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Impact analysis of the in-service teacher training programmes of the Testing and Evaluation sub-committee of the ELTR Project in Pakistan

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Abstract

The study seeks to explore the perception of the concerned EL teachers (trainees) on the in-service training programmes conducted by the Testing and Evaluation sub-committee of the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The researchers administered a questionnaire to gauge the overall effectiveness of programmes of the target sub-committee. The study brought to light a few gaps between the training objectives and their realization in real classroom settings mainly owing to the problem (of the lack of resources) faced by the trainees at their workplaces. The researchers felt the need for making merit or need-based selections/nominations of the trainees, devising a fool-proof mechanism for the follow-up of the trainees and for providing facilities to the trainees for implementation of the training input.

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1. Introduction

It is a generally accepted phenomenon that, whether it is a matter of making educational process more meaningful or a question of improving its quality, one factor that usually stands out is the role of the teachers – the quality of their preparation and their professional development. Quality improvement in educational process depends upon proper professional development of teachers (Avalos, 1991; Sharma, 1993). Similarly, Thomas (1993) too believed in the same theory that teachers cannot play any of the roles effectively unless they are properly trained. He maintains that since teaching is a lifetime profession and there is a rapid explosion of knowledge, it is not sufficient to provide training to teachers once in their life span; therefore, ensuring continuous professional development of teachers has become necessary (ibid.).

The existing need for such an on-going professional development of English Language Teachers (ELTe) in Pakistan, at almost all levels, is no exception to the whole scenario of Teacher Education. Unfortunately, in Pakistan's educational context, it is a generally observed reality that a significant proportion of the university/college ELTe has usually been kept isolated from professional development opportunities and networks that are crucial for the successful teaching outcomes at higher level. However, since its inception, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan is providing professional development

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opportunities to college/university teachers. For instance, the Commission has initiated the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project to bring qualitative improvement in English Language Teaching (ELT), and to build capacity for sustainable development of ELTe.

Accountability is seen as an important factor in raising quality (Brown 2004). According to Abbas (2003), follow-up, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms play a significant role in the effective implementation of any programme or project. They help in course correction and tracking of activities resulting in the achievement of the desired objectives. Again, the desired philosophy of teacher training programmes lays emphasis upon the adjustment of the whole exercise – internally as well as externally. It is, therefore, important that the outcomes of these teacher training programmes should reflect the objectives laid down at the outset. Thus the present study is to probe into the validity of the Higher Education Commission’s (HEC’s) claims vis-à-vis in-service teacher training programmes in ELT. It will mark guidelines for future planning of in-service teacher training programmes in ELT at higher level in Pakistan.

1.1 English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project

English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) is a Higher Education Commission’s (HEC) one of the human resource development projects to bring qualitative improvement in ELT and to build capacity for effective and sustainable development of English language teachers at tertiary level in the country (July 2004). In order to run the project, the HEC constituted A National Committee on English (NCE) as per the recommendations of Mansoor’s (2002) study regarding the declining standard of English at tertiary level. The Committee further devised the following six sub-committees to achieve the goals of the project (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1. Six Sub-committees of the ELTR Project. Source: English Language Teaching Reforms Project- An Unpublished HEC Report (as cited in Khattak et al (2010))

1.2 Testing and Evaluation Subcommittee

The Testing and Evaluation sub-committee of ELTR Project was held responsible for bringing in improvement in testing and examination system in ELT in the country. Testing and Evaluation sub-committee has conducted the following short-term in-service teacher training programmes (Table 1):

Table 1. Number of teachers trained under Testing & Evaluation sub-committee

Number of teachers trained under Testing & Evaluation sub-committee	
03 day in-service teacher training course at FJWU Rawalpindi, (21st to 23rd Nov 2005)	25 trained
03 day in-service teacher training course at BZU Multan (26 th to 28 th Jan 2006)	33 trained
03 day in-service teacher training course at GCU Faisalabad (13 th to 15 th April 2006)	25 trained
03 day in-service teacher training course at HEC Regional Centre, Karachi (25 th to 27 th May 2006)	25 trained

03 day in-service teacher training course at Peshawar University (06 th to 08 th March 2006)	25 trained
03 day in-service teacher training course at University of Baluchistan Quetta (24 th to 26 th Aug 2006)	32 trained
03 day in-service teacher training course at Regional Centre HEC, Karachi (28 th to 30 th Aug 2008)	27 trained
07 short-term in-service teacher training courses	192 trained

