A CONTRASTIVE VIEW OF TEACHING APPROACHES IN A ROMANIAN AND A NORWEGIAN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

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Abstract:This paper focuses on student-centeredness, underpinning four case studies bringing together tried-and-tested approaches to teaching in higher education. Although the teacher education programs in both the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași and the University of Agder in Kristiansand primarily aim at enabling students to construct their own identities as reflective practitioners (in Romania) or critical thinkers (in Norway), both state-defined approaches depart from the conventional monopoly of roles at post-graduate level, which leads to a heterarchical relationship between teacher trainers and trainees.

Keywords: student-centeredness, case studies, higher education, teaching approaches, effective instruction, reflective practitioners, critical thinkers, heterarchical relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a common presupposition – however slippery its accuracy – to predict that the choice of university teaching methods will be followed by significant student knowledge base differences. By considering different approaches to teaching and learning and cumulating the data from four case studies, this paper strives to see how distinct inputs represented by different teaching methods are related to the outputs of the teaching-learning nexus in each case. This is not to argue against any teaching approach, but to make available to the reader a breadth of evidence drawing on a fusion of theory, practice and pedagogical research interspersed with teacher education models and student teacher learning tools.

In a modern world characterized by cyclical waves of renewal, rapid changes and paradigm fluctuation, higher education (henceforth, HE), too, must continually reinvent itself and face a variety of challenges. Thus, contemporary societies rely on the university training of fervent, mindful individuals to develop skills and competencies recommended for today's global citizens. Universities have become the place where "new ideas germinate; roots strike and grow tall and sturdy" (Bidabadi, Nasrisfahani, Rouhollahi, & Khalili, 2016, p. 171).

Perhaps the most impostant task of HEIs, according to Dubin & Taveggia (1968), is "to develop the habits of study which are, or may be, the precondition of learning" (p. 9). They present the results of experimental comparisons between two teaching methods, such as face-to-face instruction and independent study. The first one encompasses the lecture, group-discussions[1]and the tutorial[2], where the presence of the instructor is a necessary condition for

[1] Many colleges today "… divide class time between lecture and discussions" (McKeachie, 1963, p. 1127). Lectures furnish the transmission of factual information promptly and efficiently. In contrast, discussion sessions provide students with opportunities to balance sound theory and practical advice, to undertake various activities and receive feedback. This is the "have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too" method, as Dubin & Taveggia (1968) seem to suggest.

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learning. Independent study, as opposed to face-to-face instruction, shifts the focus of attention on the student as a self-reliant individual, as his own teacher[3].

University teaching and learning have witnessed a major stress on the necessity to monitor and instruct educators in recent years. Inevitably, there are some pitfalls associated with the university system, as shown by Hussey & Smith (2002), who argue that the general direction of developmental changes has brought obvious and praiseworthy benefits accompanied, unfortunately, by malign disadvantages (p. 220). The so-called 'maggots in the apple' seem to be connected to both the teaching skills of university teachers and the beliefs and attitudes of students as the main beneficiaries of instructional efforts.

Smith (2004) points to a discrepancy between schools and universities regarding both instructional tasks and teacher praxis. Apparently, contextualized reading in HE is "a major stumbling block for a significant number of students" who find themselves 'forced' to adapt their literacy capabilities from a "limited intensive reading in pre-higher education to wide-ranging, extensive reading in higher education" (p. 91). It appears that students emerge from their previous studies with a prefabricated set of attitudes and expectations, as well as with a narrow supply of crucial study skills.

The ensuing sections will explore the extent to which novice teachers duplicate the behaviors of the 'ex cathedra' teaching types they were habituated with and demonstrate that explicit and diverse working routines displayed by the university teachers described in the four case studies at the end of this paper help students develop their own approach to teaching.

