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**Teachers' Professional Development in ELT at Tertiary Level:  
ELTR Project of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan –  
A Case Study**

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**Abstract**

The study describes impact analysis of the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. It seeks to explore the perception of the concerned ELT population about the effectiveness of the Commission's professional development courses.

The study was carried out mainly with the help of a detailed questionnaire administered to the randomly selected 740 trainees, asking them about different aspects of the courses such as the course content, the adopted methodology and knowledge of the resource persons, and about the overall impact of the courses on their teaching.

The researchers found that teachers' professional development courses were quite effective; however, the ELTR Project could have made these courses far more successful if it had selected the trainees or got them nominated on merit or need-basis and if the project had made the trainees accountable by telling them that they would be followed-up for any internal or external

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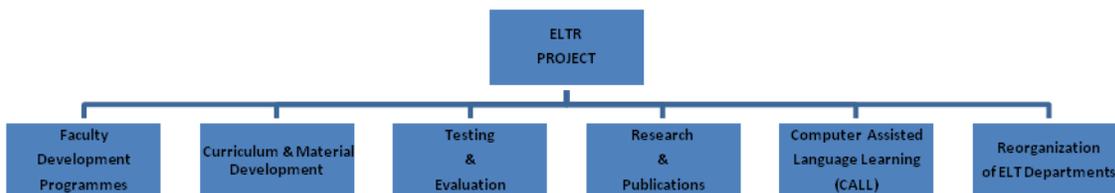
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evaluation. The researchers had asked the trainees to give suggestions to help improve upon the future teachers' professional development courses under the ELTR Project. Keeping their valuable suggestions at forefront coupled with considering the major research findings of the study, some recommendations have been made for bettering the teachers' professional development courses and also for bringing in positive changes in terms of planning and implementation of the future ELT Projects.

## 1.0 Introduction

Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan launched a project on English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) for bringing qualitative improvement in English Language Teaching and for building capacity for effective and sustainable development of English language teachers in higher education in the country (July 2004). A National Committee on English (NCE) was constituted due to concerns shown by Mansoor (2003) regarding the declining standard of English in Higher Education. The Committee decided to achieve the goals of the ELTR project through six subcommittees. These six subcommittees were:

- Faculty Development Programmes
- Curriculum and Material Development
- Testing and Evaluation
- Research and Publications
- Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)
- Reorganization of Departments/Centres of English Language.



Source: English Language Teaching Reforms Project: An Unpublished HEC Report

## 2.0 Teachers' Professional Development Courses of the ELTR Project

Higher Education Commission (HEC) has been conducting professional development courses for English language teachers from postgraduate colleges and universities under the ELTR Project since 2004. It is important to make it clear that these professional development courses range from short-term activity based certificate courses/workshops (i.e. English for Academic Purposes

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(EAP), English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Study Skills Courses, CALL Courses, Research Methodology Courses and Testing and Assessment Courses ) to long-term teachers' professional development in the form of diplomas and degrees (i.e. MS/PhD, Two year Masters in TESL, TEFL, and Linguistics and One year PGD in TEFL, TESL, and ICELT) for English language teachers.

Moreover, it is also a fact that since the HEC has been giving only fellowships / scholarships (i.e. financial support) to trainees in long-term teachers' professional development courses, taking care of the academic aspects (e.g. setting Course Content, providing Resource Persons and adopting Teaching/Training Methods) of these courses have been the responsibility of the host institution. On the other hand, for short-term courses, the commission provides both academic as well as financial support to the host institution. The HEC has been equally claiming both form of the courses in black and white, however.

Unlike long-term diploma/degree courses, the short courses/workshops were generally limited to addressing the proximate pedagogical needs of the English teachers where in they could develop certain strategies and techniques for the transmission of their professional responsibilities at workplaces. Again unlike the long-term ones, these short-term workshops dealt very little with the theoretical underpinnings of the teachers' professional development. But on the other hand, the long-term teachers' professional development courses carried both theoretical and practical components.

### **3.0 Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study were:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers' professional development courses offered by the HEC under the ELTR Project.
2. To observe the extent to which the trained teachers make use of the knowledge and training imparted to them under the ELTR Project.
3. To measure the attitude of the resource persons / trainers and the trainees' towards the teachers' professional development courses of the HEC under the ELTR Project.
4. To evaluate the selection standards of the HEC for the trainees as well as the resource persons / trainers for the teachers' professional development courses under the ELTR Project.

