



VOICES FROM PRACTITIONERS: WHAT DO ELT TEACHERS EXPECT?

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Abstract

Research supports that practitioners' belief and expectations play a pivotal role in teaching behavior. Therefore, the purpose of current study is to explore English language teaching (ELT) practitioners' expectations in relation to school administration, school setting, teaching materials and students. The participants are teachers (n=6) with more than 10 years of experience in ELT. They all work for the Department of Basic English at a private university in Turkey. The data collection procedure is one-to-one and semi-structured interviews with the participants. After transcribing the digital recordings of the interviews, the qualitative data obtained was analyzed via the construction of themes and patterns. Member checking was ensured through sharing the personal analysis of interview data with each participant. The findings indicate practitioners' views on educational problems and suggested solutions. The results of this study might be of great use to administrators, educational planners, policy makers and prospective teachers.

Key Words: Teachers' Expectations, English Language Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The expectancy theory developed by Vroom (1964) is based on the notion that individuals are in the expectation of particular actions in order to attain particular goals. The theory, as a comprehensive motivational model, explains the connection between effort and performance as well as the work outcomes that are desired in relation to different performance levels (Lewis et al., 1995). Among the several factors affecting the 'effort and performance' expectancy, there exists the condition that if the person believes situational support is provided for the performance or not (Mohrman & Lawler, 1996). Within educational organization, the individual's motivation is bounded to the existence of back up in the setting. Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory, which has received widespread acceptance, proposes the importance of satisfying personal needs arraying from psychological to self-actualization. Should this theory be applied to organizational setting, it can be assumed that people who cannot meet lower-order needs at the work place will not pursue higher-order ones. Therefore, the demands awaiting realization cause hindrance for prospective targets.

In order to depict the motivational model in an institution, expectancy is one of the most important areas of research. The close connection between expectancy and improvement in student performance has been emphasized in various studies (Enderlin-Lampe, 1997; Kelley et al., 2002). In another research on teachers' expectation from inspectors in relation to guidance and the level of realization of such expectations, the results indicated that inspectors were not efficient enough to meet those expectations (Polat & Uğurlu, 2008). Gömleksiz et al. (2010) examined prospective teachers' expectations from teaching profession in a case study; the findings indicated that, among various variables, the students had high expectations in relation to socio-cultural and career aspects. Besides, there was gender difference as the female participants had higher expectations.

In addition to motivation and expectation, teachers' general job satisfaction has also been pinpointed in order to understand their work behavior in organizations. Various factors such as class size and changes in the education system cause dissatisfaction among practitioners (Evans, 1998). The vast array of literature indicates the close relevance with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Besides, research findings designate



that job satisfaction enhances motivation, positive work values and performance, which lead to low level of burnout or absenteeism (Bagraim, 2003).

Aim

The purpose of current study is to explore English language teaching (ELT) practitioners' expectations in relation to different variables, which are school administration, school setting, teaching materials and students. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are ELT practitioners' expectation(s) from school administration, which can contribute to teachers' positive motivation and job satisfaction?
2. What kind of a school setting do ELT practitioners expect, which can contribute to teachers' positive motivation and job satisfaction?
3. What are the ELT practitioners' expectations from the material development unit at the Department of Basic English (DBE), which can contribute to teachers' positive motivation and job satisfaction?
4. What do practitioners expect from the students at DBE, which can contribute to teachers' positive motivation and job satisfaction?

Limitation

Although the literature involves studies upon undesirable or desirable effects of teacher expectation on students' academic achievement (Good, 1987; Babad, et. al., 1982, Jussim, 1989), the scope of this study is not to identify such effects. Within the study, it is aimed to find out practitioners' demands from the school and students in order to achieve higher motivation and job satisfaction in the profession. Therefore, the scope is limited to personal motivational factors only.

METHOD

The participants are teachers (n=6) with more than 10 years of experience in ELT. They all work for the department of Basic English at a private university in Turkey. Within the data collection procedure, the participants were considered as informants for the related data (Yin, 1998). In terms of interview instrumentation, standardized open-ended interview type was applied (Patton, 1990). The data collection procedure is one-to-one and semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews lasted about 40 to 65 minutes. The participants' statements were recorded. After transcribing the digital recordings of the interviews, the qualitative data obtained was analyzed via the construction of themes and patterns. Member checking was ensured through sharing the personal analysis of interview data with each participant.

FINDINGS

Expectations from the Administration

The data collected from the participating practitioners on their expectations from the administration were categorized under three main themes which were 'testing', 'regulation by the Council of Higher Education on ELT' and 'new regulations needed'.

Testing

One of the most recurrent themes related with the participants' expectations from the administration is on the examinations given at the department. It was stated that the students take only 6 exams and 2 quizzes in the whole academic year of English education, which was regarded as insufficient by all the participants. The participants (n=6) expect more exams in number and variety in task assignment such as project works and presentations. As stated by a participant, "if a student cannot score enough from the first two mid-terms, she/he loses the chance of taking proficiency test administered at the end of the academic year, and this concludes in loss of motivation and willingness. The only option left for the student is to wait for the summer school all through the year." The participants believe that at least a quiz in a week can keep the students alert on the learning objectives that were targeted.