2. TEACHING STYLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

HE teaching styles chronicle the way university teachers conduct their lectures to ensure a productive learning experience. Nicholls (2002) makes a noteworthy distinction between teaching style, lecturer behavior and teaching strategy. Teaching styles appear to be derived from both lecturer behavior and teaching strategy adopted to ensure student learning. As such, the teacher may be either "aloof or distant from the students" or "enthusiastic and friendly" (p. 10). This distinction subtly suggests the teacher's expectations from the group of students when managing teaching sessions. Usually, teaching styles are adopted to match the learning characteristics of the student body or to fit the preferences of the lecturer. However, the teaching styles teachers select should also be in harmony with the intended learning outcomes, with the aims of the training program and the objectives set at the start of the teaching session, cautiously eliminating the risk of using only a particular teaching style by showing adjustability in the choice of methods and materials.

In citing the three categories of teaching styles proposed by Barnes (1987), Nicholls comments on both the efficacy and deficiency of each. Thus, in a closed teaching approach, the lecturer is considered to be didactic and formal in his or her teaching. There will be little involvement by the students, and generally material and information is given rather than discussed or shared. In a framed teaching approach, the lecturer is considered to provide a structure for the teaching session within which the students are able to contribute their own ideas, views and interpretations to the information being given. In the third one – the negotiated approach – the lecturer is considered to provide a teaching session where the direction of the teaching events has to a considerable extent be dependent on the students' ideas and contributions.

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[2] The tutorial method deals with interpersonal "conferences" between a student and a teacher. The emphasis is placed on a reading or a group of readings recently completed by the student, with short guiding teacher sessions intermingled with student activities, aimed at helping the learners master certain aspects of the subject matter.

[3]Gagne (1967) puts emphasis upon the fact that "learning can, and often does take place in the absence of the teacher" (p. 30). In other words, the method of independent study delegates to the student central responsibility for his own learning.

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This tripartite distinction implies that student involvement in course-work decision-making can be either closed, framed or negotiated – in other words, absent, partially present and entirely present on a sliding scale of student engagement. Each aspect of the student involvement ratio in the process of teaching runs through issues of content, focus, teacher-role and teaching methods.

2. THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The experience of foreign language trainees as students becomes the bedrock of their future language teaching identity. The way one learns to teach is consistent with how one was taught during the 'other side of the desk' affair as both student and user of the foreign language. The fledging identity of language teachers is not the mere result of pre-service training, but a combination between teacher preparation and entrenched teaching patterns students encounter during their studies. Freeman (2016) goes on to argue that the dichotomy between the "teachers are born" and "teachers are made" (p. 43) assumptions helps distinguishing between in-born personal abilities and cultivated capacities within individuals, which echo the nature versus nurture debate popular in social science. Both views are directly associated with the notion of quality in teaching and teacher education, as well as with hypotheses about the process of recruiting and preparing novice teachers. Nevertheless, effective instruction is central to the craft of teaching. Training, professional support and pedagogical experience are gained through formal instruction within teacher preparation programs which aim at improving the quality of English language teaching (ELT) nowadays.

4. TEACHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

The Romanian national education system acts in accordance with the instructions provided by the legislative regulations. The right to education, together with the right to ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identity of citizens is specified in the Constitution adopted by Romania in 1991. The educational system is divided into public and private institutions and programme organisations. Bîrzea et al. (2006) divide the Romanian education and training system into five chronological components – pre-school, compulsory, upper secondary, post-highschool, university and post-university education (p. 438).

