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Teachers' Perceptions of their Knowledge and Skills in General and Specific Purposes English Courses at Distance and Regular Universities

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Extended Abstract

The purpose of this article was to explore if there were any differences between EGP and ESP teachers in terms of the way they perceived their pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills in teaching English when they were teaching in distance and regular education systems. To this aim, 84 novice teachers from a regular University and 50 teachers from a distance-study university were selected to participate in the survey. The survey instrument used in this study was a questionnaire developed by Choy, Lim, Chong, and Wong . (2012). It consists of 37 items, each with two Likert rating scales of 5 points which assess the self-perceived pedagogical knowledge and skills of the teachers. To compare the mean scores obtained from EGP and ESP teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills in distance and regular systems, MANOVA statistical technique was run on SPSS. The results showed that there was not any significant difference between distance and regular teachers of EGP in terms of their perceptions of their knowledge level and teaching skills. But, distance and regular teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical knowledge level in ESP courses were significantly different. A significant difference was also observed in the perceptions of pedagogical skills level between ESP teachers in two university systems with ESP teachers in the distance-study university perceiving their knowledge and skills at a higher level than their counterparts in regular education system. The results of this study have some implications for teacher training programs and pave the way for future studies on teachers' and learners' perceptions.

Keywords: distance education, English for general purposes, English for specific purposes, teachers' professionalism, teachers' pedagogical knowledge, teaching skills

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INTRODUCTION

Along with rapid changes in technology and education, a kind of paradigm shift was also observed in both communications and the field of teacher training (Hawkins, 2004). Teaching was once considered as a kind of “technical enterprise”, and teachers were encouraged to learn and apply certain skills and practices. Later, teaching was seen as a “cognitive process” which focused on analyzing teachers’ mental processes. In recent years, the “critical teacher training programs” have been of a great concern in which teachers are “ the agents of change”, those who can develop appropriate attitudes and mentalities to reflect on not only “what they know.” (knowledge), but also on are” (their identities) (Hawkins, 2004). Despite this paradigm shift which opens the eyes of the teachers to the critical era of change in teaching, it seems that some contexts, like the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), still suffer from a kind of chaos in pedagogy due to the incongruence between teachers of English for General Purposes (EGP) and teachers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), on one hand, and between perceptions and practices, on the other hand.

PURPOSE

Because of these instabilities, the aim of the present study is to investigate teachers’ perceptions of two aspects of knowledge and teaching skills. To this aim, the following research questions are answered in this study:

- 1) Is there any significant difference between regular and distance systems teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical knowledge and their teaching skills in General English courses?
- 2) Is there any significant difference between regular and distance systems teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical knowledge and their teaching skills in ESP courses?

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as an analytic survey using questionnaire to check the differences between self- perceived knowledge and skills of the novice teachers of English across different education systems and different types of the English courses. The survey was selected to be in an analytic type, here, because, in this study, the aim goes beyond just describing what is there; it attempts to find some answers to the research questions by analyzing the patterns observed in the participants’ answers

RESULT

The results showed that there was not any significant difference between distance and regular teachers of EGP in terms of their perceptions of their knowledge level and teaching skills. But, distance and regular teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical

knowledge level in ESP courses were significantly different. A significant difference was also observed in the perceptions of pedagogical skills level between ESP teachers in two university systems with ESP teachers in the distance-study university perceiving their knowledge and skills at a higher level than their counterparts in regular education system.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the results of this study suggested that the self-perceived level of knowledge and skills was different in EGP and ESP beginning teachers in distance and regular education systems. In some areas of teaching (those which are directly related to teacher-student interactions), distance nature of university has affected positively on teachers' perceptions while in other areas (including those aspects which are related to teacher's planning and management of classroom events), it is the teachers in the regular system that see their knowledge and skills at a higher level.

NOVELTY

Conducting research on teachers' professional knowledge and its influences on classroom decisions and performances is rather a new phenomenon in language teaching. A few studies have explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions and the way they work in EGP teaching (L. S. Shulman, 1987; L. Shulman, 1986; Cook, 1996; Andrews, 1999). However, in ESP teaching, this kind of study is rare or sporadic (Abedeem, 2015). Moreover, investigating the impacts of teachers' knowledge on their classroom teaching, and studying the practical and professional needs of ESP teachers is not found among the research carried out earlier on ESP teaching and teacher development. When different education systems come into scene (in this case, regular vs. distance education systems), the paucity of research becomes more acute.



Interdisciplinary
Studies in the Humanities

Abstract

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Interdisciplinary
Studies in the Humanities

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Interdisciplinary
Studies in the Humanities

Abstract



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