

PRE-SERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: PILOTING THE NEW METHODOLOGY CURRICULUM

Inna Samoylyukevych

Abstract

The article deals with the issues of the modernization of pre-service language teacher education in Ukraine in order to raise English-language teachers' methodological proficiency. The author analyses the ideas of remodeling language education within the contextual approach and gives an overview of the new Methodology curriculum designed within the framework of the joint project of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council Ukraine "New Generation School Teacher". The preparation for and the monitoring of the piloting process in a Ukrainian university are described. The essential prerequisites for the project implementation are specified and should be considered at further stages of the project implementation.

Key words: pre-service language teacher education, methodology curriculum, methodological proficiency.

Introduction

Improving English language teacher education has been a persistent focus in the 21st century as there is a widespread agreement that English is much needed for trade, travel, international relations and computer-mediated communication. Future teachers have to be equipped with important professional skills as well as with essential life skills to deal with the changing world.

Globally, this concern has led the wave after wave of reform initiatives, new programs and university teaching and learning innovations aimed at restructuring curriculum and instruction at various levels throughout the higher education system. An emphasis has been laid on the role of foreign language teacher preparation with the view of major change-generating themes: technology integration, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, the importance of languages and the promotion of international cooperation and understanding across borders.

Research work on the innovative language education practices was initiated by the resolution on multilingualism of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the White Paper on the education and training issued by the European Commission, the numerous language policy developments of the Council of Europe of the past decades. Quite a few scholars and researchers have shared ideas and experiences with respect to the new, emerging educational paradigm (A. Albirini), the revolutionizing impact of ICT on language instruction (G.Driden, J.Vos), the integration of information technology into the teacher education curriculum (N. Wentworth, R. Earle, M. Connell), innovative ways of teaching languages with technology (G. Dudeney, N. Hockly), language learning and teaching in a dialogue of cultures and civilizations (V.V. Safonova), the reforms of school education in the context of globalization (A.A. Sbruyeva) and many more [1, 5, 3, 2, 7,8].

Little research, though, has been carried out into the transformation potential and practice of foreign language teacher education as an revolutionizing system in response to strong societal changes. Locally, namely, in the Ukrainian educational context, pre-existing traditions in language teaching prioritized knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. With restrictions on travel and contacts with Western countries in place, there was little or no need

to see the language as an active means of communication. Ukraine's aspiration to move towards Europe and the wider world has brought into focus the need for higher levels of English among the country's citizens.

The introduction of the new State Standards for primary and secondary education, the modernized national curricula in foreign languages, the issues of ICT integration in learning and teaching require a profound reconceptualization of the content of and the approaches to the linguistic and methodological training of pre-service EFL teachers at the institutions of higher education in Ukraine. Thereby in 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council Ukraine launched the New Generation School Teacher project.

1. Reconceptualising English language teacher education in Ukraine

The idea of the project came from a baseline study of the current pre-service English language teacher education and training in Ukraine in order to identify its compliance with the challenges of the time.

The baseline study was conducted by a team of teacher educators (the author of the article among them) from the leading Ukrainian institutions of higher education that train English language teachers. For the period from March 2013 to February 2014, the project team collected and analysed the normative documents that regulate pre-service English language teacher education and training: the State Standards, curricula, core curricula and department syllabi; investigated the interests, needs and impact of primary stakeholders (English language learners and teachers in schools, university students and teacher educators) and secondary stakeholders (the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, local educational authorities, rectors of higher education institutions); conducted a survey among stakeholders and analysed their attitudes to the current EFL teacher training [9: 6-7].

1.1. Key findings of the baseline study

The key findings of the baseline study indicated the urgent need for change in the system of pre-service EFL teacher education and training in Ukraine, as it was revealed that ELT Methodology was widely taught as a theoretical discipline that averaged less than four per cent of total program hours, with insufficient attention paid to a number of essential aspects of language teacher preparation, for example, the development of intercultural awareness, ICT integration in language learning and teaching, the learner-centred approach, modern ways of assessing progress and achievement in a foreign language [9: 32]. The baseline study testified to the necessity for the reconceptualisation and strengthening of the methodological strand in the system of pre-service EFL teacher education and training in order to raise EFL teachers' methodological proficiency.

In view of the baseline study findings, the project team defined the basic principles of the new Methodology curriculum design and implementation. According to the agreed principles, Methodology was viewed as the key to the preparation of pre-service language teachers, thus, to be taught in semesters 3-8, delivered in English, harmonized with a range of contemporary teaching approaches, and complemented with language courses. The content of the new curriculum was to be standardized in terms of aims, outcomes, and assessment specifications. The structure of the curriculum presupposed the introduction of a carefully phased school experience involving guided observation, teacher assistantship and observed teaching on order to provide a bridge between theory and practice in accordance with the contextual approach to language teacher education [4 : 44].