Pre-school education takes place in kindergartens and is organized for 3-to-6-year-olds with a standard, extended or weekly programme. The pre-schooler's participation in this preliminary stage of education is optional. The authors report an overall participation rate of 69.2% in the 2002-2003 school year. Compulsory education comprises 10 grades and includes primary education (grades 1-4), the first phase of lower secondary education (grades 5-8) and the second phase of lower secondary education (grades 9-10). Upper secondary education, as the authors revealed in 2006, is considered to be organised in high-schools (4-5 years) or in Arts and Crafts schools (2-3 years). The post-highschool education level (1 to 3 years) encompasses the tertiary education at the non-university level, organised in post-highshool and foreman schools. University[4] education involves, on the one hand, short-cycle university education (for 3 years, organised in colleges) and long-cycle university education (for 4 to 6 years, organised in universities, institutes and academies), on the other. Post-university education, in its turn, incorporates advanced studies in the specialisation certified by a diploma (from 2 to 3 semesters), the master's studies (2-4 semesters) and the doctoral studies and post-doctoral courses.

The Romanian pre-service training of teachers is based either on a concurrent model – both the theoretical and the practical training being offered at the same time as instruction in a certain field of study – or on a consecutive training system available for graduates planning

[4] Starting with 2005, the Bologna Process has been implemented in Romania, higher education being divided into three cycles – the first (3-4 years) allocates the title of Bachelor to graduates, the second (2 years) the title of Master and the third, comprising the doctoral studies (3 years), grants the title of Doctor of Science.

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to be teachers at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels, which is not free of charge, as it is at the undergraduate level.

Velea & Istrate (2011) describe the Romanian initial teacher training system, providing details about the specialized departments and institutions in which it is carried out in order to assemble the information and skills of future professionals in a specific field, the admission procedures, the duration of the studies, the practical training component of prospective teachers and the options available at post-graduate level for graduates (pp. 272-277). The authors claim that pre-school and primary level teachers' training occurs in Faculties of Education Sciences – Departments[5] for Primary and Pre-Primary Pedagogy at Bachelor level.

The common admission procedure consists of the average of the Baccalaureate mark and the ones obtained during grades 9 to 12[6]. Up until this point, the steps of the admission process candidates take are similar to the procedures followed by secondary level teachers. Candidates enrolling in primary and pre-primary teacher training are also interviewed. Their communication skills and the motivation for the teaching profession are assessed. The period of undergraduate studies is of 3 years, students accumulating 180 ECTS. The teacher training curriculum involves both compulsory and optional subjects. Secondary-level teachers' training takes place in HEIs, as they study a specific domain associated with the subject(s) they will be able to teach – either one or two subjects. Once students agree to attend the concurrent training program, it becomes compulsory. In Romania, the Training Departments are organized in universities and follow a distinct curriculum[7].

Graduates of the BA level are entitled to teach at the secondary compulsory school (grades 5 to 10), while the graduates of the MA level are granted the opportunity to teach in the post-compulsory education. At the end of the training program, students receive a professional certificate which, in conjunction with their graduation diploma of a HEI, gives them the right to teach.

The practical training of both general and subject teachers is completed within schools. Future teachers are assessed and supervised both by university tutors and school mentors in pre-university educational units. At the ouset of their pre-service training, students observe the lesson taught by their mentors. Subsequently, they compile their own lesson plans and teach under the supervision of the school mentor. During the debriefing session following the teaching performance, students receive feedback and recommendations for improvement. For the future secondary school teachers, the practical training is extended over two semesters and over one semester during the Master studies.

Prospective teachers have at their disposal the opportunity to apply for further studies, which surrenders better chances to keep one's job if the issue of personnel reduction arises. Post-graduate degrees also grant incoming teachers with the chance of being better paid and the opportunity of a superior teaching position.

5. TEACHER EDUCATION IN NORWAY

Research indicates that in Norway, the HE system is organized in "fifty public-sector, state-funded universities and other institutions (Airey, Lauridsen, Räsänen, Salö, & Schwach,

[5] These departments are, in fact, the former Pedagogical University Colleges (before the Bologna Process was implemented), as Velea & Istrate (2011, p. 272) indicate. In the academic year 2005-2006, enrollment in a pedagogical high-school was considered insufficient for future teachers. The academic staff at the Departments for Primary and Pre-Primary Pedagogy is recruited identically as the academic staff of other HEIs and has the same opportunities to evolve professionally.

