



Exploring the Effectiveness of English Language Teachers Training at Elementary Level: A Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract- Trainings are the energizers of teachers as they upgrade their knowledge and develop their teaching skills. The purpose of this research explored the role of teachers' training on the development of English Language teachers. The study aimed to ascertain the perspectives of English teachers at the elementary level regarding the efficacy and practicability of implications of pedagogies introduced in the training programmes. The study is descriptive and data was collected through interviews. The structured interviews were conducted and obtained information was analyzed qualitatively in terms of thematic categories explored by the information provided. The study concluded that the ESL teachers at elementary levels enjoyed the training sessions as they were full of enthusiastic activities and rich resources regarding teaching English but they found it very difficult to incorporate those pedagogies in the real classroom for many factors. They stressed that the government should take measures to improve the provision of resource material and a conducive environment to practice the techniques and skills which they were trained for. They further expressed that such trainings are an integral part of the professional development of English language teachers and that they should be conducted at regular intervals to equip the teachers with the latest teaching skills.

Keywords: English Language teachers, pedagogies, ESL

I. INTRODUCTION

Training teachers is a worldwide phenomenon. Globalization, the advancement of technology, and an urge for competition have made the training of the teachers an inevitable phenomenon. The tradition of training the teachers is traced back to 1810 when it was realized that inadequate structure of training and a contradiction between theory and practice had made it difficult to improve the elementary education of Germany (Terhart, 2019). Since the beginning of the 19th century, there has been much discussion between the inappropriate relationship between the theory and practicum of the training provided to elementary language teachers. F. A. W. Diesterweg (1790– 1866), who himself was a trained school teacher, disapproved the insufficient training circumstances for elementary school teachers (Freitag, 2002). With the passage of time, the tradition continued and in the 20th century many training programmes were designed and introduced for the professional development of elementary school teachers and also with degree programmes for teachers or to be teachers (Bargin, 2014). Following the traditions set by Germany, many other countries in Europe started working on teacher education and training of school teachers.

The teachers training in Pakistan was started right after independence. Passing through various phases, it continued to develop and different universities offered the programmes for teacher education (Kausar, Kiyani & Suleman, 2017). In the past few years, teacher training has gained much popularity with the advent of the training provided by USAID and the British Council. Siddiqi (2019) stated that there are around two hundred and three (203) effectively functioning teacher training institutes in Pakistan along with three hundred (300) teachers' resource centers organized and run by the government. In the last decade British Council, Pakistan had contributed quite substantially to the development of school teachers on modern patterns. They are also working with the Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) that is responsible for the teachers' training in Punjab, Pakistan (Aly, 2007).

The present study aimed to explore the effectiveness and practicability of the training offered to elementary teachers with special reference to English language teaching at the elementary level in Punjab (Siddiqi, 2019). A great deal of research has been conducted to estimate the effectiveness of these training programs in general but little focus is done on how far these trainings help English language teaching from the perspective of elementary teachers. This research explored the perceptions of English language teachers at the elementary level regarding the training with a particular focus on the development of English language pedagogies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the perceptions of English language teachers at the elementary level regarding the effectiveness of professional development training(s) that they receive?

The secondary research questions are:

- How much elementary school teachers are satisfied with professional development training?
- What are their views about the practicability and availability of training sources and materials in classroom teaching?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher training contributes as an essential component in the development of the standards of education (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013; Liston, Borko, & Whitcomb, 2008). Trainings refine the skills of the teachers on one hand and the other side, they indirectly influence the learning results of the students through the application of innovative teaching pedagogies implemented by the teacher in the classroom teaching. It is a general view that the domain of teaching needs to be provided with specific resources. It includes competent teachers, adequate trainings, extensive and intensive knowledge, and the resources to impart knowledge successfully along with an environment that could yield motivation of the teachers to perform their roles as professionals in the best possible ways (AL-Hinai, 2008). Karagiorgi & Nicolaidou (2013) concluded that apart from the widespread concept of education, the professional learning and training of the teachers is still lacking.

Elementary school teachers enter professional practice either after completing formal education from a university or college. These two routes, though providing them with the knowledge, are not sufficient to face the challenges they face while commencing their professional journey of developing themselves as a teacher (Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006). Moreover, the theoretical and practical knowledge they count on is rather friable as it was obtained in an ideal situation (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013).

Songsiri (2007) explained that a trained language teacher is a source of motivation and a major factor to enhance the language skills of the students while learning a second or foreign language. He further discussed that a dedicated and proper training of English language teachers is pivotal to impart effective skills to the students. Koç (2016) investigated to what extent the language teachers were satisfied with the trainings they received before and during their professional development as English teachers. The survey was conducted in Turkey and it was explored that teachers are not satisfied with the trainings in terms of their objectives and practicability in real classrooms. Koç and Breibatch (2020) developed a scale to identify the challenges faced by EFL teachers. They worked on developing an efficacy scale for language teachers to determine the various aspects of English language teaching.

