

# An Investigation of English Teachers' Perspectives on INSET Needs and Provision in Taiwan

Wen-Hsien Yang\*

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to survey the following three questions. (1)What are the perceived INSET needs of ELT teachers in Taiwan. (2)To what extent, do the ELT teachers perceive that the provision matches their needs. (3)How can the INSET provision be made more helpful, relevant, or appropriate to their needs. The study was conducted by using an open questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with Taiwanese ELT teachers either being in Taiwan or studying in the U.K. currently. The result shows that ELT teachers in Taiwan have reflective attitudes towards their teaching development but the INSET provision for these teaches seemingly cannot match the needs suitably. In other words, there is a huge gap existing between ELT teachers' perceived INSET needs and the INSET provision in Taiwan. In suggestion, constructivism views on designing INSET courses, context-based action research, and a more positive attitude towards INSET from the school may abridge such a gap.

**Key Words: INSET (In-service education), Professional development, English teachers' perspectives**

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## INTRODUCTION

In Chinese, the word 'teaching' can/should be translated into Jiau-shiue (教學 teaching + learning) literally. Thus, 'teaching' contains two dimensions in Chinese: teaching and learning; however, who teaches and who learns is a question. Traditionally, teachers teach and learners learn. Yet, such a view has been questioned, and it has been suggested that teachers should not only teach but also learn simultaneously through their teaching career.

A modern country usually views the enhancing of teachers' quality as one of their educational target for teachers' quality indeed plays a very important part in the education development. Usually, this target can be ensured through 3 major stages: (1) pre-service education, (2) induction education, and (3) in-service education (Peng, S. L., 2000). With the global concerns about the importance life-long education, teachers' in-service education (INSET) has already become an issue for many countries. When a teacher can learn continuously in a rapidly changing world, then a good quality of education may be more likely.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan also enacted a series of procedures to develop INSET, which is part of the New Actions in Education, 1998 (Ministry of Education, 1998). The act concerned emphasizes the urgency of amending the laws to encourage teachers to join INSET and to set up of a series of programs to facilitate teachers' self-development. Hence, many public and private institutions in Taiwan are both eager to provide teachers with as many INSET programs as possible (this is a huge market for profits). The government and the teachers both realize the importance of INSET. However, what about the INSET providers? Do they clearly understand

what these teachers really need in INSET? Is there a gap between teachers' perceived INSET needs and the INSET provision? This is the major concern motivating me to do this study.

In the following, I will review the literature related to INSET and this study firstly (Section 2), then I will explain the methodology used for this study (Section 3). In section 4 I will present the results of the study and discuss them, followed by some implications. Section 5 is the conclusion of this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this following section, I will briefly review the literature about INSET, the current INSET situation in Taiwan, and the results of related research in Taiwan.

### **I.INSET:**

This part will be divided into two sections, discussing the meaning and importance of INSET briefly.

#### **i.The meaning of INSET**

In Taiwan, student-teachers receive their formal education in how to be a teacher for 4 years in a teacher university; however, normally teachers' teaching careers last to prepare is for at least 20 years. The training is obviously insufficient to deal with frequently-changing teaching problems. We, teachers, are living in a spreading moving world and an effective teacher "needs to know and understand the ever-changing content of the subjects and topics being taught" (Wragg, Haynes, Wragg, & Chamberlin, 2000), especially the pursuit of a broad range of subject knowledge and a large repertoire of teaching skills (Wragg *et al.* 2000). An understanding of the needs of continuous education and career-long professional development for teachers have boomed up rapidly since 1990s (Burgess, Connor, Galloway, Morrison & Newton, 1993).

Then, what is the meaning of "INSET"? Broadly defined, it can include the following aspects:

(1)Teachers' self-education or self-development i.e. teacher's researching and reading to absorb new knowledge.

(2)Teacher's participating in school-based teaching research seminars or activities.

(3)Teacher's participating in outside-based educational activities either for short or long term (Wu, 1995).

These activities can be termed "in-service teacher education" or "in-service teacher training", depending on the purposes or the contexts of an activity. However, some argue that there should be a clear distinction between these. Purdy (in Peng, L. G., 2000: 16) explains that 'teacher training' simply focuses on acquiring how to use different teaching methods, procedures or skills; however, 'teacher education' also includes the changes of personal teaching attitudes, belief, affect, and behavior. Nevertheless, some do not emphasize too much on the difference and thus may use two terms interchangeably (Roberts, 1998).

Peng, L. G. (2000) states that INSET refers to a series of activities designed for teachers to improve the quality of their professional teaching. INSET contains planned, systematic, organized, target-based, and context-based educational activities, which can increase teachers' professional skills and cultivate professional teaching attitude. However, what Peng focuses on is mainly the external performance that a professional teacher can obtain from INSET, but it seems that he does not address the internal changes of teachers themselves through INSET (e.g. teacher awareness or teacher belief).