2. Research Methodology

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the target in-service teacher training programmes, we, the researchers, designed and administered a questionnaire to the randomly selected 100 trainee teachers of the Testing and Evaluation sub-committee to elicit information about the effectiveness of the in-service teacher training programmes. We divided the questionnaire into two sections. In the first section of the questionnaire, we used mainly closed-ended items to reduce potential differences in interpretation. The closed-ended section comprises 31 items. However, to elicit the detailed feelings of the trainees about the training they received, in the second section of the questionnaire, we used some open-ended items. This section comprises 08 open-ended questions. Our basic purpose of administering the questionnaire to the trainees was to elicit data from them to help reaching at the conclusions about the overall impact of the courses. Some of the main dimensions of the questionnaire comprised: (i) Selection of the trainees (ii) Motivation of the trainees (iii) Course Content (iv) Training Methods of the resource persons and (v) Impact of the course on trainees. Data was analyzed using SPSS 17.

3. Research Findings

The selection/nomination procedure adopted by the ELTR Project for the trainees was not meritorious. Majority of the trainees was not sure of their selection/nomination being on merit or need based on one hand, whereas on the other hand, it was also found that some trainees from disciplines other than English also came to attend the in-service teacher training programmes under the Testing and Evaluation subcommittee of the ELTR Project. In short, proper need analysis before the in-service teacher training programmes was missing.

Majority of the trainees were keen to attend the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* and, therefore, they enjoyed being part of them. They believed that these in-service teacher training programmes had been effective enough to develop them professionally. They found the course content reflective of their academic needs. They felt that the course content helped them achieve theoretical background in ELT. According to them, the content of the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* could help them develop practical skills for teaching. The course content was found to be up-to-date and interesting. It was found applicable too as a majority of the trainees were of the view that they could utilize the content especially exercises at their respective workplaces. The content of the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* catered to the Higher Education ELT needs. The teaching/training methods adopted by the resource persons were quite effective as they could focus on the course content and the trainees' academic needs. The teaching methods adopted by the resource persons were quite effective and appropriate as these would let them encourage the trainees for feedback and provide them the opportunities to practice. The practical aspects (preparation of tests etc.) at the in-service teacher training programmes had been quite useful. The resource persons' knowledge and ability, their expertise as trainers, their readiness for welcoming the trainees' feedback, their awareness of the modern teachers' professional development trends, their management of time and their interpersonal skills have been found more than satisfactory.

The ELTR Project could not publicise the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* properly as most of the trainees came to know about these through their personal contacts and similar channels. Mostly the trainees were keen to attend the courses to improve their teaching skills in testing and assessment and to develop themselves as better professionals. Just to cross-check the previous findings on high motivation level of the trainees and to know of the real cause of their taking interest in the in-service teacher training programmes they attended, the consulted trainees were asked how far and why they felt themselves attracted to the respective courses. Like the previous finding, they responded that the in-service teacher training programmes they had attended were successful to a great extent in attracting them just because of the academic aspects of the professional development that include the course content and the teaching methodology adopted by the resource persons. Trainees found the academic aspect of the in-service teacher training programmes to be responsible for their showing keenness.

Except a very few trainees from non-English discipline, the majority of the trainees considered the in-service teacher training programmes to be quite successful and effective. The resource persons were open to design the course content as per the demand of the session or activity and also according to the level of the knowledge of the trainees.

Despite the above positive feedback from the trainees on the targeted in-service teacher training programmes, the overall impact of the short courses was very minimal as these could not bring considerable changes in the professional careers of the trainees. These could only orient them with some pedagogical techniques and strategies in *testing and assessment*. In short, the trainee teachers became more confident about making valid and reliable tests for their students, they turned, more interactive and student-centred and felt themselves better equipped with pedagogical skills regarding testing after undergoing the in-service teacher training programmes.

3.1 Discussion

The research findings enlisted above clearly indicate that most of the trainees, at the time of their selection or nomination, might not have been even aware of the fact that the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* were offered by the HEC under the banner of the ELTR Project. In other words, the Commission probably might not have properly publicised the courses wherein the trainees would be asked to attend these on the basis of their relevant qualification, personal interest and on the basis of their academic needs. It is also evident from one of the above findings that the trainees had been quite keen to attend these despite the fact that the majority of them were not sure whether or not they attended the respective courses on merit. This finding may mark the perception on one hand that the majority of the trainees in ELT in-service teacher training programmes is really keen to improve their pedagogical skills and develop themselves as professional teachers. However, on the other hand their keenness may also suggest that the teachers in Pakistan may feel free from any sense of responsibility and accountability while attending in-service teacher training programmes in general and short courses/workshops in particular. They may consider it to be a good opportunity of being away from their own respective formal academic settings and also that they may take it very easy in a less-than-formal though academic setting of such in-service teacher training.

