Original Paper

Teaching Materials and the Knowledge Base of EFL Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper investigates the structure and practices of EFL teacher education at a teacher education college in the Republic of Benin, a French speaking West African country. It examines a group of EFL teacher educators' meaning of teacher preparation, the knowledge base of EFL teacher education at that college, the types of input content and materials that are involved in teacher knowledge acquisition. Qualitative data collection operations including interviews, classroom observations, and existing documents from the research site are involved in the study. The findings from the observation data reveal a limited implementation of the curriculum goals by the participant EFL teacher educators. They also indicate tensions between their classroom practices and both the curriculum orientations and course objectives. The information from the interview data highlights the discrepancies between the meaning that they make of EFL teacher preparation and their pedagogical practices.

Keywords

EFL teacher education, knowledge/competency base of EFL teacher education, teaching materials, materials evaluation, evaluation of input content

1. Introduction

Many researchers in the field of EFL teacher education have pointed to the need for clarifying the concept of good teaching in order to determine curriculum orientations in EFL teacher education settings. According to Pennington (1989), a clarification of the concept of "good teaching" (p. 97) by program designers and administrators is important and it serves as a basis for designing an effective teacher education program because our understanding of teaching determines the type of input content we create to prepare teachers to teach. As a consequence, a lot of research studies have focused on

defining the EFL teacher knowledge or competency base and on scrutinizing the structure and practices of EFL teacher education with a view to improving the process of teacher preparation for EFL teaching. Within such a framework, an important body of inquiry has focused on the crucial role of teaching materials in EFL teacher education. However, little attention has been granted by research to the selection and evaluation of such materials involved in the knowledge base of EFL teacher education. The Republic of Benin is a French speaking West African country where people are native speakers of a variety of local languages. French, which has the status of a second language, is the language of work and instruction. English is taught as a foreign language among secondary school subjects by EFL teachers who are trained in the teacher education college under consideration.

The purpose of this study is to inquire into the EFL teacher education program at that teacher education college in Benin in order to identify (1) the teacher educators' perceptions of teacher preparation, (2) the types of input content that they provide to support the different components of the teacher education program, (3) the materials that they use to support each of these components of the program, and (4) to determine whether or not these materials are congruent with the curriculum orientations and course objectives.

To reach this purpose, the following questions have been considered in the study:

1/ What meaning do teacher educators make of "EFL teacher preparation" in the
    teacher education college under consideration in the study?

2/ What types of input content are provided to support each component of EFL teacher
    education knowledge/competency base at that teacher education college ?

3/ What teaching materials are used to support input content?

4/ Are these materials congruent with the curriculum orientations and course
    objectives?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Knowledge Base of EFL Teacher Education

Studies that have focused on determining the knowledge or competency base of EFL teacher education have attempted to identify what EFL student teachers need to know and be able to do in order to conduct their practice. These two variables that make up the EFL student teachers' professional knowledge have been termed in various ways by researchers as theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge (Lawes, 2003), declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Woods, 1996), received knowledge and experiential knowledge (Wallace, 1991), knowledge-for-practice, and knowledge-in-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), conceptual knowledge and perceptual knowledge (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

The concept of knowledge base refers to the repertoires of skills, information, and attitudes that teachers need in order to carry out teaching in their classrooms (Valli & Tom, 1988). According to educational researchers, the EFL teacher education knowledge base involves the following components:

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(1) the knowledge of the subject matter or content knowledge, (2) pedagogical knowledge which refers to the knowledge of generic strategies, beliefs and practices, and (3) pedagogical content knowledge which refers to the knowledge of teaching in reality, that is, knowledge of how to represent content knowledge in the classroom and to make students understand the subject matter in real teaching contexts (Day & Conklin, 1992; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Morain 1990).

Throughout decades there has been a variety of reform efforts to reconceptualize the knowledge base of teacher education from learning about teaching to learning how to teach. Until the 1990s, Applied Linguistics, more specifically, (psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, language description, and language teaching and testing methodology) formed the core of language teacher education as language teaching itself has historically been the primary focus of Applied Linguistics (Freeman, 1996b; Roberts, 1998). As a matter of fact, prior to the 1990s, the missionary focus of language teacher education programs was on the "teaching of teaching" (Hung, 2008, p. 39), which often entailed an exclusive concern for transmitting the knowledge of what to teach in order to serve prospective teachers well.

