

## Iraqi EFL Teachers' Perception towards the Inclusion of Lesson Planning in In-Service Training Programs

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### ABSTRACT

It is often argued that a well-ordered in-service training program would augment the teachers' capability to effectively achieve classroom activities and practices, and back the educational organization to realize its objectives and ultimately develop teaching (Mahmood, 2016). Moreover, contemporary research studies maintained that Iraqi EFL teachers have need of sustenance and aide in terms of ordering active lesson plans (Al-Tufaili, 2016; Hindi, 2012). Building an effective lesson plan is one of the essential requirements for teachers in their careers in schools. Therefore, it becomes so necessary that a training program must include items related to the content of lesson planning. This paper intends to gather Iraqi EFL teachers' opinions and views concerning items classified under lesson planning, i.e. which ones are more appealed by them, which ones they disprefer. A sample of eighty Iraqi EFL teachers teaching in secondary schools from Kirkuk Governorate have been selected to answer a questionnaire containing 15 items of lesson planning. Utilizing Likert's scale, the participants reveal that operational planning for EFL classes can motivate teachers to pay attention to specific learning and teaching goals and purposes, as a lesson plan often yields a framework for teaching EFL that enables teachers to allocate exact time for teaching activities in the class. The questionnaire also shows that planning the accurate lesson and organizing it into professional steps is an interesting matter for teachers.

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### Introduction

A lot of studies concerning the development of teaching EFL in Iraqi classrooms have emphasized the requirement to discover several methods for EFL teaching that should be underscored and explicated in the teachers' in-service training programmes which reflect teachers' exercises and activities in teaching classrooms (Amin, 2017). Additionally, a teacher is frequently envisioned as the most noteworthy part in making the students succeed or fail in learning a foreign language (Saeed, 2015). Put simply, if the English language teacher is not well-prepared to teach his/her students, the absence of preparation will surely have an impact on the student's attainment level (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Regarding these issues, the most effective method to develop EFL teachers' enactment is through holding the EFL teachers' in-service training programs. The most important point in this respect is how to assist the potential teachers to utilize these methods while teaching EFL (Akkari, 2004). As a result, there is an immense need for in-service training programs in schools directed to train teachers with the most updated and rationalized information and knowledge to meet modernized challenges and improving education. To train EFL teachers "who are in high demand in academic environments", it is necessary to scrutinize in-service training programs to recognize if these programs offer those teachers with the essential information in EFL language classes. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that these programs go in contract with both

teachers and students' necessities. Pre-service training programs have been widely investigated. However, unsatisfactory researches have been led into in-service programs (Ehrhart, et al., 2011, p. 424).

In-service Education programs help teachers know students' desires and needs, and improve their teaching process, comprising an understanding of ESL language acquisition and its consequence, and offer the teachers with insight in a specific training program's content through the numerous in-service training programs which are directed to cultivate the teachers' performance in teaching EFL. Then, English teachers should obtain a well-proportioned education and appropriate "training in professional education, psychology, and teaching methods" (Finocchiaro & Bonomo, 1973, p. 76).

The need for tenacious development in the profession of teaching stresses "teacher professional development" (Kazemi & Ashrafi, 2014, p. 246). Such development necessitates "well-designed pre-service and in-service training programmes", which are directed towards producing professional teachers (Birjandi & Hesari, 2010). Earlier, the in-service training programmes had "a transmission-oriented approach in which teachers were the recipients of knowledge from teacher educators"; but now the focus has transformed to the "constructivist approach", which enables teachers to focus on what they "know and bring their prior knowledge and personal" experiences into the innovative learning situation.

Like other countries, Iraq recognized the position of English in the primary stages of learning and hoped to offer pupils more time to learn English. In 2005, the Ministry of Education in Iraq took the decision to teach English from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with the new textbook (Iraq Opportunities) at the primary stage and it was decided to take weight from September 2007-2008. It becomes necessary to implement the introduced curriculum and the envisioned approach effectively i.e., applying the communicative approach to any educational organization. The actual situation of the training programs is the most central point in this sense (Al-Khateeb, 2013). One of the important requirements for the assurance of EFL teachers' development in teaching career is the adoption of a well-prepared lesson plan which can be considered as the pathway for successful teaching in Iraqi settings.

