



## A Study of the Effectiveness of the HEC's English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project

Vol. IV, No. IV (Fall 2019) | Pages: 638 – 645 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2019(IV-IV).59

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X

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### Abstract

*This study deals with the effectiveness of the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) project, which was launched by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan in 2004. The purpose of the ELTR project was to enhance the teaching practices of English Language (EL) teachers teaching at the tertiary level. The project was divided into two phases: Phase I (2004-2010) and Phase II (2010-2013). In both phases, EL teachers were trained from various public colleges and universities across Pakistan. The teachers were offered long and short-term courses through which they could be professionally developed. The main aim of the current research was to trace the effectiveness of the project. For this purpose, this study adopted a qualitative methodology. Data was collected by carrying out semi-structured interviews with five English Language faculty members of a university who have received ELTR training. The interviews were thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that HEC has been trying to accomplish its set goals, but there are certain areas in which the goals have not been achieved due to loopholes.*

**Key Words:** English Language Teaching, English Language Teachers, ELTR, Professional Development

### Introduction

In order to communicate in a better way, teachers require to polish their skills. As technology is advancing, likewise the expectations from teachers are also increasing. In Pakistan, pre-service training of teachers is not obligatory for recruitment. The same is the situation in many developing countries where due to a dearth of pre-service culture, most of the teachers face professional challenges (Dayoub & Bashiruddin, 2009).

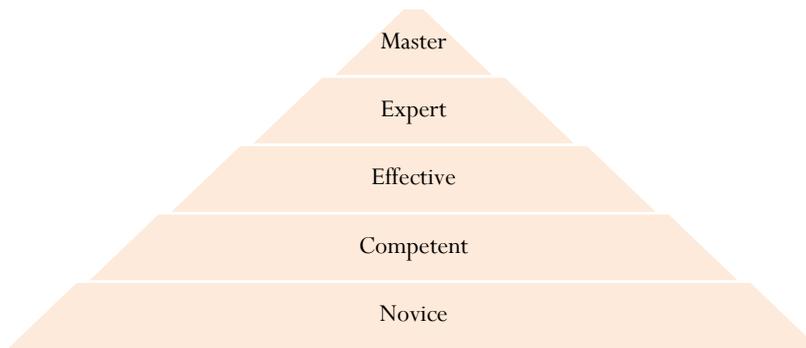
According to Trotter (1986), there is a five-stage procedure of evolution of proficiency in any area: 1) Novice, 2) Competent, 3) Effective, 4) Expert, and 5) Master (see figure 1). When teachers are at the novice stage, they know very little. They initiate to develop some preliminary skills, assimilating primary vocabulary, and locating some foundational concepts about teaching. At the competent stage, they know just the basics; they begin to enhance their data of facts. They identify and comprehend former vague details, and in doing so, they gain more knowledge of the teaching-learning process. At an effective level, they acquire experience and can perform in various situations. They become competent to distinguish between the situations and which principles to be applied to them. At the expert level, they become experienced; reaching the expert stage enables them to teach others by inventing new ways of performing their job and make decisions intuitively. This intuitive understanding only comes through the “wealth of experience” (Huitt, 2007). Finally, at the master level, they know everything perfectly, managing diverse tasks at the same time without making a single mistake. Such professionals are known as “stars of the field” (Huitt, 2007). It is not easy to reach the last stage (i.e. Master). It requires a lot of effort and experience along with training. A teacher, no matter at which stage of her carrier, needs professional development (PD).

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**Figure 1:** Five Stages in Professional Career

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan ensures to provide quality training to its teachers. Teachers from all over Pakistan receive training either in their own institutes or the training centers designated by HEC like regional offices and in Islamabad ([HEC, 2020](#)). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of HEC's English Language Teaching Reforms project.

### **English Language Teachers' Training in Pakistan**

English is considered to be the source of achieving scientific and technological development and economic stability and is a prerequisite for entry into employment both in the government and private sector in Pakistan ([Gillani, Khurshid, Juman, & Rahman, 2010](#); Javed, 2016). Mass literacy in English is one of the goals of Pakistan's education policy. Shamim (2008) argues that a major policy shift was initiated to democratize the English language in Pakistan, but research shows failure in its successful implementation in teaching practices of English Language teachers. For the achievement of quality in the English language in Pakistan, there is a dire need to introduce innovative approaches while initiating PD programs for English Language teachers ([Mansoor, 2010](#)).

