

# **THE THREE-PHASE PEDAGOGY ENHANCEMENT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: A BOTOX FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

by

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## **Abstract**

*In-service courses are offered to practising teachers as a continuous effort of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia to upgrade the quality of the teaching profession and also to induct newly implemented or revised curriculum. The Pedagogy Enhancement course for English language teachers is one of such efforts. Course participants (CPs) for the course are practising ESL teachers. The course was delivered in three phases with a focus on teaching a particular language skill in each phase. This paper presents the data collected from 12 selected CPs on the implementation, course contents and impact of the course. Results revealed that the three-phase implementation was a good choice, course contents were suitable and CPs felt motivated to learn and explore new ideas in language teaching. CPs were also invited to voice out what they felt should be included in the course and their suggestions were examined and analysed.*

**Keywords:** ESL practice, professional development, networking

## **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers have different styles of teaching in the language classrooms. They have different beliefs in their methods and approaches due to their own experience as second language learners, their teaching experience, the background and culture of the schools they are or were teaching in, the students who are and were under their tutelage, their wealth of knowledge in the context of the language classroom and their knowledge and awareness of the current trends and methodology in the ESL classroom.

These same teachers may also feel frustrated, bored or burnt out with the mundane routine in teaching and to cope with the demands in the current education system where this excruciating climate may be inadequate to address the complexity in teaching. Considering this is vital, teachers who are prompt and ready to evolve to make that change in the language classroom need to adapt their teaching styles to benefit their pupils. Neito (2003) believes that in education, teachers need to execute a more critical approach to understand their own beliefs and teaching styles, and, in every aspect of their teaching context, teachers need to learn to think strategically on making that change: on how to change. Mitchell & Weber (1999) regard this change as a cumulative process as it is an avenue for new methodologies. With teachers' change to face with current and upcoming challenges in the language classroom, this could have ominous repercussions for both the teachers and their pupils. Therefore, teachers occasionally undergo in-service courses that serve as a platform for them to share experiences with their comrade and to obtain fresh ideas bursting onto the ESL education scene from course facilitators.

## **Background To The Study**

The Pedagogy Enhancement course is specially designed for primary school teachers who have either a Teaching of English as A Second Language (TESL) certificate or a diploma. They must also be practising teachers in their respective schools in order to benefit the most from the course. They can be teachers teaching in national or national type primary schools.

The initial plan was to train 180 teachers from the primary schools but only 148 teachers came for the training as many who were not able to make it in one of the phases due to work or some personal problems. This is because the requirement for this course is that participants must follow through the three phases of the course. There were six cohorts of teachers who came in for the training. Due to the huge number of participants the training was held over two months, that is from May to July. Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 were trained on the same dates by three teams of trainers and Cohorts 4, 5, and 6 were trained a week later by another three teams of trainers.

## **The Pedagogy Enhancement course**

The training was carried out using modules prepared by Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education. There were two modules for the facilitators, namely Trainer Notes and Teacher's Module for each phase. The participants received Teacher's Module only.

The duration of the course was nine days over a period of two months. Each phase was carried out over three days. The participants were divided into six cohorts. The number of participants in each cohort is as follows:

Table 1.  
Number of Participants by Cohorts and Date of Course Conducted

Cohorts	Number of Participants	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	
		Date of Course		Date of Course		Date of Course	
1	27	21-23 2011	June	5-7 July 2011	July	19-21 2011	July
2	25						
3	26						
4	20	28-30 2011	June	12-14 2011	July	26-28 2011	July
5	24						
6	26						
Total	148						

In Phase 1, the focus was on the Teaching of Listening and Speaking Skills. The objectives of this phase were to:

- re-examine teachers' current practices in the teaching of Listening and Speaking;
- reflect on teachers' classroom practice;
- re-formulate teachers' beliefs and approaches in the teaching of Listening and Speaking;
- familiarise teachers with the teaching of listening and speaking using the communicative approach;
- adapt textbook materials as well as design communicative activities for teaching of listening and speaking; and
- identify instruments that teachers can use to document their teaching of listening and speaking.