#### **ii. The importance of INSET:**

Johnston (1971) sharply points out two main aspects relating to INSET. I define one aspect as 'internal growth' and the other as 'external growth'. The former refers to the fact that INSET can help teachers to extend knowledge, consolidate and reaffirm knowledge, acquire new knowledge, acquaint themselves with curriculum and psychological developments, realize educational changes, and develop new teaching methods/skills. In addition, teachers can develop greater understanding, better performance, the understanding of education systems, self-respect and self-satisfaction (Johnston, 1971). However, sometimes teachers need INSET simply because of the extrinsic motivation such as additional salary, improved status and promotion, or to obtain a higher degree.

When the importance of INSET is examined contextually, then it can help regain the status of teachers (Ho, 1982). When teachers can continue to develop new knowledge or even upgrade their degrees, students will be more convinced of teacher's teaching. Secondly, INSET can increase the quality of citizens in a nation. Teachers' attitudes towards learning can influence those of students, who are the citizens of a

nation in the future. Besides, Wu (1995) also clearly points out why teachers need INSET. He proposes that modern teachers need INSET for it can help them adapt themselves in a fast-changing world either in their roles of being teachers or the acquisition of new knowledge. In addition, INSET can compensate for the insufficiency of teacher-training in university.

Peng, L. G. (2000) further develops some of Wu's viewpoints. He mentions INSET can raise the issue of lifelong learning for teachers, which is currently a major concern in education worldwide. Furthermore, since 'teaching' has been regarded as a 'profession' (e.g. recognized by UNESCO and many countries), then it is necessary for teachers to make their roles more professional and INSET helps teachers to achieve this goal. Though these Taiwanese writers' have generally discussed the importance of INSET, they seem to avoid mentioning the extrinsic motivations for a teacher's joining INSET in Taiwan. As mentioned by Johnston (1971), teachers can view INSET as necessary or important for them because of the pursuit of a higher salary, status, promotion, or the force from the school or government/laws. These extrinsic factors are clearly seen from the results of this study, which will be discussed in section 4.

## **II. The related laws about INSET in Taiwan:**

This section presents the laws of INSET regulated by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan and the translation from Du's thesis (1999).

Generally, at present teachers in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan are obligated to attend any INSET courses for at least 18 hours (equal to 1 credit) accumulated within an academic year, or 90 hours (equal to 5 credits) accumulated within 5 academic years. The detailed regulations are described in the Regulations on the Pursuit of Professional Development for Primary and Secondary School Teachers in Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Ministry of Education (1995) specifies:

- After receiving their teaching qualifications, teachers have the right to attend in-service training, do research and attend academic symposia (Chapter 4: Act 16, No.3).
- To upgrade educational qualities and achievement and to encourage teachers' professional development, the authorities concerned, both the Ministry of Education

and the schools, should set up responsible organizations to take charge of teachers' INSET courses (Chapter 6: Act 21).

- Teachers should be encouraged to attend INSET courses, pursue professional development, and develop teaching competence (Chapter 6: Act 22).
- Teachers' pursuing professional development, such as attending INSET courses or studying in graduate schools, are guaranteed the rights of working while studying or studying with their jobs help open. The government and the boards of education will offer subsidies (Chapter 6: Act 23).

From Ministry of Education (1995) & Du (1999)

Similarly, the Regulations on the Pursuit of Professional Development for Primary and Secondary School Teachers in Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 1996) also states that for teachers' professional development, teachers are guaranteed and encouraged to "attend in-service training programs, or visit other schools and observe their teaching, to study in graduate schools for credits or degrees, and to do research, approved by the authority concerned" (Du, 1999). With regard to the benefits teacher will receive after attending INSET courses, the Regulations on Encouragements for Teachers' Joining INSET Courses in Act 7 (Ministry of Education, 1996) also states that teachers can apply for subsidies for joining any INSET course, apply for upgrading of salary scale, ask for the results of INSET published, and obtain the qualifications of being hired or being a principal after joining some specific INSET courses.

Currently, the types of INSET in Taiwan normally include these: regular in-school conferences, school-based courses, school-based workshops, long INSET courses, short INSET courses, peer observation and private study (Du, 1999). In addition, with the spread of the Internet, the government also encourages each school to design websites providing INSET resources for teachers to access easily (Ministry of Education, 1998). As explained above, teachers' obligation for INSET has been clearly set by the government and the authorities also try to encourage teachers to undertake more INSET courses by law. However, a crucial and tricky premise in these laws is that it also states: "the authorities concerned should recommend, appoint or agree teachers to join INSET courses with considering teachers' teaching schedules in order to avoid any disturbance or influence in their teaching job" (Ministry of Education,

1996). It is this regulation that causes many complaints from teachers in attending INSET courses in Taiwan for it gives the authority/school stronger power than the teacher has to determine if a teacher can join INSET courses or not.

Indeed, as Roberts (1998) says, there is still a shortage of empirical research into INSET for English teachers whose mother tongue is not English. This statement is also applicable to Taiwan. Currently in Taiwan, most research is about the exploration of the importance of INSET for teachers, especially for primary school teachers, and seldom does it talk about English teachers' needs for INSET in secondary schools, nor investigate the gap between English teachers' INSET needs and the present provision in Taiwan.

