

Exploring PD Practices of ELTs Working in Federal-Capital Universities of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study forms a part of a doctoral dissertation and aims at exploring the professional development (henceforth PD) practices of English language teachers working in federal capital universities of Pakistan. Data for the study was collected from 109 teachers of 8 federal capital universities. The instruments employed for the collection of this data were a survey questionnaire and some interviews. Findings indicated that teachers do seem to know the benefits of PD but they do not actively engage themselves in such activities. Most of the activities which they do take part in are due to institutional demands and they also lack in the area of other, more personal and continuous development efforts. The overall situation of the institutions and the teachers' awareness and interest in this matter also seems to be lacking. Furthermore, a number of teachers consider language teaching as a simple and easy task and do not consider any form of training to be a necessary prerequisite.

Key words: English language teaching, Professional Development, Professional development practices/approaches

Introduction

We have witnessed a consistent pursuit of betterment and advancement throughout the human history. When it comes to teaching, this universal principle acquires added significance. Eternal vigilance is the price of teaching and a good teacher, by definition, is one who is constantly mindful of this necessity. This brings in the notion of PD with reference to teaching in general and in our case with reference to English Language Teaching (ELT). Language teaching, with all its social, psychological, pragmatic and applied complexities, requires a constant and systematic professional growth on the part of teachers. Thus, we can see that the notion and the practice of PD are very relevant for an English language teacher.

In Pakistan, however, the situation is far from satisfactory. PD in Pakistan is marred by a large variety of factors which are at once conceptual, psychological, professional and technological. Even when PD programs are conducted and teachers are made to participate in them, the exercise does not prove as fruitful as it should. The way such programs and activities are theorized, structured, executed, and understood needs a thorough re-thinking on the part of policy makers, administrators as well as teachers. The reasons for such a state of

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affairs are both quantitative and qualitative—that of degree as well as of kind. To deal with these issues and, thus, overcome these challenges, a comprehensive diagnostic and a workable roadmap is paramount.

A number of studies have been conducted on the PD of teachers in Pakistan. Most of these studies deal with a specific area, situation, or method. Dilshad (2010) and Rarieya (2005), for example, deal with the opinions of students and the application of a specific technique in a specific case. Halai (2001) and Khamis & Sammons (2004), similarly, have written on the Agha Khan's initiative for teacher development. While most of these studies deal with education in general, there are some, such as Khattak & Abbasi (2010) and Khattak, Abbasi, & Ahmad (2011), which talk about English language teaching, but not in a university context. Furthermore, most of these studies are based in areas like Karachi or in a few cases the KPK province. The present study tries to fill this gap in three ways. First of all, it deals with ELT specifically. Secondly, it is based in the federal capital and it focuses only on university English language teachers. Finally, the study aims to look at the overall developmental activities of English language teachers and not at a specific case or problem.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the PD programmes or activities that English language teachers of the federal capital universities do take part in, and
2. To suggest measures to improve future PD endeavours.

Methodology

This study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The population and sample for the survey questionnaire were English language teachers working in federal capital universities in Pakistan. The universities in the federal capital (Islamabad) include: National University of Modern Languages, International Islamic University, Air University, National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, COMSATS, Bahria University and Quaid-e-Azam University. The reason for including the entire population in the survey was to make sure that the results obtained were as generalizable as possible. Out of all distributed questionnaires, around 109 were completed and returned to the researchers. This data was complemented and triangulated by the responses to ten interviews that were conducted alongside the survey. A data file was created to enter and analyse these responses using the computer software program Statistical Package for Social Sciences, v.20 (SPSS). The statistical

analysis carried out on the data consisted of the calculation of descriptive statistics in terms of frequency.

Literature Review

Teacher Development is considered to be one of the most important aspects of a teacher's life (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Teaching, like all other professions, requires its practitioners to not just sit by idly, but rather to work hard to achieve the highest possible degree of success (Bailey et al., 2001). A teacher is expected, in the words of Harmer (2001), to not just repeat the same lessons over and over, but to bring something new every time they take a class. The teacher must be creative, actively involved, and willing to try innovative and engaging activities. And by doing this, it is hoped not only that they will be able to attain a higher standard, but they will also be able to engage their students and enjoy the practice of teaching.