Although previous studies (Yuldasheva, 2019; Ng'entu) conducted on lesson planning have revealed interesting findings, little attention so far has been paid to the Iraqi EFL teachers' perception towards the inclusion of lesson planning in In-Service training programs are still scant. Thus, this paper endeavours to detect EFL teachers' perception of the insertion of lesson planning in in-service training programs with the aim of pinpointing the beneficiality and functionality of this insertion and the effect of lesson planning in these programs on teachers' teachability.

### **EFL Teachers' Status in Iraq**

In-service training programmes are executed to provide individual teachers with understanding the main basics needed to develop their abilities and performance (Jacobson, 2005) in their teaching profession. Ultimately, the teacher will place further effort to guarantee teaching efficacy and consequently, the students realize the specified objectives (Scott et al, 2007; Schneider et al, 2013). Because of their low salaries, Iraqi EFL teachers have received no consistent in-service training programs as well as the absence teachers' workshops, seminars and conferences.

Rationally, the position of teaching English in Iraq is given importance in both the primary and secondary schooling. It is decided that English is taught for eight years from 5<sup>th</sup> stage of primary school to the latest stage of their secondary or preparatory schools. Further, there is a consensus that English would be taught from the third year of primary school, particularly from 2008 to 2013, All of a sudden, in 2013, a noteworthy change took place in syllabus and curriculum of primary school, the Ministry of Education decided to place English subject in the first year of primary school. English subject has become an obligatory subject in Iraq since then.

Later in 2014, the strategy of Ministry of Education in Iraqi has been rehabilitated. Then, they decided that English subject is essential to be "taught from first grade using the textbooks that were specially written for the

Iraqi elementary schools" (Altufaili, 2016. p. 1). The importance of teaching English language comes from the opinion that scientific studies are made available in English texts, i.e. English should be considered as important as Arabic.

### **Teachers' in-service Training Programs**

It is broadly recognized that in-service training actions are dependent on the most teachers who are anticipated to stay in their places for a stretched period; therefore, improving their proficient abilities is a vital issue in cultivating their teaching (Kárpáti, 2009; Purdon, 2003). In addition, in-service training programs are envisioned to be the most encouraging and enthusiastic networks not only for vocation growth, but also for fighting monotony and estrangement among in-service teachers. Such programs are also an operative manner for the teacher to attain professional gratification (Rahman et al., 2011). Training in this respect seem to be an important part of teachers' development in their educational careers. Training is seen "as systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that result in improved performance in another environment" (Goldstein, 1993, p. 3).

Interestingly, what the training content includes is an important issue in addition to the beneficial material given by trainers and grasped by teachers in in-service training programs. This idea is more emphasized by Heacox (2002) who describes the contents as the subjects of the training programs as well as the notions or concepts given to teachers. In other words, content refers to "the knowledge or subject matter that is to be taught" (Renzulli & Reis, 2008, p.98). Content assortment is a problematic issue of the training programs. In this sense, Provenzo, *et al.* (2011) argue that "the content of textbooks is highly sensitive issue in any culture". It serves as "the most traditional means by which a society preserves its values, traditions and beliefs" (p. 311).

To be an effective program, in-service training program must be associated with issues such as communicative competence, classroom management, lesson planning, information and communication technologies and motivation, as these aspects have great influence on teachers' performance in teaching classes. One essential aspect affecting teachers' behaviour in educational classes is effective lesson planning which surely assist them to arrange activities and roles in teaching classes.

### **Lesson Planning**

Lesson planning is concerned with the authentic activation of the practice of lesson preparation in the in-service training programs in accord with the actual teaching that supports teachers to improve his ability of teaching English competently in language classrooms. More elaborately, Ayres (2014) identifies that lesson planning "is a fundamental procedure in structuring individual lesson outcomes that are mutually supportive of the overall course outcomes. Lesson plan assist in structuring lesson outcomes and activities associated with those outcomes". Further, Jones (1998) affirms that lesson planning is a "key feature of effective teaching in that it is evidence of much deeper, reflective activity" (p. 89).

