Towards Improving Content and Instruction of the 'TESOL/TEFL for Special Needs' Course: an action research study

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Abstract:

Action research (AR) – as a participatory problem-oriented methodology - has been recently employed in Egypt by both researchers and practitioners to resolve complicated classroom and learning problems, and provide context-based solutions. Simultaneously, new 'special education' courses have been recently included in the university bylaws and internal regulations of Egyptian colleges of education in 2010, and this imposes many challenges, especially as far as course design and content selection are concerned. Therefore, the present study aimed at negotiating and improving the structure and delivery of a new special-education language-learning course entitled, 'TESOL/TEFL for Special Needs Students' taught to English majors (EFL student teachers) at Assiut University College of Education (AUCOE), and reaching a final framework of how the new course content should be like, and the best methods to be used in delivering it. Therefore, an action research methodology of two cycles was employed with two different groups of English majors throughout two successive semesters during the academic year 2012/13: the first group included 106 junior general-section EFL student teachers (1st semester, 2012); and the second group consisted of 51 senior primary-stage EFL student teachers (2nd semester, 2013). Data collection tools were used for both formative and summative evaluation purposes, and thus varied both at the initial stage and during the two iterations. They included: (1) questionnaires; (2) online diaries; (3) semi-structured interviews; (4) final feedback reports; (5) following-up logs online (on a Facebook page). The two AR cycles resulted in a final framework of the course structure and content along with some suggestions and guidelines into how to deliver it to the target learners. Moreover, results presented some educational implications of teaching English as a foreign language to students with special educational needs as well as some conclusions related to using AR methodology in Egypt to resolve many real teaching/learning problems.

Keywords:

Action Research; TESOL/TEFL for Special Needs; Special Language Course Design; Special Education; Content Delivery; Course Structure and Content

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