

## Importance and Implications of Teachers' Training for Teaching English Literature

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### *Abstract*

*This study analyses the issues and the experiences of senior and junior teachers who teach English literature. The main aim in carrying out this study is, firstly to examine lack of training and its effects on teaching English literature. Secondly, how training is important for teaching English literature at the university level. To achieve this objective, the semi-structured interviews were conducted from teachers at the Institute of English Language and Literature (IELL), the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. The findings of the research show that due to lack of trainings, the traditional lecture method is applied in classrooms and teachers either try to emulate the way they have been taught or teach on trial and error basis, which results in ineffective and monotonous teaching practices. This study emphasizes teaching with novel and fresh techniques by arranging teachers' training and professional development programs for teaching literature subjects and to ensure the practical implication of the trainings in the classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *training, teacher, literature, classroom, implication of training*

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching as a skill is enhanced and polished by professional trainings in the relevant disciplines. Teaching in the field of education requires extra care, improvement and a lot of enhancement depending on the various requirements of course, subject along with learners' aptitude level. Teacher education is important for raising the standard of education. Investing in teacher education is an important investment which pays back in the form of quality education (Rao, 2004). The concentration and proper handling of teachers' needs in education, actually confirms the prosperity and advancement of the country, because upon the quality of its teachers the quality of education is known. Teaching is the noblest profession, thus it needs more concentration. The teacher-education is a starting point for revolution in education. The quality education depends upon the quality of its teachers and teaching is improved and groomed by frequent specialized trainings in the relative subjects. Teachers' training is pre-requisite for the improvement and quality change in education. Having professional skills and knowledge, a teacher can teach properly, can handle the classroom and disseminate that knowledge in an appropriate way in the classroom. For effective teaching, a teacher needs not only sufficient knowledge of the related subject, but proper delivery and dissemination of that knowledge to learners is also very important. Moreover, it requires

special attention in the subjects that are not in native languages, and are in second or foreign language of communication. Therefore, teachers need well-timed professional trainings in order to improve and enhance their teaching skills.

In the context of Pakistan and particularly in Sindh, English needs more attention for teachers' trainings. The eligibility criterion for the appointment of the English teacher (lecturer) at Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro is first class Master's degree. There is no pre-service training or experience required for newly appointed teachers. Soomro (2011) and Bughio (2012) explain this situation by saying that a formal plan or system of teachers training is lacking here. Hence, before starting their career, newly appointed teachers of English do not get any training. It is also noted that they hardly have any teacher taken development courses during their career. Rao (2004) and Khan (1984) also highlight pre-service training courses for teachers. Moreover, new researches in teacher education mainly focus on their professional and technical training which helps in imparting teachers' education, knowledge and specifically their involvement in the classroom. Keeping in mind this view, the present research identifies the challenges and issues of the teachers while teaching to the students of English literature.

### ***Defining the Term Teachers' Training***

Basically, training is a process and an act of instructing and teaching a specific skill. In this act of teaching for skills, knowledge in that particular subject is attained and then that knowledge is applied in particular classes to the particular learners. It is called a process because by this a trainee learns different skills which are necessary for a particular profession, for an art or for any job. Teacher training in words of Henderson (1978) is "any activity which teacher undertakes before or after he has begun to teach, which is connected with his professional work" (p. 11). Thus, teacher training becomes an integral part of a teacher's professional life. It is a systematic development of a teachers' attitude, knowledge, skill, behavior and patterns which are mandatory to perform sufficiently in the field of education. With the help of training, the main focus is on specific attitude, specific knowledge and specific skills of teachers. A teacher's real performance depends upon the training (Rao, 2004) he/she receives. Thus, in educational context, training becomes a source to provide ways to teach in an appropriate and a better way.

### ***Background of the Research***

This research is conducted at the Institute of English Language and Literature (IELL) University of Sindh, Jamshoro as a result of observation of English literature classes at IELL as a part of MPhil assignment. It has been observed that in literature classes, there is lack of creativity; classes are less interactive, students are mostly passive, while the teacher is active in giving lecture consecutively for fifty minutes. As a result, it creates boredom in the classroom, students sit passively and mostly silent, inactive, yawning, feeling drowsy or doing other activities, like chatting or texting on mobile or passing chits to one another filled with jokes.