Lu (1999) in his PhD thesis investigated the problems of teachers' professional development in primary schools using questionnaires. He classifies the reasons that will influence teachers' intentions for joining INSET. These factors include gender, teaching experience, degrees, jobs, the scale and location of schools, and the credits and length of INSET courses. He mentions that these primary school teachers like to attend courses with a degree awarded and prefer the courses to be held in their schools. He suggests that the authorities concerned should design a series of topic-based and school-based INSET courses for teachers' professional development. However, Lu's suggestion is seemingly contradictory to the current law for it is rather unlikely for a teacher to get a higher degree by joining these short-term school-based INSET courses. At present, if teachers in Taiwan who hope to obtain a degree after attending the INSET courses, they have to join those INSET courses which are held by accredited universities only.

Quite different from Lu's (1999) research method, Chang (2000) used the case study consisting of observation, interview, and documents analysis with three primary school teachers to discuss the relationship between INSET and professional development in Taiwan. She discovered that with the help of INSET the participants can continuously re-examine themselves (self-reflection), increase their confidence in teaching, acquire new teaching methods, and open their minds to absorb other's experience and new knowledge. These four points exactly match what Johnston (1971) states about why teachers need INSET. In addition, Chang also proposes that

collaborative action research is helpful for teachers' professional development, and more other methods should be designed for teachers to pursue new knowledge.

In her study, Peng, L. G (2000) discusses the advantages and necessities of carrying out school-based INSET in Taiwan but she also mentions some problems it may confront. These include the fact that successful school-based INSET should also greatly rely on support from other (including teaching and administration) staff, the principal, school culture, educational environment, and social condition. Besides, the force of resistance may come from teachers' communicative ability, the difference between teachers' degrees, the overloaded job, insufficient time, and external disturbances. These factors all make school-based INSET difficult to carry out in Taiwan. In fact, in the book "Making School-based INSET Work", Eason (1985) clearly points out the likely difficulties of carrying out school-based INSET. He mentions that introducing some changes to school may result in pressure both to individual teachers and a whole group of staff, which makes some become aggressive, some gloomy, and others withdrawn. What is worse, mistrust may possibly permeate the school with an atmosphere of tension.

In addition, though what Peng, S. L. (2000) focuses on is investigating the functions of the teacher centers in Taiwan, he also compares the present INSET systems in Japan, Britain, and Taiwan. He suggests several points. The first one is that private institutions can take charge of running INSET programs as well, and the government should provide subsidies for teachers in joining any public-run or private-run INSET course. Secondly, teacher centers should combine with enterprises, or local communities in sharing practical experiences. This suggestion is quite novel and valuable, especially when the Ministry of Education is currently spreading the idea of resource-sharing between school and community. Finally, he suggests the government set up an official institution to accredit what teachers have obtained from INSET programs, which can greatly motivate teachers to attend INSET more positively (Peng, S. L., 2000).

Du (1999) used questionnaires to investigate the INSET needs of English teachers in Taiwan. She lists the hierarchy of these language teachers' INSET needs as follows (from the highest to the lowest): pedagogical skills (37%), motivating students in



learning (17%), broadening horizon (9%), creating a positive classroom (9%), evaluating skills and testing (7%), teaching cultural things and authentic contexts (6%), supplementary materials and activities (6%), changing opinions and experiences (6%), aids in teaching activities (5%), knowing collaborative learning (2%), and teaching English literature (2%) (Du, 1999). This result differs from what Roberts (1998) asserts about non-native speakers of English teachers' first need in INSET –the proficiency in using English. However, this may be due to the limitation of Du's questionnaire (see Du, 1999: p.65-p.68). She used a close questionnaire with no question about the need of increasing English proficiency. Finally, she advises that the government should listen to teachers' voices and needs to make future INSET more efficient and applicable. Though Du's research investigates English teachers' INSET needs in Taiwan, she does not discuss much about the gap between current INSET provision and language teachers' perceived needs in Taiwan. This is the reason why I conducted this small-scale study.

However, due to the recent educational reforms in Taiwan, a number of studies examine teachers' INSET needs from the perspectives of nine-year integrated curriculum, school-based INSET model, multiple-intelligences education, and current INSET investigation. For example, in Lin's research (2002) he advises teachers to integrate the teaching skills or techniques with multiple-intelligences theory to facilitate teachers' professional development and to accommodate pupils' differentiated learning needs. Moreover, all of Chou (2001), Lee (2002) and Jian (2003) suggest that school-based short-term INSET model like seminars, study groups, action research, or classroom observation is the most appropriate, effective and popular means for in-service teachers but they also urge that in order to improve the current INSET situations some potential problems also need to be solved immediately, such as the insufficient budget, unsuitable time, irrelevant courses, inflexible laws or regulations, and the lack of resources. They, including Jiang (2004) conclude that professional growth and development is positively closed to the achievement and recognition of teachers' professionalism, which is indeed the goal of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Furthermore, the implementation of nine-year integrated curriculum arouses many researchers' interests in how to identify teachers' INSET needs and then plan

appropriate provision accordingly (Weng, 2000; Yang, 2001; Yang, 2002; Lu, 2002). These studies pinpoint that the current shortcomings of the INSET provision are that teachers are not respected in terms of specifying their INSET needs, provision may not be suitably and practically accommodated, or teachers cannot obtain sufficient administrative supports. Thus, they advise that the INSET provision with the implementation of the nine-year integrated curriculum should be focused on school-based model, peer-coached model, team interaction, local characteristics, and community-integration. Besides, teachers themselves are also suggested to change their attitudes towards INSET, and teach reflectively and cooperatively. In particular, Lu (2002) points out that English teachers in Taiwan express their 'urgent' INSET needs in the resources and references of English curriculum development, the teaching practices, the referential guides to nine-year integrated curriculum, and the school-based English-teaching training. In a word, the implementation of nine-year integrated curriculum shifts the focus of provision to the integration of the local context.