In order to achieve these objectives, participants were given input on theories, approaches and current trends of teaching listening and speaking. Various hands-on activities were included for them to have a go. The facilitators familiarised the teachers with the teaching of listening and speaking skills using the communicative approach. To further enhance their understanding of the approach, participants spent some time examining the allocated sample activities provided in the module. This was to enable them to scrutinise the regularly implemented activities in the classrooms. Next, they were also guided to adapt textbook materials as well as design communicative activities for the various stages of a listening and speaking lesson. The participants then shared their work with the rest of the class for comments and feedback. Finally, the participants were required to identify instruments that they could use to document their teaching and enable reflections. Participants then discussed the result of their implementation during the first meeting in Phase 2.

The focussed language skill to work on for Phase 2 was teaching reading skills. The objectives for this phase were to:

- develop teachers' ability in providing effective reading instructions by drawing upon and building on the practical experience gained while teaching English;
- understand the key concepts and procedures related to the methodology of teaching reading;
- get ESL teachers to develop their own activities and materials through collaborative group work and try them out in simulated teaching sessions;
- reflect on their classroom practice;
- re-formulate their beliefs and approaches in the teaching of reading; and
- document and reflect on a reading lesson.

A practical and experiential approach was adopted for this phase of the course. Participants scrutinised the exemplars provided in the course modules, developed their own activities and materials through collaborative group work and tried them out in simulated teaching sessions. This approach enabled the participants to exploit and extend their already available resources such as the ministry-prescribed textbooks with new eyes and knowledge. In this way, the familiar textbook was made 'unfamiliar' and new insights were gained. At the end of this phase, participants were assigned tasks for them to implement in their respective schools and they were to discuss their result during the first meeting in Phase 3.

The final phase - Phase 3 of the course focused on the teaching of writing. The objectives for this phase were to: develop teachers' ability to provide effective writing instruction; understand the key concepts and procedures related to the teaching of writing; enable teachers to exploit the resources available using sound and appropriate instructional procedures; and document and reflect on a writing lesson.

The training approach adopted in this module draws heavily on cooperative and collaborative learning principles. Participants worked in pairs and groups. They began by drawing on their teaching experience, re-examining and re-formulating their beliefs about teaching writing. Having addressed these issues, the sample teaching materials provided in the module were then scrutinised based on their experience and new knowledge. Participants then adopted and adapted the sample materials to be used with their own pupils. The lesson plans created were to be used as exemplars for teachers to further develop and enhance their own teaching resources. At the end of the session, participants learned to create a blog where it served as a platform for cohort discussion and sharing of information. Participants were to implement some assigned tasks when they returned to their respective schools and post their results on the blog for sharing purposes. It was hoped that this platform provided continuous support and encouraged professional development.

### **Aims of the Study**

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of a three-phase English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy course for in-service teachers. The researchers wish to explore how the course is able to add on and enrich existing pedagogical knowledge and practices of these experienced ESL teachers. It specifically focuses on the change in the teachers' willingness to adopt and adapt new found pedagogical practices in their classrooms. In addition, the impacts of the course on teachers' long term and short term professional development are also examined.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

The objectives of this study are to:

explore the implication on the teachers' long term and short term changes in their personal professional development;  
gain some constructive insights for improvement of course contents in future courses.

### **Research Questions**

This research will answer the following questions:

How has the three-phase pedagogy course equipped the teachers for professional development?  
What are some areas to be considered for future planning of similar courses?

### **Significance Of The Study**

Findings from this study will shed lights on the effectiveness of in-service courses offered to school teachers. They may serve as useful information on planning similar courses in the future, especially in deciding on course contents, duration of course and mode of implementation.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Teachers who have been teaching for a certain number of years may differ from one teacher to the other in their practice and beliefs, depending on their own behaviour and outlook towards the profession and what it takes for them to underpin the reality of how a professional practitioner acts. In this context, it is their ability and willingness to take challenges to the betterment of the teaching profession. There are teachers who may adapt and modify quickly to changes to cater to the needs of the fast changing and growing demands from the institutional framework and those who may not be able to cope with such 'growing crisis' (Schon, cited in Moon, 2000). Teachers in both the situations should have the ability and capability on "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action", borrowing the terms used by Schon (cited in Moon, 2000), in their beliefs and teaching styles in whatever the situation is which may help them to develop professionally and most likely to establish understanding in making significant changes in the ESL classroom context.