There are a number of studies dealing with the issue of PD in general and PD in Pakistan in particular. For instance, in a study assessing various teacher training programmes, Davies and Iqbal (1997) concluded that teacher training programmes in Pakistan do not seem to be incorporating new ideas and methodologies into their frameworks. Another study dealing with training practices was conducted by Dayoub and Bashiruddin, (2012) who concluded that PD activities in Pakistan lack the element of community support. Retallick and Mithani (2003) have observed that the Agha Khan University's Advanced Diploma in School Management (ADISM) seems to have a positive impact on school performance and education standards. Rarieya's (2005) study, on the other hand, was intended to pass off a specific development technique as an alternative to the theory focused, decontextualized methods that are commonly used in the country.

These studies were mostly case studies based in specific areas and dealing with a specific situation or problem. Our study, on the other hand, deals with the general development practices of university English language teachers in the federal capital.

Analysis, Findings and Discussion

This section along with the analysis of the collected data presents the results of the survey questionnaire and the interviews. These results are then discussed and commented on, alongside specific recommendations that the researchers believe ought to be considered.

As per our data in table 1 below, in response to question 1, that asked participants about their PD activities, most of the teachers said that they attended workshops (87%), conferences (70%) and seminars (65%) for their PD. In fact, these are the only answers which got a score higher than 60%. Out of the more personalized and individual activities mentioned in the questionnaire, only two scored higher than

30%, whereas most scored lower than 25%. From this it may be concluded that teachers usually do not engage themselves in PD activities at a personal level, but only engage in institutional level activities such as workshops and seminars. Even there, if we look at whether or not participation in these PD programs/activities mandatory for them (question two), we would see that for around 53% it was mandatory (table 2), meaning that there might have been some teachers who did not want to take part in these activities but only did so because it was required.

The same results can be seen in the interviews, where only a few of the respondents said they took part in individualized activities and some even said that they did not look for development opportunities until and unless they came face to face with a problem class. AI and MS, in particular, did not seem to engage in anything but institutional feedback and an occasional discussion with their colleagues. In another question dealing with the frequency of these activities, only one or two of the interviewees actually said that reflection and development were a constant and never-ending part of the teaching process, while others talked about how frequently they were able to attend a workshop.

With regards to the second question, the interviewees mostly said they were not in any way forced to take part in PD activities. However, one interviewee did mention that if your boss nominates you for an activity, then it is not really possible for one to refuse. Furthermore, some interviewees did mention that consent is usually not always taken before nominating someone for a workshop. This, when coupled with the earlier observation that teachers rarely take part in non-institutional activities, makes it probable that these teachers only participated because it was required, which, according to writers such as Guskey (2000), goes contrary to the entire idea of PD.

Table 1. Frequency, Question 1

Level	PD Activity	No	Av. %	Yes	Av. %	Total
Individual	Self- Monitoring	69	63	40	37	109
	Teaching Journal	99	91	10	9	109
	Teaching Portfolio	97	89	12	11	109
	Analyzing critical incidents	99	91	10	9	109
One-to-one	Action research	7	6	22	20	109
	Peer Coaching	84	77	25	23	109
	Peer Observation	68	62	41	38	109
	Action research	87	80	22	20	109
Group-based	Team Teaching	87	80	22	20	109
	Case Analysis	89	82	20	18	109
	Action research	87	80	22	20	109
	Teaching journal	99	91	10	9	109
Institutional	Teacher support group	87	80	22	20	109
	Workshops	14	13	95	87	109
	Action research	87	80	22	20	109
	Teacher support group	87	80	22	20	109
	Conferences	33	30	76	70	109
	Seminars	38	35	71	65	109
	Webinars	107	98	2	2	109

Table 2. Frequency, Question 2

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	51	46.8	46.8	46.8
Valid Yes	58	53.2	53.2	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

Building on the first two questions was the third which dealt with how frequently teachers engage in PD activities. The resulting data shows (table 3) that a very few (9.3%) teachers view their PD activities as ongoing (“always” in the questionnaire) or rare (17.4%). In the figures in between, the percentage for those who chose “sometimes” (28.4%) was higher than those who chose “usually” or “often” (below 25%). And the same results, as we discussed above, were seen in the interviews, where only a few said that they engage in personalised and individual activities, while others only talked about an occasional workshop and nothing else.