Very different from above studies, Lee (2003) attends her study to investigate university teachers' INSET needs and provision. She adopts a self-designed questionnaire to probe these university teachers' INSET needs and finds that firstly, in common, her participants demand the professional suggestions about how to motivate students in their learning, but secondly these teachers also reveal a large degree of differences in their needs of professional growth due to the very diverse academic specialties. Very interestingly, he indicates that these university teachers prefer attending the face-to-face seminars through the traditional medium i.e. paper-based texts to using technologies like the Internet or long-distance INSET provision. This result is, indeed, different from the cases in secondary and elementary schools such as in my study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The following section is about the research aims, the participants, research methods and limitations of the study.

## **I .Research Aim/Questions:**

In this study, there are three main aims. Firstly, I try to identify the English teachers' perceived needs in INSET courses in Taiwan. Secondly, I hope to investigate if there is a gap between English teachers' INSET needs and INSET provision in Taiwan. The final aim is to offer the INSET providers in Taiwan with suggestions made by the language teachers to make their INSET design more suitable and helpful in the future. Therefore, three research questions were set for this study.

What are the perceived INSET needs of English teachers in Taiwan?

To what extent, do the English teachers think that the provision matches their needs?

How can the INSET provision be made more helpful, relevant, or appropriate to their needs?

## **II . Research participants and methods:**

This study is divided into two stages and two different research methods are used i.e. open questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

At the first stage, there were 17 Taiwanese English teachers (including primary and secondary schools) involved in this study. Of these, 4 are teaching English in secondary schools in Taiwan currently and 12 of them are studying for their higher degrees in the U.K. at present. These 12 participants were all full-time English teachers in Taiwan and have stayed in Britain less than one year. After one-year's study approximately, all of them will return to Taiwan to resume their jobs as English teachers. The other is simply staying in the U.K., accompanying her husband for his doctoral degree. All the participants are non-native speakers of English teachers. The reason why most of the participants are those who are studying in Britain currently is because this study was conducted mainly in Britain. Furthermore, their teaching experiences vary as well. Only one of them has over 10 years' experience. The rest participants have taught for under 6 years.

All the participants were asked to complete an open questionnaire, designed by myself, about their perceived INSET needs and provision. The questionnaire was conducted anonymously but if any participant was willing to be interviewed for the

further study s/he could write his/her contact information on the questionnaire. The questionnaire included 6 open questions and could be answered either in Chinese or in English. These questions are:

(1)Have you ever joined any INSET course before? What were they about?

(2)What made you join these INSET courses?

(3)What are your general comments on these INSET courses? (suitable, useful, meet your needs, any difficulty before or while joining?)

(4)What topics do you think you need in INSET courses?

(5)What suggestions do you have for the INSET providers?

(6)Have you experienced any problems in joining INSET courses so far?

After all the 17 questionnaires were returned to me, I tried to analyze them by categorizing the answers of each questions into several groups. The results will be presented in the section 4, findings and discussion.

Before conducting my second stage, I would have expected to interview as many participants as possible originally, but only 2 participants responded that they were willing to be interviewed. Though the number for the interview is slightly small, I still believed it would be worthwhile to interview those two respondents, too.

The interviews were semi-structured and designed to probe deeper perceptions of these English teachers about the INSET needs and provision. The key questions included (1) what will make you believe you need INSET courses, (2) what kinds of courses do you need more urgently, (3) what further comments do you have on the INSET providers and provision in Taiwan, and (4) what are the most likely factors to discourage you from joining any INSET course.

I noted the content of the two interviews down on the paper, and the key ideas were later confirmed by the two interviewees. The main purpose of why I conducted this interview was to listen to teachers' voices more directly and to make up for the shortcomings of the questionnaire. The results of the interview were mainly used to supplement the statements of stage one.

### **III.Limitations of the study:**

There are four possible limitations in this study. Firstly, the number of the participants is not large enough to be representative and only two participants were

interviewed due to the limit of time and distance, and hence the results cannot be generalized to other English teachers in Taiwan. Secondly, most of the participants (12 out of 17) are studying their higher degrees in the U.K. at present and this may imply that to some degree these participants are unsatisfied with the current situations of INSET in Taiwan and therefore they chose to study abroad. Thirdly, this study did not include other potential participants' opinions such as the school administration staff, the INSET providers, or the authorities concerned, who indeed can be further investigated to achieve a more holistic and balanced view about the INSET problems. Finally, as a common drawback of a questionnaire, it is difficult to ensure the answers from the respondents are highly reliable or true. However, these limitations should not discourage me from conducting this research.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the findings from the research will be presented and discussed. For each question, I will show the question first, and then list the categorized responses. Finally, I will discuss what the responses mean with reference to the literature.

