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## **Training Dilemma: Analysis of Positive/Negative Feedback from the Workplace Setting in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Training courses usually enhance the proficiency of the trainees, be they of any field or of any area. Teaching, especially English language teaching, requires sustained training programs keeping in view the significance of English in the world in general and in the developing countries, in particular.

In Pakistan, HEC has launched ELTR (English Language Teaching Reforms) Project in 2004 to upgrade and update the efficiency of the teachers to exploit the latest methods of teaching English. But the objective conditions in our educational institutions perhaps do not fully provide the trained people to apply what they have learnt. However, there is no denying the fact that training does improve the efficacy of teachers in their respective institutions despite their facing least conducive environment.

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The present paper seeks the views of the heads of the institutions as feedback regarding the performance of the trained teachers. The paper looks at the provided feedback and analyses the progress of the trained English language teachers, keeping in view the hurdles which they encounter while teaching in their respective colleges.

The analysis of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews reveals that the training courses had been found partly effective. Perhaps this has been due to the fact that there usually remains a huge gap in the training and workplace settings. The trained teachers mostly are deprived of the state-of-the-art facilities that may be considered pre-requisites for the utilization of the courses. The trained teachers are made aware of the theoretical importance of the content, but they do not usually practice the methods and techniques they do learn.

## **Introduction**

It is a generally acknowledged fact that, in order to make an educational process more viable or to improve its quality, the role of teachers, the quality of their preparation and professional excellence are very vital. Quality improvement in the educational process depends upon the process of professional development of teachers (Edge 2005; Sharma 1993; Avalos 1991). Similarly, it is also generally observed that teachers cannot play any of the assigned roles effectively unless they are provided with the opportunities to undergo quality professional development program(s).

Since teaching is a lifetime profession and there is a rapid explosion of knowledge, it is not sufficient to provide professional development to teachers once in their life span. Therefore, continuous education of teachers has become necessary (Richards and Farrell 2005; Thomas 1993).

The existing need for such an on-going professional development of English language teachers in Pakistan, at almost all levels, is no exception to the whole scenario of teacher education. Unfortunately, in Pakistan's educational context, it has generally been observed over the years that a significant proportion of the university/college ELT faculty has usually been kept deprived of professional development opportunities and networks that are crucial for the successful teaching outcomes at higher level.

Since its inception, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has provided professional improvement facilities to college/university level teachers in different disciplines. For example, it has started English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project to bring qualitative improvement in English Language Teaching, and to build opportunities for sustainable progress of English Language teachers.

## **Role of Monitoring and Subsequent Assessment of the Program**

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Monitoring and subsequent assessment of the progress provided by the teachers is important in maintaining the efficiency of the trained teachers in their respective institutions. To improve the efficiency, the system of accountability is deemed as a key factor in upgrading quality of teaching (Brown 2004).

Abbas (2003) observes that follow-up, monitoring and assessment apparatus play a significant part in the execution of any program or project. These measures help in course improvement and sorting out plans and actions that could result in the achievement of the desired objectives. He further maintains that, unfortunately, in the education sector such mechanisms have not been developed and, hence, there are a very limited means of assessment to gauge the teachers' performance and the teaching approaches they apply.

Although, the annual results are considered performance markers, yet, due to many flaws in the examination system, these markers are valued comparatively less dependable. As a result, less attention is paid by the educators and teachers towards learning and enhancing their teaching expertise. This gives rise to inefficient teaching and slow downfall in the education standards (ibid).

### **Higher Education Commission's ELTR Project**

HEC's ELTR Project has conducted the First Party (Self -Evaluation) and the Second Party (Peer-Evaluation) evaluations to gauge the efficacy of the teachers' professional development programs. The internal evaluations of such nature have provided recommendations to the HEC for strengthening the teachers' professional development courses and other academic activities on an on-going basis. Yet such internal evaluations may very easily be termed as the ones based on subjectivity and partiality, for the HEC, being the sole financier of these programs, is one of the supreme stakeholders in this regard.

