Evaluation of the effectiveness of in-service teacher training courses of the CALL sub-committee of the ELTR project in Pakistan

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Abstract

The study seeks to explore the perception of the concerned English teachers (trainees) about in-service training courses conducted by the CALL sub-committee of the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The researchers interviewed 10 volunteer trainees during one of the CALL courses asking them about the usefulness and applicability of the course for them. The researchers again interviewed them as a follow-up at their respective workplaces mainly to see whether or not they had been practicing the training in-put; whether or not they had got the requisite technology to utilize the training and whether or not consequently they had got themselves professionally developed. The study brought to light the ineffectiveness of the training course in terms of the trainees not being able to utilize it mainly owing to the problem (of the lack of resources) faced by them at their workplaces. The study stressed for making merit or need-based selections/nominations of the trainees, devising a fool-proof mechanism for the follow-up of the trainees and for providing facilities to the trainees for implementation of the training in-put.

Keywords: CALL, In-service teacher training, evaluation.

1. Introduction: CALL Subcommittee of the ELTR Project

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 (2002) regarding the declining standard of English in Higher Education. The Committee devised 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

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• Research and Publications  
• Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)  
• Reorganization of Departments/Centres of English Language.

1.1 Computer Assisted Language Learning Subcommittee (CALL)

The CALL subcommittee of the ELTR Project aimed at working to strengthen independent and interactive language learning through Computer Aided Language Learning to help teachers use electronic tools of communication to support language learning. The ELTR Project also aimed at working for facilitating the provision of Self Access Centers (SAC) with computers and internet facilities in model departments/centers in higher education institutions and to ensure that that teachers and students become computer literate. Since its inception, the Call sub-committee has arranged six in-service teacher training courses for college and university English teachers across the country. In these courses, 135 teachers have been trained. The present study probes into the effectiveness of one such course that was held at FAST National University Peshawar from 27th October to 1st November 2008.

1.2 Basic Prerequisites for the Successful Implementation of CALL

In one of the recent online discussion forums organized by the IATEFL Learning Technologies Special Interest Group, the participants stressed on the following key factors for the successful implementation of CALL:

a. Foremost, appropriate hardware, such as computers and printers, is an indispensable provision for the successful implementation of the CALL.

b. Similarly, the provision of appropriate classroom software, relevant to teaching and learning needs, is also a must.

c. Teachers and students should be given easy access to technology i.e. hi-tech labs which are usually kept under lock-and-key as the institution’s precious possession.

d. It is imperative on the part of the curriculum designers to integrate technology into the syllabus.

e. Teachers ought to be trained so that they become confident users of technology.

f. Again, teachers ought to be trained to help implement CALL in the classroom without sacrificing language learning pedagogy.

g. Proper technical and pedagogical support ought to be given to teachers in order to save their time and energies in maintenance of the equipment and also to help build their confidence in using new technological applications.

h. It is important to involve the teachers in the process of CALL implementation and thus promote their feeling of ownership about technology (Ioannou-Georgiou, 2006).

Inferring from the above pre-requisites for the successful implementation of CALL, its success may sound a far cry from, for in majority of the educational institutions of Pakistan, computers are still placed in a protected room which has no room for the teachers to experiment with language teaching and learning. Consequently, the teachers stick to the conventional methods of teaching languages wherein the students get very few chances to interact either with one another or with the teachers.

2. Research Methodology

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the said in-service teacher training course, we, the researchers, employed a very simple research method. We conducted semi-structured interviews from 10 volunteer trainees at the course to seek their views mainly on the way they got selected/nominated for the course, their feeling keenness or otherwise before the course, on the practicability of the course content, the resource persons’ adopted methodology and their (the resource persons’) repertoire of the relevant academic field, and also these semi-structured interviews were targeted at getting their feedback about the possible impact of the course on their teaching. We interviewed (semi-structured) the same trainees after six months of the training course as a follow-up at their respective workplaces mainly to see whether or not they had been practicing the training; whether or not they had got the requisite technology to utilize the training with and whether or not consequently they had got themselves professionally developed.
3. Analysis of the Trainees’ Interviews conducted during a CALL Course

Following is the detailed interpretation and discussion of the descriptive analysis of the data collected through recording and transcribing the semi-structured interviews of the trainees who were imparted in-service teacher training under the CALL sub-committee of the ELTR Project of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan.