5. To recommend changes, if required, in the existing system of teachers' professional development courses offered by the HEC under the ELTR Project.

#### 4.0 Population

The following was the target population of the study:

1504 teachers from various colleges and universities who had participated in the teachers' professional development courses of the HEC under the ELTR Project between 2004 and 2009 (Shown in the Table A below).

- Faculty Development (751 teachers professionally developed)
- Research and Publications (290 teachers professionally developed)
- Testing and Evaluation (192 teachers professionally developed)
- Curriculum and Material Development (136 teachers professionally developed)
- Computer Assisted Language Learning (135 teachers professionally developed)
- Reorganization of the Departments / English Language Centers (No teachers' professional development courses conducted)

Teachers' Professional Development Courses under the ELTR Project						
Subcommittees	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
Faculty Development	110	171	176	264	30	751
Research & Publication	20	20	45	65	140	290
Testing & Assessment	95	40	30	N.A	27	192
Curriculum & Material Development	24	46	66	N.A	N.A	136
Computer Assisted Language Learning	21	39	50	N.A	25	135
<b>Total:</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>1504</b>

Table A: A Consolidated view of Teachers' Professional Development Programmes in English Language Teaching 2004 to 2009 (Source: HEC Five Years Unpublished Report)

There were more than 45 resource persons of the six sub-committees of the ELTR Project.

## 5.0 Sample

The sample of the study comprised the following:

1. Of the overall target population of 1504 professionally developed teachers under the ELTR project, I randomly selected 740 professionally developed teachers under the short-term courses/workshops from the following four sub-committees as a sample of the study:
  - (a) Faculty Development (440 teachers),
  - (b) Testing and Assessment (100 teachers),
  - (c) Research and Publication (100 teachers),
  - (d) Computer Assisted Language Learning (100 teachers)
2. 20 Resource Persons were taken as sample.

## 5.0 Justification for the Selection of the Short-term Courses

We selected the short-term teachers' professional development courses of the ELTR Project, for these courses could be called entirely the effort of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. As described above, the Commission would hold the stake of conducting these short-term courses at host institutions. It would make efforts for selection/nomination of the trainees, appointment of the resource persons, finalization of the course content/material, scheduling of the sessions and it would also arrange for the refreshment and transportation etc. of almost all the concerned. We think all this makes the courses theirs.

On the other hand, unlike such short-term courses, for the long-term professional development courses of the teachers, the Commission would offer only fellowships/scholarships to the trainees. It would not get involved in the academic aspects of the courses. Thus, it can be said that the short-term courses/workshops of the delimited four sub-committees were relatively more representative of the whole ELTR Project.

According to an HEC's official report, the basic aim of the these sub-committees was to identify strategies for facilitating faculty development in order to improve the qualification as well as enhance skills of English language teachers working in higher education in the public sector. This aim also resonates in the general objectives of the ELTR project as the HEC's official

website suggests that the project will focus on faculty development through the courses / workshops / seminars / national and international conferences.

Moreover, we selected the short-term courses, for the teachers trained under the short-term courses/workshops of these sub-committees were easily accessible. The detailed record of the names and addresses of the trained teachers could easily be obtained. And fore-mostly, the trainees trained under these sub-committees were mostly active teachers and thus they could easily be followed up at their respective colleges and universities for evaluation purposes after the completion of the courses.

## **6.0 Mixed Methods Research**

Until the recent past, research was categorized as either quantitative or qualitative. The two paradigms were considered diametrically opposed. However, in recent times, there has been a sort of reconciliation between the two paradigms and now it is quite common for the practitioners to integrate the two (Bryman, 2006).

Similarly, the related literature shows that no one design is sufficient in all evaluation cases. Alderson (1992), Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) suggest that a valid design should match the evaluation objectives, participants and project criteria.

Evaluation presupposes a rigorous research procedure to enable the researcher to delve deep into the research problem, identify the strengths and the grey areas and frame suitable recommendations for further research. Mixing the research methods and thereby collecting data through various means allows the researcher an opportunity to undertake research in a rigorous manner (Creswell and Clark 2007).

Alderson and Scot (1992), Mitchell (1992), Weir and Roberts (1991) and Low et al (1993) undertook evaluation studies of different teacher education programmes using mixed methods research.

As the present study was aimed at evaluating the impact of teachers' professional development courses offered by the HEC, we considered it opportune to collect data through different means so as to converge data and ensure internal validity.