We researchers, therefore, felt the need for undertaking the evaluation of the effectiveness of the teachers' professional development courses conducted under ELTR Project. Secondly and most importantly, since the HEC had invested Rs.35.390 million on the ELTR Project Phase -1, the theory of Value for Money (VFM) became one of the reasons of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the teachers' professional development courses of the ELTR Project.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study has been conducted to measure the impact of the teachers' professional development courses. Semi-structured interviews were recorded from 05 heads of the English departments of colleges in Rawalpindi and Islamabad whose teachers have received ELT training.

The present paper seeks the views of the heads of the English departments as feedback regarding the performance of the trained teachers. The paper looks at the feedback received and analyses the progress of the trained English language teachers keeping in view the hurdles which they encounter while teaching in their respective colleges.

### **Analysis of the Interviews**

Following is the detailed interpretation and discussion of the descriptive analysis of the data collected through recording and transcribing the interviews of the heads of the departments whose teachers had been to professional development courses. The following questions in bold italics were asked in the order presented below:

***Q. How far do you think the trained teachers of your department have been successful in benefitting from HEC's teachers' professional development courses that they had attended?***

Answering to the question how far the teachers benefitted from the courses, the heads of the departments were divided in their perception regarding the effectiveness of the courses. Two out of the five heads of the departments interviewed gave positive feedback about the impact of the courses on the teachers. On the other hand, the rest of the three were not cherishing the same view about the teachers benefitting from the courses. Their respective responses are given as below:

- A. *"They extremely benefitted from it in terms of discovering the theoretical and methodological approaches to teaching of English..."*
- B. *"I can see a great difference in the teachers of my department who had been to a CALL course. They seem far better equipped than the others...they are using technology."*
- C. *"Two of my junior colleagues had been to one of the CALL courses...Unfortunately I didn't find any change in their teaching methods though they know now more about the theoretical importance of computers in ELT..."*
- D. *"Since my teachers mostly teach literature here in the college, I think, the trained teachers cannot practically benefit from the courses they attend..."*
- E. *"They have not benefitted from the training courses to a...a great extent...."*

From the above responses made by the heads of the departments, it can be inferred that the courses had been partly effective. This has been due to the fact that perhaps there is a huge gap in the training and workplace setting. The trained teachers are made aware of the theoretical importance of the content, but they do not usually practice the methods

and techniques they learned. It also shows that there generally remains some sort of communication gap between the heads of the departments and their colleagues (trained teachers).

**Q. *What institutional/departmental facilities could you provide them to utilize the training in their professional life?***

Answering to the question what departmental facilities they could provide to help the trained teachers in utilizing the training, the interviewee heads of the departments gave the following set of responses:

- A. *“The one way in which the department could facilitate teachers was by arranging frequent sessions for them to share and improve...otherwise, the college does not possess photocopying/multimedia facilities...”*
- B. *“We have got a CALL lab, multimedia and library available in our department.”*
- C. *“Our department could give the teachers computers, internet and books...”*
- D. *“There are white boards, markers and newspapers that our department could facilitate them with...”*
- E. *The available institutional facilities for trained teachers are reference books, board with markers...”*

From the above analysis, it is evident that the trained teachers mostly are deprived of the state of the art facilities that may be considered pre-requisites for the utilization of the courses. In most of the cases, our teachers do not make the use of training, for they do not have the needful paraphernalia. In our colleges, teachers are not provided with the milieu in which they may be encouraged to share the training with those teachers who do not attend it. Seminars and special sessions are not arranged for them where they can replicate the training.

**Q. *Do you think that they would ever have shared the training with their fellow teachers?***

When they were asked whether according to them they would have shared the training with their fellow teachers, they responded as per the following set of responses:

- A. *“Yes, I think, they do share and pass on what they have learnt...”*
- B. *“I don’t know about their ever sharing it with their colleagues...”*

- C. *“I don’t remember their doing so in my presence...”*
- D. *“I think, they would share it with them informally...”*
- E. *“I don’t know... therefore, I won’t say anything on it...”*

The above brief and negative responses show that our trained teachers do not feel themselves responsible for imparting the training to others. It is evident from the above that trained teachers may feel themselves apart from those who do not go on training. They perhaps forget that they ought to learn from one another to teach. It also reveals the bitter situation that some heads of the departments may not be running the academic affairs properly. They ought to arrange seminars in their departments where in the teachers may exchange new things with one another.