For teachers to be actively intellectual, they will need to understand that there is always a need to move out from their comfort zone. Attending refresher courses may allow them to meet other teachers who may serve as a rich platform to talk about professional issues amongst them. However, it can be generally said that many of these teachers are attending such courses as directed by the authorities, and not on their own initiatives. Nicholls (1997) believes that these teachers have little desire to enhance their own personal development, but are attending courses to fulfil the requirement by the schools or the Ministry of Education. Teachers need to see this as an opportunity for them to develop because they are the asset and agent of change in pupils' learning behaviour (psychological context), and in the learning environment and climate in their schools (social context). Hence, Nicholls (1997) posits that with knowledge gained for courses attended, teachers in school will be able to influence the environment they are in for positive changes and construction in many aspects: "catchment area, school development plans, day-to-day working conditions". Therefore, there is a strong need for teachers to consider the importance of teachers' interactions within the school community whereby they would be sharing and discussing professional talks in hope to create a culture where this would turn into an intellectual practice.

Penuel, Riel, Krause and Frank (2009) argued that the value of teachers' interactions provides a perspective of a solid ground for teachers' social network which involves their expertise and resources exchanged. Such interactions could be among teachers in their own schools or other schools in many forms. Thus, with teachers cultivating this practice, a positive improvement in teachers' access to expertise and resources could be attained.

It is clear that teachers need to be injected with realisation through certain training courses to make them see their current understanding in their teaching methodology, to look into other possibilities in teaching and then to reflect on the implementation or to make changes in their teaching because these can be a key factor to teachers' satisfaction in teaching (Blackman in Holly and McLoughlin 1989) when they see their pupils participate actively in their language classroom. Blackman further states that collegial sharing of ideas among teachers in schools is powerful and empowering as it helps in teachers' personal-professional growth. This means that there is a huge opportunity for teachers to develop their beliefs and attitudes in their practices, and it does not stop where the training course ends, rather a continuous and career-long-process as "teachers have different professional needs in differing educational contexts and at different stages of their careers" (Connors, in Hughes, 1991). The complexity of this process, Nias (cited in Holly and McLoughlin, 1989) explains as that whatever decisions or actions teachers do and react on falls back on how they see and take matters into their strides because they are determined by schemata and assumptions in which in turns, are continuously being modified by experience and activity. Hence, the attitudes, beliefs and actions of a teacher in his/her practices differ from one to the other, depending heavily on their own ways of perceiving the world, in this case, in teaching.

According to Holly (in Holly and McLoughlin, 1989), teachers who are able to regard themselves as 'searchers' are effective teachers who continue to grow to improve themselves. Belleli (in Edge and Richards, 1993) stresses that a positive attitude in a teacher is crucial to enhance the diversification of his/her approach to teaching. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of their own practices, in other words, to be more reflective, be it in the past or present. Teachers who are always searching for ways to improve their teaching styles and approaches and with the interest to improve the learning situation, are generally those who are willing to make that move out from their comfort zones and change for the betterment in their beliefs in teaching. These vigorous reactions would anticipate in teachers' future practice which will be appropriate and productive (Belleli, cited in Edge & and Richards, 1993) in their professional journey, constantly contributing to enrich the global teaching-learning landscape.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, we will discuss the research design, the participants involved, the procedure and the research instrument.

### **Research Design**

This research is an exploratory study. It began with a qualitative approach to identify whether the content of the course match the participants' expectations and to what extent the course has helped in their professional development. The impacts on teachers' personal growth and the extent of support rendered by the school administrators to the participants during and after the course are also explored qualitatively.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was used in identifying the 12 course participants (CPs) from the total of 148 course participants. They were identified based on several criteria: age, academic qualification, professional qualification, professional training and teaching experience.

The age ranges from 25 to 59, where by 3 CPs are in the age range of 25 -29, 6 CPs are in the age range of 30 – 39 as a great majority of the CPs are in this age range and 2 CPs are in the age range of 40 – 49 and 1 CP is in the age range of 50-59.

Out of the 12 CPs, seven have a Bachelor Degree, four with Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (MCE/SPM) and one with Higher School Certificate or *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (HSC/STPM).

Among the 12 CPs, nine graduated with a teaching diploma (KDPM), one with a Bachelor of Education from a twinning programme, and two with a post-graduate teacher training certificate (KPLI).

The CPs also vary in their teaching experience: three CPs have 3-5 years of teaching experience, four CPs have 6-10 years of teaching experience, two CPs have 11-15 years of teaching experience, one CP has 16-20 years of teaching experience and two CPs have more than 20 years of teaching experience. The particulars of the CPs are depicted in Table 2.