### **6.1 Research Design: Triangulation**

Triangulation of data is currently a very valid approach being used to research in applied linguistics. It is classified as a method under the group of component designs of mixed method evaluations (Greene 2007), referring to the procedure of using multiple methods in order to assess the construct. In component designs, the methods used remain distinct throughout the

evaluation procedure and the combination occurs at the level of interpretation and conclusion (Fitzpatrick et al. 2004). Triangulation describes the approach where different methods are implemented in order to evaluate the same phenomenon toward increased validity.

Research literature supports the choice of triangulation as an evaluation method for education and learning. If the purpose of an evaluation is to increase the validity in measuring a construct, as in the present case, then measures with different biases should be selected for increasing validity (Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009). As educational procedures are generally found to be extremely complex, ideally different methods should be used to completely understand the issues under investigation (Briggs and Coleman, 2007).

Again, the triangulation of evaluation methodologies can reveal contexts that a narrower approach might fail to illuminate, and this approach comes closest to satisfying both the positivist and the phenomenological traditions. Moreover, as these dimensions give an in-depth perspective, triangulation permits a deeper view of the phenomenon under evaluation (Towns and Serpell, 2004).

Educational procedures are multidimensional and our understanding may be inadequate if we approach them only along a single dimension (Mason 2006). Additionally, the findings from two or more different methods enable researchers to conclude whether or not an aspect of a phenomenon has been accurately measured. This claim is based on the assumption that if different research methods produce similar results, then accurate measures have been used (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006).

The present study used a triangulation design. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected to reach at valid and reliable conclusion and also ensure an in-depth analysis of the teachers' development programmes of the Higher Education Commission. Different types of data were collected from different participants simultaneously. This helped us in converging data. Convergence of data, in terms of triangulation, means the construction of data in a way that cancel out threats to the validity of data (Flick, 2007).

## **6.2 Research Instruments**

In the light of the above, we used triangulation design as a research approach mainly to evaluate the teachers' professional development courses in ELT offered by the HEC under the ELTR Project. The study had both the qualitative and quantitative aspects. The qualitative approach was adopted for interviews and observation, whereas the quantitative approach facilitated the collection of responses from the questionnaires. In simple sense, the triangulation design comprised the following research tools:

- Questionnaire

- Interviews (Semi-Structured)
- Observation of the Courses

## 7.0 Findings of the Study

Following are the research findings from the analysis of the data got through administration of the different research tools:

### 7.1 Findings from Questionnaire

Through the descriptive analysis of the questionnaire administered to the sample trainees, following research findings have been got:

1. The selection / nomination procedure adopted by the ELTR Project for the trainees is not up to the mark. Most of the trainees were not sure of their selection / nomination being on merit on one hand where as on the other it was found that some trainees from non-English disciplines also attended the teachers' professional development courses under the ELTR Project. In short, proper need analysis before the teachers' professional development courses was missing.
2. Majority of the trainees was keen to attend the teachers' professional development courses and therefore they enjoyed being there.
3. Majority of the trainees believed that the teachers' professional development courses had been effective enough to develop them professionally.
4. The content of the teachers' professional development courses had been reflective of the trainee teachers' academic needs. However, under the CALL sub-committee, the reflection of the trainees' academic needs was relatively less found.
5. The content of the teachers' professional development courses helped the trainees achieve sound theoretical background in ELT. However, under the Faculty Development sub-committee, the trainees' theoretical background in ELT was relatively less developed for some of the sample trainees were from other than English discipline.
6. The content of the teachers' professional development courses helped the trainees develop practical skills for teaching. However, under the Research and Publication sub-committee, the trainees' pedagogical skills in ELT were relatively less developed for mostly the course content there was theoretical and secondly the trainees usually did not have to teach research components at the colleges.
7. The teachers' professional development courses under the ELTR Project helped the trainees develop proficiency in ELT through the course content to the great extent.
8. The content of the teachers' professional development courses reflected the proposed objectives of the ELTR project to the great extent.
9. The content of the teachers' professional development courses was found to be up to date and interesting.