Regulation by the Council of Higher Education on ELT

According to the recent regulations by the Council of Higher Education in Turkey, the students enrolled at the departments of which medium of instruction is Turkish are to be registered at their own departments even if they cannot pass the proficiency exam administered by the department of Basic English at the end of the academic year (<http://www.resmi-gazete.org/tarih/20090628-7.htm>). The related regulation was stated by the participants (n=6) that turned ELT education into a burden in the eye of the student and led to “confusion” and “low motivation” on the student side. The participants expect the administration to revise the educational program of ELT at the university so that, as indicated by a participant, “one-year, non-stop ELT education can be turned into a program of 4 year education that the students can have all through their departmental education so that losing time and money on one-year-only-English education expands into four year of learning English and graduation with the highest level achieved.”

New Regulations Needed

Under the category of theme; new regulations needed, the participants came up with expectations in relation to ‘workload’, ‘rotation’ and ‘student profile’. It was observed that while indicating problematic issues, the participants also suggested their own solutions for such issues.

Workload

Another common theme among the data collected was “the need for new regulations” in the workplace. The majority of participants (n=4) indicated that equal distribution of workload was needed. As stated by a practitioner, “if we are all members of a team, not always the same people should be loaded with too much work while the same people are just ‘telling the working bees what to do’”. Therefore, the practitioners are in the expectation that the administration keeps the record of employees’ workload and regulates it each academic term to ensure equality.

Student Profile

The participants (n=5) stated that they expect the administration to improve the student profile who preferred that particular university. Students with “low motivation” or “low success level” were stated to have “less awareness” on the importance and the necessity of learning English as a foreign language. The participants who highlighted the related issue came up with the suggested solution that the university was supposed to provide more scholarships for high-scorers at the university entrance exam, which would contribute to the betterment of student profile having English language education at the department.

Rotation

The participants (n=3) highlighted that they were not given the “opportunity” to be rotated, which would provide them to work with students with different proficiency levels. The teachers who work with the lowest level of English keep teaching them for more than several years. As a participant stated, “I carry out my research work in pursue of PhD degree in ELT, I want to teach departmental English courses. I informed the administration on my request during teacher appraisals countless times. Nevertheless, I have never been given such an opportunity or the chance of taking any responsibility at the departments of testing or material development”.

Expectations from the School Setting

Technology

As stated by all the participants (n=6), they expect the school setting to be improved with technological facilities. “The classrooms are completely empty”, states a practitioner and adds that “even state universities and schools are equipped with smart boards or projectors. However, we only have our carton materials, coursebooks and CD players”. The participants indicated that there is only one language laboratory and video room which were supposed to be reserved beforehand by the teachers who wanted to integrate technology into teaching. In addition, the number of computer laboratories on campus was found to be insufficient by the teachers and they also ask for at least one computer in each office for two or three teachers’ use.



Class population

The problem of crowded classes was stated by practitioners (n=3). They stated that they have 22 students in each classroom, which was regarded as “too much in number for a language education”. They shared their expectations on the class population and proposed that reducing the number to 15 or 16 students in each class would enable successful language teaching environment. A participant stated that “with less than 15 students, I do not attain ‘enough communication exchange’ but with more than 15 ends up with ‘too much communication and distraction’ among students”.

Expectations from the Material Development Unit

Variety

As for teaching materials, in order to achieve standardization, the Material Development Unit (MDU) is responsible for providing supplementary to the coursebook for in class use. The participants (n=6) expect variety in such materials to cater for different student needs and interests. A participant indicated that “although MDU works much efficiently this year, the review materials provided before mid-terms have been the same at least for five years”. Another participant stated that “material design is not based on realistic targets as they are not built upon classroom teaching objectives. Especially for writing skill, the materials are either too easy or too difficult”.

Expectations from the Students

Motivation, Awareness and Autonomy

The participating teachers expect the learners to be motivated for learning the English language (n=6). The majority of participants (n=4) stated that should the students have ‘awareness’ on why they need to learn a foreign language, they succeed in the attempt. The practitioners (n=3) also indicated that students with learning ‘autonomy’ develop their own learning strategies and support in-class instruction with extensive reading and listening activities.

CONCLUSION

The findings of present study suggest that the practitioners in this specific case have expectations from the Testing and Material Development Units on attaining variety. Besides, the teachers expect renewal of regulations in relation to workload, student profile and rotation. The teachers’ happiness, satisfaction, dedication and commitment are supposed to be ensured so that both the society and their students benefit from them (Sarıçoban and Mengü, 2008). Providing that teachers’ such expectations are taken into account by administrative units, practitioners’ motivation might be affected in the positive aspect, which has a close connection with maintaining teachers’ job satisfaction.

As stated by Demirtaş and Sert (2010), Turkish learners attending English language classes at a Department of Basic English are not equipped with autonomous learning skills. Since the thematic analysis of current research also underscores the same finding in relation to teacher expectations, such a lack in personal competency requires attention. Teacher expectations in relation to technology, reduced class population and revision in the educational program of department may pave the way to increasing student motivation, autonomy and teachers’ job satisfaction. As indicated by expectancy theory, in order to create the work output that is desired, the employees must be provided with sufficient opportunity. Thus, a combination of favorable circumstances must be experienced to reach for the desired work output (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). The administration maintaining communication with practitioners on their expectations and enabling convenient teaching environment takes a further step in ensuring teacher motivation and student success.

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