These criteria were used as the researchers want to know whether the participants exhibit different characteristics with different years of teaching experience, professional qualification and in different school contexts. The school contexts refer to are the national school (SK) where the medium of instruction is *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language), or national type school (SJK) where the medium of instruction is Chinese or Tamil. This is important as the number of contact hours for the English Language and the syllabus are both different, as compared to the national schools as presented in Table 2.

## Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of an online open-ended questionnaire which has two parts; Part I Personal Information and Part II Course Evaluation. Part I required participants to provide information on gender, age, academic qualification, professional qualification, professional training, teaching experience, and teaching workload. Questions for Part II were constructed based on and grouped under specific themes: course effectiveness, professional development (networking strategy), personal growth, and administrative support. Data collected will be analysed qualitatively.

Table 2.  
Details of Selected Course Participants

CP	Gender	Age (yrs)	Academic Qualification	Professional Qualification	Professional Training	Teaching Experience (yrs)	Teaching Hours/ Week	School Context
1	F	25-29	Bachelor	B. Ed	Twinning	3-5	14	SK
2	F	25-29	MCE	Diploma	KDPM	6-10	11	SK
3	F	30-39	MCE	Diploma	KDPM	11-15	13	SK
4	F	40-49	HSC	Diploma	KDPM	16-20	5	SJKC
5	F	50-59	Bachelor	Certificate	KDPM	> 20	17	SJKC
6	M	40-49	Bachelor	Certificate	KDPM	> 20	11	SJKC
7	F	30-39	Bachelor	Diploma	KPLI	3-5	7	SJKT
8	F	30-39	Bachelor	Diploma	KDPM	6-10	7	SJKT
9	M	30-39	Bachelor	Diploma	KDPM	6-10	8	SK

10	F	25-29	Bachelor	Diploma	KPLI	3-5	16	SK
11	M	30-39	MCE	Diploma	KDPM	6-10	13	SK
12	M	30-39	MCE	Diploma	KDPM	11 - 15	4	SK

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Responses from the questionnaire administered on the 12 selected CPs revealed a rich pool of information and reflected a set of emerging themes. These themes are the impacts of the course on their pedagogical beliefs and practice, and on their personal professional development; on the three-phase mode of course implementation; on usefulness of continuous professional supports and on the needs for administrators support. This data will thus be analysed and discussed with reference to the themes emerged.

### Theme 1: Improving Classroom Practices

There were four items (Items 1, 2, 23 and 24) in the questionnaire that explored this theme.

*Item 1: How did the training build on your existing teaching experience?*

All the participants agreed that the course was useful and effective in showing them ways and means of better classroom practice. Seven (58.3%) out of the 12 CPs (CPs 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10 and 12) expressed that the course was like a ‘refresher’ in giving them back the learned theories and principles in effective language teaching. CP 2 said,

*‘The training really helped me to refresh and realise on the basic concept of teaching English Language. It was like an indicator that able to show me either I was using the appropriate methods in teaching language or not.’*

To CP 2, the course had served as a channel to confirm her current practice, while gaining new ideas that she could use in her language classroom. This is an important aspect for teachers as to keep abreast with the constantly changing teaching-learning scenario in the language classroom (Nias, cited in Holly and Mcloughlin, 1989).

Similarly, CP 10 felt that the course provided a ‘boost’ to all while refreshing memories of the days of teacher training. To these CPs, the school environment might have caused them to give too much emphasis on completing the syllabus and little or no interest in making the language classroom more enjoyable and exciting. With this sentiment, CP 10 responded,

*‘The training was really a boost to all the new and experienced teachers. We may currently use the ordinary teaching methods and might have forgotten or ignore the methods that really excite and are useful to the pupils. So, this training actually brought back the memories on the methods that we could use in our existing teaching experience.’*

The remaining 41.7% (5 out of 12) of the CPs revealed that course had encouraged them to be ‘more creative’ (CP 4 and 5) in designing teaching-learning activities, ‘aware of pupils’ learning’ (CP 3), ‘aware of the pedagogical principles’ in planning a lesson (CP 9) and how fun and enjoyable language activities could be a means in ‘better classroom management’ (CP 11).

