacher 1): ... *I believe ... English teachers in Kurdistan need much time to be an active and successful teachers, I mean the course should be long term (about 5 weeks) while now it is approximately 4 weeks and sometimes it was only one week!, also the syllabus of the course was not much interested, I hope next years the time of the study will be more ...*

(Teacher 2): ... *I want to emphasize that my answer (No) to participation in next courses, is because of some points I have about the course, I think all English teachers in Kurdistan need to participate even if it is not (Must), but frankly the course that I attended was weak in terms of time and place. It can be sharpen in time and place because all of us want to be active teacher ...*

(Teacher 3): ... *you know English in our country is not communicative, so we as English teacher have to improve our capabilities, I wish that in next courses the administration will provide the real course for English teachers according to good time and good place and also the syllabus of the course such as: psycholinguistic and linguistic skills.*

In responding to the question (b) about weaknesses of the course in the interview theme that teachers who attended the course expressed about weaknesses of the course, in below are statements of the participants about this issue (question b):

(Teacher 1): ... *I think the course that I attended was not good in terms of knowledge of trainers, I believe that trainers of such course must be fluent in English and have years of experiences in teaching English language to know our demands as English teachers...*

(Teacher 2): ... *I am expecting to get great motivation from the course which was designed for us, because the trainers are not professional, and I think it was a kind of wasting time, and it did not provide any kind of experience ...*

(Teacher 3): ...*I feel that the course did not provide any facility for English teachers, because trainers were not native in English, they learn the curriculum grammatically, while we know that our problem with teaching English language (in this country which is English not communicative language) is more than grammar...*

And finally in the last section of the interview in this study, participants suggested some points for developing and improving these courses, below are their recommendations:

(Teacher 1): ... *I really want to attend the course again, if these suggestions that I believe will be done; the course should provide discussing methods of teaching, strategies for controlling class, psychological approaches to understand students' behaviors, and the course must build the teacher's confidence to change attitudes, skills and knowledge ...*

(Teacher 2): ... *As far as teacher needs to have awareness with different aspects relating to students and the environment that he/she teaches in, it is significant for me to have enough information regarding psychology of students, the program, the behavior of the teacher in the class, I hope next course will provide such items...*

(Teacher 3): ... *I hope next courses will not come like the course I attended, I suggest course provide more motivations of learning, discuss the role of technology in teaching English language, child development, school policies (i.e., school reforms), methods of teaching short stories and techniques for using power point in large classes. And the last thing that i recommend*

is Language course for English teachers outside the Kurdistan (in other countries such as: UK or USA)...

Discussion

The majority of the teachers (participants of the study) responded that the overall ‘Training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan’ had attended was highly effective. High percentage of the teachers expressed that, the course was successful in increasing their teaching skills and they have become interested in management and organizational skills inter-personal skills.

Also the participants responded that their knowledge about educational theory and teaching methodology and practice has increased. And they strongly agreed that the course motivated them to become an active and successful teacher, and after the course, they found their job less-challenging as a teacher.

Whereas, from responding of attenders the study elicited that courses were not good in terms of linguistic skills and linguistic knowledge. In second section of the questionnaire participants responded that they strongly disagreed and they did not interest course in linguistic skills.

From the results of the study we can say that most of English language teachers could offer better service to students and learners in Kurdistan than before attending the course. Dornyei (2001) argued that the way to promote students’ confidence were through providing experience of success, encouraging the learners and reducing anxiety. Here, according to teachers’ responding to section (A) questions, the study investigated that the teachers had felt that after attending the course, there was successful for give better serve to the students. But, in tow items of this section (3 & 7) the study declared that the training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan has weaknesses and there are weak points in the course. According to questions of this section, most of the teachers who attended the course dissatisfied with the course in terms of *linguistic skills*.

Hence, the questionnaire data findings in section (B) showed that the training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan was also highly effective in improving English language teachers’ motivation. And the teachers responded that the course motivated them to become an active and successful teacher, and also after attending the course, they find their job less-challenging as a teacher. It matched with the study of Maher and Brackmap (1986) findings that the change in behavior are signs and symbols of motivation, they believed that motivation is a process that embedded in the ongoing stream of behaviors.

Conclusion

The results of the study have responded the questions of this research about the effectiveness of training course for English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the study investigated that the courses were high in terms of increasing teaching skills, interpersonal skills, methodology knowledge and theories of education. Whereas in terms of linguist knowledge and linguistic skills as significant aspects of teaching processes the courses were not effective yet.

To sum up, from the findings of the study, the study investigated that more teacher training courses must be administered to familiarize the teachers with the curriculum and techniques for

teaching it. Finally, it can be concluded that there are serious weaknesses of the courses in terms of quality of the course, and from the suggestions of participants below recommendations can be presented:

1. The setting (time and place) of the course is very important.
2. Trainers of such courses must be fluent in English and have years of experiences in teaching English language to know o demands of English teachers.
3. Courses in outside of Kurdistan for English teachers especially in those countries which English is first language
4. The syllabus of the course must be in taking consideration, i.e., the syllabus should provide effectively to improve teachers in their job.

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