

Transforming training: Evaluating the impact of training of trainers' programs through the lens of transformational learning theory

Lhoussine Qasserras^{1*}

¹American TESOL Academy of Rabat, Morocco; lhoussine_qasserras@yahoo.com (L.Q.).

Abstract: This study assesses training of trainers (TOT) programs using the framework of transformational learning theory. It explores participants' perspectives, training quality, trainer effectiveness, training philosophies, and suggestions for program improvement. A qualitative content analysis of the participant portfolios of 16 senior teachers underscores the importance of experiential learning components such as simulations and role-plays in promoting practical skills and enhancing theoretical understanding. Based on the results, we emphasize the importance of trainers possessing qualities such as empathy and respect as well as adopting a trainee-centered approach to create a transformative learning environment. We also recommend increasing program durations to facilitate deeper exploration and reflection. These insights enhance the continuing discussion on adult education and trainer development, providing recommendations for TOT programs.

Keywords: Content analysis, Training of teachers, Training program, Transformational learning.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Engaging in continuous professional development is essential for educators to stay abreast of the ever-evolving educational landscape. Training of trainers (TOT) programs play a crucial role in this process by equipping senior teachers and educational leaders with the knowledge and skills required to proficiently instruct and mentor novice teachers. These programs are essential for cascading expertise, nurturing a culture of continuous improvement, and ensuring the implementation of best practices throughout the educational system (Qasserras et al., 2023).

To enhance participants' pedagogical and leadership skills, the American TESOL Academy of Rabat meticulously designed the specific TOT program under examination in this study. This program encompassed interactive seminars, hands-on activities, and introspective strategies aimed at cultivating deep learning and professional growth. A key component of this TOT program was the creation of comprehensive portfolios by participants. The portfolios included participant bio forms, course objectives and expectations, definitions of quality training, qualities of excellent trainers, training philosophy, training experiences, and suggestions for improvement.

Participant portfolios are essential for assessing the outcomes of TOT programs, offering a comprehensive view of participants' learning experiences. Klenowski (2002) posits that portfolios allow individuals to document progress, articulate learning, and plan future professional development. They also facilitate self-reflection, providing a more detailed and insightful evaluation than traditional assessment methods.

Past studies have emphasized the significance of reflective practices and portfolio-based assessments in professional development programs. Chye et al. (2019) argue that portfolios facilitate educators' engagement in critical self-reflection, fostering connections between theory and practice while enhancing their professional identities. Portfolios also allow educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Garrett (2011) postulates that portfolios nurture a sense of ownership and agency, which in turn sustains engagement in the learning process.

This study aims to evaluate the TOT program's effectiveness and identify the key success factors by analyzing participant portfolios. The insights gained can inform the planning and execution of future TOT programs, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in promoting educators' professional growth.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of TOT Programs and Their Importance

TOT programs aim to equip experienced educators with the essential expertise to instruct their colleagues, ensuring effective teaching methods are disseminated throughout the education system. According to Qasserras and Qasserras (2023b), TOT programs play a crucial role in generating a multiplier effect, where educated instructors can influence and enrich the practices of numerous others, thereby improving the overall quality of education.

TOT programs enhance the sustainability of professional development by improving the skills and resources within educational institutions, cultivating leadership in educators, and standardizing training processes (Lefkowich et al., 2018).

2.2. Prior Research on Techniques for Assessing Training Effectiveness

Assessing training efficacy, which is crucial for improvement, encompasses quantitative measures such as pre- and post-tests and qualitative methods, including participant feedback and observation (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Erdas Kartal et al. (2019) argue that conventional evaluation methodologies frequently overlook the intricate and subtle results of professional development programs. Scholars have recommended the integration of qualitative methods such as participant portfolios to offer a more comprehensive and clearer depiction of the learning process and its results (Peet et al., 2011).

Participant portfolios are now recognized as a significant instrument for evaluating professional development programs. Portfolios enable educators to chronicle their learning process, reflect on their experiences, and exhibit their progress and accomplishments. Gómez Urrutia and Arellano Faúndez (2022) emphasize that portfolios promote profound and introspective learning, allowing instructors to establish connections between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation.

Portfolios for professional development have numerous advantages. First, they document participants' progress and accomplishments, facilitating both ongoing and final evaluations (Fox et al., 2008). Second, portfolios promote feelings of possession and control among individuals, as they actively participate in the process of recording and contemplating their learning experiences (Borko et al., 1997). Third, they enable individualized learning, enabling participants to customize their professional growth according to their own requirements and objectives.

