

Reducing Teacher Resistance to Change and Innovations

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Abstract

This paper discusses the reasons of teacher resistance to change and innovations in educational settings with particular respect to the role of teacher education. It emphasizes the kinds of innovations, their characteristics, the reasons of resistance of teachers in using technology and some suggestions to handle with this important problem of our age. In order to pave the way for a new and modern society, it is essential to create awareness and to educate teachers as open-minded, innovative and far-sighted individuals to innovations and well-informed users on the recent technology. In this paper, the author, who is a curriculum designer and instructor, will share her experiences within the in-service and pre-service educational programs of Turkish teachers on the way of reducing resistance to change and innovations.

1. Introduction

We live in an era of “Information, Technology and Communication”. The mode of communication has changed recently through the use technology in the global world. It has become virtually instead of leaving the materialistic manner, such as; paper, envelope and stamp. The internet is the most important factor for this change. It is the fastest one among the other networking systems, and brings the most widely known information net to our homes and deserves being one of the best inventions within the last twenty five years. Even though the internet is a gigantic library in our houses and schools which makes our lives more comfortable and more time saver it might be difficult

for some people to be adapted to the changing technology and as a result might cause resistance to use.

It is known that instructional technologists are responsible for implementing and fostering the adoption of a variety of innovative programs and devices to improve the teaching-learning process. Without doubt, instructional technology and its potential to improve instruction have progressed more rapidly than acceptance and utilization in the classroom. *“The largest single factor affecting adoption is teacher resistance”*, VanWyck [1] says. *“With several years of additional experience on a wider variety of academic levels, it is more apparent to that, to effectively reduce resistance we must be more practical in terms of objectives and needs.”*

On the other hand, Fullan [2] says; *“Change is a double-edged sword.”* and he adds; *“If you ask people to brainstorm words to describe change, they come up with a mixture of negative and positive terms: On the one side, fear, and danger, panic; on the other, risk-taking, excitement, and energizing. Change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, the leadership is the key.”*

It is clearly seen that upon the recent fundamental changes in technology and as a result the need for change in instruction at schools necessitates the redesign of teacher education. That is especially important when the teacher leadership and guidance are considered vital factor for training qualified generations.

Characteristics of Innovations

In order to develop an appropriate frame of reference, a brief examination of the characteristics of innovations may be listed. An innovation has two characteristics:

1. An idea, method, object or piece of equipment which is novel to the individual or group.

2. The anticipation that some desired change will result from the adoption of the novel idea, method, object, or equipment, and related materials.

Evans [3] defines four major components influence the process whereby an individual or group becomes aware of, evaluates, and finally accepts, resists, or rejects the innovation:

- The innovation itself,
- The process, its production, promotion, and adoption,
- The characteristics of the individual or group comprising the social system,
- The nature of the social system.

Reasons of Resistance

Brickell [4] suggests that major innovations require significant shifts in the normal operating procedures of six structural elements of a school or institution: Teachers, students, subjects, methods, times and places. Some innovations require acceptance or rejection by the entire school or institution with little freedom of choice for the individual. For instance, the implementation of modular or flexible scheduling requires the commitment of the entire staff. Other innovations permit the individual to accept or reject independently of group action, such as in the development of a televised course or the implementation of a film-making unit. If it is thought from the point of view of teachers, it brings in the autonomy of teachers within the classroom. Much of the literature on teacher resistance has been corroborated through many years of personal experience of researchers consulting with and assisting teachers on elementary, secondary and higher education levels [4]:

- Any sudden or formidable change in the traditional role of teacher and student is likely to elicit some form of resistance.
- Many teachers and administrators feel that technological innovations tend to promote a mechanization of instructional process, which thus becomes “dehumanized”, resulting in a loss of feedback between student and teacher.

- The degree of complexity of innovations and/or changes, particularly those involving equipment, has a strong influence on acceptance, resistance, or rejection. *“If the equipment is not technically reliable simple to operate, and readily obtainable, resistance can be anticipated”*, Aquino says [5].
- Some of the innovative failures are caused by ignorance, which existed when innovation was unknown or its complexity led to a lack of understanding.
- Sometimes innovation is not accepted because it was not used in the past.
- Teachers are confident of the success of their own methods, making innovation unnecessary.
- Sometimes the cause is psychological. It does not fit the personality of the teacher.
- Or, the cause is interpersonal relationships; if colleagues do not use it, why should I?

