

# Chapter 31

## Reforming Pre–Service English Language Teacher Training Using Professional Community of Learning

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the English language teaching context in Nigeria, teacher training-institutions often use theoretical and outdated curriculum with little emphasis on the acquisition of communicative language teaching (CLT) skills or content mastery. This does not adequately prepare teachers for work in basic and secondary schools. This chapter focuses on the potential of using professional community of learning to train pre-service teachers of English in CLT approaches. Two groups of teachers with similar pre-service training were evaluated during teaching practice, with one group being exposed to CLT approaches. Results suggest that pre-service teachers that were exposed to CLT approaches performed better in class than those who were not. Following these results, the potential for replication and integration into the national teacher-training curriculum in Nigeria is explored.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter identifies challenges in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context at various levels, including having Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) that are strong on theory but without corresponding practical pedagogic skills, experienced teachers who cannot cascade acquired training skills, outdated curriculum used in teacher training institutions, and general systemic failures resulting from a combination of these factors. In response to these challenges, the chapter outlines how a Professional Community of Learning (PCL) was used in the FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja (COEZ) to identify, explore and turn these challenges into resourceful potentials for improving teacher and institutional capacities.

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In addition, the chapter reviews previous research into PCL, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the Cambridge ESOL Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) with a focus on identifying features that inform PCL design and implementation techniques. The ways in which PCL is used to institute multi-level reform in English language teacher education in Nigeria is then explored, with a focus on improving pre-service teachers' competences and strengthening institutional capacity to improve ELT in schools.

Through this exploration, it became apparent that the PCL approach has the potential to strengthen weak and outdated pre-service curriculum, prepare pre-service teachers with adequate CLT skills for the classroom, provide ready-made master-trainers in primary and junior secondary schools, and develop a body of knowledge for future application across ELT contexts. Furthermore, the PCL approach may also improve the teaching of English significantly by improving pre-service teachers' linguistic skills and exposing them to professional practice even before they graduate to face the challenges of their profession.

The chapter reports on a pilot programme in Nigeria that used PCL to give a basic grounding in the CLT approach to pre-service English language teachers with a view to making them better equipped for professional practice and development. PCL implementation as described here progresses in three stages. The first is preliminary work where the team is formed, curriculum is integrated, and the operational system is outlined. The second stage is project implementation which occurs in two sub-stages, starting off and the actual practicum. The final stage is evaluation done when pre-service teachers are on teaching practice. Students go for teaching practice supervised by subject specialists and the credits earned count as a requirement for graduation. By examining the implementation and outcomes of this approach, the chapter offers a reform that promotes a student-centred teaching approach and active learning strategies among pre-service teachers of English in Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND**

### **Communicative Language Teaching and Professional Community of Learning**

The project described here integrates the CLT approach into the existing language teacher curriculum and devises a way to train pre-service teachers in the practical application of CLT. Richards (2006) described CLT as a set of core principles of language teaching and learning that aims to help learners develop communicative competence or ability. For the teacher, CLT implies making real communication the focus of language learning, supporting learners to learn by doing, being tolerant of learners' errors, and providing meaningful feedback (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002). The TKT aims to introduce prospective teachers to the core knowledge of teaching English to speakers of other languages in a communicative way. It targets inexperienced teachers or teachers in pre-service training who wish to receive a basic grounding in CLT theory in preparation for their teaching practice.

The TKT has three modules. Module one focuses on language and background to English language learning and teaching concepts, module two deals with planning for language teaching, and the third module handles classroom language and management (Banegas, 2011; Ngamsa & Jauro, 2013). The TKT relies on proven language learning theories, aids teachers with being constructively expressive, and encourages learners to use the language communicatively.

The TKT and CLT have a joint concern with improving language teachers' competences. Competence implies mastery of subject matter and possessing the ability to transmit knowledge in an easy, memorable and motivating way (Caena, 2014). From a linguistic point of view as expressed by Canale

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