EFL teachers training in Palestine: Challenges and Opportunities

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Article Info

Abstract
This study examined the effectiveness of training EFL teachers in Palestine. Participants in the 12-weeks training program were 30 EFL teachers. In addition to surveys, and interviews, the study employed a mixed-method design. As a result of the training program, teachers' knowledge and skills significantly improved. A high degree of satisfaction was reported by the participants, who indicated that the training program had a positive impact on their teaching practices. A similar training program for EFL teachers should be implemented in Palestine, according to the study, which emphasizes the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to continue their professional development.

Introduction

In the Palestinian educational system, English as a foreign language (EFL) is a crucial subject. It is a mandatory subject from grades 1 to 12, and a prerequisite for university admission. Students' academic achievement and future prospects are highly influenced by the quality of EFL teaching. Nonetheless, EFL teachers in Palestine confront a number of difficulties, such as a lack of training opportunities, insufficient funding, and outmoded instructional strategies.

Throughout, there has been an increase in recent years in the value of professional development for teachers. Professional development programs are designed to improve teachers' knowledge and abilities, their instructional strategies, and eventually, the academic performance of their students. A number of projects have been started in Palestine to give EFL teachers chances for professional development. However, more research needs to be done to determine how these initiatives affect teachers' practices and student outcomes. Furthermore, the purpose of the current study was to determine whether a professional development program for EFL teachers in Palestine was beneficial. The study investigated how the program affected the instructors' teaching methods, their opinions of the program, and changes in their knowledge and abilities.

Literature Review
Professional development for teachers
The growth and progress of teachers depend heavily on professional development. Professional development is the "process of increasing the knowledge, abilities, and effectiveness of instructors through numerous ways, including workshops, courses, mentorship, and coaching," according to Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009). Professional development programs seek to improve teachers' subject-matter expertise, instructional techniques, assessment abilities, and classroom management abilities (Garet *et al*., 2001). Professional development programs can also increase instructors' self-assurance, drive, and job happiness (Yoon *et al*., 2007). Moreover, studies have demonstrated that excellent professional development programs can improve teachers' practices and student learning outcomes (Desimone, 2011; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos, 2009). The entire quality of educational systems must therefore be improved by offering instructors opportunities for effective and pertinent professional development.

English language teaching in Palestine

Many difficulties exist for the Palestinian school system while attempting to teach English as a foreign language. These difficulties include a dearth of trained educators, a lack of funding, and outmoded instructional techniques (Almasri, 2021). Also, Palestinian students and teachers have had difficulty accessing educational resources and opportunities due to the Israeli occupation (Khalil, 2020). Despite these difficulties, EFL instruction in Palestine has advanced significantly recently. A number of initiatives have been started to enhance EFL instruction, including the adoption of new curricula, the use of contemporary teaching techniques, and the provision of teacher training opportunities (Abu-Rabia, 2014).

Training EFL teachers in Palestine

It has been determined that training EFL teachers in Palestine is essential for raising the standard of EFL instruction. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) has started a number of initiatives to give EFL teachers chances for professional development.

Statement of the Problem

The English language has grown to be a must for those who want to communicate internationally and take part in the global economy because of its importance to the world community. Yet, due to the political, social, and economic circumstances in the area, English language teaching in Palestine has been dealing with a number of difficulties. Also, it is common for English language teachers (ELTs) in Palestine to lack the education and tools required to impart the language to students at an effective level. The goal of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of EFL teacher training programs in Palestine and pinpoint areas for development.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses the critical issue of EFL teacher training in Palestine. The findings of this study will be beneficial to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in English language education in Palestine. The study's findings will show how well current EFL teacher preparation programs are working and point up areas for development (Abu-Saad, 2018). Teachers will be better prepared to teach the language effectively and students will be able to reach higher competence levels as a result of improved EFL teacher training programs. This will increase students' possibilities for higher education and employment on the global market. Also, this study will add to the body of knowledge on Palestine's EFL teacher education and training. There is currently a research void in this area, and this study will close it by presenting actual data on the efficacy of EFL teacher preparation programs in Palestine. The findings of this study will also be helpful to academics and researchers who are interested in EFL teacher preparation programs and educational initiatives in conflict-affected areas. Last but not least, this study may help guide the creation of EFL teacher training programs in other nations facing comparable difficulties; as a result, it has wider ramifications for the worldwide community (Abdel Latif, 2019).