### **Research Questions**

- How does lack of training affect teaching English literature?
- How important is teacher-training for teaching English literature at the university level?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A teacher plays pivotal role in teaching and imparting knowledge among his/her students. Teaching is a complete process and in this process there isn't one way performance by teacher only. It is actually a collective effort by teacher and students. It is an interactive and collaborative activity in which teacher plays vital role in each activity in the classroom. With the help of different techniques, a teacher imparts the knowledge among students in the best suitable way with the various techniques so that the classroom becomes student-centered. For making a classroom student-centered and best place for learning, teacher education is essential. It will help in raising the standard of education. It is the teacher who makes the learning environment suitable in the classroom and carries out the changes and implements them in learning process. Thus, teachers' training helps in the development of the teachers' cognitive and effective abilities. Teacher education programs as Rao (2004) points out are designed to prepare effective teacher by providing theoretical awareness of teaching and to develop teaching competency and teaching ability.

Teacher training programs are widely supported and demanded by the researchers (Allix, 2003; Bughio, 2012; Farooq, 1995; Khan, 1984; Memon & Sangi, 2011; Rao, 2004; Soomro, 2011). Bughio (2012) in his study focuses on the professional training of teachers and deems it as essential part of teaching and learning. He notes that in-service training programs are essential for teachers "to enhance their professional skills and to be able to manage change" (p. 237). He asserts that it is very important to bring motivation among teaching faculty to

exercise and apply the changes that can come through discussions, teacher training, workshops and seminars. Farooq (1995) also necessitates teacher development with teacher training. Having theoretical knowledge of the subject only is not sufficient for bringing improvement in education. In fact, teachers need methodological principles which will help in bringing solutions to their problems and it will emphasize the learning experience. Khan (1984) asserts that the whole educational system surrounds the teacher, therefore teacher is pivotal. Thus for quality education, it is the teacher who needs different techniques, methods and efforts. It is necessary for teachers to make changes in their teaching methodology depending upon the circumstances, time and approach of students, to adopt new processes and technologies.

Chisman and Crandall (cited in Buriro, 2011, p. 70) believe that since the world is persistently advancing in technology, therefore, for teachers it becomes part of their duty to get acquainted and trained with new processes and methods of teaching. Hence “for effective teaching, combination of professional knowledge with specialized skills is necessary” (p. 70). With this teacher gets confidence on new technological advancements and will use them in the classroom. Since a teacher is a supporter, guide and a counselor, therefore, he/she is responsible not only for teaching but for developing the personal traits of the students as well. Thus, in order to improve education there is a need to educate the educators.

From the past researches, it is noted that there has been a great discussion on trained and untrained teachers and difference between their teaching practices. There is a huge difference between the teaching of trained and untrained teachers (Bughio, 2012; Farooq, 2005; Rao, 2004). Explaining the difference between trained and untrained teachers Rao (2004) notes that a trained teacher will impart sophisticated thoughts drawn from the fundamental disciplines of pedagogy. On the other hand, an untrained teacher defines events and objects in the term of common sense. Therefore, trained teachers can do much more than untrained teachers.

The researchers have also focused on the pre-service training and teaching experience for university teachers. As Bughio (2012), Soomro (2011) and Khan (1984) discussed that there is neither prior training nor teaching experience required for the job of a lecturer at University of Sindh. Khan (1984) emphasizes pre-service training and then after joining in-service training programs for the teachers so that they can teach in a better way. During teacher training, different skills, methods and techniques should be emphasized to enable teacher to

face different problems regarding teaching of English. Similarly, Khan also emphasizes on the different approaches of teaching that can be adopted in teaching both literature and language. In Khan's research traditional lecture method of teaching is highly discouraged and research and professional trainings for teachers are highly recommended. For Khan, a best teacher is one who combines teaching and research together. Thus, workshops and seminars should be frequently arranged in order to refresh the knowledge and professional skills of teachers. Memon and Sangi (2011) discussed three methods of training teachers in their research on how a teacher should be trained for teaching ELT. They suggested power coercive strategy, rationale empirical strategy and normative re-educative strategy. With implication of these strategies a teacher would be able to get good training for teaching English language. The researchers also provided models for bringing changes in teaching at university level.

Moreover, in most of the public universities in Pakistan, current teaching method as in view of (Scrivener, 1998) is traditional. Still majority of the teaching faculty is untrained for fresh methods and novel techniques of teaching as per need of the time. Therefore, teachers desperately need to adopt new trends in their teaching. So that classrooms become student-centered and there is constructive environment. (Scrivener, 1998).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out at the Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro in 2014 as a part of an M.Phil. assignment. The facts and figures shown in the study are limited to the year of the study when it was carried out. The data for this study was collected from six teachers of IELL, three male and female senior teachers and three male and female junior teachers. Seniors having five to ten (or more) years teaching experience at the institute, while junior teachers were newly appointed having less than three years teaching experience at the institute. Senior and junior teachers were selected in order to know the various problems of teaching in English literature classes and to know the difference between the teaching methodology of junior and senior teachers and their experiences.