As it has already been discussed that teachers training is one of the most focused areas for intellectual studies and teaching practitioners around the globe and the traces are quite visible in Pakistan as well (Siddiqi, 2019), but there is no proper and dedicated training for the English language teachers especially at the elementary level. As a result, the English language teachers are not adequately trained (Sarwar, Ahmad & Hyder, 2017). The materials and the resources provided while educating and training teachers are insufficient to train and develop them effectively (Teevno, 2011). Emery (2012) conducted a survey in 89 countries of the world pertaining to the training and education of English language teachers. The survey explored that the problem was not only concerned with some particular country or region, but the issue of the lack of training for English language teachers was also worldwide. According to Ahmad, Ahmed, Bukhari, and Bukhari (2011), the students of the schools run by provincial governments were facing more problems

than the ones studied in the schools run by the federal government in learning the English language. The study concluded that one of the major reasons stated by the respondents was the teachers lacking proper training. The same was reported by Ali, Ahmad, Manzoor, and Naseer (2014) who concluded that many of the issues regarding the speaking skills of the students were because of the insufficient training of the students. The study explored that the teachers were not trained in the sound recognition and pronunciation of the English language.

Similarly, Gopang (2016) investigated the aspects of teachers' training in terms of the development of the professional abilities and communication skills of the teachers. He further concluded that the opinions of the teachers were very much positive towards the training programmes being conducted for their professional development. Zain (2015) conducted a study to explore the issues of pre-service trainings of the teachers and concluded that there is a great need to redesigning the existing training programme and they should be according to the needs and requirements by providing specific preparatory materials and guidance to the teachers at the elementary level. His research design was consisted of semi-structured interviews to collect information from the elementary school teachers in Indonesia. Ahmad (2012) investigated various dimensions of the teachers training through the opinions of policymakers, trainers, and teachers to explore the factors that affect the teacher's education and training.

Although a great deal of efforts has been put into studying the effects and impacts of training on the knowledge, skills, and professional development of the teachers with the help of the opinions and perspective from both the students and teacher, it is needed to investigate the satisfaction level and perspective of the English language teachers at an elementary level specifically. The present study was designed to record the perceptions of the English language teachers towards the recently developed and administered training programmes organized by the Punjab government in Pakistan.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is qualitative. A structured interview questionnaire was designed to interview the respondents. The interview questionnaire was based on the thematic categories identified by Koc (2016) in which she attempted to explore the information required for manipulating the level of satisfaction of elementary teachers regarding the effectiveness and practicability of professional development trainings for an English language teacher in Turkey.

Participants of the Present Study

The participants were 37 elementary English language teachers. The respondents, both male, and female were selected randomly as a sample to collect data from the schools in the Multan division of Punjab province. It was ensured that all of them had the experience of 1-10 years to get information about the decently developed programmes of training for them. Out of 37 respondents, 21 were female and 16 were male teachers of English at the elementary level.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure of Research

As discussed earlier, the instrument was adapted from Koc (2016) that was developed on the thematic categories given by Çoşkun (2014) and Tekin and Yaman (2008) to evaluate the effectiveness of training for elementary English language teachers. A few modifications are incorporated depending on the context of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. The first section was about demographic information that included age, gender, and teaching experience of the teacher. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of eight thematically categorized questions pertaining to the contents, instructors, and reflection about the training(s). The third and last section was an open-ended question for the respondents if they wanted to add some extra details of their experiences. Most of the data were collected by meeting the respondents personally. In some cases, their opinion was recorded through online meetings. Their responses were recorded and transcribed according to the themes of the questions asked.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the recorded data were transcribed and analyzed descriptively in line with each theme that emerged from the responses of the respondents. In this section, the findings of the research will be discussed according to each theme separately.

Activities of Training and Needs of Elementary English Language Teachers

The first question explored if the activities of the trainings provided were according to the needs of the ESL teachers at the elementary level. Almost all of the teachers appreciated the efforts of the education department for providing them with the trainings but they also lamented that the activities and tasks, though they were exciting and ideal, were general and not specific to English language teaching. Since the respondents were English language teachers so they thought that this is a huge lack in the trainings that they are given. Most of the teachers reported that many activities can develop the educational skills of the students but some of the aspects of language teachings were ignored. The teachers described that there was no proper training for teaching speaking skills to the students. They said that the activities focused more on learning core skills generally but a holistic approach to teach English is usually overlooked. Almost all of the teachers commented that teaching the English language at the elementary level requires a lot of exposure to the grammatical concept of the English language and they recommended that English teachers should be trained separately where they could be trained in pedagogies specific to the English language. The opinions of this statement were very similar to the study conducted in Turkey by Koc (2016) who stated that the majority of respondents regarded this training as irrelevant to their specific needs. The same is in the case of content-specific activities that are reported to be beneficial for their professional development as language teachers (Koc, 2016; Robinson, 2012).