Relationally, operational training programs greatly rely on the skill of those who run these programs and whether they are able to bring about the proposed valuable consequences, which lead to the development of competent teachers who in return are capable of stimulating "student learning that enhances their cognitive, social, affective, and personal development in accordance with a repertoire of teaching modes and principles" (Ko & Bakkum, 2014: 67).

According to Nunan (1992, pp. 3, 6), a lesson plan is "a written description of how students will move towards attaining specific objectives". It designates "the teaching behaviour that will result in student learning". Lesson plan is significant for English language teachers because "the success with which a teacher conducts a lesson is often thought to depend on the effectiveness with which the lesson was planned". Lesson plans enable teachers to reflect methodically about what will be enclosed in English lesson. It allows teachers reason about not only the difficulties and problems before encountering them in the lesson, but also the construction of the lesson; further,

it is a "map for the teacher to follow", in addition to "a record of what has been taught". Accordingly, competent EFL teachers are required to be exposed to the models of actual teaching, before putting on the model and information in the lesson plan. Operational lesson planning can simply be attained via practice. The student teachers must get acquainted with the content of an effective lesson plan and the information to be taken into account while formulating lesson plans.

Nevertheless, the topic of lesson plan is often overlooked in teachers' progress programs and argument associated with teachers' development. And any discussion "on improving classroom teaching, pedagogical practices, aspects of participation, intervention, achievement and learning outcomes revolve around lesson planning and preparation" (Boikhutso, 2010, p. 207). The directors of the in-service training programs should think through the resources by which schools can designate moralizing teaching systems and put on involving learning which is relevant to learners' common life, circumstances and instances.

To recap, in-service training programs should emphasize how EFL teachers can create more unified lessons and the instrument by which they can achieve the pre-planned aims by choosing the types of actions and events that accomplish such aims, and the organization of the chosen actions and events, the essential means, and time allotted for each action. Implementing lesson plans by EFL teachers enables them to evaluate their own material with reference to the part taught (Reed & Michaud, 2010).

## **Methodology**

The paper is based on a descriptive-qualitative method employed to gather the necessary data for this study, which permits the researcher to elucidate the results and conclusions that come from the teachers' responses to the designed questionnaire. The researcher employs a review technique of descriptive study by means of a questionnaire which allows him to gather data from the subjects' responses concerning the inclusion of lesson planning in the training program.

The sample of the study consists of 80 secondary school EFL teachers out of the entire population of teachers (1029) of the governorate of Kirkuk of 343 schools during academic year 2019-2020. It comprises "a group from the population to form the basis for estimating, studying and predicting facts, attitudes or outcomes regarding the population in general" (Kumar, 2005, p. 57).

The pre-eminent method to gather data in the training arena is questionnaire which is identified as "a popular and fundamental tool for acquiring information on knowledge and perception" (Bird, 2009, p. 1307). Substantially, a questionnaire "is an instrument for the collection of data, usually in written form, consisting of open and/or closed questions and other probes requiring a response from subjects" (Nunan, 1992, p.231). This questionnaire (consisting of 15 items) is planned to elicit EFL teachers' responses concerning the inclusion and importance of lesson planning in the in-service training program based on a five-point Likert scale: "strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree".

The questionnaire is concerned with lesson planning involving three phases: "lesson planning activities, lesson planning objectives and planning for problem solving". These phases are distributed as follows. Items 1-5 are arranged to highlight activities of lesson planning EFL teachers must be loaded with in the in-service training programs to be applied in their operative lesson planning. Items 6-10 are placed to highlight the lesson planning objectives EFL teachers need to be conscious of in the in-service training programs to designate the objectives of their lesson while performing in English teaching classes. Items 11-15 are postulated to account for planning for problem solving EFL teachers must be equipped with in the in-service training programs that help teachers to attain the anticipated purposes of teaching.

## Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it has been exposed to a jury of professors and experts in applied linguistics and ELT to determine the content and to see whether it logically and inclusively involves the requirements of the study, as shown in table 1 below.