2.3. Essential Elements of Successful TOT Programs

Successful TOT programs possess various essential elements that contribute to their effectiveness. Initially, they exhibit a high level of organization and structure, characterized by explicit goals, well-defined content, and measurable outcomes (Qasserras et al., 2023). A well-structured curriculum that effectively combines theoretical knowledge with practical application is essential to ensure that participants can effectively utilize their acquired skills in real-life scenarios.

Moreover, successful TOT programs prioritize active learning and involvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that active learning tactics such as collaborative projects, peer observations, and hands-on activities are crucial for promoting profound learning and the acquisition of skills. Motivating participants to actively participate in significant exchanges, openly discuss their personal experiences, and acquire knowledge from each other is crucial. Reflective practice through activities such as journaling, talks, and portfolio construction enhances individual learning and fosters a reflective culture in institutions (Jarvinen & Kohonen, 1995).

Finally, continuous assistance and follow-up are critical for maintaining the effectiveness of TOT programs. Providing participants with ongoing mentorship, coaching, and resources ensures they can effectively apply and improve their newly acquired skills and knowledge over time (Hayes & Pridham,

2019). This continuous support is essential for converting professional growth into enduring improvements in teaching practice and student achievement.

TOT programs are vital for professional growth in education. Evaluating these programs, especially through participant portfolios, yields insights into their effectiveness and potential improvement areas, enabling more effective development initiatives by policymakers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design that is well suited for exploring complex phenomena and understanding the experiences of participants in depth (Smith & Chudleigh, 2015). The primary data sources for this study were participant portfolios from the TOT program held at the American TESOL Academy of Rabat. These portfolios provide rich, detailed accounts of participants' learning journeys, reflections, and professional growth, making them ideal for qualitative analyses.

3.2. Participants

The study included 16 participants, from different departments such as English, Health, Culture, Science, logistics, and Physics'. They all completed the TOT program and belonged to two cohorts. We selected the participants based on their active participation in the program and the comprehensiveness of their submitted portfolios. The participants were 10 male and 6 female senior teachers with varied backgrounds, degrees, and prior training experience, providing a diverse range of perspectives for analysis. Of these, 12 teachers hold BA degrees in English, Physics and Science, while 4 hold Master's degrees in English, Logistics and Science. Nine teachers have more than 10 years of teaching experience, 5 teachers have 3 to 5 years of experience, and 2 teachers have less than 4 years of experience.

3.3. Data Collection

By the end of the TOT program, the participants had submitted their portfolios digitally and in hard copies. Each portfolio comprises several key components:

- (1) Course Participant Bio Form: Personal information, including name, gender, degree(s), contact details, prior training experience, and professional aspirations.
- (2) My objectives and expectations
- (3) My definition of quality training
- (4) Qualities of good trainers
- (5) My training philosophy
- (6) My TOT training experience
- (7) My suggestions to boost TOT quality

3.4. Data Analysis

The participant portfolios were analyzed using a systematic qualitative content and thematic analysis process. This method involves interpreting textual data through a series of coding and categorization steps to identify meaningful themes and patterns (Kuckartz, 2019).

3.5. Coding and Categorization of Data

- (1) We read the portfolios multiple times to familiarize ourselves with the content. We documented our initial notes and impressions to guide our later coding.
- (2) Open Coding: Data were segmented into meaningful units and initial codes were assigned such as professional background, training aspirations, and prior experience. TOT experiences were coded under reflective insights, new training practices, and challenges encountered.
- (3) Categorization: We grouped similar codes into broader categories such as impactful learning moments, challenges faced, and application of new knowledge.

- (4) Theme Identification: The TOT program identified and further analyzed recurring themes such as the importance of reflective practice and experiential learning techniques such as role-playing and simulations to understand their contribution to the transformative learning experience.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

We strictly adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the study to protect participant confidentiality and ensure voluntary participation. We obtained written informed consent from all the participants, providing clear explanations about the research purpose, data usage, and their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. We anonymized the portfolios and securely stored all data to ensure privacy.

3.7. Identification of Themes and Patterns

The thematic analysis involved examining the coded data to discover overarching concepts and trends and identify themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We identified and interpreted key themes, including the significance of reflective practices and role of active engagement in professional growth.

We used triangulation to ensure that the findings were reliable and valid by comparing the themes and patterns with other data sources such as feedback from the participants and observations made by the facilitators (Carter et al., 2014). This approach helped confirm the accuracy and relevance of the identified themes.

The final step involved synthesizing the themes and patterns to draw comprehensive conclusions about the effectiveness of the TOT program. This synthesis provided valuable insights into the strengths and areas of improvement of the program, offering practical recommendations for future TOT initiatives.

By employing a qualitative content analysis of the participant portfolios, this study provided an in-depth evaluation of the TOT program, highlighting the key components that contribute to its success and offering guidance for enhancing professional development programs for educators.