Ways of Reducing Resistance

According to Rossi and Biddle [6], an innovation is less likely to cause resistance if it supports or slightly modifies current educational practice rather than changing or replacing the practice. Another important point is the “Role of administrator” as “Change agent”. It is necessary for teachers and administrators to work cooperatively in a spirit of common professional concern to initiate desired change in instructional programs.

Persellin [7] lists some conditions before innovations have a chance to succeed. They are as follows:

1. The educational community must perceive and express a specific need for change.
2. The need must be recognized by the community at large.
3. A state of the art in both methodology and media must exist for meeting the need in a cost-effective manner.
4. Sufficient funds must be available for paying the cost.
5. Teachers should be prepared for the change adequately.

Another important point is taking the advantage of experience and wisdom of teachers in the planning process, particularly in the establishment of programs to bridge the gap between the old and the new. Teachers must be allowed, and should be encouraged to participate in the evaluation and selection of equipment, materials and policies related to their use.

We must prepare students and teachers for the innovations. In-service programs and workshops must be carefully planned so that all involved, are better able to handle the inevitable problems associated with change in an ongoing system. For example, a teacher should be familiar with the advantages and limitations, and feel comfortable using a cellular, a video or a computer.

To sum up, essentials for successful innovation and /or change can be listed as follows [8]:

- Adequate participation in planning by all those who will be involved at various levels and stages in implementing a project.
- Support in principle from those authorities who have responsibility for education in the area in which an innovation will operate.
- Sufficient preparation to ensure that the teachers who will be involved and the facilities at their disposal will be capable of meeting the demands placed upon them.
- Clear identification of the limits within which an innovation may operate and the extent of the supporting services that can be provided.

Developing Solutions to Teacher Resistance

Technology has been changing rapidly. The innovative use of technology is one of the best solutions to remove the obstacles between teachers and learners, teachers and teachers and also to remove the walls among the countries. Ineffective leadership is one important single factor in our inability to significantly reduce teacher resistance to innovation. Another one is training. A Brazilian educator Eduardo Chaves says; *“We are born incompetent and dependent. But we are born with an incredible capacity to learn. Education is the*

process by which incompetence is translated into competence, dependence into autonomy. This process takes place through learning”.

As people in the world today, we stand on the cusp of the information age. We are now moving rather swiftly toward this revolutionary social transition [9]. Factors that tend to reduce resistance are teacher understanding and involvement, in-service training programs to bridge the gap between the old and the new, efficient support services, effective communications, understanding administrators and confidence in the media professional responsible for implementing desired change. It seems logical, therefore, that teachers should be trained in the utilization of the modern technology. Therefore it can be said that technology must be used in such a way that it should not only satisfy the needs of the students in a qualified manner and it must also be the meeting point of teachers with other creative and innovative teachers. Thus, students will again get benefit from such coincidences. In order to open that gates of innovative learning programs and modes to young students; universities, companies and some research centers are trying to design new programs on the way of reducing teacher resistance. Some IT companies collaborating with the Ministries of Education try to create new environments to meet teachers with other teacher who follow more innovative routes in their classes. The sharing platform in those programs, naturally, becomes the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet. The author shares her experiences as the localizer of an international ICT Program within Turkey on the way of reducing teacher resistance to change in the following section [10].

A Case from Turkey: Innovative Teachers Program

“Innovative Teachers Program” was developed by the experts of an IT company as a part of their “Educational Initiative”. In July 2005, nearly 100 educators from 23 countries came together in Washington, USA to explore their mission on the frontlines of education. During that event, teachers investigated leadership, teaching, and learning in thoughtful exchanges with peers and leading thinkers in Education.

Teachers also shared best practices and insights of their own. At the moment, more than 100 countries have been implementing that program. As part of the initiative, the authorities of the company collaborate with local and international experts and seek to increase access to latest computer technologies in educational institutions.

The author, with some qualifications such as being an ex-high school teacher, a curriculum designer, a teacher-trainer and a quality expert, worked as one of the local partners of that company in Turkey between the years of 2004-2009 [8]. The author participated in many international meetings and seminars as the advisor, localizer and also the trainer of the Innovative Teachers Program to internalize the philosophy, and then, she prepared a 32-hour Program for the future “Innovative Teachers” of Turkey. She wrote and edited the book and other training materials of the program in 2005. After two pilot groups, she modified the training contents and prepared for the implementation step. With the collaboration of the authorities from the Ministry, she trained nearly two hundred teachers at four different regions of Turkey. After each training program, feedback was collected from the participating teachers, modifications were done, and the Program was handed in the Minister of Educational Technologies of the Ministry of National Education in 2009.