1.2. An overview of the new Methodology curriculum

The new curriculum was designed by the project team in 2014-2015 for Bachelor's level students who are training as teachers of English. It is an essential resource for University decision-makers, teachers of Methodology, teachers of English, school mentors and other stakeholders interested in modern methods of teaching English. The new curriculum consists of six modules, one module per semester, each representing a broad area of methodology ranging from "Understanding Learners and Learning" to "Specialised Dimensions" and "Professional Development". Module descriptions include aims, learning outcomes, and recommended assessment specifications. Each module contains a number of units, each of which covers an essential specialist topic for pre-service English teachers. Unit descriptions contain detailed objectives, indicative content and recommended reading. The modules are arranged to reflect the learning progression that students make on their way from being language learners to becoming language teachers by the end of the programme.

While the new curriculum intends to provide students with important professional skills related to Methodology, it also emphasizes opportunity for developing essential life skills in them, such as: intercultural awareness, communication skills, teamwork skills, time-management skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, information literacy and creativity. To develop these life skills, modern ways of learning and teaching such as project work, task-based learning, case study and problem solving are recommended.

2. Piloting the new curriculum in Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University

The academic year of 2016-2017 was devoted to piloting Semesters 3 and 4 of the curriculum in selected universities, including Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University. The piloting was organized at the Institute of Pedagogics (which trains primary-school teachers of English) and at the Institute of Foreign Philology (where teachers of English and World Literature are trained). The piloting process was carefully documented and monitored all through the academic year.

2.1. Preparing for the Piloting Process

The programme needed full support from all levels of management within the university. The most important prerequisites for the implementation of the project are considered to be the regulatory environment, the organizational, psychological and pedagogical conditions [6: 89].

Organizational conditions.

- The project coordinator was appointed at the university.
- A number of meetings were held before the new academic year, involving all those concerned with the management (the Vice-rector, the Deans, the Heads of the Departments) and delivery of the new curriculum (Methodology teachers and English teachers). It was ensured that everyone involved understood their roles and responsibilities.
- The experimental and control groups (cohorts) of students were selected.
- The classroom hours were allocated to the delivery of the curriculum, and they were fully accounted for in the timetable.
- The partner schools and their teachers were informed about the new curriculum and the requirements for school experience.

Regulatory environment.

- It was checked that all documents relating to the curriculum (the curriculum map, the curriculum guidelines, supplementary materials) were in place.

- The Methodology teachers were given support in the form of sample unit maps, session materials, observation tasks for use during school experience, self-assessment checklists for students to use at the end of each unit, bibliography of key titles in methodology, and an extensive glossary listing key terminology with Ukrainian equivalents as well as English definitions.
- The students of the experimental groups were provided with the Student's Book which contains a description of the course requirements for students concerning attendance, self-study hours, class participation, setting and meeting deadlines, as well as self-assessment as an integral tool in the process of developing students' autonomous learning skills.

Psychological conditions.

- A number of meetings were held with at the start of the academic year, in which the Methodology teachers, the mentees (student teachers of the experimental groups) and the mentors (cooperating school teachers) had an opportunity to meet and familiarize themselves with the curriculum guidelines and the details of the piloting process.
- It was emphasized that the new curriculum represented a significant change in pre-service language teacher education and required time and patience, and that any problems that might arise would be best dealt with by good communication and regular consultation with all interest groups.
- A four-hour introductory module was provided for the students of the experimental groups in the first week of Semester 3.

Pedagogical conditions.

- The teachers new to the curriculum attended training seminars and professional development schools.
- The Methodology teachers were recommended the course planning steps, the key principles underlying the session design, and a range of modes of learning and teaching that can engage students in active learning.
- Both the Methodology teachers and the students of the experimental groups were introduced a range of assignment types intended as learning experiences as well as ways of assessing students.
- Specifications for continuous and final assessment in the Methodology course were clarified for all the interest group.
- The teachers and students were presented the Profile of a Newly-Qualified Teacher designed by the project team so that they could correlate the prospective learning outcomes with the knowledge, skills and qualities of a graduate from the PRESETT Bachelor's programme.
- Consultation on self-study skills was given to the students of both the experimental and control groups.

2.2. Monitoring the Piloting Process

In the first year of piloting, the universities participating the project exchanged monitoring visits. Each visit presupposed class observation, meetings with the university authorities and teachers, interviews with the students. The report on the results of the monitoring visit to Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University in Semester 2 (23 November 2016) was submitted by O. Z., a member of the project team. It presented the findings from different stakeholders, notes on areas of good practice, and action points.