[6] Some faculties may combine the results of an admission examination with the Baccalaureate score of the candidate.

[7] This curriculum is included in the frame-curriculum of the faculties. Velea & Istrate (2011) report on the existence of 52 Romanian universities having teacher training departments.

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2017, p. 565), with 27% of the master-level students being enrolled in English-medium instruction programs.

Norwegian students follow two traditional paths in teacher education. At first, they take a disciplinary degree, where they take possession of scientific ideals and ways of thinking. The next step they take in order to join the teaching profession in their specific subjects is a teacher training program after their disciplinary studies[8]. Nilsen (2011) indicates that this is a one-year program (worth 60 ECTS credits) called the "Practical Pedagogical Program". There are two versions available – for candidates with an academic degree and for candidates with a vocational competence. It can be attended in both universities and in regional university colleges (p. 228).

Nilsen (2011) further claims the existence of a second tradition connected to teacher-training practices (p. 228). The alternative is a four-year-concurrent teacher education program, seen as the leading program in Norway. Until 2009, it has only been offered in regional university colleges. Starting with 2009, it has become available at university-level, too (at Tromsø University). The major difference between universities and regional university colleges[9] resides in the amount of academic freedom the two have in offering degrees with their corresponding content.

The national core-curriculum for teacher education includes a general segment referring to the role of the teacher within the Norwegian society, the professional ideals to be acquired and key views on children's education, learning and teaching. It also involves more fine-grained descriptions related to the teacher's competencies that need to be refined. HE in Norway – as compared to HE in Romania – has implemented the Bologna system in 1993 (12 years earlier).Teacher education is also organized at bachelor or master level. The Norwegian teacher education system nurses the development of two types of teachers:

1. **General teachers** (with an expansive professional competence) – educated through a concurrent TE program at the primary and lower secondary level. Such teachers can further be:
    a. **Pre-school teachers** – attending a three-year program (30 credits) to occupy a teaching position in kindergartens. If they decide to take one more TE supplementary year, they are entitled to teach at level 1-3 in primary school.
    b. **General teachers attending a four-year profession oriented program** (120 credits) – they have the opportunity to select and combine subjects with 30 or 60 credits.
2. **Subject teachers –** which are trained to be subject specialists and didactically competent instructors. Their aim is to teach two or three disciplinary subjects at lower and upper secondary levels[10]. Their training takes place after they graduate. The disciplinary component may be at either BA or MA level.

The 2005 admission procedures for individuals wishing to get into general teacher education reflects the criterion of "a minimum level with respect to marks in Norwegian language and literature, Mathematics and Social Science" (Nilsen, 2011, p. 234). Because of this, the number of Norwegian candidates to enroll in teacher education studies has decreased (recruitment is a crucial issue, especially in rural areas).

[8] The training of Norwegian teachers is subject-specific. A necessary condition for students wishing to become teachers is to be university graduates.
[9] Regional university colleges cannot provide master and PhD programs without the ministry's permission.
[10] In order to become subject teachers, they must take a one-year TE program worth 60 credits and attend mentored practice sessions in schools. Their studies focus on educational theory and subject didactics.

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The practical training of prospective teachers ranges from a minumum of 12 weeks in the one-year programs, 12 to 14 weeks in the three-year programs to a minimum of 20 weeks in the four-year programs, as Nilsen (2011) has shown (p. 238). The students' school-based practice is conducted similarly to the one Romanian students complete. The major difference between the Romanian and the Norwegian systems is that Norwegian students get the marks Passed or Not Passed when evaluated on their teaching performance.

Norwegian students have the opportunity to continue their studies at the master's level. After all, lifelong learning among Norwegian teachers is regarded as a shared goal. Students who get a master's degree attain the Lecturer title. They can go even deeper with their education pursuits and decide to enroll for PhD studies. After a 3- or 4-year TE program, students get the title Teacher (which is different from their previous one, that of Adjunct).

6. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

As the main objective of this paper was to produce qualitative data, the approach adopted combines a conventional literature review with the examination and discussion of four case studies based on distinct teaching approaches utilized by teacher educators in two countries – Romania and Norway.

Case studies offer a flexible design procedure, allowing for fruiful (and sometimes heated) discussions and opportunities for focused reflection. Such cases are created through investigation and start their very existence when researchers conceive them. They provide readers with a forward glimpse of concrete teaching events, helping them anticipate meaningful situational patterns even before coming across university teaching contexts as the ones described in the forthcoming chapers. The last part of this paper is, in fact, a half-grown casebook. It comprises a number of teaching cases that deal with micro-teaching and flipped classrooms, critical writing across the curriculum, traditional lectures and trainer feedback solutions both from the perspective of the trainee and of the trainer who must deal with the issues at hand.

The selection of the two educational institutions was motivated by the fact that, first, I am a student in the Applied Linguistics MA program at UAIC in Iași, second due to my one-semester Erasmus experience in Kristiansand. The four trainers were involved in the study in confidential and anonymous conditions.

The 1st trainer (T_1) has been with the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Letters, UAIC, since 1996, having experience in teaching English morpho-syntax, translation, academic writing for research and methodology at BA level and instructional technologies and foreign language acquisition and learning at MA level. The 2nd trainer (T_2) has had over a decade of experience in teaching English Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Letters. The 3rd trainer (T_3) and the 4th (T_4) have taken over the two classes attended in Norway – Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition – for the first time in the academic year 2018-2019, although they have built their approach to teaching over the last 30 years. T_3 was interested in phonetics and phonology, psycholinguistics and historical linguistics, speech processing and lexical representation, while T_4 had expertise in the field of cognitive psychology, neurolinguistics, morphology and language acquisition. T_3 and T_4 co-taught the two courses taken in Norway, each being allocated one half of the semester for each course.

The Norwegian group of trainees had a Bachelor's degree with an English Major of at least 80 ECTS credits. The English Major had to include at least 30 credits in language/linguistics and at least 30 credits in literature. Students were supposed to have obtained the average grade C for their English Major in the Bachelor's program. The Romanian students, too, had a Bachelor degree with an English Major or Minor of 180 ECTS credits.

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18 Romanian trainees initially took the two courses – Theories and Approaches to TEFL and FL Acquisition and Learning. By the end of the time alloted to the courses, the number of students diminished to 15, as three of them chose to withdraw from the MA program. 22 Norwegian trainees registered for the Language Acquisition classes at the beginning of the 1st term and the same number of students registered for the final examination. 25 Norwegian trainees registered for the Linguistic Theory classes, this number decreasing to 24 by the end of the semester.

The process of data collection was undertaken both during the first semester of the academic year 2017-2018 for approximately two months in which Romanian trainees at the Faculty of Letters at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași attended the first module of their master's studies in Applied Linguistics and throughout the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019 for 4 months and a half at the Faculty of Humanities and Education in Kristiansand, Norway, when I attended MA courses as an Erasmus exchange student.

7. CASE STUDIES

The Romanian master's program is ideal for teachers of English or for those wishing to build a career in this direction. The MA courses significant for my analysis are Theories and Approaches to TEFL and FL Acquisition and Learning. The Norwegian master's program provides a basis for teaching English literature and language or working with English in a research capacity. Of these courses, the ones significant for my case studies are Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition. The two Romanian trainers use interactive lectures, seminar discussions and oral presentations, focusing on the ongoing evaluation of students, while the Norwegian ones use traditional lectures and feedback workshops, assessing students through ungraded assignments and digital examinations.

Each case study deals with the guiding theory behind the teaching approach, a description of activities, the implementation of the teaching approach and a discussion of results.