*Item 2: How does the training improve classroom practice?*

One of the course goals is to provide CPs a platform to discuss, explore and try out a variety of teaching-learning activities in the language classroom. Four (33.3%) CPs felt that this goal had been achieved. They (CPs 1, 2, 3 and 11) believed that the course provided them the opportunity to discover many more exciting ways of teaching the English language. They said,

*‘It allowed me to have a variation of activities in the classroom.’ (CP 1)*

*‘The training basically emphasised on the pedagogical aspects which I think could help me to comprehend more about those 4 main skills in ELT. I started to recognise the suitability of applying some appropriate methods in*

*classroom, understand the appropriate ways to deliver various of relevant activities and most importantly, I could learn again on how to identify the strength and weaknesses of my teaching through reflective thinking.'* (CP 2)

*'Instead of just chalk and talk I prepare lessons that are interesting and I find that my students enjoy learning the language better now.'* (CP 3)

*'Previously, the activities held in the classroom were just as simple as it is. Later after the training, I was able to "steal" some of the pupils' time with some simple activities gained through the training.'* (CP 11)

Having a chance to meet in an intellectual context to discuss professional practices will allow for sharing of and generating new ideas (Connors, in Hughes, 1991). Within this context, CPs were also provided with the opportunity to learn from each other's success story which would encourage them to be more adventurous in their own language classroom.

In addition to acknowledging the impact of interesting language activities had on pupils' learning, CP 2 also revealed that the course had enhanced his/her reflective practices. This is important as reflective teaching is the key to continuous improvement in one's professional practice (Westgate, 1995).

The other eight (66.7%) CPs (CPs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12) have differing view on how the course has improved their classroom practice. While some revealed that the course had made them more aware of the importance of peer interaction, others felt that their critical thinking skills were enhanced, strategies to improve pupils' learning were explored, and the course had also served as a springboard to continuous personal and professional development. A comment that the course contents were practical and feasible was also mentioned in one of the responses (refer Table 3).

Table 3.  
Some CPs' responses on how the course had improve their classroom practice

CPs	Responses
4	'I am reminded to carry out group and individual activities more often'.
5	'Enjoyable lesson. Motivate shy students to speak up.'
6	'We can monitor closely the achievement of the pupils in the classroom.'
7	'The training provided ideas on teaching each specific skill. The workshop session needed our critical thinking and we had feedback on how to improve our lesson plan.'
8	'The training provided improve the students learning area.'
9	'Some of the theories can be implemented in classroom practice.'
10	'As I have mentioned above, this training includes methods that we could use in our classroom practices. We could learn methods from books and internet too. But this training incorporates on how the methods could be carried out in the classroom. In addition, the comments that were given by the lecturers during the short 'microteaching' during our training was really constructive.'
12	'I had implemented most of the techniques, and I found that my students had shown some Progresses.'

*Item 23: To what extent have you explored/used ideas learnt from the course in your classroom? How did your pupils respond?*

All 12 CPs (100%) reported that they had tried out some teaching-learning activities learned or explored during the course. The reasons they had not tried all were time constraints and pupils' proficiency levels. They had also revealed that their pupils welcomed the changes in their lesson delivery and had all participated actively in the activities. CP 2, in particular related the positive impact his/her pupils experienced through participation of the activities as very motivational – that pupils were productive in the target language. She/he reported,

*'Basically, I have tried a few ideas from the course in my English classroom. For instance: demonstration in showing processes and procedures, e.g. 'How to make coffee'. They need to talk and describe the steps of doing it as clearly as possible. Pupils' response: They participated actively in the lesson since it involved them to deliver the process as well. They could use the sequence connectors in sentences because they understood the usage. They could speak and describe since it relates to things they do in their daily life.'*

CP 2 had taken the initiative to inject fun element and reduce the threat in his/her language classroom. His/her pupils were engaged in fun-filled language activities, thus lowering their affective filter (Krashen, 1988) and were able to use the language structure learnt. CP 2's initiative was fruitful and this would boost her motivation. This is in-line with Blackman's (in Holly and McLoughlin, 1989) stance that when pupils are motivated to learn and take part actively in teaching-learning activities, teachers will feel most satisfied, making them more enthusiastic to continue exploring new ideas in teaching.

CP 10, on the other hand, was concerned when implementing some of the activities learned in the course due to pupils' low language proficiency. He/she agreed that the activities were well received by a number of pupils but the majority of them 'needed more guidance due to their low proficiency in the English language'. This experience shed light on two aspects: the newly learnt ideas are workable and effective but some modification may be required.