It has always been a matter of concern for every stakeholder whether or not in-service teacher training programmes being offered or conducted will be effectively utilised by the trainees' at their respective workplaces. To ensure effective implementation, one basic motive for the trainees is definitely the availability of the resources at their respective workplaces. In the context of the study, there usually is the dearth of resources at the disposal of the teachers who undergo in-service teacher training programmes. In other words, there usually is observed a great difference between the training course situation and the real classroom setting. However, in the context of the present study, this gap between training and its implementation was hardly an issue as the courses and workshops were on *testing and assessment*.

As per the philosophy of teacher education, one of the most important reasons for conducting in-service teacher training programmes is to develop the trainees professionally. Usually the courses aim at making them better teachers. They can surely feel themselves to be better teachers provided that they may utilize these at their respective workplace. There are myriad of factors that may either motivate the teachers for, or hamper them from, utilization of the content of the courses in their teaching at their respective workplaces. These include, the applicability of the course content, the availability of the resources and the work load of the teacher trainees at their workplace, and fore-mostly the administrative support they may get at the workplace. In the context of the present study, definitely they may well have had to take on the same sort of problems at their respective workplaces but the above findings suggest that they have been more than successful in utilizing the content of the courses.

From the above findings, we came to know that the resource persons and their adopted teaching/training methods at the courses were quite effective. A Resource person is definitely one of the key factors in making any training course successful and effective both during and in the post- course arena. During the course, the resource person keeps the trainees motivated, transfers theoretical knowledge to them and helps them chisel up their pedagogical skills. Similarly, in the post-course arena, the resource person through his or her personal inspiration on and his or her constant contact with the trainees help the latter to improve and develop themselves as teachers. As per the above findings, the trainees considered the resource persons and their methodology to be more than successful and effective.

Despite the finding that a few trainees felt themselves to be same teachers even after having undergone the teachers' professional development; however, there were others who felt that they had been changed by the training experience. Those who felt some positive change in them because of the in-service teacher training programmes them attended; they were yet again to tell in what way they were feeling so. There were a few of the consulted teachers who considered themselves to be better

equipped with pedagogical skills in their post-courses teaching experience. Some other trainees said that they turned more student focused in their teaching after attending the in-service teacher training programmes.

Again the open-ended items of the questionnaire were very vital in determining the effectiveness of the training courses to an acceptable standard. Though these questionnaire items were a bit general and wide in scope, yet the responses of the trainees certainly helped the researchers reach at certain conclusions. First of those respondents who did not feel themselves to be any better teachers after attending the courses, they reasoned that due to lack of resources and because of the heavy load of work they could not utilize the courses and, thus, felt themselves to be none different. Besides, they also felt so, for they thought the vicious administrative system at their respective workplaces shunned their eagerness to take initiatives and bring in innovations. On the other hand, those who felt themselves better equipped with pedagogical in-put after having undergone the courses, were of the same view because they considered themselves to be more confident, interactive, more aware and knowledgeable, more students and their needs- focused, and as a whole to be more professional.

Most importantly, the impact of these short in-service teacher training courses/programmes would have been far better, had the HEC under the ELTR Project targeted only truly needed teachers. In other words, the ELTR Project should not have brought together teachers from colleges and universities for *testing and assessment courses* as there usually exists a wide gulf between their academic needs in our context. College teachers in Pakistan have hardly any say in testing their students; whereas, the university teachers do both formative and summative assessment of their students.

4. Recommendations of the Study

In the light of the above summarized findings from the present study, the following recommendations could be made for even better and more effective conduct of the in-service teacher training programmes in *testing and assessment* in future:

- i. The HEC should hold the stake of making proper, merit and need-based selection/nomination of the trainees in future. Commission should do proper need analysis of the prospective trainees before proposing any area for of the in-service teacher training programmes.
- ii. The in-service teacher training programmes need to be tailored in the way that the environments created by resource persons become congruent with trainees' needs and abilities.
- iii. The in-service teacher training programmes need to be made more of practical use. The resource persons who are not active teachers may, for instance, need to temper their thinking and their action with a sense of what is important to trainees and their students.
- iv. The college and university teachers should not be put together for any of the future in-service teacher training programmes where their academic needs may obviously differ especially in terms of syllabi and examination system. For instance, the difference in Semester and Annual system prevalent in universities and colleges respectively may not allow an in-service teacher training programme in *testing* to be an effective one.
- v. For better impact, long-term in-service teacher training programmes in ELT especially in *testing and assessment* should be arranged. It should be made a regular and even more frequent feature for the overall professional development of English teachers at higher education level not at the pretext of the quality though.

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