The findings from students provided an insight into:

- Motivational issues ("The students did not expect the course to be so motivating and interesting");

- Challenges of English as a medium of instruction (“*Students see it as an opportunity rather than a problem. It creates favourable conditions for practicing the language*”);
- Beneficial impact of school experience (“*Students share the idea that Guided Observation is essential in the course. They believe that this is the stage where theory comes to practice*”);
- Lack of resources (“*The teacher provides only the copies*”).

The findings from teachers refer to:

- Session design (“*It's time consuming and rather challenging to design sessions following all the requirements*”);
- Students' level of motivation (“*Students are getting more and more motivated in the Course*”);
- School experience (“*Guided observation is crucial though difficult to have it in the fixed timetable*”).

The finding from university authorities contain evidence of:

- Their understanding of the role of the new methodology curriculum (“ It is at the core of pre-service language teacher education);
- Commitment to the project implementation (“We are determined to provide further support for the course piloting”);
- Organizational challenges (“We find it difficult, so far, to allocate the required number of hours”).

The areas of good practice identified by the visitor include the way students reflected on their learning at the end of the session, the content of the students' portfolios and ways of using them in the Methodology classroom, students' responsibility for grouping / pairing-up techniques in the lesson, and learner-centredness in action.

In the Action Points section of the monitoring report, it was recommended that:

- Solution should be found to integrate school experience into the Methodology course in terms of allocation of hours;
- University should be ready to provide basic reading resources listed on the core bibliography and make them available to teachers and students on the programme;
- School mentors should be specially trained for cooperating with mentees in three phases of school experience.

The curriculum piloting will continue in Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University in Semesters 5, 6, 7, and 8 between 2017 and 2019, and depending on its results, it will be revised to meet the future needs and priorities.

Conclusion

To better prepare prospective English-language teachers for meeting the challenges of the 21st century, teacher-training programs should introduce changes that will ensure quality and diversity in the teaching and learning of languages. The reconceptualisation of English language teacher education in Ukraine is taking shape with the framework of the joint project of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council Ukraine New Generation School Teacher. The new Methodology curriculum designed by the project team can become an essential resource for University decision-makers, teachers of Methodology, teachers of English, school mentors and other stakeholders interested in modern methods of teaching English. It intends to provide students with important professional skills related to Methodology and also emphasizes opportunity for developing essential life skills in them. To raise the level of English-language teachers' methodological proficiency, modern ways of

learning and teaching such as project work, task-based learning, case study and problem solving are recommended. Depending on the results of the curriculum piloting, it will represent a significant change in the way pre-service English teachers are educated in Ukraine.

References

1. Albirini, A. (2007). The Crisis of Educational Technology, and the Prospect of Reinventing Education. // *Educational Technology and Society*. No. 10 (1). – P. 227-236.
2. Dudeney, G., Hockly, N. (2007). How to teach English with technology / Series Editor: Jeremy Harmer. – Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. – 191 c.
3. Integrating information technology into the teach education curriculum: process and products of change / Nancy Wentworth, Rodney Earle, Michael L. Connell, editors. – NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 2004. – 188 p.
4. Вербицький А.А. Психологопедагогіческі основи контекстного обучения в вузі: Автореф. ... д-ра пед. наук, 13.00.01, 19.00.07. – М., 1991. – 55с.
5. Драйден, Г., Вос, Дж. Революція в навчанні / переклад з англ. М.Олійник. – Львів: Літопис, 2005. – 542 с.
6. Самойлюкевич І. В. Напрями модернізації професійної підготовки вчителів іноземних мов в умовах інформатизації освіти у США // Педагогічна компаративістика. – 2009. – № 1. – Умань: АЛІМІ. – С.87-91.
7. Сафонова В. В. Изучение языков международного общения в контексте диалога культур и цивилизаций. – Воронеж: ИСТОКИ, 1996. – 237с.
8. С布鲁ева А. А. Тенденції реформування середньої освіти розвинених англомовних країн в контексті глобалізації (90-ті р.р. ХХ – початок ХХІ ст.): Монографія. – Суми: ВАТ „Сумська обласна друкарня”. Видавництво „Козацький вал”, 2004. – 500 с.
9. Шкільний вчитель нового покоління. Допроектне базове дослідження (березень 2013 – березень 2014). – К.: Ленвіт, 2014. – 60 с.

Information about author:

Inna Samoylyukevych – Professor, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine. E-mail: innasamoylyukevych@gmail.com