Content and Instructors of Training

As far as the trainers were concerned, there was a very interesting point to be noted while transcribing the responses. The trainee teachers of the urban areas appreciated their trainers and reported that they were engaging, energetic, confident, motivating, and had the expertise. While trainee teachers from rural areas reported that their trainers were less engaging, lacking in management skills during training courses, and not motivating. There were again the same contrasting reports about the contents of the training material. The teachers from urban area appreciated the materials and contents of the training materials and delivery of the trainer during trainings while the teachers of the rural areas pronounced that the content of the training was difficult to understand and most of them said that it was quite difficult to develop an understanding with those materials. One of the reasons for this problem may be that the content provided was ambiguous. In this regard, Harland and Kinders (2014) suggest that trainings must be designed on 'constructivist approaches' that were proved to be more effective.

Evaluation of Training Activities

The next statement aimed to find out the opinions of English language teachers about the evaluation of the activities they had done during their training. Most of the respondents disapproved of the method of the evaluation of activities during trainings. The respondents further added that it may be because a large number of teachers were there in one session and it is hard to collect the reflection of all of the trainees in a short period of time. They stated that there is only one evaluation form which is provided each day at the end of the training to give an opinion about the daily activities and at the end, a final evaluation form was provided with closed-ended questions. This is very similar to the finding of Koc (2016) as she also described that the English language teachers reported that out of four steps of evaluation only reflection method was adopted that was considered inappropriate and insufficient way by the respondents.

The practicability of Training in Real Classrooms

The respondents were asked to express how far these trainings and the activities they learned could be practiced in the real classroom. Almost all of the teachers reported that they were unable to apply most of the knowledge and skills acquired from the trainings in the classroom for the following reasons:

- they were not specific to English language teaching
- the activities are time taking whereas in the classroom teachings they were supposed to complete the syllabus that is lengthy and there is little time left in each class to conduct activities
- they were supposed to teach from an examination point-of-view where these activities were not taken as part of the assessment
- the sources and materials provided by the government to train the teachers were not available in the actual classroom and it would be impossible to conduct activities in the classroom
- on the ground, they teach in a low-resource environment where technology and other "*fancy gadgets*" are hardly available

The results were similar to the study conducted by Kanli (2014) who concluded that the teachers commented that they could not actualize what they had learned from the trainings.

Pedagogical Implications and Enhancement of Teaching Skills

The last question was about the pedagogical implication of the trainings for an English language teacher. The respondents thought of these training programs as just a formality and opined that they did not contribute to the enhancement of their knowledge, specifically the knowledge of their subject. They described that they used to feel motivated and excited about the activities and their participation in the training program but in the actual classroom, almost none of the pedagogies might be implemented. Koc (2016) concluded the same problem in his study as his respondents found these training as inappropriate and insufficient and they said they felt less motivated for teaching when they found the training programme did not meet the standards of the actual classroom. She further commented that the purpose of the training was to enhance the teaching skills of the English language teachers along with their pedagogical implication and practicality to actualize the materials and sources in the classrooms.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current research was conducted to investigate the perceptions of English language teachers about the trainings offered and conducted by USAID and the British Council with the collaboration of the Directorate of Staff Development, Punjab. These two agencies are playing a pivotal role in training school teachers from the primary to the secondary level. The findings of the study were predominantly consistent with the studies earlier in the related areas not only in Pakistan but also in Turkey. The findings disclose that the practices of the master trainers and the themes of the trainings are attractive and catchy but they do not meet the needs of English language teachers at the elementary level. As it is not possible to practice the activities and techniques effectively in a language classroom, these trainings are unable to improve the quality education of the English language in Pakistan and also insufficient to equip English language teachers with enough skills and do not provide appropriate professional assistance.

The study further reveals that the trainings are conducted in ideal circumstances with all the instruments and material provided but this is not what happens in an actual classroom. Learned skills are difficult to practice in the classroom. So, the effort to train a teacher to impart quality education becomes futile. The study emphasizes that the authorities and institutions should know that the trainings offered to elementary English language teachers are ineffective and there is a great need to revise the plan of action to organize these trainings in order to get the most of these training programmes.

Taking into consideration the results obtained from the experiences of English language teachers, the present study concludes two major confirmations: first is that the trainings offered are not practicable in actual classrooms and there is a need to offer specialized training programmes for language teachers. The English language teachers should be trained by expert trainers specific to the field of English language teaching. Directorate of Staff Development, Punjab should work to design new and improved training courses for language teachers by keeping on board the main stakeholders. It has been recommended by several researchers that a systematic needs analysis is mandatory before designing the training course for English language teachers at any level (Koc, 2016; Gopang, 2016 & Ahmad, 2012). The training programmes should not be based on idealistic grounds rather they must take realistic accounts into account to make them a success (Daloğlu, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2001; Ruba, 1985). It is further recommended that the trainings should not only aim at the development of the skills of English language teachers but they should also include the components that may enhance and upgrade the knowledge of the subject. This study is conducted with English language teachers at the elementary level. Further studies may be conducted on a different level to validate the results and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

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