The jury members have read the content of the questionnaire and affirmed that it should be slightly modified. They have given some comments and suggestions that some items must be deleted whereas other items modified. For obtaining effective Lesson Planning, the jury recommend to alter item 4 from "selecting appealing resources" to be "using applicable teaching resources". For item 6, the jury members recommend to alter it from "formulating the aims" to "lesson sequencing". Item 8 should be changed into "correlating lesson objectives with teachers' needs" in place of "lesson goals". For item 9, the jury committee advised using "correlating lesson activities with class duration" in place of "objectives within the lesson". All these have been taken into account to arrive at the final shape of the questionnaire.

*Table 1: Jury Members*

Academic Rank and Name	Institution
Prof. Abbas Lutfi Hussein	Mustansiryah Univ.
Prof. AbdulkarimFadhil	Univ. of Baghdad
Asst. Prof. Nadia Majeed Hussein	Middle technical Univ.
Asst. Prof. RaedFadhil Mohammad	Maysan University
Asst. Prof. Ali ArifFadhil	Univ. of Baghdad

For the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha equation has been applied to calculate the results. The representative correlation of "split-halves" has been applied to the obtained results of the subjects. The questionnaire's items have been proved reliable as Cronbach's Alpha evaluation records above 70; this indicates that the items are suitable for the questionnaire (Raduan et al, 2006).

## Data Analysis

The 15-item questionnaire comprises EFL teachers' perspectives of the employment of lesson planning in in-service training programs. The teachers' answers to these items range from "strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree to strongly disagree" to the tasks and activities concerning lesson planning. Table 2 summarizes the applicants' total replies to the items concerning lesson planning.

*Table 2: EFL Teachers' Responses to Items of Lesson Planning*

LESSON PLANNING							
No	In-service Training Programs Discussed Lesson Planning in terms of:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTAL
1	Class sequencing activities	44	14	17	3	2	80
2	Language analysis	48	14	10	3	5	80
3	Using a range of teaching methods	13	17	33	8	9	80
4	Using applicable teaching resources	13	12	39	12	4	80
5	Using observation skills during the teaching sessions	39	36	3	1	1	80
6	Lesson sequencing	3	2	40	24	11	80

7	Follow up activities	6	9	41	21	3	80
8	Correlating lesson objectives with teachers' needs	41	34	4	1	0	80
9	Correlating lesson activities with class duration	15	17	1	18	29	80
10	Achieving desired outcomes	45	32	2	0	1	80
11	Anticipating problems	8	17	4	28	23	80
12	Planning relevant solutions	2	4	66	8	0	80
13	Managing personal disclosures	3	1	69	6	1	80
14	Examining students' needs	0	2	30	48	0	80
15	Evaluating students' responses towards taught activities	1	6	55	17	1	80

An examination of the table above reveals that the subjects have tendency towards five items of the given. They show their preferences of items 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10 "class sequencing activities", language analysis", "using observation skills during the teaching sessions", "correlating lesson objectives with class duration" and "achieving desired outcomes", as they mostly give answers with *strongly agree* and *agree*. Yet, they reflect their dereferences for items 11 and 14 "*anticipating problems*" and "*examining students' needs*" as more than half of the participants answer with *disagree* and *disagree*. Further, the participants reflect their uncertainty about the employment of items 6, 7, 12, 13 and 15, as more than half of them give the answers with "*not sure*". All in all, this means that EFL teachers in general should take into consideration the items concerning the participants prefer and those they disprefer given in this questionnaire.

## Conclusion

The participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire demonstrate that for integrating an operative lesson planning in the in-service training programs, EFL teachers must sequence activities in teaching classes, appeal to the analysis of language, use observation skills while teaching, associate lesson aims with their requirements in teaching EFL, and attain desired consequences. This is because a workable lesson planning plays a significant role in improving their competence of teaching EFL more vigorously in Iraqi settings.

Operational planning for EFL classes can motivate teachers to pay attention to specific learning and teaching goals and purposes, as a lesson plan often yields a framework for teaching EFL that enables teachers to allocate exact time for teaching activities in the class. The questionnaire also shows that planning the accurate lesson and organizing it into professional steps is an interesting matter for teachers. Perhaps, a lot of EFL teachers are incapable of conveying their teachings efficiently in various classroom situations leaving their learners discontented. The study recommends that these in-service training programs should be held periodically to help EFL teachers track the rationalised and fresh practices and techniques in teaching EFL in schools.

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