The present research is qualitative in nature because participants were interviewed to collect data. Open ended questions were asked from the participants to explore different problems and participants' experience of trainings regarding English literature classes. In order to get

answer of the main research questions, various subsidiary questions were also asked from the participants. The study uses the framework of thematic analysis.

## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

### ***Experience of and views about Teacher Training***

The participants in this study were asked about their experience of training for teaching the subjects of English literature. In their interviews, majority of the participants pointed out that in their experience there had been no particular training for teaching the subjects of English literature. One of the senior participants said that he has experience of teaching English literature for more than ten years but he has not attended a single training “specially meant for teaching English literature subjects”. However, he has attended trainings regarding language teaching like ESL, EFL, and ELT. He explained that since English language is given more importance than English literature that is why there are more programs for English language. Another senior participant informed that out of twenty seven permanent faculty members in the institute, only fifteen senior teachers have attended different trainings. However, these senior teachers were provided trainings only for language classes. There has been no specific training for literature. Junior/newly-appointed teachers stated that since their appointment, there has not been a single training meant for English literature, nor “we have pre-service training trend in the university” as one of the participants mentioned (it confirms with views of Soomro, 2011; Bughio, 2012; Khan, 1984). Notwithstanding, one participant had a different opinion regarding this. He disagreed with the thought of teacher training for teaching in literature classes. For him, literature as a subject cannot be taught with the help of providing trainings to the concerned teachers. In fact, for teaching literature, a teacher clears the ideas about prose or verse, he must understand and comprehend the piece of literature with deep thinking and reading. He justifies that there have been several versatile writers, competent teachers and great intellectuals in literature who have not been trained in the traditional way. The participant viewed that the concept of training is not applicable for teaching English literature. Though it is fine for language teachers but it is not recommended for literature because literature is solely related with the thought and understanding, it is not calculation based. So the participant asserted that teaching English literature with the help of attending trainings and implementing them in classroom is useless. But other junior teachers responded that as they were given no specific training for literature classes they face different problems during class.

The participants stated that during their teaching they adopt the old methods for teaching which they have seen in their student life. Their teaching methodology is similar to their teachers, the way they have taught them in past. Thus, from their past experience as a student, they adopt the teaching methodology which they have already experienced. Hence, following the copied method, the participants agreed to this point that it creates monotony in teaching. In this method, it is the teacher who remains active in speaking during class and delivering a lecture for fifty minutes. Participants categorically emphasized that for teaching English literature requires skill to teach different subjects such as fiction, criticism, poetry, world literature, drama. For this, a teacher needs not only vast knowledge but he/she needs proper method and relevant techniques to teach. If these subjects are not handled properly in classroom, then they result in disinterestedness, boring and inactive class. In addition to this, one participant shared the experience that particularly teaching to the large classes mostly creates problems where managing students' attention, motivation and disseminating the idea become difficult. Due to scarcity of resources and modern equipment in the class, teacher carries on lecture method. Therefore, it results in boredom and inattentiveness among students, even few students leave in mid of the class. Another participant responded "our problem is that we are not familiar with new methods of teaching English literature because of lack of proper training in the field of English Literature. Since there are various ways and techniques for teaching language, similarly teaching literature must be performed with certain techniques and methods, but we are not acquainted with such practices. Eventually, the students in the classrooms are mostly noticed as less inclined that minimizes the tempo of teachers as well". One of the junior participants asserted that she faces intricacy while starting the class where she notices students' poor attention. However, she further affirms that she cannot repeat similar inspirational talks in each class.

The participants' responses were different on the matter when they were asked about the ways they deal with scarcity of training. One of the participants said that she tries her best to apply different strategies/methods to teach literature more efficiently. She learns from the practices and experiences she gets from her daily classes and thus based on her experiences she adopts different methods on trial and error basis. She deems in teaching English literature "I train myself and learn from my mistakes and experiences and from observations in classroom. I improve my teaching by learning". Further she stated "for me it is learning by teaching". Another participant told that she uses various methods to improve teaching in literature class, sometimes she succeeds while sometimes not.