10. Though the content of the teachers' professional development courses was found to be applicable or implementable, however under the CALL sub-committee it was relatively less applicable as the ground realities at the trainees' workplaces denied the content materialization.
11. Majority of the trainees could utilize the content of the teachers' professional development courses at their respective workplaces.
12. The content of the teachers' professional development courses catered to the Higher Education ELT needs.
13. The teaching methods adopted by the resource persons at the teachers' professional development courses were quite effective as with these they could focus on the course content and the trainees' academic needs.
14. The teaching methods adopted by the resource persons at the teachers' professional development courses were quite effective and appropriate as these would let them encourage the trainees for feedback and provide them the opportunities to practice.
15. The practical aspect of the teachers' professional development courses had been quite useful.
16. The resource persons neither told the trainees to keep diaries nor did they tell them about their possible evaluation at any time at their respective workplaces.
17. The resource person's knowledge and ability, his / her expertise as a trainer, his / her commitment and dedication, his / her readiness for welcoming the trainees' feedback, his / her awareness of the modern teachers' professional development trends, his / her method of delivering teachers' professional development, his / her management of time and his / her interpersonal skills have been found more than satisfactory.
18. The ELTR Project could not advertise the teachers' professional development courses properly as most of the trainees came to know about these through their personal contacts and similar channels.
19. Mostly the trainees were keen to attend the teachers' professional development courses to improve and develop themselves as professional teachers.
20. Trainees found the academic aspect of the teachers' professional development courses to be responsible for their showing keenness.
21. Except a very few trainees from non-English disciplines, the majority of the trainees considered the teachers' professional development courses to be quite successful and effective.
22. 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.
23. The targeted short-term teachers' professional development courses / workshops could not bring any positive change in the professional careers of the trainees. These could only orient them with some pedagogical techniques and strategies.
24. The trainee teachers turned more confident, more interactive and student centered and felt themselves better equipped with pedagogical skills after undergoing the teachers' professional development courses however.

## 7.2 Findings from Resource Persons' Interview

Through the analysis of the recording and transcription of the interviews from the sample resource persons, following research findings have been got:

1. Most of the resource persons got associated with the ELTR Project through their personal contacts.
2. The resource persons were not happy with the selection / nomination criterion for the trainees adopted by the ELTR Project.
3. The resource persons found the trainees not motivated and keen at the start of the teachers' professional development courses; however, they found the latter more eager over the progress of these courses.
4. A limited number of resource persons were available to the ELTR Project to conduct the teachers' professional development courses.
5. The resource persons enjoyed optimum autonomy in designing the course content for the teachers' professional development courses.
6. The content of the teachers' professional development courses they designed reflected the academic needs of the trainees.
7. Some of the resource persons were not aware of the proposed objectives of the ELTR Project for the teachers' professional development courses.
8. The content of the teachers' professional development courses they designed reflected room for application at real classroom setting.
9. The resource persons were divided in their perception regarding the professional development of the trainees through the teachers' professional development courses that they imparted.
10. The resource persons adopted interactive teaching methods for developing the trainees professionally that accordingly used to let them focus on the content, the trainees' needs and also used to help them ask for their feedback.
11. The resource persons could neither conduct proper formative and summative evaluation of the sessions nor did they ever beware the trainees that they might be evaluated at any time at their respective workplaces.
12. The resource persons were not happy with the nonexistence of the proper and effective co-ordination among the six sub-committees of the ELTR Project on one hand; whereas on the other, they were quite dissatisfied at the absence of long term planning on the part of the Project.

## 7.3 Findings from Observation

Through the analysis of the observation of the course sessions done at the CALL course of the ELTR Project, following research findings have been got:

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1. The resource persons had been well skilled with good knowledge and most of them started off the session in an appropriate way.
2. The resource persons enjoyed command over the communication skills and they were utilizing the technology very effectively.
3. The resource persons had been focusing on theoretical in-put more than on practical aspect despite the CALL course basically had to be more practical than theoretical.
4. Motivation level of the trainees was not up to the mark; however, the resource persons seemed motivated.
5. The content of the teachers' professional development courses was not overtly related to the academic needs of the majority of the trainees, however, there were a very few who could feel at home about the course content as these were reflective of their academic needs.
6. The participation of the trainees at the teachers' professional development courses had not been up to the mark.
7. The resource persons did not appropriately provide the trainees with hand-outs during or after the sessions.
8. The resource persons could not evaluate the sessions either formatively or summatively.
9. The overall sessions were interesting and the milieu there at the CALL room was feasible and appropriate for the teachers' professional development course.
10. Some of the sessions were repetitive and were not delivered in proper sequence.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

In the light of the above stated findings, it is beyond any doubt to assert that the ELTR Project has been quite effective in its efforts. The teachers' professional development courses have been found quite successful at least on the respective course venues.