*Item 24: Were there any problems in implementing new ideas/strategies learnt in your classroom?*

Five (41.7%) out of the 12 CPs reported no problem in carrying out new ideas/strategies learned in the course, while the other seven CPs (58.3%) revealed that they faced various problems when trying out some of the activities in their language classroom.

Table 4.  
Some problems faced by CPs during implementation of new ideas/strategies learnt

CP	Yes / No	Problems faced
1	No	-
2	Yes	mixed ability pupils; classroom management (noise); pupils could not complete task on time
3	No	-
4	No	-
5	Yes	time consuming in preparation; classroom environment not conducive for the activities; might not be able to complete syllabus
6	Yes	no comment
7	Yes	time constraints due to pupils' language proficiency
8	Yes	time constraints due to pupils' language proficiency
9	No	-
10	Yes	pupils' low proficiency required more attention
11	No	-
12	Yes	Pupils' attitude

Generally these seven CPs were concerned that the low language proficiency of their pupils would upset the time allocated to complete a particular topic or language items. They were also stressed by the extra preparation that might incur in implementing the activities. Schon (cited in Moon, 2000) calls this group of teachers as those who are threatened by the 'growing crisis' in today's fast changing and innovative education landscape. Though they were apprehensive, they did make an effort to try out the learnt strategies, reflecting that the course had left a positive impact on them.

## **Theme 2: Mode of delivery or implementation of the course**

There were seven items in the questionnaire that explored the effectiveness and suitability of the mode of course contents delivery and the three-phase implementation of the course. These items are Items 3, 4, 5, 11, 13 and 25. All 12 (100%) CPs agreed that the course provided many opportunities to give feedback throughout (Item 3). Responses for Item 4 were quite diverse as in Table 5 below:

Table 5.  
Responses on how the course should be delivered (Item 4)

CP	Responses
1	shorter period
2	smaller groups (not more than 25)
3	more opportunities for practice
4	teaching of grammar to be included



5	avoid school exam week
6	utilises ICT
7	more hands-on activities especially in the afternoon slots
8	-
9	course to be accredited
10	provide online support after the course
11	longer period of time
12	good

In response to Item 5 on what course contents would support their professional development, all the CPs (12, 100%) stated that a focus on pedagogical principles should be considered. It was believed that such course contents would 'make teachers be more alert and prepared themselves with various challenges in teaching of English Language' (CP 2) and provide a platform to explore strategies to 'adopt ideas and approaches from foreign English language teaching context' (CP 5). In addition, they felt that a course focussing on pedagogy would be able to prepare them on how to 'align [them]selves with students' behaviour so that [they] can easily make [the pupils] understand on the subject matter, for example, theories on Bloom's Taxonomy and Howard Gardner' (CP 10) on enhancing thinking skills in the language classroom.

All but one CPs (91.7%) felt that the course should be accredited to facilitate and encourage future professional development. They recognised that the teaching profession required its practitioners to be 'life-long learners' (CP 2) in order to keep afloat in the race to meet the constantly changing and challenging scenario in education.

Both CPs 7 and 8 said 'no coursework please' reflecting that they were stressed with the existing paper works in school, and though they felt fortunate to be chosen to attend the course, they were heavy-hearted in having to do coursework.

When asked 'which phase of the course they liked most' (Item 13), majority of the CPs (5, 41.7%) stated that Phase 1 (Teaching of Listening and Speaking) and Phase 2 (Teaching of Reading) were most enjoyable. Two CPs (16.7%) preferred the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase (Teaching of Writing), another two CPs (16.7%) liked all the phases and one CP (8.3%) suggested that the teaching of grammar should be included.

Five CPs (41.7%) could not identify the rationale for the implementation of the course and stated that they were asked to attend the course as 'they have previous/background knowledge' in TESL. The rest of the CPs (7, 58.3%) gave differing rationales, but reflected a common theme: that teachers need refresher course from time to time to avoid fossilization of passive language teaching (refer Table 6).