The following questions in bold italics were asked in the order presented below:

*Would you please tell us how did you get selected/nominated for the CALL course of the ELTR project of the HEC?*

The descriptive analysis of the data got through interviewing them clearly suggests that 50% of the trainees were nominated by the regional directorate of Education (Table 1.0). 20% each of the trainees were got nominated by their departments and through their personal efforts. On the other hand only 10% of the trainees were nominated by the funding and organizing agency i.e. HEC. There was no selection criterion adopted. This clearly shows the flaw in the nomination/selection procedure.

Table 1.0: Would you please tell us how did you get nominated for the CALL course of the ELTR project of the HEC?

| Response                                      | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| I was nominated by my department              | 2         | 20.0    |
| I was nominated by the directorate of education| 5         | 50.0    |
| I was nominated by the HEC authorities        | 1         | 10.0    |
| I got myself nominated on my personal effort/contacts/interest | 2 | 20.0 |
| **Total**                                     | **10**    | **100.0** |

*Were you motivated and wanted to attend it or do you feel that you were forced to attend it as a trainee/participant?*

Again when the trainees were asked about their feeling motivated or otherwise to attend the course, all of them responded that they were fully keen and motivated for attending the course (Table 2.0).

Table 2.0: Were you motivated and wanted to attend it or do you feel that you were forced to attend it as a trainee/participant?

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes      | 10        | 100.0   |

Some of the responses given by the trainees to the question if they were motivated to attend the teachers’ professional development course are as following:

(a) “I really was motivated to attend it because I am in this sort of thing so using and utilizing the language lab...”
(b) “....we are personally enthusiastic and quiet keen to know about this training ... it’s a unique thing for us, and it will enhance our style of traditional teaching...”
(c) “Yes, I personally was motivated for such type of workshop because I want to groom myself first and then my students....”
(d) “Yes very much, that’s why our principal too much restricted us but still just in spite of resistance against this, we participated in this program so this shows our keen interest for programme.”
(e) “I’m a learner, still I’m a learner not a teacher, my spirit motivated me.”
(f) “It was my personal interest that dragged me here and I am most honoured to be here....”

All the above responses clearly show that the trainees had been quite keen and motivated to attend the course (Table 2.0).
Do you think that the content of the CALL course reflect your academic needs?

Answering to the question whether the content of the course reflected their academic needs, 80% of the trainees believed that these reflected their needs (Table 3.0).

Table 3.0: Do you think that the content of the CALL course reflect your academic needs?

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes      | 8         | 80.0    |
| No       | 2         | 20.0    |
| Total    | 10        | 100.0   |

Table 3.0 shows a very positive finding that the course content reflected the trainees’ academic needs. Whatever the finding to the question is but the fact remains the same that almost 80% of the teachers interviewed were actively teaching literature to their students at FA/FSc, BA and MA level. Besides, it is a generally observed fact that teaching literature through computer technology seems relatively a remote possibility in comparison to teaching language components at any level. However, the interviewed trainees were not of this apparent observation. They viewed the content proximate to their academic needs.

Are you satisfied with the knowledge and communication skills of the Resource Persons?

Answering to the question whether they were satisfied with the knowledge and communication skills of the Resource Persons, 70% of the trainees expressed their satisfaction about the knowledge and communication skills of the resource persons (Table 4.0).

Table 4.0: Are you satisfied with the knowledge and communication skills of the Resource Persons?

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes      | 7         | 70.0    |
| No       | 3         | 30.0    |
| Total    | 10        | 100.0   |

Table 4.0 shows that a majority of the trainees were of the perception that the resource persons possessed satisfactory knowledge vis-à-vis the training course and also that their communication skills were of an acceptable standard.

Are you satisfied with the methodology adopted by the Resource Persons for the course?

Answering to the question whether they were satisfied with the methodology adopted by the Resource Persons for the course, 70% of the trainees showed their satisfaction methodology adopted by the Resource Persons for the course (Table 5.0).

Table 5.0: Are you satisfied with the methodology adopted by the Resource Persons for the course?

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes      | 7         | 70.0    |
| No       | 3         | 30.0    |
| Total    | 10        | 100.0   |
In the same way, Table 5.0 shows that the trainees were satisfied with the methodology adopted by the resource persons on the CALL course.

**Would you be able to replicate the training input back there at your respective workplace?**

Answering to the question whether they would be able to replicate the course input back there at their respective workplaces, only 30% of the trainees showed confidence that they could replicate and apply the content of the course (Table 6.0).

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes      | 3         | 30.0    |
| No       | 7         | 70.0    |
| Total    | 10        | 100.0   |

Table 6.0 exposes the trainees’ real motivation and keenness about attending and utilizing the course. Only 30% of the interviewed trainees were of the perception that they would be able to utilize the course content at their respective workplaces. One of the interviewee clearly said, “I am telling you, I am teaching in Charsadda, we have a computer lab there but we have no access to that lab, besides, ... I have a large number of students... and it’s awesome to get access to that lab.”