As current English Language teachers' PD programs in Pakistan follow the traditional models, they have been unsuccessful in contributing to the professional development of English Language teachers ([Kasi, 2010](#)). [Khattak, Abbasi & Khattak \(2010\)](#) and [Kasi \(2010\)](#) stress the importance of developing a range of English Language PD programs from short-term and one-shot activity-based certificate courses and workshops to long-term programs like diplomas and degrees for English Language teachers according to their learning needs. Special attention needs to be paid to need and merit while selecting course content, skills, appropriate academic area, trainees, resource persons and teaching/training methods ([Khattak, 2010](#)).

In Pakistan, Higher Education Commission (HEC) has taken the responsibility of training university English language teachers. Keeping in view the EL teachers' training in Pakistan, [HEC in 2004](#) inaugurated the first-ever English language-based training project English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR). This project was launched to train English language teachers from all over Pakistan. The main aim of this project was to recuperate English language pedagogy in Pakistan in such a way that the students and teachers both could meet the international standards (National Education Policy [NEP], 2009).

## **Literature Review**

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is defined as "activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher" ([OECD, 2009](#)). Therefore, if one wants to have a successful career, they need to polish their professional competence by increasing the knowledge of the field through professional development courses/trainings. [Saleem, Masrur and Afzal \(2014\)](#) consider PD as those "skills" and "knowledge" that are gained for personal development and progress in career. PD involves a whole range of learning

opportunities, stretching from “college degrees to formal course work, conferences and informal learning opportunities”.

As all professionals require advancement trainings to outshine in their field, likewise, educationists also need to enrich their competencies and knowledge so that they can get acquainted with the modern techniques of imparting knowledge to their students. If teachers are provided with quality training, only then they would be able to produce quality students. Hence the quality of education is directly proportional to the quality of teachers, which is based on the worth of training given to them. Therefore, the achievement of a nation is dependent on the achievement of the education system. Whereas the achievement of the education system relies on the quality of teachers, which is in turn reliant on the quality of teacher education.

### Teachers’ Professional Development (TPD)

[Diaz-Maggioli \(2003\)](#), while describing professional development for language teachers, comment that TPD is an “ongoing learning process”, which is a kind of a regular activity for a teacher as she changes her way of teaching while looking at the needs of the students. This practice is performed by the teacher like her everyday routine with her full consent. The teacher who is able to acclimatize with the classroom environment turns out to be a responsible teacher. According to [Diaz-Maggioli \(2003\)](#), PD is not a “one-shot, one-size-fits-all event”; instead, it is a process of growth where a teacher evolves with time and practice (p. 202). She has to realize that if she is going to apply the same formula of teaching to all students, she will not get good output. So, for the productive outcome of students, she has to allocate a variety of strategies. In doing so, she would advance in her personal and professional growth. The same practice is required in other responsibilities of the job as well. The more she would practice, the better she would be able to perform.

[Darling-Hammond and Richardson \(2009\)](#) describe teachers’ professional trainings as: “Professional trainings are designed or conducted to prepare teachers for more adaptive, knowledge-based practice, while simultaneously tackling the redesign of schools and teaching” (p. 47). The afore-mentioned notion infers that in teachers’ training, teachers stock themselves with professional skills and development. These teacher training programs include such kind of curriculum which is mostly activity-based. Such kinds of activities are enjoyed by the teachers, and they participate in them with interest. Teaching is a profession that requires manageability, subject knowledge, and awareness of the needs of learners. This is a very creative procedure of gaining knowledge for pupils, who (students) acquire in a different way with divergent patterns, and teachers evaluate that by what method and what students are learning and adapt teaching directives to innumerable methods of learning ([Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009](#)).

Teacher development targets transforming the viewpoints and manners of teachers. When a belief or a viewpoint is built, various factors get involved in its formation. It is a continuous procedure that keeps on happening. It is not that beliefs are formed overnight; it is a process that goes on generation after generation. The context of teachers’ working environment and the context of teaching itself provide conditions in which teacher development programs flourish or flop ([Saleem, Masrur, & Afzal, 2014](#)). Seyoum (2011) highlighted positive viewpoints of tertiary teachers concerning professional enhancement and concluded that professional advancement has the possibility to prepare tertiary teachers with the compulsory pedagogical skills and keep them up to date to handle the contemporary technology.

