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p-ISSN: 2663-3299

e-ISSN: 2663-3841

L-ISSN: 2663-3299

Vol. V, No. I (Winter 2020)

Pages: 293-303

An Analysis of the HEC's English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project

Abstract:

This study aimed to analyze 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. A further aim of the ELTR project was to bridge the gap between college and university teachers. 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. This study adopted a qualitative methodology. In order to collect data, HEC's documents, reports and research did by other researchers on the ELTR project were analyzed. The findings revealed that HEC tried to accomplish its set goals, but there were certain areas in which the set goals of ELTR were not achieved. As HEC took a challenging step to train a large number of EL teachers, resultantly it had to face various challenges like scrutiny of participant's background, lack of facilities, monitoring and evaluation and implementation of the training provided through the project.

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

Introduction

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). The HEC accentuates the professional development of higher education teaching personnel in sequence to update their level of learning and research. According to HEC Annual Report 2014-2015, the qualified and professionally trained teaching staff would serve in Higher Education Institutes (HEI), they can create a culture which would be “learner-oriented”, “transferring knowledge” with certain method grounded on learning consequences and then drip down characteristic learning and research to the students (HEC, 2015).

HEC established Learning Innovation Division (LID) in 2003 to ensure an in-service Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for the Higher Education Teaching Faculty and university administrators across Pakistan to support them in sustaining their academic excellence and qualitative governance by supporting their professional needs through open and customized programs. An extreme need was sensed to commence the training of university level teachers as at the time of induction of new lecturers in university, pre-service training is not required and even there were no provisions for in-service coaching. It was challenging for LID to train about more than 17000 university teachers at one go. So, it commenced teacher training at two levels:

- First, “by providing training to different universities at their own premises” and:
- Second, “by inviting volunteer teachers at LID Islamabad” (Saleem et al., 2014, p. 165).

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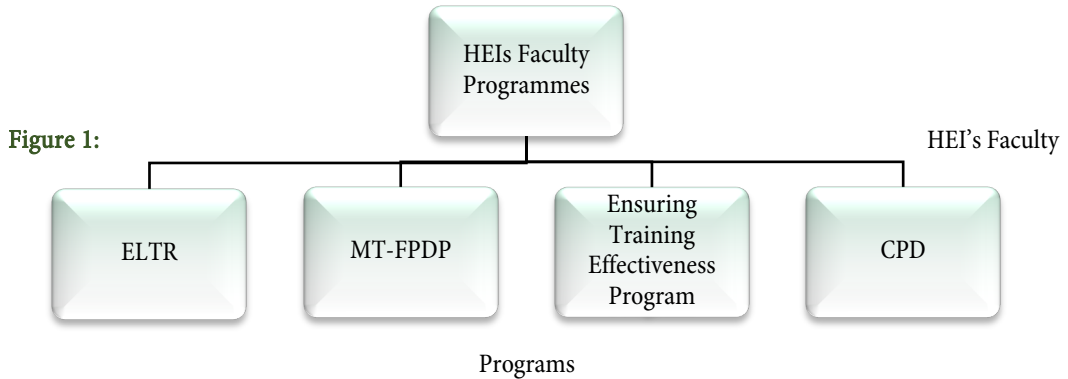
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HEC not only trains to teach staff but also trains the management staff ranging from Vice-Chancellors of the universities to hostel wardens only to bridge the gap between the teaching faculty and management team of the universities. In this way, LID has two categories:

- HEIs Faculty Program
- HEIs Management Program

Following are the categories of training of teaching staff conducted by HEI ([HEC, 2015](#)).