According to Richards (1998), these language teacher preparation programs followed a top-down pattern of transmission of theoretical knowledge based on modelling good practices, the practices themselves built around a standard recognized teaching method. Becoming a language teacher meant acquiring a set of well-structured theoretical knowledge and mastering discrete skills such as lesson planning, techniques for presenting new teaching points, and for teaching the four skills. The approach to teacher preparation at that time, as Richards (1998) points out, was training dominated and consisted of a limited diet of theory courses mainly confined to linguistics, grammar, literature, and the study of methodology.

However, during the 1990s, general educational theory and practice exerted a much more powerful influence on the education of both pre-service and in-service language teachers. Therefore, the orientation of the language teacher education began to shift from the "teaching of teaching" to the "learning of teaching" (Hung, 2008, p. 39). Such a paradigm shift, that is, the shift from the old process-product paradigm to a cognitive-reflective paradigm, coupled with teacher educators' awareness of the fact that teaching cannot be taught directly (Richards, 1998), gave rise to a line of research on teacher learning that seeks to understand the teacher's process of learning to teach and to support the learning of teachers. More attention is, therefore, given by research to the teacher's general understanding of teaching and of him/herself as a teacher.

What matters with the new paradigm is no longer "knowledge for teachers" but "knowledge of teachers" (Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001, p. 443). Thus, the good teacher, according to Schelfhout et al. (2006), is expected to have good mastery of the discipline he has been trained to teach, to demonstrate skills and knowledge about teaching/learning, to experience the realities of school teaching, to inquire into his/her teaching in order to bring necessary adjustments. Helping EFL student teachers to construct such professional knowledge has been the objective of many language teacher

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education programs both in second and foreign language teacher education. However, the nature of the knowledge base has differed somewhat for the various contexts in which second/foreign language teaching and learning take place (Britten, 1985).

In the teacher education college under consideration in this study, the main objective of EFL teacher education program is to prepare student teachers for professional teaching, that is, to equip them with the knowledge base and skills they need to carry out their profession. This knowledge base as outlined in the curriculum involves the following components: the theoretical knowledge which includes both the knowledge of the subject-matter (in other words, content knowledge or the knowledge of English), the pedagogical knowledge which includes the knowledge of the theories of English language teaching and learning, the knowledge of the techniques, the skills and the values essential to good teaching). The program also includes a pedagogical content knowledge component that is made available to the EFL student teachers through a teaching practicum. Both the pedagogical knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge are taken care of in the framework of the TEFL methods component of the teacher education program. This component is implemented through lectures and activities such as: group discussion, workshop, and classroom presentation, observation of teaching/learning events, and classroom teaching. In the TEFL methods course, the EFL student teachers deal with topics related to EFL theories, principles of EFL teaching and learning, TEFL methods and materials, TEFL skills, learners' assessment, class management, the Competency-based Approach to EFL teaching, and field practice.

2.2 Teaching Materials in EFL Teacher Education

According to Brown (1995, p. 139), teaching materials refer to "any systematic description of the techniques and activities to be used in classroom teaching" and through which learning takes place. Defined as such, teacher education materials are the various types of teaching aids that are involved in the process of teacher preparation for the teaching profession in a teacher education program. Basing on the defined knowledge/competency base of EFL teacher education program, most EFL teacher education programs are designed in three components: language component, science component, and practicum component.

Some educational researchers (e.g., Brown, 2001; Candido de Lima, 2001; Cullen, 2001) argue that it is the language component of the EFL teacher education program that enables student teachers to develop language proficiency. They consider language competency as one of the most important characteristics of good teaching pointing to the fact that it enhances the student teacher's knowledge of the language and communicative competence, and that it makes the non-native teacher develop some confidence in the use of the English language in the classroom. The implementation of the language component of a teacher education program involves courses on the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as well as courses on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture, which requires the use teaching materials of the following types: Xeroxed documents, reading documents like textbooks, audio and visual aids that provide input in both written and spoken forms, and through which student

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teachers can communicate and interact during the learning process.

As far as the science component is concerned, it refers to the specialized knowledge of language teaching theories and pedagogy and includes courses such as teaching methodology, testing, research methods, and linguistics which are known to give student teachers exposure to methodological and pedagogical knowledge as well as knowledge about language. The input content related to this component is delivered through lectures, readings, and discussion, and the use of support materials such as pamphlets, handouts, journals, reference books, and textbooks.