### **I .Have you ever joined any INSET courses before? What were they about?**

All of the respondents replied that they have joined several INSET courses before in Taiwan, and they are about:

(a)professional teaching in English: methodologies/methods (including how to teach writing, reading, listening, and speaking), how to use the new curriculum, innovative teaching (e.g. activities and materials designing), and testing and evaluation.

(b)competences of being a teacher: classroom management, computer skills, collaborative teaching and learning, special needs education, teacher appraisal, evaluation of peer-teaching, art therapy, and the relationship management with students' parents.

(c)lifelong learning for a teacher: personal development, career planning, and lifelong education.

(d)personal interests: the death-experiencing (to experience the feeling of being dead), Chinese and Western paintings, and English literature.

In fact, it is rather difficult to classify each item under an absolutely appropriate heading. For example, the course in learning how to use a computer could arguably be placed either under personal interest or teaching competence. Most of the above courses used speeches, demonstrations, seminars or workshops.

It is interesting to note that most teachers in the study viewed the courses related to how to teach English efficiently as the priority compared with other INSET topics. From this, it can be inferred that since English is not these teachers' native language they need a sense of security in teaching their students English. Therefore, the teachers need these INSET courses to increase their confidence in their English teaching ability. Roberts (1998: 97) asserts that one of the characteristics of the non-native speakers English teachers' learning need is they "may lack confidence in their English language ability and give their own language improvement a high priority", which is confirmed to some extent from the responses of this study.

Ms L in the interview said, "When I noticed my students' grades in English decreasing, then I realized that it was time for me to take some courses to strengthen my English teaching ability." The questions of "how do these teachers perceive their INSET needs is greatly influenced by the status of English in a society. Both 'the purpose of English education' and 'the English language curriculum' play crucial roles in affecting how these English teachers perceive their INSET needs (Roberts, 1998).

In Taiwan, English is learned and taught as a foreign language, and is usually related to passing tests. Therefore, when learners do not perform well in tests, many teachers will assume that perhaps it is their fault and they need some INSET courses about professional teaching, especially the courses of how to teach English more "effectively". Besides, most textbooks currently used by Taiwanese schools still focus on how to develop or strengthen learners' linguistic competence rather than communicative competence; hence, how to use the textbooks efficiently becomes these teachers' major concern.

## **II. What made you join these INSET courses?**

The reasons why the participants joined the INSET courses can be grouped into 3 types.

(a)Passive reasons: 13 out of 17 participants replied that they were 'forced' or nominated by the school administration to join the courses. Some responded that there was a rotation list in the office and every English teacher took turns to join the INSET courses regardless whether the course was suitable or not.

(b)Active reasons: Some respondents said the reasons why they joined the course were because they believed that the courses were helpful and they thought it was better to keep on learning something new about teaching. Therefore, these participants joined the courses based on their needs and intention.

(c)Passive + Active reasons: Two of the participants wrote that because joining INSET courses for 18 hours (or 1 credit) within one academic year was a regulation for teachers in Taiwan, they sometimes just attended some INSET courses to accumulate the hours in order to obey the law. These teachers joined the courses actively without suffering any force from the school but they were 'pushed' passively by the regulation.

The reasons can also be classified into intrinsic reasons and extrinsic reasons. The reasons like needing teaching improvement, self-development, experience-sharing can be intrinsic, while the reasons like getting a pay-rise, credits or promotion in positions are more extrinsic. From the responses, it seems that most teachers have a negative attitude towards what made them join the courses. Self-awareness of why and how to be an English teacher did not feature strongly. However, there were some examples of them. One responded that *"I believe firmly that teachers should keep learning all the time because the world, our society and our students are always changing and we, teachers, also need some changes to adopt ourselves in this changeable world."* Another interviewee said, *"I clearly know that what I have learned in the teacher university was too limited and insufficient. I need growing and need to make my students grow as well. So, I need these courses."*

Interestingly, when the two interviewees were asked 'why they chose to study abroad (the U.K.) as their INSET fulfillments, they both replied: *"In addition to learning the latest English teaching trends, I can also expose myself to the 'authentic' English and its culture, and this is very important for an English teacher in Taiwan."*

### **III. What are your general comments on these INSET courses? (suitable, useful, meet your needs, any difficulty before or while joining?)**

The responses can be categorized into two major groups: positive and the other is negative.

(a)Positive: A great majority of the participants agreed that to some degree these INSET courses are useful, helpful, interesting, inspiring, and innovative. They said generally the courses can introduce new teaching activities, update teachers' knowledge, help them deal with classroom problems, and meet their needs. One respondent mentioned that she liked the courses because usually she can meet her old friends during these courses. One responded that she thought the courses were good and not 'harmful' because she was not assessed at the end of the courses.

(b)Negative: The participants complained that sometimes the courses were too theoretical, irrelevant, and not practical in a real classroom. The speakers were usually experts but only good at 'addressing' not 'giving teaching tips'. One mentioned that the speaker only spoke 'empty words' because what the speaker said cannot be realistically carried out in her own classroom. Ms L in the interview criticized the fact that many INSET courses were sponsored by certain book publishers and the courses usually ended with the promotion of a book sale. In addition, Mr. T also complained that sometimes he was 'fooled' by the topic because the content was totally different from what the topic conveyed to the audience. Besides, he also mentioned that the speakers usually collected the feedback forms at the end of the courses but it seemed that they hardly improve or even make a change for their next courses. In addition, he said the audience seemed to be usually the same in different courses and 'those who did need courses to improve themselves did not join any course at all' ironically.