Table 3. Frequency, Question 3

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	10	9.2	9.2	9.2
Usually	23	21.1	21.1	30.3
Often	26	23.9	23.9	54.1
Valid Sometimes	31	28.4	28.4	82.6
Seldom	19	17.4	17.4	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

The fourth and the fifth questions of the questionnaire dealt with why teachers seek PD and which area(s) of PD do they focus on. In the case of the former (see table 4), 65% said they participate for knowledge and 63% said it was to stay up-to-date in their fields. Rarely did they say it was for a higher salary (23%) or so that they did feel isolated (14%). In question 5, too, similar results were seen, with 65% saying their goal was knowledge, 63% choosing skill, 39% materials development, 39% better understanding of students, 39% self-analysis, and only 29% career advancement (table 5). Of course, since these choices can overlap, the 29% and 23% who chose career and salary might have taken it as an extra bonus goal and not as their primary one. As such, it would seem that teachers do realise what benefits are to be gained from PD and that they do try to keep those goals in front. At the same time, it might also indicate that they do not

engage in PD activities (see the analysis of questions 1 through 3) despite knowing of these benefits.

Table 4. Frequency, Question 4

	Anks		Kcelt		Psalary		cnegativity		osisolation		slearning	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
No	38	35%	40	37%	84	77%	89	82%	94	86%	61	56%
Yes	71	65%	69	63%	25	23%	20	18%	15	14%	48	44%
Total	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%

Table 5. Frequency, Question 5

	Smk		Pe		Sa		upl		ucm		cad	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
No	42	39%	40	37%	66	61%	67	61%	67	61%	77	71%
Yes	67	61%	69	63%	43	39%	42	39%	42	39%	32	29%
Total	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%

The data acquired for the following two questions is rather disappointing. From questions 6 and 7, which attempted to explore about teachers' membership of any teaching forums and their roles therein, it can be seen that only 51.4% of the teachers are part of any sort of teaching forum, and out of them only 6% participate as organizers and around 2% as speakers, whereas the others only prefer to listen and participate without taking any active role in such activities. Furthermore, the fact that out of the few who were members of such associations, only a few (5.7% and 9% respectively) took part as organizers or presenters shows that there is a greater trend of being a passive participant than of actually taking part and trying out new things, a trend which might be reminiscent of an earlier discussed issue, that of teachers not engaging with PD at a personal level.

Table 6. Frequency, Question 6

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	53	48.6	48.6	48.6
Valid Yes	56	51.4	51.4	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. Frequency, Question 7

	Participant		Organizer		Presenter	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
No	57	52%	99	91%	103	94%
Yes	48	44%	6	6%	2	2%
Total	105	96%	105	96%	105	96%
Missing system	4	4%	4	4%	4	4%
Total	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%

Similarly, regarding teachers' or their institutions' subscription to ELT journals (question 8), we learn that only around 58.7% of those who responded to this question are subscribed to a journal related to teaching or language teaching (table 8). If we add to this the data from the interviews, it could be said that even those who have subscribed or whose institutions are subscribed to a journal oftentimes do not receive their copy. What is more shocking, however, is that in such situations most of the interviewees do not even try to inquire as to why the Issues (of the journal) had not reached them nor do they check their institution's libraries, which shows that they either have a severe lack of interest or a lack of motivation in this matter.

Table 8. Frequency, Question 8

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	44	40.4	41.1	41.1
Valid Yes	63	57.8	58.9	100.0
Total	107	98.2	100.0	
Missing System	2	1.8		
Total	109	100.0		

An even bigger shock, however, comes from the fact that very few of teachers (13%) had a degree in TEF/SL (question 9) and that most of the institutions or teachers (78%) do not even consider it necessary to have one (question 12). This indicates that the lack of participation in PD activities might actually be a problem that is rooted deep within the mind-set and approach with which these teachers and institutions view this profession.