After the training of “Innovative teachers”, the next step was to determine the volunteer “innovative teachers” to be “Innovative coaches” for their own school districts. For, the “Cascade Model” would be used to increase the number of innovative teachers within Turkey. At that time, there were 650,000 teachers working different levels of Turkish schools. The author prepared a different set of in-service training program:

1. A 32 hour-training program for the Innovative Coach trainees and
2. A 12 hour-leadership training program for their school principals.

As it has been easily understood, It had been designed as a “Collaborative Coaching Program”. The author focused the program to the cultural values of Turkish people which is shortly known as

İmece (=Collaboration). The pilot studies were done with four teams and after the modifications they were also delivered to the Ministry. Some of the trained teachers, in other words “Innovative teachers” participated in the “Worldwide Forums” in Helsinki and in Philadelphia. They won various awards. The program still goes on in Turkey and the experts of the Ministry are continuously training new innovative teachers.

Including Teacher Trainees into the Program

The author has been working at Educational Faculties to train innovative and quality-focused future teachers. While training the future innovative teachers through the collaborative in service programs of Ministry; she also has decided to include the students of Educational Faculties into the movement. She designed and opened a course under the title of “Innovative Teaching” at Boğaziçi University in the Spring Term of 2005-2006 Academic year. Each year, the program has been developed gradually and adapted to the changes in the era. The course has been going on for seven years. In the academic year of 2011-2012, the title of the course was changed into the “Teachers of the Future”. More than 500 teacher-trainees elected the course. The Syllabus of the course is as follows.

TEACHERS OF THE FUTURE

Course Objectives:

The Objectives of this course are to develop a basic understanding of Quality, Personal Quality, Quality Leadership among the future workforce of the community, the difference between innovation and innovativeness, to internalize how to “manage change” in 21st Century organizations, to learn the recent techniques and approaches concerning innovation, leadership roles and skills in the work environment, to understand the importance of using technology at various settings through some “Information and Communication Technology (ICT)” projects and some innovative techniques for the new life styles, to be familiar with the problems of challenged human resources, to learn how to conduct İmece (quality) circles and to improve “peace and quality” concepts at work. On the other hand; Leadership Styles,

Personal characteristics of Effective Leaders, Leadership Skills in the Society and various organizations, Communication Skills, The Role of the Leaders in Strategic Planning Process, Managing People, Managing Organizations and Managing Change will be studied in detail to develop a global understanding for the changing world. Each term a new issue is analyze; like “The Challenged”, “Human Dignity” or “Peace”.

Target Group: This course is for the ones who are very close to their graduations professional lives. Recent developments in daily life and innovative ideas for business world, including the quality journeys of overseas organizations will be introduced. Attendance is essential, for project-based leading is realized. It is mainly open to all students who will be leaders of the future in any field.

Course Contents:

- *Introduction*
- *Defining Quality, Personal Quality & Leadership*
- *Main pillars and principles of Total Quality in Education & and goals: Strategic planning,*
- *Organizational culture and climate*
- *Leadership in 21st Century: Discussion on the Big Picture*
- *Innovation, innovative and innovativeness: Sample cases from Turkey.*
- *Qualities of effective leaders/teachers*
- *“Challenged students in Turkey and in the world”.*
- *Developing team work and circles at work.*
- *ICT Sample projects from Turkey, India, USA and some other European countries (Leadership, Marketing, Career Portfolio).*
- *Human Dignity & Humiliation Studies for future leaders.*
- *General Evaluation.*

Required and Suggested Readings and also evaluation part will be shared upon request. The reflections and outcomes of the course will be shared during the presentation.

Some Final Words...

Teachers are confronting with challenging circumstances today. An increasingly diverse student population, rapid changing educational systems, problems in teacher training policies and adaptation problems of people to ever-changing technology are only a few of the main problem areas. The solution lies in education. School partners must walk arm in arm within the difficult path of education and technology. The innovative use of technology in education can add support to teachers working in teams. Collaborative projects may bring the joy of learning and sharing to students. Parents might take part in them to see what is going on in the educational world. Business world and media might catch some small but effective applications in various places. School directors might exhibit a real school leadership to combine all.

As a final remark, it can be said that; “Innovations are valuable and effective according to how wisely they are used, and how well they are taught to be used for the future use.”

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