***Q. In what respect of their professional life do you think the training might have helped them the most....I mean, in their teaching method, knowledge, confidence etc.?***

Answering to the question in what respect of their professional life the trained teachers would have improved, the interviewee heads of the departments gave the following set of responses:

- A. *“I think that the course helped them in terms of knowledge about English language teaching. They openly declared that they had never thought of their profession in terms of objectives, learning outcomes, lesson planning etc.*
- B. *“Yes, it has given them orientation about the art of teaching English language...It made them discover a brave new world....*
- C. *“The course might have helped them in improving their personal and interpersonal skills but I don’t know whether or not they are using these skills in their professional life...”*
- D. *“Of course, the training might have helped them in their teaching methods and theoretical knowledge...”*
- E. *“I don’t see any marked difference in their teaching before and after the teaching methods though they have come know of the importance of technology in teaching English...”*

From the above set of responses, it is clear that most of the trained teachers have turned better teachers in terms of teaching methods. They had acquired new knowledge about the importance of teaching English language. They might have realized the importance of teaching with students-centered approach. It also shows that a majority of teachers in our

country are recruited without having proper training in the teaching field. So they must be introduced to new ways and methods of teaching.

According to some heads of the departments, there was hardly any change that they could see in the teaching of the trained teachers.

On the whole, it can be inferred from the discussion that by attending the courses, the trained teachers came to know about new ways of teaching; the courses improved their self confidence; and finally they became more student-focused, having better interpersonal skills.

***Q. What about their teaching load...? Do you think it would be a spur or check to them in utilization of the training?***

When they were asked whether the teaching load of the teachers spur or check them in utilizing the training, the interviewee heads of the departments responded as per the following set of responses:

- A. *“Teachers have to cope with large classes and probably they feel comfortable with the traditional methods because it is familiar...”*
- B. *“I think due to heavy work load... most of the teachers find intimidating to implement a new method...”*
- C. *“To me, workload itself is not a barrier...it is the desire to experiment that matters...”*
- D. *“Yes, their work load, large classes and lack of resources....all these act as a check for their utilization of the courses...”*
- E. *“I think, the trained teachers are not made accountable by the training or funding agency...that’s why they remain carefree...I believe that definitely the trained teachers learn from the courses...”*

From the above responses, it seems to appear that teachers have heavy work load and they usually face large classes due to which they are not able to make the use of training. Besides, they usually do not utilize the training, for the examination system makes them bound not to experiment in the classes.

However, apart from these external forces, there are definitely some internal factors too which stop them from doing so. These are affective filters working in them. They themselves do not take initiative to experiment. They do not show interest and

enthusiasm. They do not feel any sort of pressure from either the HEC or then from their seniors to work differently. They keep on teaching with traditional methods.

***Q. What about your role in spurring or checking them to utilize the training?***

Answering to the question what their role was in spurring or checking them to utilize the training, the interviewee heads of the departments gave the following set of responses:

- A. *“Personally, I am very ambitious about improving the quality of teaching in my department.”*
- B. *“So members of the department frequently meet formally and informally and share ideas...”*
- C. *“We sit together and assign tasks...In a recent meeting I assigned the task of preparing activities on the textbook of 1st and 2nd year...These assignments will be shared... and it would ensure that they bring their training into practice...”*
- D. *“I run my department democratically...I have never stopped them from experimenting with the students...”*
- E. *“It is not up to the chairman of the department to let or stop a teacher from teaching the way he or she does... I think, it is the examination system that dictates them...”*
- F. *“I always facilitate my teachers to teach the way they like...”*

Again from the above responses, it is clear that the heads of the departments do not properly supervise their junior colleagues. The teachers have to cope up with the problem of heavy work load and large classes. They usually do not feel free to incorporate training, for the examination system makes them not to experiment in the classes.