Another participant shared his personal experience of teaching fiction that he used to teach with the traditional method of text-reading but then he felt that students were not inclined for reading the text or listening to a long lecture about the text, and then he used audio visual aids in order to give a proper understanding of the book that he teaches. He said then he changed his methodology. First he started with the reading and understanding of the text and then showed the same visually through multimedia in the classroom. It resulted in a good understanding and appreciation of the book and students seemed more interested in audiovisual class than the traditional textual readings and lecture methods. He believes that if we are provided training regarding teaching English literature we can teach in a more proper and better way and can achieve better results. We are learning by our own experiences (Rao, 2004, also opines same when he differentiates the experience of trained and untrained teachers).

To the question on the reasons behind lack of due attention to English literature, most of the participants said that nowadays more importance is given to the English language. Since the introduction of linguistics as Master's degree in IELL, more focus is given to language teaching, and frequent trainings are conducted on ELT, ESL/EFL etc. One of the senior participants admitted that even in training for language there are some elements that we can utilize in literature class also. The trainings that he attended on language teaching contain 20% things that can be utilized in literature classes as well, for example, motivation, pulling the attention of students, maintaining teacher-students repute, arranging group and pair work, controlling the class, teaching a large number of students, etc., "these are the things that even we learn from trainings of language". He believes that though there is no particular training for teaching English literature yet these few elements can be learned from language trainings as well. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the need of trainings in English literature, because there are certain subjects that need specific training to handle.

On one question from senior participants that how far they practice the techniques in classroom from any training they had attended, two participants answered that they do not apply the techniques in totality, hardly few things they try to apply, because of the lack of resources (i.e. multimedia classrooms, electricity, crowded classrooms) and environment problem i.e. big classes, noisy and disturbing classes, boycott system, unpunctuality and irregularity of students etc. Things are quite different in the classroom; students belong to different backgrounds (middle, lower middle and lower class) and different educational levels



(from government and private institutions). While one participant said that he applies those methods practically in classroom with whatever resources are available.

Participants also discussed the role of the authorities in conducting teacher training. They explained that there were hardly any training programs for literature teachers. While Higher Education Commission (HEC) mostly conducts trainings for English language and research methods. There is no serious consideration for trainings by the authorities.

The participants suggested that in order to improve teaching English literature at the university level, HEC should frequently conduct trainings for English literature teachers at least twice a year and ought to cooperate with the university to enhance and arrange trainings which are beneficial not only for teachers but for students as well. The trainings will certainly be useful for teachers and through this way via teachers the knowledge will be disseminated to students in a proper way. Because, for effective teaching just knowledge of the subject is not enough, it is the technique and method that will impart knowledge in a proper way.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Teaching is a skill and it can be improved, enhanced and groomed by the professional trainings, workshops, or seminars etc., in the related subjects. This research was aimed to analyse and highlight the issue of teachers' training for English literature classes. The data was collected from six teachers of IELL- male and female, randomly selected and interviewed.

From the participants' interviews, it was found that there was no specific teacher training for teaching English Literature. As teachers are not exposed to the different styles of teaching English Literature, and have not been provided any relevant training and workshops which can help them to improve their teaching, they teach either by emulating their teachers as they have experienced as a student or they teach from their personal experiences on trial and error basis, which results in an ineffective and monotonous teaching. Thus, it would not be wise to expect them to perform better without having been provided proper training required for the discipline.

It was also found that comparatively, literature as a subject was paid less attention by the authorities, because on national and international level now there is more importance and demand of linguistics, teachers and students are more inclined to linguistics. Consequently, the students in literature class could not get properly what they ought to. Recurrent trainings,

workshops or seminars for teaching literature will develop teachers' cognitive and effective abilities which will develop teaching competency and teaching ability. In view of the study, few suggestions are given to enhance teaching English Literature.

Firstly, English literature in the context of teaching should be given due place in trainings so that the teachers would enhance their teaching skills. There should be frequent trainings for teaching English Literature. HEC should collaborate with the University of Sindh and IELL to enhance and arrange the training programs which are beneficial not only for teachers but for students as well. Secondly, teachers after being trained should practically apply their learning in the classrooms so that better results could be achieved. Thirdly, on the part of authorities, there should be monitoring system to check the teaching methodologies and efficiency of teachers in the classroom. Finally, for enhancement and improvement, students also should provide their feedback about teachers' teaching methodology so that the teachers may improve it more, because students are the best judges of the teachers' way of teaching.

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