The third component, that is, the practicum component refers to the student teachers' acquisition of the skills and knowledge of how to teach in a real school context, and provides them with the opportunity to be immersed in a school culture in order to "develop a professional identity as a teacher" (ten Dam & Blom, 2006, p. 647). This component is implemented through courses that focus on the development of the student teachers' practical knowledge through observation of classroom events and school realities, and interactions with other teachers in the same field. Therefore, it gives them exposure to notions such as learners' characteristics, teaching materials, learning assessment, and school and parent relationship.

In an attempt to enhance student teachers' professional knowledge, research has recently focused attention on teaching materials in EFL teacher education (Goker, 2006; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Schelfhout et al., 2006). The selection of these materials, according to these researchers should take into account some criteria such as the program goals and objectives, learners' needs and cultural issues, the methods and values of the teacher education program. For this purpose, Korthagen, Loughran and Russel (2006) outlined a set of principles of effective teacher education. These fundamental principles, according to them, not only "shape teacher education programs and practices in ways that are responsive to the expectations, needs, and practices of teacher educators and student teachers" (p. 1022), but also enables a reconstruction of the teacher education program from within. They are summarized as follows:

1/ Learning about teaching involves continuously conflicting and competing demands (both theory and practice.

2/ Learning about teaching requires a view of knowledge as a subject to be created rather than as a created subject.

3/ Learning about teaching requires a shift in focus from the curriculum to the learner.

4/ Learning about teaching is enhanced through student teacher research.

5/ Learning about teaching requires an emphasis on those working with their peers.

6/ Learning about teaching requires meaningful relationship between schools, universities and student teachers.

7/ Learning about teaching is enhanced when the teaching and learning advocated in the program are modelled by the teacher educators in their own practice.

These principles outlined as such can serve as selection and evaluation criteria to judge the suitability

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and appropriateness of teaching materials in EFL teacher education, as they are oriented towards the program goals and objectives, the student teacher's role, cultural issues, and the teacher educators' role. For example, the first two principles are concerned with the aims and objectives of the program. Principle 1 highlights the integration of theory and practice in learning how to teach. Therefore, it emphasizes teaching materials that focus on both components in order to enable student teachers to build the professional knowledge and competency they need for their full involvement in their school life. Principle 2 highlights the meaning and relevance of the program for student teachers and emphasizes teaching materials that offer student teachers opportunities to deconstruct their prior beliefs and conceptions about EFL teaching and learning and to help them reshape these prior beliefs and conceptions to match program goals. Therefore, an inductive approach to learning about teaching is emphasized with student teachers constructing their own knowledge of EFL teaching and learning through collaborative and creative work, trying to make sense of the teaching/learning theories they are exposed to in the teacher education context.

The next three principles (3, 4 & 5) are concerned with the student teacher's role. Principle 3 emphasizes materials that provide opportunities for student teachers' full involvement in the learning process and that enable them to self-construct their knowledge. Principle 4 highlights materials that foster student teachers' engagement in research on specific teaching/learning issues and encourage them to inquire into their own learning and teaching through self discovery activities such as reflective practices, case analysis, peer discourse, problem solving, and narrative enquiry. Finally principle 5 addresses teaching materials that would enable trainees to develop skills of collaboration through peer coaching, peer collaboration, and collaborative reflection.

The next principle (6) is concerned with cultural issues. According to this principle, support materials in EFL teacher education should emphasize the cultural context in which EFL is going to be taught by the student teacher. Finally, the seventh principle relates to the role of teacher educators in selecting and using in their own classes teaching materials that provide them with opportunities to model the teaching approach that they preach in the teacher education context.

3. Method

A qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations of the teacher educators' actual classroom practices, and the collection of existing documents such as the EFL teacher education curriculum and the courses syllabi is used in the study. The participants are three EFL teacher educators involved in the TEFL program at the teacher training college under consideration in the study. Table 1 provides information about each of them, the course module that they teach, and the component that it relates to in the curriculum. Pseudonyms are used in this report to refer to them. Individual participants are observed three times during their teaching and are interviewed once after the three classroom observations. The observation data are analyzed in order to determine whether or not the input content and the support materials are congruent with the curriculum orientations and course

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objectives. The same set of observation data is also used to compare the teacher educators' classroom practices with the trends that emerged from the analysis of the interview data and that are representative of the meaning they make of EFL teacher preparation.