Except for the comments on the courses, a decent percentage of the participants also expressed some difficulties they confronted while joining the courses. For example, sometimes they received limited information about these INSET courses, the venue was too distant, and the number of the audience was too limited. Furthermore, it was difficult for them to find other teachers to cover the classes while joining the in-term INSET courses; therefore, they had to give up the opportunities unfortunately.



#### **IV. What topics do you think you need in INSET courses?**

As mentioned earlier, none of the participants is a native speaker English teacher in this study; therefore, how to become competent and confident in teaching English seems to be their high priority (Roberts, 1998). The topics suggested can be grouped into several types as follows. The hierarchy is listed according to the frequencies the participants mentioned in the questionnaire (a. is the most frequently mentioned, and d. is the least frequently mentioned).

(a) Professional English teaching: This means the topics that can make English teaching more effective. This includes the applications of new English teaching methods, the effective use of curriculum/materials, innovative teaching and English activities, materials design, the evaluation and testing of English teaching, the demonstrations of effective English teaching, the introduction of new English teaching theories (e.g. communicative approaches).

(b) Professional teaching: This group refers to the topics that can make teaching a profession. It includes the application of computers in teaching, students' counseling, classroom management, life-long learning, how to take care of learners' differences in a large classroom and how to motivate students in learning.

(c) Student-related topics: This means the topics that focus on helping the students in their learning, such as how to make students understand they are learning, how to help students develop learning strategies, and how to keep a good relationship with students' parents.

Personal interests: This group contains some INSET topics that are not so relevant to (English) teaching though some may argue that these courses are still related to teaching to some extent. The courses are about Taiwan culture, drama training, music appreciation, or feminism.

#### **V. What suggestions do you have for the INSET providers/provision?**

Quite a few suggestions emerged from the participants either for the speakers, the course itself, the course provider (institutions) or the teaching schools.

(a) Suggestions for the speakers: Most respondents suggested that they would like

an expert with practical experiences in how to teach English rather than an expert with a huge number of theories. Few mentioned that some well-known foreign experts needed to know the context in Taiwan in order not to only convey ideal thoughts instead of practical skills. In addition, one teacher said: *“The speaker must be an informant or real resource for me rather than a renowned lecturer.”*

(b) Suggestions for the institutes: The teachers strongly advised that the providers should investigate what teachers really needed for the INSET before designing any course. They suggested that the providers design a questionnaire researching what teachers need for INSET periodically. Besides, some participants also mentioned that it would be better if the content of the courses could be printed, video-taped or put onto the Internet for future reference. In additions, they also hoped that some INSET courses could be more school-based. Other suggestions includes offering more seats for a large audience, reminding teachers of bringing new knowledge back to schools, and tracing the continuous effects of the courses. One interesting suggestions is that the venue of the INSET course should be located in a peaceful and tranquil place which can inspire teachers’ spiritual minds.

(c) Suggestions for the courses: It seems that nearly all the participants responded that what they need is practical knowledge like tips, skills, demonstrations or ‘secrets to successful teaching’. They did not show much favor for theoretical lectures. This preference is greatly influenced by the status of English teaching in Taiwan.

(d) Suggestions for the teaching schools: Some teachers replied that they hoped the schools should not force or appoint them to join INSET courses; on the contrary, the schools should know teachers’ needs and respect their intentions. Furthermore, some initial teachers advised that the opportunity for joining INSET course should be equal, not only for new-coming teachers. No matter how many years a teacher has taught in school, s/he also needs INSET courses. This voice reflects the traditional school culture in Taiwan to some degree. In addition, many teachers strongly hoped that the problem of covering classes could be solved by the school administration unit; otherwise, this usually discourages teachers from joining any INSET course.

## **VI. Have you experienced any problems in joining INSET courses so far?**

Some of the problems these teachers had experienced have already transformed into the suggestions they made in the section 4.5. Therefore, the responses of this question may overlap with the previous points.

(a) Personal problems: These problems include teachers' physical conditions (e.g. sickness or tiredness), a family to take care of, unaffordable registration fee, unqualified background, and difficulty in understanding speakers' English.

(b) Providers' problems: These refer to the problems such as a distant venue, unsuitable time, the scarce opportunities, and insufficient information about the courses.

(c) Course problems: These means the courses were irrelevant, boring, unhelpful, or theoretical. Speakers frequently offered theories rather than practical suggestions.

(d) School problems: The teaching schools were not willing to look for cover teachers for them. (It is regulated that only when the INSET course lasts over 3 days will the school find another cover teacher automatically for the teacher in Taiwan.). The participants mentioned that they had to exchange many classes with their colleagues if they hoped to attend any INSET course, which usually discouraged them from joining any. One teacher responded that even in joining a school-based INSET course, her class would overlap with other classes. Some respondents felt that the schools seemingly did not encourage teachers to join any INSET course because this would bring some troubles either to the administration unit or influence the teaching schedule.