4. Results

4.1. Objectives and Expectations

The qualitative analysis of the participant portfolios revealed clear goals regarding their development as trainers. They sought to improve their training skills and understanding of adult learning principles. Their reflections and documented aspirations revealed several key themes.

Theme 1: Understanding Theoretical and Practical Foundations

The participants documented a strong desire to merge theoretical knowledge with practical training skills. For instance, participant (5) wrote, "My objective was to understand not just the 'what' but also how to put these training techniques into practice."

Theme 2: Confidence-Building

Building confidence to conduct impactful training sessions was a recurrent theme. One participant (9) stated, "I seek to leave this program not just with knowledge but with the confidence to apply it effectively."

4.2. Quality of Training and Trainers

This theme encapsulated the participants' evaluations of the training quality, focusing on both the program's instructional design and the trainers' competence.

Theme 3: Effective Training Practices

Most of the participants highlighted active participation and engagement as essential for effective learning. One participant (6) noted, "The program excels when it engages us with hands-on activities and micro-training sessions that make learning concrete and memorable." Another participant (11) said, "Interactive sessions have not only engaged us but also reinforced our understanding of complex concepts."

Theme 4: Experienced and Empathetic Instructors

Several of the trainees praised the trainers' quality and approachability and noted the trainers' knowledge, empathy, and understanding as key factors to the learning transformation.

4.3. Philosophy of Training

The participants expressed their training philosophy, highlighting the importance of using a learner-centered approach and creating empowering learning environments.

Theme 5: A Learner-Centered Approach

The emphasis on tailoring the training to meet learners' needs was evident. One participant (2) expressed, "Adopting a learner-centered approach allowed me to engage more effectively with the content." Another (7) stated, "I have observed something very important, which is that this program respects and addresses our individual learning styles while making the learning process effective and personal."

Theme 6: Empowerment and Inclusivity

Some of the trainer trainees underlined the importance of creating an inclusive and empowering training environment. "The program's focus on empowerment through inclusive participation has been pivotal," wrote one trainee (12). Another (15) reflected, "Creating an environment where every participant's opinion is valued has enriched our collective learning experience."

4.4. Experience and Efficacy of Training

Several of the trainees valued the practical components such as workshops and simulations, with suggestions for extending the program to enhance learning outcomes further.

Theme 7: Practical Application

Many of the trainees highlighted the practical application of theoretical knowledge through active learning strategies. "The simulations and role-playing activities have brought theory to life," one participant (3) detailed in their portfolio. Another (9) echoed, "Applying what we've learned through practical exercises has boosted my understanding and skills."

Theme 8: The Need for an Extended Duration

Some of the trainees felt that extending the program would provide greater benefits. "A longer duration would allow us to delve deeper into advanced training techniques," suggested participant 12.

4.5. Recommendations for Enhancement

Based on their experiences, the participants recommended specific enhancements to improve the TOT program's effectiveness.

Theme 9: Increased Duration and Depth

The majority suggested extending the program. "Extending the program duration would provide us with a more thorough exploration of key training concepts," participant 1 suggested. Another participant (9) recommended, "A longer training period would help trainees practice more extensively and improve our techniques."

Theme 10: Expanded Practical Opportunities

The participants advocated for more practical engagement and reflection opportunities. "Additional practical sessions would develop our ability to implement what we've learned," noted trainee 11. Another (16) stated, "More hands-on and reflective activities are important for putting all we have learned into real practice."

4.6. Overview of the Findings

The in-depth content and thematic analysis of the participant portfolios underscores the need for a training approach that effectively integrates theory with practice, emphasizes learner-centered methods, and provides ample opportunities for practical application. These findings highlight the necessity of designing training programs that are not only informative but also transformative, enabling trainees to enhance skills, confidence, and readiness to apply knowledge effectively.

5. Discussion

The evaluation of the TOT program, based on the feedback of the 16 participants, provides valuable insights into its efficacy and potential areas for improvement. This debate analyzes and explains these findings in the context of broader educational philosophy and proposes potential consequences for future practice.

5.1. Consistency with Training Objectives

The findings reveal a robust correlation between the program's objectives and participants' expectations, which include understanding training ideas, gaining practical skills, and building confidence in their training capabilities. This aligns with the core goals of TOT programs (Qasserras & Qasserras, 2023b).

The program's objectives are clear and well aligned with participants' expectations, indicating that the TOT program is well designed. However, achieving these goals is contingent on both the quality of the teaching and the relevance of the material. The focus on practical application and direct involvement exemplifies the concepts of experiential learning, which assert that active participation and real-life significance improve learning results (Kolb, 1984). Participants' feedback supports the effectiveness of interactive sessions and practical activities in expanding their comprehension.