Table 1. Background Information about the Participants

Teacher educators	Qualification	Course module taught	Curriculum components
Clement	University teacher	Introduction to Literary Analysis	Content knowledge
Victoria	University teacher	Learning Styles	Pedagogical knowledge
Pamela	Secondary school supervisor	Teaching practice	Pedagogical content knowledge

4. Results

4.1 The Participant Teacher Educators' Meaning of EFL Teacher Preparation

To inquire into the participant teacher educators' meaning of EFL teacher preparation, post-observation interview data were elicited from all three of them. Each of them is in charge of a course that belongs to one of the three components that constitute the input content of the training program under consideration. Clement teaches a course module entitled "*Introduction to Literary Analysis*", a course that can be considered to belong to the language component of the training program as it enables trainees to gain knowledge of the subject matter (English), the language they are being prepared to teach. The aim of the course, as he put it, is to acquaint trainees with the literary theories they can use to make sense of a written text and to respond to it. Through this course, they are expected to develop both reading and writing proficiencies, and to acquire knowledge about the language. Victoria, as far as she is concerned, teaches a course module entitled "*learning styles*" that belongs to the science component of the program. It is included in those courses scheduled in the training program to enable trainees to develop pedagogical knowledge, that is, knowledge about teaching and learning. As for Pamela, she is a secondary school supervisor in charge of the supervision of trainees assigned to her for the practicum module. Therefore, she provides input related to the third component of the training program, that is, pedagogical content knowledge. Through the practicum component, trainees acquire knowledge of how to teach, of classroom and school realities, and of how to represent content knowledge in the classroom.

4.1.1 Clement's Meaning of Teacher Preparation

Overall, four themes emerged from Clement's description of the meaning he makes of EFL teacher preparation: opportunity for trainees to develop their language proficiency, quality preparation, dedication, usefulness of the course. In his description, Clement focuses on the prospective teachers' knowledge of the language they are being prepared to teach. As he put it, his course objective is to help

trainees to improve the way they read, to become familiar with some terminology related to literary analysis, to be aware of the relation between reading and writing, and to start reading as active readers who can interact with the text through a response resulting from their critical analysis of the text. His meaning of teacher preparation relates to helping trainees to develop language proficiency. He alludes to a change that the course will bring about in the way they read. They will become proficient readers and writers. He describes his vision as follows:

> *The aim of the course is to introduce to student teachers some literary concepts and theories that would help them have a better understanding of the novels assigned to them in the literature classes and to carry out literary analysis using appropriate terminology. They will know what is meant by setting, plot, characters, theme, and so on. I want them to change the way they used to read before. I want them to see the link between reading and writing, to be able to read and analyse a novel, a chapter, or a text. Analysing a text implies changing the way they used to read; they should read like analysts. They should use critical thinking. I want them to be well prepared.*

The informant also perceives the type of preparation that should be given to the EFL trainees as quality preparation. When asked to expand on his view of quality, that is, what he means by "being well prepared", he emphasized the opportunity for practice and trainees' active involvement. He explained his view of good preparation relating to his course in the following words:

> *As far as my module is concerned, it should cover both theoretical and practical aspects. I will make sure that they get enough practice in literary analysis. It will be more time for practice than theory.*
>
> *This is valid for other courses. Trainees need to be active participants in course events. It is not a matter of focusing on theoretical discussions. During class sessions, they should be given the opportunity to translate knowledge acquired in the theoretical part of a given course into practice. They should be assigned tasks to be completed drawing upon theoretical notions discussed.*

The informant's dedication to reach the goal of quality preparation of trainees in the course module he is in charge of teaching warrants attention, as the amount of time allocated for it in the course schedule is 10 hours, which is not sufficient to put a particular emphasis on having trainees get enough practice in literary analysis. Pointing to this time constraint, the informant made it clear his intention to go beyond the allocated ten hours as free contribution to reach his course objectives. He contends as follows:

> *I would say that it is my first experience teaching in this school. I taught in other higher education institutions, and I know that dealing with teacher preparation requires a good dose of practice. During the different courses, they need to be acquainted with tasks that require their critical thinking to find solutions to teaching and learning problems that may arise in real classroom situations. But in 10 hours, I cannot cover what I planned to cover. I intend to go over the 10 hours. I have already discussed with the trainees and we agreed on doing extra hours. I*

am not expecting a reward from the administration for that. I just want to help those trainees reach the learning objectives defined from the start. It is also my free contribution to help them to get a deeper understanding of all the contours of literary analysis and to master this task. I just want them to be well prepared for that. It should be the goal of any trainer here in the subject he or she teaches.