As discussed above, besides these external forces, there are definitely some internal factors too which stop them from doing so. These are affective filters working in them. They neither intend to take initiative to experiment nor do they show any interest and enthusiasm. They do not feel any sort of pressure from either the HEC or then from their seniors to work differently. They keep on teaching with traditional methods.

However, there are a very few heads of the departments, who in order to keep the traditions of their institutions, do ask their subordinates to undertake novel approaches in their teaching methodologies. They convene meetings wherein they share and exchange

newly acquired knowledge. But alas! Such a healthy practice of arranging meetings and seminars are very rare in Pakistan.

***Q. Any suggestion to the HEC or Future Training Sponsors in Pakistan for better or more successful conduct of the teachers' professional courses/workshops?***

Answering to the question what they would like to suggest to the HEC for better conduct of the teachers' professional courses/workshops, the interviewee heads of the departments gave the following set of responses:

- A. *"I think it will be better if they train freshly appointed teachers at the outset...This would require good quality training institutions to be set up and most importantly to produce a batch of highly competent teacher trainers who can also carry on the task of in-service training..."*
- B. *"Training courses should carry more practical work. I believe, no educational policy or curriculum design can be implemented effectively without trained teachers..."*
- C. *"Whatever chances of improving as teachers are available; these must be communicated to the colleges well in time and the resource persons must be well selected..."*
- D. *"The trainings should be curriculum based to make more easily and quickly applicable in classrooms..."*
- E. *"The HEC should make available requisite technology and other resources for teachers to utilize the training at the workplaces..."*

It is clear from the above suggestions made by the heads of the departments that they asked for conducting more and more professional development courses. They were of the view that such refresher courses ought to be made a regular feature of the academic calendar. Mostly new teachers should be trained as they usually are novice. The trained teachers may be made accountable for attending the courses as one of the heads of the departments suggested to the sponsoring agency HEC to tighten the throttlehold on them in future as they never bother of implementing the training at workplaces. The courses should be set according to the academic needs of the prospective trainees. The trained teachers ought to be provided the necessary resources at workplaces so that they can try implementing the training at their workplaces.

Moreover, it is also felt that the courses would be more effective if content of the courses be set according to the proximate needs of the trainees. The heads of the departments may

also sense their duty to make the trained teachers realize that they seriously work on maximum utilization of the training at their workplaces.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It can be inferred from the above analysis that the training courses had been found partly effective. This has been due to the fact that perhaps there is a huge gap in the training and workplace setting. The trained teachers mostly are deprived of the state-of-the-art facilities that may be considered pre-requisites for the utilization of the courses. The trained teachers are made aware of the theoretical importance of the content, but they do not usually practice the methods and techniques they do learn. In most of our colleges and even universities, teachers are not provided with the milieu in which they may be encouraged to share the training with those teachers who do not attend it. Seminars and special sessions are not arranged for them where they can replicate the training. The trained teachers have heavy work load and they usually face large classes due to which they are not able to make use of the training. Besides, they usually do not utilize the training, for the examination system makes them bound not to experiment with their teaching methods, testing procedures, etc. in the classes.

In light of the above conclusions, it is recommended that the trained teachers may be made accountable for attending the courses. One of the heads of the departments also suggested to the sponsoring agency, i.e., HEC, to tighten their hold on the trainee teachers in future as they usually do not bother to implement the training they received at their workplaces. It is also recommended that the courses should be set according to the academic needs of the prospective trainees. The trained teachers should be provided with the necessary resources at workplaces so that they can at least try implementing the training at their workplaces. Moreover, it is also felt that the courses would be more effective if the contents of the courses were set according to the proximate needs of the trainees. On the other hand, the heads of the departments should also take responsibility to keep making the trained teachers realize that they have to seriously work for optimum utilization of the training they have received in their workplaces.

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