Table 6.  
Some CPs' view on the rationale of the course being implemented

CP	Responses
1	reinforce the pedagogical approach
2	to enhance the TESL optionist to refresh those various teaching aspects, add some more new knowledge include the latest information of English education
3	enhance our teaching and of course it was a wake up call for all of us
4	to upgrade their knowledge and skills in teaching English to primary pupils
6	to have the ideas that the pupils will learn all the skills needed and they can be monitored easily
10	an effective element for self and career development for the optionists
12	to enhance the teaching skills

### Theme 3: Follow-ups and professional supports

This theme emerged when CPs were asked if setting up a network or community of teachers would benefit them professionally. All except one CP welcomed the idea of having a network as a platform for them to share and generate ideas in language teaching. They felt that such network would allow continuous support and encourage professional development. In-line with this thought, CP 7 says that:

*'It would prove to be very useful as we would be able to share resources and share ideas as well as to clear any doubts that we have regarding teaching'.*

CP 5 views the setting up of a network or online community as a good initiative as it serves as a platform for teachers to ‘not only share techniques of teaching but also to release stress and tension’.

And agreeing with this argument, CP 10 felt that there should be:

*‘...more frequent discussion and experience sharing among the teachers from various location and levels. This information sharing would eventually benefit us in improving our ‘day to day’ teaching and learning in classroom’.*

Another CP (CP 2) elaborated on the importance of having this networking among teachers by saying ‘it is useful for a group of English teachers to put their hands together in applying good (teaching practice) through discussion, plan and implementation of (interesting) activities or events related to English (language)’.

When asked how they would like to see such network or community set up, four out of the 12 CPs suggested an online community. They felt that in today’s digital era, an online community is the fastest and most effective platform for sharing of ideas and discussion, with minimal or no cost at all. However, two other CPs said face-to-face contact would be good, and they viewed in-service courses as one of the channels for such purpose, and three other CPs acknowledged the usefulness of such network but did not give any suggestion. The CPs responses are as in Table 7.

Table 7.  
CPs’ suggestions of a networking mechanism

CPs	Responses
1	An online group/network through social network such as Facebook or Yahoo group.
3	Online like facebook where we could share all these.
5	Frequent group discussion during in house training or courses (face-to-face)
9	Meetings every week discussion on issue or problems
10	I would like to see if the network set up could be implemented via online.
12	Through courses conducted by departments (face-to-face)

In other words, 75% of the CPs agreed that one form of continuing support for teachers is by having a network or community where they can share ideas and seek help should any teaching-learning problem arise. In support of this, Nicholls (1997) posits that as agents of change, teachers should always be involved in intellectual discussion sessions to share and exchange ideas, and to attend professional development courses, for all these will enable them to bring about constructive modification both to the organisation they work in and their professional practice.

The researchers probe further by asking how such networking would help them in their classroom practice, these ideas emerged: pools of immediate and workable ideas (CP 1), encourages continuing learning (CP 3), enable adopting and adapting of ideas from counterparts (CP 4), variety of teaching-learning ideas and teaching aids (CPs 7 and 8) and continuous professional development (CP 10). These responses showed that teachers welcome the idea of networking as a channel for continuous support that goes beyond any in-service courses, and also as a means to encourage professional development.

## CONCLUSION

The data collected from this research revealed that in-service courses for practising teachers not only serve as a refresher that revitalises the passion for the profession, they also open the door to future or continuous professional development. Such outcomes are most welcoming as teachers need to be active life-long learners to be able to make their classroom a lively and fun-filled learning environment, as their ideas need to be kept abreast with the current trends and practice, and the global needs of its citizens.

## Implications and Suggestions

The responses from the CPs implied that the content of the in-service courses planned for practising teachers have to be focused on current pedagogy. This is to lead teachers into the current needs of the curriculum and trends and practices. The interaction between the teachers in the course will enable them to share ideas of good classroom practices and encourage further professional development. The online support system should also be

given more emphasis and the IPG might want to play a more active role in maintaining the network community. One way of doing this is by including a forum wedge in the IPG portal, where all alumni of the IPG campus and CPs of short courses can 'meet' and share or discuss issues on language teaching.

The planning of the course contents and the implementation of the course should also take into consideration the duration, the interest of the CPs attending the course and also the coursework assigned to them. All these will affect the learning outcomes of the CPs which will then benefit the pupils they teach. This research found out the administrative support is very important and has great impact on the CPs, especially in trying out the new ideas picked up from the course.

The researchers hope that the information revealed from the data collected will be useful for planning and implementation of future courses.

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