When asked about the relation of his course input content to the trainees' future profession, the informant pointed out that it is a useful course that normally prepares student teachers for effective teaching of the reading and writing skills in advanced secondary school classes, especially to students in literary fields. Unfortunately, due to the way learning and assessment tasks in reading and writing are structured in secondary school classes, this course ends up having limited usefulness. In fact, secondary school students are often asked to deal with isolated texts and the tasks they are required to complete on the text focus on grammar, vocabulary, and a few comprehension questions. In writing, they are often asked to write on a topic related to the reading passage. He declared what follows about this issue:

As prospective teachers of English, this course will help them in literary classes. First of all, it will help them in writing and teaching writing, as well as in reading and the teaching of this skill. The impact of the course would be really noticeable in their teaching in the future if the EFL curricula in secondary schools had not changed. In the former EFL curricula, senior secondary school students were assigned the reading of novels written in English. They were asked to prepare a presentation of the characters, the plot and the themes of assigned chapters from the novels. The current curricula implemented now do not require learners to do such tasks. They are rather given short or medium length isolated texts to read, which makes the application of literary analysis problematic and scarce. In students' textbooks, the proposed texts are followed by skimming or scanning tasks and a few comprehension questions.

Besides, an aspect that emerged from the analysis of the interview data elicited from the informant that does not relate to the meaning he makes of the teacher preparation, but that warrants attention pertains to his ignorance of the curriculum orientations at the teacher training college. When asked if he has any knowledge about this curriculum, his answer was negative. He even confessed not having access to the document in question as the school has not made it available to trainers, which means that he has no clear idea about the targeted competencies defined in the curriculum for trainees. Here is what he said about this matter:

Before starting the course I was invited by the school administration to come and get the schedule. That's all. I tried to discuss with other trainers at the school about the curriculum. All I was told is that the trainees at the college are to be prepared for the teaching of the subject they registered in to secondary school students. So, I designed my syllabus on the basis of that information and showed it to one of them who had already taught the same module in the past. He advised me to remove some details because the amount of time allotted for the course module will not allow me to cover all details. But I did not have access to the copy of the training

curriculum itself. The school administration did not hand any document of the kind to me.

4.1.2 Victoria's Meaning of Teacher Preparation

From Victoria's description of what teacher preparation means to her, the following major themes emerged: importance of teacher preparation, need focus, linking theory to practice, importance of teaching materials.

Describing her understanding of teacher preparation, she made it clear that it is a very important step that anybody who wants to do the job should go through in order to be able to face classroom realities. In her opinion, this preparation should get trainees ready for the teaching of the different language skills, what EFL teaching in secondary schools is all about. She declared:

Trainees need this preparation to be ready to overcome any difficulty in their classrooms, to be well equipped to face classroom realities. I am assigned two classes, that is, 'teaching reading and writing methods and materials' and 'learning styles'. I taught the first one in the first semester. Now I'm dealing with the second, and through this one I want to make them aware of their own learning preferences, and know about the strategies they can use to learn in their different courses. Once aware and informed, they will be able to do the same with their learners in their own classrooms when they start teaching.

Expanding on her understanding of teaching in a teacher education context, the informant considers prospective teachers' education as something technical, totally different from regular classroom events in some other contexts. She alludes to it as being rigorously need focused, and ignoring these needs might make the teacher education program ineffective. Therefore, careful attention should be given to the way trainees are taught. Here is what she said about this aspect:

They need to acquire the skills, the required techniques to meet their learners' needs. The teacher educator's role is to equip trainees with the tools they need to face classroom realities and to meet learners' needs. Feeding them on what they need in order to get them ready to carry out the teaching job in the future matters a lot. Otherwise they can't make it.

