‘An investigation into the preparation of teachers for language teaching at primary level: Implications for an initial Language Teacher Education programme’

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ABSTRACT

Following the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004 and based on the philosophy which underpins the language policy in Europe, the island has been investing heavily in early foreign language learning. However, despite improvements in English language learning in primary state schools, no significant changes have been evident as regards the preparation of English teachers at this level. In conducting this research, my primary intention was to offer prospective and practising primary teachers a “voice” to express their own views regarding the content and teaching approach of a potential ELT module within teacher education curricula.

The research adopted a mixed-method sequential approach carried out in two phases between March and July 2010. Data were initially obtained from 296 in-service primary teachers and 124 student teachers through a questionnaire-based survey. Data obtained in the second phase through individual and focus group interviews with 9 in-service-teachers and 11 student teachers respectively were used to explain, interpret and further examine the findings of the survey.

The findings have highlighted the importance of theory and practice, showing evidence that both are necessary in order to avoid fragmented language teaching. The study suggests, therefore, that providing student teachers with meaningful opportunities to form links between the taught theory and its practical application is a fundamental basis for a more holistic teacher approach to teacher education.
This study has also provided evidence that participants view learning as a process embedded in a social context, within which knowledge is constructed through collaborative, awareness-raising tasks set by mentors whose mediating roles in the creation of desirable learning contexts is perceived to be crucial.

Although the findings of this research directly concern the Cypriot situation, they are likely to have broader applicability beyond Cyprus, especially in countries where early foreign language learning forms part of their educational agenda. Developing primary teachers’ language teaching knowledge and skills while considering the various types of support they receive during their pre-service education form part of a wider endeavour to ensure quality in early foreign language learning, an objective set by the European Union.
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