## **VII. Discussion and Implications:**

In this section, I will discuss what the results of this study from three different dimensions, the providers, the teachers, and the schools.

Firstly, there seems to be a gap between English teachers' perceived INSET needs and the INSET provision in Taiwan. Many participants complained that either the contents of the courses or the speakers invited disappointed them and they found the courses 'unhelpful'. This suggests that teachers' voices and needs have not been

researched sufficiently by INSET providers. In general, the current INSET courses are usually 'one-directional'. That is they hope to pass down experts' personal knowledge to 'each' teacher and tell him/her to bring the knowledge back to classroom and then implement it directly regardless of any context (teachers, students and schools) difference (Bax, 1995).

In fact, participants of the INSET courses expect to be more involved in such teacher training courses and also expect that the local context either from teachers themselves or students can be taken into consideration when the courses are designed (Bax, 1995; Du, 1999). Here, constructivists' views on teacher education can provide another perspective for the INSET providers. Williams and Burden (1997:2) propose that each person can construct his/her own knowledge/reality only when the knowledge/theories/ideas make sense to him/her in a personal way (Williams, 1999). This implies that only when input from the INSET courses can match what teachers perceive in their original knowledge/experiences are these courses regarded helpful or meaningful to these participants. Therefore, "a constructivist view of LTE (language teacher education) will see an intervention (such as a classroom experience, a lecture on learning theory, or a peer observation) not as a model or as a 'bolt-on' additional bit of content, but as an experience which we select from and then construct in our own way" (Roberts, 1998: 24).

Hence, what the provider can do is to work from each teacher's personal theories that each participant can bring to his/her INSET courses (Williams, 1999). In this way, teachers' perceived knowledge/needs should be researched before any INSET course is implemented. As mentioned earlier, the course providers can investigate English teacher's needs and priorities through questionnaires, interviews, or seminars, and then design courses based on the results. It is English teachers themselves not the administrative staff that decide what an INSET courses will be like. According to the results of this study and Du's survey (1999), what most English teachers in Taiwan urgently need in INSET courses are those which can introduce or demonstrate new English teaching pedagogical skills to make teaching more effective.

In order to take individual differences into consideration, the topics of INSET courses can be broadened to meet individual needs and local context. Moreover, in the

contents of the INSET courses, there should be a distinction between in-service teacher education and pre-service teacher education. Besides, the courses can focus more on practical applications and specific content to enable participants to combine theories and practices. It can be suggested that the INSET courses are differentiated on the basis of teachers' service years, specialty, and local context (Peng, L. G., 2000). Just as Penninton (1990) proposes, teaching can be more effective if a teacher can teach and learn based on his/her knowledge of being a particular teacher and learner.

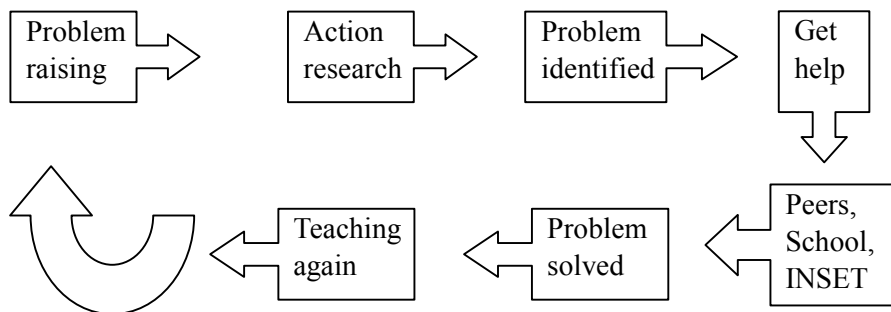
Secondly, the results imply that most English teachers in the study have reflective attitudes towards their role of being a(n) (English) teacher. The premise of suitable INSET course design is teachers' self-awareness. Only when teachers keep on reflecting on themselves and their teaching can teachers' needs be identified more directly and correctly. "A reflective teacher knows the art and craft of teaching, and considers it carefully both during and after interaction with students" (Lange, 1990: 247).

Being an English teacher in Taiwan, how can I clearly know what is going on in classroom, what is wrong with my teaching and what I need in my teaching? Here, action research may be helpful. The teacher is not merely a person who teaches students but also a researcher who can identify a problem in a classroom and then solve the problem; in other words, teachers also can be initiators of classrooms (McDonald & Shaw, 1993). Such classroom action research mainly focuses on a specific situation or problem in the teacher's own setting. The methods of classroom research can vary depending on teachers' purposes. Interviews, questionnaires, observation, peer-collaboration, fieldwork, documentary analysis, or even interaction with school can be used (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

What a teacher faces daily is a changing world, a changing school and a changing classroom. There should be a reflective model for her/himself to make teaching effective, which can be linked with INSET as well. The model can be illustrated as follows.

This model stresses the importance of teacher's self-awareness in his/her teaching through doing research and self-development by getting help from INSET.