The informant went on to make it clear what effective teacher preparation entails in her opinion. For her, during the training, trainees need to acquire sound theoretical knowledge as well as practical knowledge. Therefore, they should be given the opportunity to link theory to practice in order to be aware of the usefulness of the course content they are exposed to. She contended:

They should be able to link theory to practice. Not only theory, but in practice what we can do concretely. We should propose tasks that help them translate theory into practice through the use of power point, video projections, research works, presentations and discussions. I focus attention on the fact that whatever they are exposed to here in the training college, they need to project it in their class in the future. So, what matters is that they be aware of the usefulness of the course for their future job.

Elaborating on her use of materials in the way she gets trainees prepared for the teaching task, she points to the crucial role of these materials in teacher education. She considers them as being very

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important tools in teacher education in that a regular use of adequate materials included new technology in the teacher education context is not only part of trainees' preparation process, but it also makes the course enjoyable. She points to this aspect as follows:

It is really important for EFL teacher trainers to use materials to teach their courses. I think that as teacher trainers, it is important for us to use new technology to teach our trainees because they are going to follow the same example in their own classrooms in the future. So it is important for them to know how to use these materials. It is only by using such materials that we get them ready to use the same materials in their own classes. In addition, the teacher trainer should use interesting teaching materials to make trainees feel comfortable. Then learning is not stressful for them. It becomes pleasant. Unfortunately, we teacher educators have no such materials at our disposal in the college.

An aspect of the data gathered from her relates to her ignorance of the content of the TEFL curriculum at the teacher training college. Like clement, she confessed having no idea about it, but could guess that its main objective is to help trainees acquire the necessary skills that would enable them to become real teachers. She said:

I have no idea. I didn't read anything about it, but I guess that it should help them become real teachers; teachers who know the basics about how to handle a class, what to do in a classroom. They should have hands on how to teach. I had a discussion with the director before starting classes, he explained the objectives to me, but he did not hand any copy of the training program to me. I think that the content I expose them to will match the curriculum orientations.

4.1.3 Pamela's Meaning of Teacher Preparation

Four major themes emerged from Pamela's description of the meaning she makes of EFL teacher preparation: the practicum is a crucial component, trainees' readiness, linking theory to practice, staff qualification.

In her description, Pamela considers the practicum component she is in charge of as a crucial component of the training program. She is critical to the fact that this component of teacher preparation is too short in the program under consideration, and suggests that it receive more emphasis to reach the aim of good preparation. She contends as follows:

This component is valuable, but the length is too short. This component enables trainees to acquire pedagogical content knowledge. They learn to connect theory to classroom realities. So they need to spend more time in the secondary school where they are sent. They need more immersion in the classroom realities to be ready for the job, and the practicum is scheduled to get them more prepared technically.

As far as trainees' readiness for the profession is concerned she thinks of it as being the main purpose of any teacher preparation program. For her, the practicum component she is in charge of is the one that is conducive to trainees' readiness. She declared:

Teacher preparation means being ready to face classroom realities and this cannot be possible

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without practice.

In her description of effective teaching preparation, she made it clear that theory should be linked to practice and both should go side by side starting from the first year of training. She said what follows:

Theory is different from practice. You can know how to teach. You can learn it through theory, but in class it is another reality when practice is concerned. It is how to do things. It is an activity that must be practised repeatedly. Therefore, theoretical preparation must go side by side with practical preparation. What they learn in theory in the training college must be translated into actions and be evaluated from the beginning till the end of the training.

A very important factor that, in her words, contributes to good preparation relates to staff qualification. She points out clearly that in an EFL teacher education context, teaching should be carried out by a qualified staff, and this is true for the theoretical training as well as the practicum. On that particular component, the supervisor, in her words, should be not only qualified but should also be experienced. Here is what she had to say about this issue:

One important thing is that trainees should be trained by a qualified staff, and at that level there's no worry because the training college attends to that. As for the practicum, supervisors are not chosen at random. Experience and qualification are taken into account.

4.2 The Types of Input Content Provided by the Participant EFL Trainers

The observation data are considered here in order to determine whether or not the input content provided by the participant EFL teacher educators is congruent with the curriculum orientations and their course objectives. The table below presents a summary of the information related to the curriculum objectives drawn from existing documents on the research site, the teacher educators' stated objectives for their course modules in their course syllabi, the input content and the support materials that they provide to meet these objectives, the activities that they carried out during the observations, and the mode of assessment that they intend to use at the end of their courses. It should be noted that the curriculum objectives relate to what trainees are expected to be able to do at the end of their training program.

