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TEACHER PREPARATION IN TESOL: A Brief Report on Responses to an International Questionnaire

by Lynn E. Henrichsen

In the spring of 1978, the Communications and Language Arts Division of the Hawaii Campus of Brigham Young University initiated a formal evaluation of the course requirements for its TESL major—preliminary to a revision of those requirements. As part of this evaluation, a questionnaire dealing with the elements

perceived as needed in a TESL teacher-training program was developed. Over the summer, five hundred copies of the questionnaire were sent to TESL educators and employers in the United States and nearly fifty foreign countries.

One hundred fifty-three of the questionnaires were returned—a return rate of 31% (acceptable given the circumstances under which the questionnaires were distributed). The return rates for questionnaires from within the United States (30.72%) and those from non-domestic respondents (31.14%) were compared and examined for response bias, but none was found.

Questionnaires were returned from the following areas—a total of thirty different countries:

Mainland U. S. (77)	Sudan (1)
Hawaii (9)	Rhodesia (1)
American Samoa (4)	South Africa (1)
Palau (1)	Egypt (1)
Western Samoa (1)	Saudi Arabia (1)
Tonga (9)	Kuwait (1)
Fiji (1)	Iran (2)
Japan (12)	Belgium (1)
Korea (2)	England (1)
Taiwan (1)	Greece (2)
Philippines (3)	Turkey (1)
Indonesia (2)	USSR (1)
Thailand (4)	Brazil (1)
Bangladesh (1)	Colombia (1)

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India (1)	El Salvador (1)
Pakistan (1)	Mexico (1)
Senegal (1)	Canada (5)

Institutions represented by the respondents covered a broad range also—colleges and universities (91), adult education and military schools (10), commercial language schools and government agencies (25), and public schools at the secondary and administrative levels (26).

Questionnaire recipients were asked to respond to the questionnaire by writing a number indicating their recommendation in front of sixty specific TESL-related topics and four general summarizing areas. A computer summary of all responses is provided in table one (pp. 10-11). Both mean and mode responses for each questionnaire item are indicated.

Certain topics were definitely more popular than others. In the general section, TESL methods and materials (2.758) led, followed by linguistics (2.254), education (1.745), and literature (1.183), in that order.

In the specific areas, ranking the mean responses from high to low results in the following order for the twenty topics considered most important by questionnaire respondents:

1. Specific training in teaching listening comprehension (2.627)
2. Specific training in teaching reading (2.555)
3. Student teaching experience (2.523)
4. Specific training in teaching writing (2.516)
5. Intercultural understanding and awareness (2.503)
6. Special skills in testing and evaluation (2.484)
7. General, introductory linguistics (2.471)
8. Special skills in teaching conversation (2.464)
- 9.5. Materials selection and evaluation (2.451)
- 9.5. Language Learning (2.451)
11. Specific training in teaching pronunciation (2.412)
12. Modern english usage (2.372)
13. Phonology (2.255)
14. Language acquisition (2.209)

15. Materials development and production (2.190)
16. Syntax (2.150)
17. Structural grammar (2.026)
18. The audio-lingual method (1.987)
19. Foreign language proficiency (half-way between near-native command and basic competency: 1.523) (1.889)
20. Transformational grammar (1.882)

The ten areas considered least important (or about which respondents had little or no opinion or information), excluding the "other" items which appeared under four categories, were as follows:

47. St. Cloud (Audio-visual) method (0.993)
48. Dialectology (0.928)
49. Literary analysis and criticism (0.869)
50. Suggestopedia (0.856)
51. British literature (0.797)
52. Pidgin and creole languages (0.667)
53. Shakespeare (0.621)
54. Asian literature (0.556)
55. Polynesian literature (0.516)
56. Australian-New Zealand literature (0.477)

Perhaps the safest generalization that can be drawn, based on the relative importance given to questionnaire items by respondents, is that TESL educators and employers throughout the world want teachers trained in the practical aspects of everyday ESL teaching. The demand for training in "methods" is much lower than that for training in specific classroom "techniques." Moreover, it would also seem that audio-lingualism and structural grammar still hold sway in the TESL world and that many of the recently developed methods and grammars have not yet made their mark on the international TESL field. In spite of its prominence in linguistics, transformational grammar barely makes the top twenty, and methods such as The Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and Suggestopedia are far down the list.

The counter-argument to the above is that—whether employers recognize it or not—"there is nothing so practical as a good theory." It is questionable whether teachers

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trained only in specific teaching techniques would be able to function as anything more than mere classroom automatons. Good teachers need to know not only *what* to do but *why* they are doing it. It is also quite understandable that the "field workers" in TESL would lag behind the "theoreticians and innovators." Which of the current rages will catch on widely and perhaps dominate the field in the future and which will be forgotten in a few years is anybody's guess at the moment.

A final remark in the limited space available for this report would be that, with the exception of a "general literary background," TESL demands very little training in the area of literature *per se*. Specific training in teaching literature (for ESL students), however, ranks relatively high on the list.

In conclusion, it must be noted that this brief report does not attempt to offer an exhaustive summary and discussion of the results of this questionnaire and is certainly not "the last word." A more extensive analysis of questionnaire responses by geographical location and institutional status of respondents is yet to be written.