4. Analysis of the Trainees’ Interviews post-CALL course

There was a need to elicit the views of the trainees about the impact of the training course on their teaching at their workplaces. We conducted post-course semi-structured interviews from the same trainees. The purpose of the interview was mainly to see as what the trainees’ have got at their disposal in terms of physical resources, seniors’ persuasion or dissuasion at their workplaces for utilising the training; and also to generally gauge the perception of the trainees regarding the course in developing them as professional teachers; and to record suggestions as to how the situation can be changed for the better. All this was necessary to know as to what extent the desired impact of the teachers’ professional development courses could be attained in future.

In the paragraphs to follow, we only proffer the brief interpretation and discussion of the two major and pertinent questions after having recorded and transcribed the semi-structured interviews from the trainees who had participated in the target course.

**How far have you been successful in utilizing the CALL course that you participated in?**

A vast majority of the CALL trainees was of the view that they had not been able to utilize the course to a considerable extent. As one of them expressed her disappointment in the following words: “No, I haven’t been able at all in utilize the content of the CALL course because our overall educational system does not allow it”.

One more CALL trainee was of the view that: “Unfortunately, I have to say NO. They (teachers and students) often think about the drawbacks of the internet etc. So it is quite difficult for us to utilize it on academic level”
Yet another one said, “I couldn’t utilise the content of the training as it was not related to my immediate needs plus as I don’t have any CALL lab in my college. Similarly, one more also asserted, “I found the course content to be quite good and interesting but it was not proximately relevant to my academic needs as the courses I teach at my college are mainly literature based and my teaching is usually dictated by the examination system and nothing else…”

Again, one said, “No, I haven’t been able at all to utilize the content of the said course because our overall educational system does not allow it. We have a computerized language lab in our institution but we haven’t yet benefited of it. The reason is simply that all the English teachers are taking 5 classes a day and the time table does not allow them to take students to lab and teach them language.”

Another one said, “No, I haven’t applied it because there in our college internet facility is not available. So, I couldn’t utilize it…”

The other overruled the possibility of utilising the content by saying, “No, I could not apply the content taught at the CALL course into my teaching assignments as they were not proximate to our academic needs. I could hardly afford to experiment with my students…”

**How far do you think the CALL Course Content helped you develop professionally as teachers?**

Strangely enough, despite the majority of the CALL trainees, as above, saying that they have not been able to utilise the training considerably, a few of them believed positive changes in them as professional teachers after the course. Of those trainees, one said, “It has added a new dimension to my professional practices. We had a computer lab in English department which I can now use more fruitfully. I shared my knowledge and learning with my other colleagues who did not attend the workshop and they also found it very beneficial and useful.”

Another exclaimed, “Greatly! It increased our knowledge of the modern teaching techniques. We feel that now, we are somewhat at par with up-to-dated institutions.”

One more self-believed, “It developed me a lot on the professional side. Only after attending the said course, I came to know that computer and I.T. plays a vital role in teaching English language. If used properly, this technology does miracles in language teaching.”

However, there were some who said that they were the same teachers as they had been before the training course as one of them representatively said, “I don’t feel myself to be a far better teacher after attending the CALL course as I could not utilize the content to great extent.”

5. **Conclusion with Recommendation**

The above analysis clearly shows that the said CALL course was conducted without any prior proper planning for it. The selection of the trainees for the course was not merit or need based. The training course was not addressing the academic needs of the majority of the trainees. Though the content of the course was not applicable on the part of the trainees, yet it can be positively said about the course that it made aware the trainees about the use of computer technology in teaching of English, and to some extent many of them have been professionally groomed as well.

In public sector universities and especially in colleges there is a lack of prerequisite resources for the implementation of the training courses such as in CALL. The teachers, for instance, do not have any multimedia and have not got, at places, even any internet facility. These things should be provided to them there, otherwise such training courses will have no effect on them and after going back to their workplaces, and they will forget everything because they will not be able to practise these things there. So until and unless such paraphernalia are provided to the teachers, there hardly can be any utility or positive impact of the training on their post-courses teaching in such a dynamic field as CALL. It is also stressed that training conducting and funding agency must make
amends for making merit or need-based selections / nominations of the trainees, devising a fool-proof mechanism for the follow-up of the trainees and for providing facilities to the trainees for implementation of the training input.

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