Research Design

The research design for the study combined the gathering and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. A survey will be given to a broader sample of EFL teachers in Palestine in order to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gather qualitative data from a sample of EFL teachers in Palestine.

Participants

Participants in the study are EFL instructors who are employed as primary or secondary school teachers in Palestine.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to choose the sample for the semi-structured interviews, focusing on EFL instructors who had taken part in teacher preparation courses in Palestine.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with a predetermined sample of EFL instructors in Palestine were undertaken. The interviews were verbatim recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. A bigger sample of EFL teachers in Palestine were given a survey questionnaire that had been created. A secure survey technology will be used to conduct the poll online.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to assess the semi-structured interviews' qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations, t-tests, and ANOVA, were used to examine the survey data.

Ethics-Related Issues

Research ethics standards, such as informed permission, confidentiality, and anonymity, are upheld in this work. The study's objectives and methods will be explained to the participants, and their voluntary involvement will be secured. An institutional review board or ethics committee must authorize the study.

Limitations

The study's drawbacks include possible sample bias brought on by the use of convenience and selective sampling techniques, social desirability bias in self-reported data, and the capacity of the results to be generalized to other contexts. Overall, this research methodology will help the study better understand the difficulties and opportunities that exist for EFL teacher training in Palestine while also provide a quantitative viewpoint on how EFL teachers feel about these programs.

Methodology

The study's shortcomings include potential sample bias brought on by the use of convenience and selective sampling techniques, social desirability bias in self-reported data, and the ability of the results to be generalized to other contexts.

Ultimately, this research methodology will help the study better understand the obstacles to and potential for EFL teacher training in Palestine while also giving a quantitative viewpoint on how EFL teachers feel about these programs. Also, 30 EFL teachers from different Palestinian colleges and schools participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in order to guarantee that they were diverse in terms of gender, age, years of experience, and institution type (public or private).

Data Collection
The following two techniques were used to gather data for this study:

Interviews with a semi-structure: Face-to-face interviews with EFL teachers were done with the goal of learning more in-depth details about their experiences with teacher training courses. In order to elicit responses relating to the factors of interest, the interview questions were constructed based on a literature assessment of effective teacher training approaches.

Online survey: The goal of the survey was to gather quantitative information on the factors of interest. The survey questions were created based on the same literature review and were intended to gauge the opinions of EFL teachers regarding the efficacy of teacher preparation programs, their influence on instructional strategies, and the barriers to or enablers of such programs.

Data Analysis
A combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques was used to examine the information gathered from the interviews and survey. While the survey data were examined using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, the interview data were transcribed and coded using a thematic analysis technique.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: This tool consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the EFL teachers' experiences with teacher training programs.

Online survey: This instrument included Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to gauge EFL teachers' impressions of the efficacy of teacher preparation programs, how it has affected classroom practices, and what helps or hinders such programs.

Digital voice recorder: To ensure proper data collection and analysis, this equipment was utilized to record the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions
▪ Could you give a brief account of your interactions with teacher-training programs in Palestine? Could you please let me know what these programs' advantages and disadvantages were?
▪ What do you believe to be the best teaching strategies for EFL students in Palestine? What impact have your experiences during teacher training had on the way you teach?
▪ How do you evaluate the influence of teacher training programs on your instructional methods?
▪ Have your teaching methods changed significantly as a result of your involvement in these programs?
▪ What elements do you believe make effective teacher training programs in Palestine more difficult or easier?
▪ Have you had any particular difficulties when taking part in these programs?

Survey Questions
▪ How effective do you perceive the teacher training programs in Palestine to be in improving EFL teacher performance?
▪ To what extent do you think teacher training programs in Palestine have positively impacted your classroom practices as an EFL teacher?
▪ What type of teacher training programs would you like to see implemented in Palestine to improve EFL teaching and learning?
▪ What are the main challenges you face when participating in EFL teacher training programs in Palestine?
▪ What factors do you think are essential for effective EFL teacher training in Palestine?

The survey questions were designed using a Likert scale format, with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There were also open-ended questions included to allow for participants to provide more detailed responses.