### Types of TPD

According to [OECD, 2009](#) following are the types of TPD:

- Courses/workshops (based on topics that can help teachers to develop their skills, knowledge and teaching practice);
- Education conferences or seminars (teachers present their writings either paper or research through which other researchers can get benefit);
- Qualification program (usually a two-year degree program to develop teachers professionally);
- Observation visits to other schools; (teachers usually visit other schools and observe teachers of that school and compare their pedagogical skills with other teachers in this way they learn a lot of new things;

- Participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for the professional development of Teachers;
- Individual or collaborative research on a topic of professional interest (teachers usually on an individual basis or in pair and sometimes in the group select a topic for research in this way they write a paper and get it published and side by side it becomes self-study for them and provides them with the opportunity to evolve professionally);
- Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, as part of a formal school arrangement (the senior teachers usually become mentors for the beginners. They help and polish the novice to become professionally upgraded);
- Reading professional literature (e.g. journals, evidence-based papers, thesis papers); and
- Engaging in informal dialogue with peers on how to improve teaching (such discussions are always very helpful since all work at the same place in the same working environment, having similar pedagogical settings. The problem of one staff member is related to the other. Hence by discussion, they can solve issues and improve teaching style by taking help from the instructing styles of colleagues).

There could be many other approaches to TPD, but the above-mentioned are the most common ones which are mostly practised.

## **Research Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The population of the study comprised English language faculty of public sector universities in Pakistan. The sample consisted of five faculty members of the English Department who had received ELTR training either in their own university where they teach, selected training centers of HEC, regional offices of HEC or in the Head office (Islamabad). Interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

## **Results and Findings**

The findings revealed that overall, all the participants were satisfied with the performance of the ELTR project. They praised the efforts of resource persons who endeavoured to impart knowledge to the trainees. Nevertheless, according to the study participants, there are certain areas in the project that need to be renewed or reviewed, or probably they portray a lack of coordination of organizers. These loopholes in the project are having a negative impact on the effectiveness of the project. Four themes emerged after the data analysis: Absence of need analysis, inadequate resources, lack of monitoring and implementation, and university and college teachers are trained together.

### **Absence of Need Analysis**

It is an ultimate responsibility of an organizer that before conducting the training, he should clearly check the background of the trainer. As one of the participants said: "A meticulous background check on the trainees should be run before they sit for receiving their training because...they belong to different learning backgrounds, cities, college/universities with the totally different environment" (P1). It is the right of the participant to receive such knowledge which s/he requires. The knowledge which is impractical for participants would not help them to advance professionally. When the trainer would be informed of the background of the trainees, they would be moulding their training content according to the training needs of the participants.

As the trainees are from diverse backgrounds, their educational activities may also vary from each other. For instance, one of the interviewees (P5) responded that when she went to take her training, there were teachers from all over Pakistan. The teachers were from urban and rural or far-flung areas of Pakistan. She noticed that the teachers who belonged to the urban areas had better exposure as compared to the teachers belonging to small cities. She gave an example of a teacher who belonged to Kasur. She was a competent teacher, but she lacked in knowledge of new technologies in teaching and "appeared to have entered a new world" (P5). This is because the need analysis of participants was not carried out. If a similar training is offered to teachers belonging to the diverse

environment, it will end up in confusion because if it would focus only on the context related to teachers belonging to big cities working in the best institutions of their cities, then the teachers from less privileged and backward areas would not get anything out of that training and vice versa.

### **Inadequate Resources**

Although the trainings of ELTR are funded by the government, and HEC has a lot of resources, but yet again, there are some areas where the resources provided by ELTR are deficient. One such example is of lack of Information Technology facility in colleges. The facilities that are enjoyed by the university faculty are not available to the college staff. One of the participants (P2) reported on this situation in these words, “On my training, I met a college teacher who got shocked to learn about the facilities that university teachers receive on campus”. Similarly, participant three said: “One of the biggest problems is the lack of provision of information technology and other advanced teaching and learning materials in the college sector. I have served in a college for five years before joining this university. Unfortunately, teachers who received training on how to use information technology in teaching English could not put their training to practice due to the lack of these resources in the colleges. Their training actually got wasted”. In Phase II of the ELTR project, Self-Access centres (SAC) were established in 4 universities. SAC is such kind of a project of ELTR in which internet facility is provided to the university along with computers. The teachers and students can get benefit from these smart rooms. On the contrary, such a facility is not provided to the college sector. In this way, college teachers cannot have access to information technology and research projects. Also, the training Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) cannot be carried out in colleges due to the unavailability of IT facilities in colleges.