The content of the teachers' professional development courses had been reflective of the trainees' academic needs to a great extent, the resource persons' adopted methodology and their expertise had been found quite effective, and moreover the overall milieu of the teachers' professional development courses had been quite good.

However, there had been a few loopholes in the overall conduct of the teachers' professional development courses under the ERLTR Project. These are related to the selection / nomination criterion of the ELTR Project team that they had been adopting for the trainees as well as the resource persons. There was no attention paid to the words *need* and *merit* in the case of the trainees and appropriate academic area, skills and knowledge in the case of the resource persons.

Secondly and the most importantly, the trainees were never made accountable to the impact that they had to cast on their post-courses teaching profession. Similarly, the resource persons, too, were not feeling the burden of accountability either. Both the trainees and the resource persons will always consider the closing of a teachers' professional course to be the ending of their responsibility or duty until and unless they are asked to follow that course up as well. It is due to this absence of the responsibility-taking that in some cases, the trainees had not been practising the course content at their workplaces due to whatever reason(s) and therefore they could not feel themselves professionally developed or positively changed after the courses.

Moreover, the resource persons' adopted methodology lacked incorporation of proper time management, conduct of the frequent formative and summative evaluation of the sessions, and the initiation of practical techniques of teachers' professional development like the use of diaries for the trainees, and also the resource persons' reliance on more practice based activities for the trainees. The resource persons felt that the trainees were not given proper attention by the ELTR Project in terms of incentives.

## **9.0 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 professional development courses and other academic activities under the ELTR Phase 2 of the Learning Innovation Division of the HEC.

1. The HEC being the sole funding agency of the ELTR Project should hold the stake of making proper, merit and need-based selection / nomination of the trainees in future.
2. The HEC should do proper need analysis of the trainees before proposing any area for the teachers' professional development. These should neither be conducted in a haphazard manner nor for the sake of conducting the courses and for putting up on record.
3. Teachers' professional development courses need to be tailored in the way that the environments created by resource persons must be congruent with trainees' needs and abilities.
4. Teachers' professional development courses need to be made more interactive in a sense that persons, behaviours, tasks, and environments are assumed to be interdependent.
5. Teachers' professional development courses need to be made more contemporaneous in the way that it must enable resource persons to be familiar with the immediate conditions of teaching and learning of ELT in the public sector universities and colleges.
6. Teachers' professional development courses be these short- or long-term ought to be made more developmental-- it must be concerned with the growth of a teacher over time.
7. Teachers' professional development courses need to be made more reciprocal, not one way. Just as trainees may be affected by environments created for them by resource persons, the latter can also be affected in turn by the trainees.

8. Teachers' professional development courses 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.
9. The college and university teachers should not be put together for any teachers' professional development course 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 a teachers' professional development course in testing to be an effective one.
10. The HEC should make the task of teachers' professional development more effective by appointing skilled, committed and expert resource persons.
11. The HEC should arrange training sessions for the resource persons where mechanics, logistics and academics are explained and discussed before conducting any teachers' professional development course.
12. The HEC should clarify the role of the resource persons and the course co-ordinators as the latter should manage the non-academic affairs related to the teachers' professional development course where as the formers' responsibility must be restricted to the academic aspect of the teachers' professional development course only.
13. The resource persons should try to relate their course content to the academic needs of the trainees on one hand, whereas on the other, they ought to manage time; always try to do formative and summative evaluation of their sessions and also to help the trainees develop themselves professionally in all possible ways.
14. The resource persons and the course co-ordinators should try to make the trainees accountable even after trainees going back to their respective workplaces. For this, the ELTR Project team could either arrange monitoring visits or then they could ask the concerned department to report about them.
15. Teachers' professional development courses should not be arranged at the prime time of the session as the HODs very reluctantly let their teachers attend the courses.
16. Like the long-term professional development of the teachers in the form of foreign scholarships, the HEC should also send a few resource persons abroad to further chisel their expertise in certain fields. The target fields, in this regard, can be the Testing and Assessment, Curriculum Development and CALL.
17. Teachers' professional development courses in ELT 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. Summer vacation may be more often used for conducting 6 to 8 weeks teachers' professional development courses.
18. The HEC should plan and arrange teachers' professional development courses by keeping at forefront the available resources for the trainees at their respective workplaces.

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