An alternative to the traditional lecture is the flipped classroom, where the trainer and trainees exchange roles. Romanian students undertake research to prepare for the delivery of team-presentations and carry out peer- and self-assessment. Students take charge of their own learning and work collaboratively to achieve presentation target goals. At first, the teacher set forth the guidelines for student portfolios, helping students to become self-managing. Students received oral peer-feedback, learning to negotiate content and refine presentation techniques. The flipped classroom experience led to a revision of attitudes and practices, shown in the end-of-term assessment grids students completed as part of their portfolios. As a result, trainees combined theory, observation and reflective practice to prepare themselves for full-time teaching. They participated actively during classes and made use of ICTs to deliver presentations. Thus, trainees focused on essential 'up for grabs' student-centered activities.

The second case study focuses on team-microteaching as loop input, where a model of target teaching behavior is practiced by trainees within time limits, with a small number of learners and teaching objectives. The trainer used Tessa Woodward's (1991) concept of *loop input*: two trainees acted as teachers concentrating on a certain method and the other trainees simulated specific age and proficiency levels. In Woodward's terms, the content (for example, the techniques within the Audio-Lingual method) is carried by the process (drilling students to use grammatical sentence patterns), but the process (the actual teaching) is also part of the content. That is the loop. The microteaching session follows four steps: the briefing (here, students became familiar with Diane Larsen Freeman's teaching methods), the team-teaching, the debriefing (when students received feedback) and the re-teaching stage, which was dropped altogether in this program to leave room for constructive criticism and reflection. The approach provided students with real teaching experience and immediate feedback on their performance.

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The third case study illustrates a Norwegian approach – the traditional lecture format. As this was a theory-oriented course, lectures combined with teacher-delivered PowerPoint Presentations were compatible with the distribution of large amounts of information. Students read primary research articles prior to lecture meetings. These were posted on a virtual learning platform system called Canvas. During classes, the lecturer was the sole performer, offering detailed explanations. At the end of each lecture, trainees received 'Test-yourself questions', useful for exam preparation. Then, students evaluated the quality and scope of the instruction, offering proposals for changes through class representatives. Before taking digital examinations on an assessment platform called Inspera, trainees completed two article summaries. Despite using lectures, the trainer placed all trainees at the center of her teaching, allowing them to negotiate the course content and the teaching methods and educating them to become digitally competent teachers.

The last case study is based on a Norwegian course aimed at getting students to read and discuss primary research literature to improve their critical thinking skills and be prepared to do a better job in formal examinations. At first, trainees were offered some background on summary critiques and a list of assigned readings. They focused on the experimental design of a research article and followed writing guidelines to submit assignments. An in-class oral report after the submission would follow, trainees receiving peer-feedback and formal feedback on Canvas, the platform mentioned before. At the end, students were better prepared to review research articles for final exams. The main benefit of the approach is that students could bridge the gap between theory and practice, building critical skills. The trainer used a hierarchy of thinking procedures: 1. Privileging information; 2. Filtering it through your own words; and 3. Commenting on results based on the successful replication of other scientific studies.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The global conclusion of this paper after reviewing the two programs is that Romanian trainees receive microteaching and presentation opportunities to develop practical teaching skills, while Norwegian trainees get to develop research skills necessary for end-of-program thesis writing. More concretely, these results confirm the hypothesis that in Norway, content-learning is aimed at educating digitally competent teachers through low-stakes assignments and final examinations, while in Romania, the ongoing evaluation system equips trainees with practical classroom skills. Both programs have similar ultimate aims and rely on a non-hierarchical teacher-student relationship, but the Romanian one focuses on training reflective practitioners and the Norwegian one on training critical thinkers. While the Norwegian TEFL teacher training program mainly uses the lecture format to convey subject matter knowledge and student evaluations to place trainees at the center of all educational events, its Romanian counterpart is based on the concept of recursion, where students'teaching and presentation sessions are embedded within the training classroom to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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