### **Lack of Monitoring and Implementation**

The basic loophole in the structure of ELTR that has a negative impact on its effectiveness is that it keeps no record of the trainees and whether they are implementing what they have learned in training or not. When the participants complete their training, they receive a certificate, and after that, when they get back to their universities/colleges, they do not practice what they have received a certificate for. All the effort from their side and from the resource person gets wasted. There are various reasons behind not implementing the training content in classroom practice. The major reason, according to the study participants, is that trainings are forced on the teachers. One of the interviewees responded, “I was in my class when my Head of the Department called me to inform me that I was nominated for one-week training without getting any prior consent from me. Going on training was hectic for me, but I had no other choice” (P3). All of the participants had the same response that they were nominated by the HOD, and they did not go on training with their own consent. In such a situation, a teacher cannot get the maximum out of the training when she is forced to receive it.

The second reason, according to the study participants, for not practicing the new skills and teaching methodologies learnt during training was that teachers are already under pressure to finish the syllabus on time. For example, participant four said: “In the semester system, teachers do not have ample time for extra activities. Therefore, teachers just concentrate on finishing the syllabus rather than indulging their students in different activities”. Similarly, participant one reported, “I have to take 5 classes daily, so I have the burden of completing the syllabus and implementing training/workshop practice in the classroom is near to impossible as we have no extra time for such activities”.

The third reason, according to the participants, was that the training which they received did not match their training need and level. Moreover, although the training was suitable for novice teachers, she was forced to receive it. In this case, the teacher cannot be blamed for not implementing the training content in classroom practice since the material conveyed to her was below her professional knowledge and skill needs. Participant one said: “The mistake is at the part of the training organization who develop the training programs and material. It is a wrong approach to consider novice and expert teachers to be requiring same professional development training”.

The fourth reason is pointed out by the participants was that the professional development training they received under the ELTR project was out of context; whatever that was conveyed by the resource person was not according to the context of a particular teacher’s classroom practice. One of the participants commented: “I

really appreciate how Ms Anne Burns was training us on the topic of Action research, but unfortunately that could not be practised in my own classroom as that training was unsuitable for local students. Had the resource person been someone from our own country (environment), she could have trained us in a better way” (P4). Similarly, participant five remarked: “Such type of trainings are trainer-oriented where a trainer is an outsider and cannot resolve the problems of in house teachers because he/she is unaware of the troubles via which teachers pass through”.

The fifth reason in view of the study participants is that when ELTR itself is not monitoring the teachers, then teachers have no willingness to implement the training content in their classrooms. Participant three said: “...nobody ever asked me if I have applied the training material in my class or not: no one either from my department or from HEC ever bothered to do that”. The wide range of skills and knowledge delivered to participants in training are not implemented in the classrooms, and the teachers are not held accountable for not implementing the knowledge and skills gained from the training in their classroom practice due to the absence of a monitoring system.

### **University and College Teachers are Trained Together**

According to the findings, another loophole in the training of the ELTR project is that university and college teachers are trained together. An interviewee responded to this issue in the following manner: “There is a lot of difference between the learning and training needs of a college and university teacher. They have different learning environment, teaching materials and resources like multimedia vs no use of technology, lecture halls vs no proper space, updated libraries vs only one centralized library with no relevant material and books and so forth” (P2). Universities are aided with digital libraries. Research facilities and resources such as multimedia are mostly absent in colleges. With such a difference in environments, when university and college teachers are provided with the same training at a time, then it becomes difficult for the college teachers to make use of it.

### **Discussion**

HEC is faced with various challenges for effectively implementing its ELTR project. The project started in 2004 with the aim to train public sector EL College and university teachers. It was a great initiative from HEC to train a large number of EL teachers. Therefore, only 1504 teachers were shortlisted to get trained in different programs of ELTR. It was a challenge for HEC to deal with a large number of EL teachers. It was not easy for all the teachers to come to the head office (Islamabad) or regional offices of HEC to receive the training. So, HEC again had a challenge which was resolved by providing resource persons to far-flung areas of Pakistan to train EL teachers.

At times it is difficult for the trainers to train participants due to the lack of motivation of EL teachers. Once a teacher gets a job, she thinks that she can work for decades, and professional development is not required. To train such teachers is a challenge for ELTR project resource persons. Another challenge confronted by HEC is the maintenance of training record. Shamim (2008) reports that there have been complaints against the HEC that it has not maintained any authentic data on the first six years of the ELTR project.