Table 2. The Input Provided by the Teacher Educators

Curriculum objectives	Teacher educators	Course modules	Course objectives	Input content	Activities	Materials	Assessment mode
-Knowledge of content and ability to transmit it to learners -Ability to manage class efficiently -Ability to plan teaching/learning events -Ability to organize teaching/learning events taking into learners' needs and	Clement	Introduction to Literary analysis	- Acquaint trainees with the literary theories they can use to make sense of a written text and to respond to it. -Have them respond to texts using these theories	-Literary concepts -Relation between reading and writing -Study of literary theories	-Lecture -Discussion on assigned readings	Handout on assigned readings	End of term exam (pencil-paper test)
learning styles -Ability to use efficient and appropriate teaching methods -Ability to create a nurturing classroom environment -Ability to maintain good	Victoria	Learning styles	-Prepare trainees for the teaching of the four language skills -Arouse their awareness of learners' preferences	-Theories on learning styles -The different learning styles -Distinction between learning styles and learning strategies	-Lecture -Discussion on assigned reading	Handouts on assigned readings	End of term exam (pencil-paper test)

| rapport with learners taking into account individual learners' characteristics -Ability to design appropriate assessment instruments -Ability to make adjustments in their teaching in the light of assessment results | Pamela | Teaching practice | -Enable trainees to connect theory to classroom realities -Enable them to acquire the skills in teaching | -Lesson planning -Material selection and design -Classroom management -Stages of a lesson -Assessing learning | -Observation of teaching and learning events -Discussion with supervisor -Classroom teaching -Feedback sessions | Textbooks Teacher's guides Sample lesson plans | Inspection (assessment of the trainee's teaching performance) |

The data from the observations reveal an overemphasis of the input content trainees are exposed to in the course modules on theory, except for the practicum. In Clement's course module, for example, trainees are acquainted with the theoretical information they need, but have no opportunity to carry out literary analysis of texts as stipulated in the course objectives. As for Victoria, the observation data do not reveal any activity that would help trainees see the link between their preparation for the teaching of the four language skills (as stipulated in the course objectives) and the theories on learning styles. Normally, opportunity should be given to them to be exposed to a repertoire of learning tasks related to each of the four skills for them to identify, for example, the task types that match with the different learning styles in an EFL classroom. During the practicum, however, a clear shift of emphasis can be noticed through the observation data. More focus is put on practical tasks to prepare trainees to what they are expected to be able to do once in-service.

Overall, the observation data indicate that the course objectives are met to a limited extent since the input provided by two of the three teacher educators focuses on theoretical knowledge. The data also reveal some discrepancies between the meaning they make of teacher preparation and their classroom practices. While Clement expects trainees to be able to respond to written texts using the literary theories they are acquainted with in his course, no practical learning tasks are provided to make this happen. Similarly, Victoria did not provide her trainees with opportunities to deal with practical awareness raising tasks such as case studies, critical thinking and problem solving tasks. Both Clement and Victoria made it clear in the interview carried out with each of them the importance of linking

theory to practice in their respective courses, but this does not translate into their teaching.

Besides, a look at the content of the curriculum also reveals some tensions between the teacher educators' pedagogical practices and curriculum orientations. Though the teacher educators are aware of the necessity of linking theory to practice, the input content provided and the learning activities proposed give little room to practice, which indicates limited implementation of the curriculum orientations. Most of what relates to linking theory to practice is left to the care of the practicum component. Most of the teaching is carried out through lecture and discussion on assigned readings, which justifies the type of materials and mode of assessment used by the teacher educators.