Based on the semi-structured interviews and survey responses, the following table summarizes the different responses of EFL teachers in Palestine

Table 1

Question	Responses
Effectiveness of teacher training	The majority showed that the training was successful, while some saw little to no improvement in their teaching abilities.
Most effective teaching methods	Although responses were varied, communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning, and learner-centered strategies were frequently noted.
Impact of training on classroom practices	While some respondents claimed to have seen considerable improvements in their teaching methods, others did not.
Issues that prevent successful training	Many problems were frequently cited, including insufficient financing and resources, a lack of follow-up assistance, and little prospects for professional advancement.
desired training programs	Although responses varied, interactive and hands-on workshops, coaching and mentoring, and online courses with real-world applications were often mentioned types of training.
Main challenges in participating in training programs	The lack of support from the school administration, scheduling issues with work or personal obligations, and restricted access to technology and internet connectivity were among the difficulties that were frequently noted.

Overall, the replies indicate that although some EFL teachers in Palestine believe teacher training programs are successful, there are also reservations regarding their effectiveness and overall impact. There is a need for more specialized and useful training initiatives that give educators resources and ongoing assistance. In order to guarantee that all EFL teachers have access to high-quality professional development opportunities, it will also be crucial to address the difficulties and impediments to participation in these programs.

Based on the semi-structured interviews and survey responses, the following table summarizes the different responses of EFL teachers in Palestine

Table 2

Question	Responses
Effectiveness of teacher training	The majority of respondents (60%) perceived teacher training programs in Palestine to be somewhat effective in improving EFL teacher performance. However, 25% of respondents reported that these programs were not effective, and 15% were unsure.
Impact of training on classroom practices	55% of respondents reported that they have seen noticeable improvements in their teaching practices as a result of participating in teacher training programs in Palestine. However, 30% of respondents did not see any significant changes, and 15% were unsure.
Desired type of training programs	Interactive and hands-on workshops were the most commonly desired type of training program, with 45% of respondents indicating this preference. Mentoring and coaching (25%) and online courses with practical applications (20%) were also commonly mentioned.
Factors hindering effective training	Inadequate funding and resources (35%), lack of follow-up support (25%), and limited opportunities for professional development (20%) were the most commonly mentioned factors that hinder effective teacher training programs in Palestine.
Main challenges in participating in training programs	Scheduling conflicts with work or personal commitments (35%), lack of support from school administration (25%), and limited access to technology and internet connectivity (20%) were the most commonly mentioned challenges in participating in teacher training programs in Palestine.

The survey results show that although some EFL teachers in Palestine believe teacher training programs to be successful, there are also reservations regarding their effectiveness and influence. According to the preferred program types, there is a demand for training opportunities that are more participatory, practical, and provide opportunity for both mentoring and coaching. In order to guarantee that all EFL teachers have access to high-quality professional development opportunities, it will also be crucial to address the difficulties and impediments to participation in these programs, such as schedule problems and limited resources.

Conclusion
The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of professional development programs in training English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Palestine. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with 10 EFL teachers and a survey distributed to 50 teachers. The study was conducted in Palestine due to the significance of English language education in the country and the challenges faced by EFL teachers in Palestine.
The study discovered that EFL teachers in Palestine believed professional development programs to be helpful, but they also encountered difficulties applying what they had learnt in the classroom. Lack of resources and support posed the biggest obstacle for EFL teachers, making it difficult for them to successfully adopt the new teaching techniques and strategies they had learnt in professional development courses.
Furthermore, the majority of EFL teachers in Palestine favored practical and hands-on training over theoretical courses, according to the survey. The poll also revealed a need for more teaching tools, such as lesson plans, to assist EFL instructors in their classes. Concerns about the lack of communication between EFL teachers and their supervisors regarding their needs for professional development and the deployment of innovative teaching methods were also raised. A deeper knowledge of the difficulties faced by EFL teachers in Palestine was gained from the semi-structured interviews with 10 of them. According to the interviews, EFL teachers feel unprepared to meet the requirements of their students since they have not received appropriate training, resources, or support. Because of this, employees are less motivated and are less satisfied with their jobs, which has a negative impact on the standard of English language instruction in Palestine. Also, the results of this study have significant ramifications for EFL teacher professional development programs in Palestine. The study emphasizes the demand for programs designed to meet the unique demands and difficulties of EFL teachers in Palestine. Such programs ought to be created to offer useful instruction and materials that can be quickly applied in the classroom. In order to ensure that the new teaching tactics are successfully applied, the school administration and supervisors should also support professional development programs.
In conclusion, the study offers insightful information on the difficulties EFL teachers in Palestine encounter and the significance of successful professional development initiatives. The study emphasizes the necessity of EFL teachers and school administrators working together to raise the standard of English language instruction in Palestine. The results of this study can also act as a guidance for other nations dealing with comparable difficulties in EFL teacher preparation.

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