The biggest challenge that HEC has encountered for making ELTR project effective is the lack of Evaluation and Monitoring. HEC does not do any monitoring or evaluation of its trainees. As a result, the knowledge and skills imparted to the participants of ELTR training remain with them and are not transferred to the students. The ELTR project team should visit the concerned universities/colleges to check if the trainee is imparting the knowledge gained in training or not, because if the training skills and knowledge are not conveyed, then the whole purpose of conducting the training goes wasted ([Khattak et al., 2010](#)).

Another major challenge for HEC was to scrutinize participant's background, i.e. need analysis of the participants is not carried out before training them, and the details are not shared with the trainer so that s/he can select the training content according to the need of the participants. In trainings, many times, teachers from all over Pakistan come to take training. In such cases, teachers who belong to big cities have ample exposure to facilities and technology, but the teachers from small cities have less exposure due to lack of facilities and do not find the training to be useful. Poskitt (2005) presented an outline for effective PD. In her outline, the very first essential for effective PD is need analysis. Unfortunately, ELTR does not carry out need analysis prior to training.

In this way, many problems arise for participants and resource persons because if the training is out of context, then it loses effectiveness.

Most of the times, under the ELTR project, English teachers from colleges and universities are provided training together. In such a joint program, a trainer should not be introducing anything which is out of context for participants, especially college EL teachers, because public colleges in Pakistan are devoid of many facilities such as information technology. If a trainer trained the college teachers about research, it would be of no use to them because they do not have the resources to carry out research in colleges. Hence, it becomes a challenge for the ELTR project team to train college and university teachers together. [Khattak et al. \(2010\)](#) also report that the university and college teachers are trained together irrespective of the fact that they have different backgrounds, learning environment, syllabi, examination system and so on. The university teachers are fully equipped with modern technology, computer labs, research centres, and internet facilities etc., which are not present in colleges. Even the public colleges in Pakistan do not have internet facility at college premises. [Chaudary \(2011\)](#) also opine that such kind of trainings is not “authentic problem solving”. In such trainings, whatever new knowledge is generated goes wasted as teachers cannot make its connection with their context. Although all teachers are equal but other than their profession, they are individuals as well and treating all teachers (expert and novice) in the same manner is a wrong methodology (Chaudary, 2011).

Ever since its inception, ELTR Project is facing a lot of criticism both at the national and international level. According to [Lotbiniere \(2010\)](#), ELTR Phase II is Pakistan’s last hope to restore the dwindling English language learning and acquisition ability of college and university students. Little hopes rest in the success of ELTR Phase II. It has even been reported that the Planning Commission of Pakistan believes that this English teachers’ professional development project to be a waste of money as the project holds an uncertain future ([Interface, 2010](#)). No attention is being paid to the resources available to the trainees at their respective workplaces while planning and designing the professional development courses. The short-term courses are limited to only addressing the pedagogical needs of English language teachers and have not been designed to deal with the theoretical underpinnings of the English Language teachers’ professional development ([Khattak et al., 2010](#)).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that there are some very important areas that need the attention of HEC, and they should be revised; for instance, there is an absence of need analysis while conducting the training. If the credentials of the participants are not shared with the trainers, how would they get to know what the requirements of participants are? For this purpose, HEC should carry out institutional need analysis so that such loopholes may not hamper the training. Most of the trainings of HEC have ample resources, but at times, they get deficient of resources as well. Sometimes local resource people are not available, and if they are available, they are few in number. Another inadequate resource is the lack of IT facilities in colleges due to which the college EL teachers cannot be trained for CALL. In this way, the college teachers cannot even carry out research projects because they do not have the required facilities available. Lack of monitoring is one of the major loopholes of the ELTR project. The teachers are not monitored after receiving the training. As a consequence, they do not convey the knowledge and skills taught to them while training and in this way, students are not benefitted. Moreover, university and college teachers are trained together, which increases a state of confusion among the participants because some of them are unable to comprehend what the trainer wants to deliver.

This research study has certain limitations, which are genuine in nature. The first limitation is the size of the sample. The participants were only five in number because only five participants could be located who had received ELTR training and were ready to cooperate with the researcher. The rest of the faculty members who took ELTR trainings were either not interested in the current research topic or were busy and could not take out time for an interview. The study was limited to participants from one public sector university only. Other university teachers were also in the loop for interviews, but due to the corona pandemic, the researcher could not approach them and had to limit the number of participants to five only.

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