4.3 Materials Used to Support Input Content at the Training College

Two of the participant EFL teacher educators used handouts on assigned readings. Even the third in charge of the practicum supervision resorts solely to secondary school student textbooks, teacher guides, and sample lesson plans for her supervision work. A look at the course objectives in the three modules reveals the teacher educators' intention to link theory to practice in their respective courses. However, the materials used, though they help the teachers transmit the theoretical content provided, are not congruent with the course objectives. In addition, though the curriculum orientations emphasize learners' acquisition of practical skills, the learning activities carried out in Clement's and Victoria's course modules and the mode of assessment reveal a heavy emphasis on theoretical content provided through reading materials. In teacher education, one thing is to know about theories, but the other thing is to have a clear understanding of how they apply to practice, and this objective can be reached if trainees are given exposure to practical tasks that would enable them to acquire the know-how. In Clement's course module, for example, trainees are acquainted with different literary theories, but they have no exposure to literary analysis task to help them gain mastery of such tasks in order to be able to teach them in their own EFL classes in the future.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal some commonalities in the informants' perceptions of EFL teacher education. Of the views expressed by them, there is one that warrants a special attention. All three acknowledge the importance of quality teacher preparation in the teacher education context. They are also aware of the fact that reaching such a goal requires opportunities for linking theory to practice in their respective TEFL course components. Unfortunately, this does not translate into reality because of time constraints, and more importantly because of the lack of adequate materials, which creates a gap between their course objectives and their pedagogical practices. Teachers constitute vital agents in any educational system. Their readiness for the profession requires that a special attention be given to the way they are trained and the resources that are made available for that purpose. In an attempt to respond to the need for quality teacher preparation, a special attention should be given to the availability of adequate materials in the teacher education context in order to facilitate an optimum mix of theory and practice and thereby to enable student teachers to make sense of their learning and take an active role in their

own professional development processes (Tercanlioglu, 2001).

The issue related to the lack of materials is a crucial one at all levels of the educational system in the Republic of Benin. Despite the current approach to teaching and learning which is competency-based, no adequate and permanent solution has ever been found to date to equip schools. A key characteristic of the competency-based approach highlights the crucial role of teaching materials by stipulating that a variety of support materials keyed to the skills being mastered be used in the teaching learning context. As such, detailed materials are then needed to support the acquisition of knowledge and the targeted skills. This aspect of the CBA has surely some implications for teacher educators in their teacher preparation mission. With regard to this, Korthagen, Loughran and Russel (2006) point clearly to the teacher educators' important role in selecting and using in their own classes or courses teaching materials that provide them with the opportunity to model the teaching approach that they preach in the teacher education context. Student teachers will be likely to design and use innovative teaching materials if they are fed on the same diet in the teacher education context.

Another aspect of the findings that deserves attention pertains to the informants' ignorance of the curriculum orientations at the teacher training college. Such information, as they put it, is not formally made available to them. In a school context, should teachers have knowledge of the curriculum goals and content through a guessing game? Should program goals be part of the hidden curriculum? Should the competencies targeted by a training program be obscure to trainers? This situation calls for an urgent revision of the management system in the school involved in the study.

6. Implications

The findings of this study suggest some implications for both teaching and administrative staffs at the teacher training college under consideration. First, there is a need for an effective collaborative work of both staffs for the design, implementation and follow-up of training programs at the school. Both categories of actors should be familiar with these programs and make them available for the student teachers. Teacher educators' knowledge of the program goals will enable them to design their course syllabi in accordance with the curriculum orientations. Second, the findings also suggest some implications for the teacher educators themselves as to the effort they should make to link theory to practice in their courses. All three informants pointed to the importance of this link in the components that they are in charge of; yet they made little effort to make it happen in their courses. All three relied mostly on printed materials. An effective preparation of student teachers for the design and use of teaching materials calls for the trainers' ongoing professional development. Such professional development opportunities will enable them to be familiar with up-to-date educational technology and its integration to their teaching.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights the value of studying teacher educators' classroom practices, more specifically what they actually do while implementing their course objectives. It also points to the need for granting a special attention to teaching materials in EFL teacher education. The knowledge-base of EFL teacher education is not limited to the acquisition of theoretical notions. Prospective teachers also need exposure to practical tasks in the process of learning to teach. Their involvement in learning activities that will prompt them to derive theoretical principles from observation, analysis, critical thinking, and problem-solving should be the focus of TEFL courses.

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Appendix

Interview Guide Questions

1/ What does EFL teacher preparation mean to you?

2/ How would you describe your understanding of teaching in an EFL teacher education context?

3/ What types of input content do you create to prepare your trainees for EFL teaching in the course module that you teach?

4/ What types of materials do you use to support their learning?

5/ How would you describe the role of teaching materials in EFL teacher education?