In Vulliamy & Webb's research (1991), they reported that the teachers who can conduct classroom research claimed the process had brought the greatest impact on



their teaching. Besides, research also gives teachers “added motivation, increased confidence, analyzing and evaluating information to inform decision-making and a recognition of the roles of pupils, other staff and institutional structures in the change process” (Vulliamy & Webb, 1991: 234). Obviously, on the one hand, teachers’ INSET needs are greatly influenced by the outcomes of teachers’ research; on the other hand, the INSET providers can design more suitable and helpful INSET courses based on these research results. In a word, action research not only serves as means of remedying teaching problems in a classroom, providing teachers with new teaching skills, and heightening self-awareness, but also links the communication gap between teachers and INSET providers (Cohen & Mansion, 1994). Therefore, action research is highly recommended for teacher’s awareness and development in this study.

Thirdly, it is not simply providers’ and teachers’ jobs to make INSET work, but the school itself also play an important role. At present, there seems to be two problems in many schools in Taiwan with their attitudes towards teachers’ INSET. Though the school clearly realizes INSET is important for teacher-development and effective teaching, yet the school usually neglects that each teacher has different needs in INSET. Indeed, it is inappropriate for a school to ‘appoint’ or even ‘force’ a teacher to attend a course that does not match the need. Vulliamy & Webb (1991) cite Ried *et al.* that there are many thinking and more effective teachers but not too many thinking schools. In fact, teachers are the learners of INSET, and should be offered the right to choose the topic or course they are interested in and need (Peng, S. L., 2000). If not, it will result in those who need INSET not being allowed to join INSET and those who do not need it occupying seats. This happens quite commonly in Taiwan schools.

It cannot be denied that though school-based INSET still has some issues and

difficulties in implementation (such as budgets, loads of work, pressure etc.), it is widely accepted that school-based INSET is still seen an effective way of transmitting the ideas, interests and values for teachers because it can combine what teachers' need with local context (Eason, 1985; Du, 1999; Peng, S. L., 2000). Another important factor determining teachers' INSET needs is the school culture-the context. Many teaching problems are actually contextualized and the characteristics of action research are that it is situational, or context-based, collaborative, participatory, and self-evaluative (Nunan, 1990). Therefore, many problems can be solved more efficiently by doing school-based action research and designing school-based INSET for teachers to work them through.

A crucial problem of discouraging the participants in this study from joining outside-based INSET is either due to the distant venue or the difficulty of finding another teacher to cover the missing classes. School-based INSET can basically provide a solution to such a problem. It is suggested the schools should encourage teachers to do action research and then share honestly what they have gained with their peers through holding a professional discussion or seminar (Peng, S. L., 2000; Chou, 2001; Lee, 2002; Jian, 2003). When the school itself becomes a professional place for INSET courses, the development of teachers and the school can have a longer-term effect. Hence, he concludes that any INSET course in Taiwan can be more effective if it is designed on the basis of being 'school-based' and 'teacher-centered'.

## **CONCLUSION:**

With the rapid changes of the world, teachers are supposed to obtain the latest thoughts, and new teaching methods/skills, so they can interact with learners and teach students more efficiently. This makes INSET become more urgent and important for teachers. On the one hand, teachers can carry out self-reflection and self-development through INSET; on the other hand, students can also be taught new skills to adopt themselves well in such changing society (Peng, S. L., 2000). Therefore, INSET is not only crucial but also should be well-planned and soundly-organized.

However, as the results of this study show, many teachers are not satisfied with

the current INSET provisions in Taiwan. Both the government and teachers themselves realize that good quality of teachers is the base of successful education and INSET will usually help to promote such quality. However, if teachers are simply forced or nominated to join unwanted INSET courses, and if there is a gap existing between teachers' perceived INSET needs and current INSET provision, then how can we ensure the effects of INSET?

Therefore, the authorities concerned and the INSET providers in Taiwan are strongly advised to spend some time listening to teachers' voice, investigating what teachers really need in INSET, and designing appropriate programs with suitable speakers before any INSET course is implemented. INSET should not be carried out in a 'top-down' direction; instead, it should be built up from down to top. Teachers' needs and voice are the base of INSET implementation. In a word, it should be the teachers themselves that decide what their INSET needs are rather than the higher authorities or the providers.

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# 由英語文教師之觀點探討臺灣在 職進修教育之供需問題

楊文賢\*

## 摘 要

本研究之主要目的在於調查下列三項問題：(壹)、臺灣的英語文老師本身所認知的在職進修教育需求為何，(貳)、英語老師認為現今所提供的在職進修教育符合其所需的程度為何，及(參)、提供給英語老師的在職進修教育應該如何改善使其更有益處、相關性和適合其所需。本研究採用開放式問卷及半結構性的訪談進行調查、研究對象為在英國進修的現職台灣英語教師和現今在台灣的第一線英文教師。研究結果顯示這些英語老師對其本身的在職專業成長存有反思的能力及態度，然而現今政府所提供的在職進修教育卻又似乎無法精準的符合其所需求，也就是說英文教師所認知的在職教育進修的供需之間存在著極大落差。本研究提供下列建議以彌補此認知的差距：以建構性主義的角度來設計在職進修教育的課程內容、教師從事學校本位的行動研究及學校行政系統對教師從事在職進修採取更積極促成的態度。

**關鍵字：**教師在職進修、專業發展、英文教師觀點

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