5.2. Quality of Training and Trainers

The participants' highlights emphasize the need for dynamic training techniques and empathetic trainers. High-quality training is marked by clear goals, a well-organized syllabus, and effective feedback (Qasserras et al., 2023).

The results align with the idea of formative evaluation, emphasizing the need for ongoing feedback and adaptation in the training process (Brown & Gerhardt, 2002). Trainers' proficiency and compassion are crucial, as they have a substantial impact on the learning atmosphere and participants' level of involvement. Trainers' responsibility goes beyond simply delivering knowledge and includes motivating and supportive functions, as highlighted by the participants' feedback. This is consistent with the concepts of adult learning theory, which proposes that effective trainers should act as facilitators of learning and be attentive to the needs of their learners (Tiedeman & Knowles, 1979).

5.3. Training Philosophy

The participants favored learner-centered approaches, empowerment, and inclusivity with current educational methodologies (Freire, 1970). The emphasis on a learner-centered approach signifies a transition from conventional teacher-centered approaches to more cooperative and interactive forms of education. Research substantiates this strategy by highlighting the benefits of active learning settings for enhancing student engagement and improving learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The TOT program promotes inclusivity and respect, in line with the values of equity and social justice in education, to ensure equal opportunities for all participants to succeed.

5.4. Efficacy of Training Experience

The participants provided positive feedback on the effectiveness of experiential learning. However, the suggestion to extend the program indicates a recognized limitation. This inclination toward longer training aligns with the notion that additional time permits a comprehensive examination of the subject matter and the application of skills (Gan & Ouh, 2019). Integrating practical, tangible applications is essential for closing the divide between theory and practice. Extending the program would enhance participants' skill proficiency and the necessary tools to utilize these abilities in their professional settings. This proposal indicates a preference for a more extensive educational encounter that encompasses both theoretical and practical elements of instruction.

5.5. Suggestions for Enhancement

The participants' suggestions for curriculum expansion and practical opportunities highlight areas for improvement. These ideas are crucial for enhancing the program and ensuring it adequately caters

to participants' diverse needs, aligning with the need for differentiated methods (Qasserras & Qasserras, 2023a). Responsive curriculum development entails incorporating participants' feedback into program design and tailoring the program based on learners' needs and experiences (Ameyaw et al., 2019). Extending the program time and improving the practical components could improve skill development. Research indicates that making iterative modifications to training programs based on participant feedback yields more effective and engaging outcomes (Cole, 2008).

6. Conclusion

This study evaluated the TOT program's efficacy through feedback from 16 participants. The results indicate that the program effectively establishes a supportive learning environment, aligning with participants' expectations, and provides high-quality training. Participants appreciate the interactive and practical components for developing their understanding and skills.

6.1. Summary

The program aimed to equip trainers with necessary skills and knowledge. The participants valued the focus on practical application and hands-on learning, which aligned with their expectations. They highlighted trainers' expertise as a key factor in the program's success but noted the necessity for more extensive practical experience and a longer program duration.

6.2. Limitations

Despite positive feedback, this study has some limitations. The first limitation is regarding duration. The 5-day duration limited exploration into training methodologies and practical application. The participants expressed a desire for a longer duration to improve their comprehension and proficiency.

The second limitation regards the range of practical experience: The participants desired more hands-on practice exercises and real-world simulations.

The third limitation concerns generalizability. Feedback from one participant group may not fully represent the experiences of all attendees, particularly within the particular context of the TOT program in Rabat at the American TESOL Academy.

Based on the study results, the following recommendations are suggested:

Lengthen the program duration: Extend the program's duration to allow for a more comprehensive analysis of training techniques and more opportunities for practical application, aiding participants to effectively refine their skills and comprehension of the content.

Incorporate more practical components: Incorporate more extensive practical exercises and real-world simulations to enhance skill implementation in various contexts. This may involve providing additional interactive sessions, conducting role-plays, and conducting case studies. **Ensure diverse participant feedback:** Solicit feedback from a diverse group of participants to comprehensively assess the program's effectiveness and improve generalizability.

Provide ongoing evaluation and improvement: Implement continuous feedback for ongoing evaluation to identify areas for improvement to ensure the program's ongoing relevance and effectiveness and facilitate iterative enhancements.

Focus on trainer development: Provide additional training and professional development opportunities for trainers to improve the quality of instruction including providing educators with advanced adaptability, empathy, and facilitation skills. Finally, the TOT program effectively facilitates the professional development of trainers; however, there is potential for improvement in terms of the program's duration and practical experience. By addressing these limitations and implementing the recommendations, the program can increase its effectiveness and influence on future trainers.

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