Table 9. Frequency, Question 9

	Dil		Dlit		Dling		Dtefl	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
No	42	39%	81	74%	89	82%	95	87%
Yes	67	61%	28	26%	20	18%	14	13%
Total	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%

Additionally, only around 17.4% teachers were part of any virtual teaching forum (question 10) and only between 21% to 38% participated in some form of co-curricular activities (question 11) in order to maintain interest or relieve stress, which would further strengthen our theory that teachers see ELT as some sort of “easy” task.

Table 10. Frequency, Question 10

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
no	88	80.7	82.2	82.2
Valid yes	19	17.4	17.8	100.0
Total	107	98.2	100.0	
Missing System	2	1.8		
Total	109	100.0		

Table 11. Frequency, Question 11

	Mw		Wipe		Oest		Rlsetc	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
No	66	61%	82	75%	71	65%	64	59%
Yes	39	36%	23	21%	34	31%	41	38%
Total	105	96%	105	96%	105	96%	105	96%
Missing system	4	4%	4	4%	4	4%	4	4%
Total	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%	109	100%

Table 12. Frequency, Question 12

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
no	85	78.0	84.2	84.2
Valid yes	16	14.7	15.8	100.0
Total	101	92.7	100.0	
Missing System	8	7.3		
Total	109	100.0		

From the remaining questions (13 and 14), we see that the majority of the teachers do not engage in peer observation (67.9%) and that most of them have not even participated in more than 5 workshops (64.2%) arranged by HEC or any other organization. These results are also strengthened by the interview results from which we learn that only respondents AS and KS regularly attend workshops while others do it either once in a while or when they have to.

Table 13. Frequency, Question 13

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
no	74	67.9	70.5	70.5
Valid yes	31	28.4	29.5	100.0
Total	105	96.3	100.0	
Missing System	4	3.7		
Total	109	100.0		

Table 14. Frequency, Question 14

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1-5	70	64.2	64.2
	6-10	20	18.3	82.6
Valid	11+	5	4.6	87.2
	None	14	12.8	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	100.0

Conclusion and Suggestions

From the above discussion, it can be said that while the teachers are well aware of the benefits of PD, they do not seem to have a proper vision of what PD entails. In their opinion, PD consists of mainly workshops and seminars and as such they do not engage in personalised and individualised activities. They also seem to take ELT as a simple task which does not require much training and there is a possibility that they might be uninterested or may even look down on the idea of improving oneself for teaching language. This can be deduced from their responses to questions regarding journal subscriptions, co-curricular activities, and forum participations. Also, most of those who do participate usually do so as listeners and do not take up any active roles. There is also a lack of initiative amongst teachers, with most of them only participating in institutional activities and workshops.

This, of course, is not in accordance with the vision of PD put forth by people like Guskey and Bailey et al., which requires that teachers think of PD as an approach to the profession and personally take interest in such activities¹⁶. Thus, the first thing to be done is to have the teachers improve their vision of both PD as well as ELT. For this, workshops, case studies, and faculty discussions can be used to instil a healthier understanding of PD in teachers. This transformation, of course, would have to be at an administrative as well as at a faculty level, for both of these complement each other.

A second recommendation would be to encourage context-grounded and guided experiments amongst teachers, like the type reported by Rarieya¹⁷. Such a case would not only train teachers to use specific techniques, but it would also allow an experienced person to guide them through the initial days of difficulty and failure. Furthermore, since it would be context grounded, it would have more in it than just a vague set of ideals. Such an approach would not just help change PD practices but it would also help change the perceptions of teachers and hopefully kick start a tradition of active participation.

Of course, to even consider doing this and to later on expand this into the idea of group planning, some sort of community level

cooperation would be required; wherein universities become learning communities and teachers help each other out and thus ensure that none of their practices become static. Such an environment would also encourage context-grounded case studies and maybe even formal or informal discussions. It might even foster an environment, in the long run, where teachers would not just teach language, but also generate literature and perhaps even courses on professional development.

That being said, the responsibility for this cannot be put solely on the community. The teachers themselves need to reach out to each other and to students, and they need to organise small, department level or even friend-based discussions and activities. The administration, too, need to be informed about such matters so that they are supportive and can help arrange and assist in such a change. All in all, it might be said that a serious need for rethinking and practical experimentation is required amongst both teachers as well as institutions.

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