English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR)

HEC, while recognizing the significant place of the English language in a contemporary educational setting, stepped forward and launched the first-ever language-based project labelled as “The English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR)” project in July 2004. This project was initiated with an aspiration to

- revolutionize and apprise criteria of teaching English as a subject;
- generate a substantial upgrading in the learning and teaching of the English language and research in HEIs across Pakistan ([HEC, 2015](#))

In order to gain the required results from the project, it was divided into short- and long-term courses. The trainings and activities done under the umbrella of ELTR are as follows:

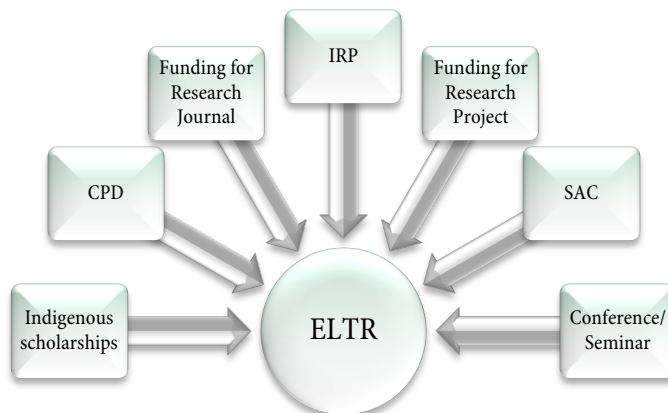


Figure 2: Trainings and Activities

Conducted by ELTR Program

The objective of HEC’s English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project is to enhance the teaching and learning of English in colleges and universities of Pakistan. Through enhancement in the teaching and learning of English, the project intends to transform ‘the socio-economic indicators of Pakistan’ and ‘contribute considerably to supplement the efforts of the government to improve the standard of higher education and scientific learning’ (NEP, 2009). As English is a lingua franca so by enlightening the teaching

and learning of English, students from the public sector higher education institutions would be able to get good jobs in Pakistan. It happens that students from private institutions with the best provision of English teachers become capable of speaking and understanding good English and hence getting good jobs in Pakistan or abroad. HEC wanted to demolish this difference between private and public institutions by raising the level of teachers of the public sector so that they can produce good students as well make them capable of competing with the world in every way.

The ELTR Project has delivered in-service advancement prospects for the English language teaching staff of higher education institutions. Up till now, it has trained 1504 lecturers in its first phase (2004-2009), and further 1400 teachers were trained in the second phase (2010-2013). It is not that the project focused on University English language (EL) teachers only; instead, it worked for the betterment of College EL teachers as well. It was observed that the college EL teachers had constituted the largest number of participants so far in the trainings of the ELTR project. [Coleman \(2010\)](#) appreciates the work of the ELTR Project and admits that the project has made a noteworthy effort in establishing pre-service teacher education in elementary colleges and colleges of education.

According to the HEC Annual Report (2014-15):

Since the inception, the ELTR project is working with dynamism to renovate and improvise the standards of English Language Teaching to bring them at par with academically advanced countries...the project brushes up on mechanisms and policies to streamline the English fraternity in a more systematic way and to facilitate native English faculty with international trainings through international donor agencies like British Council and US Embassy, Pakistan (p. 95).

Ever since the initiation of ELTR, it is confronting a lot of condemnation both at the national and international level. According to [de Lotbiniere \(2010\)](#), ELTR Phase II is Pakistan's final hope to reestablish the declining language learning and acquisition proficiency of college and university students. Fewer expectations are associated with the success of ELTR Phase II. It has even been related that the Planning Commission of Pakistan supposes this project to be a waste of money as the project maintains an ambiguous future ([Interface, 2010](#)).

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted in which an analysis of the HEC documents, Annual reports of HEC and research articles on the ELTR project were analyzed.

Analysis

Goals and Achievements of ELTR

HEC launched the ELTR project with certain goals. ELTR project is based on two phases: Phase I and Phase II.

ELTR Phase I

ELTR phase I started in July 2004 and got completed in five years of time. In these five years, the project offered short and long-term training programs to 1504 EL teachers across Pakistan. It collaborated with National English Committee (NCE) and formed policies, and executed them. Moreover, an organized framework was launched that worked for the betterment of the EL teachers. It also reviewed the facilities provided to the EL staff in colleges and universities and worked for their improvement ([HEC, 2011](#)).

In Phase I, 125 Long-term Indigenous fellowships were endowed to the faculty in public sector universities. In the same phase, the ELTR Project supplied sustenance to the universities for the launch of the Self Access Centre (SAC) through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Subcommittee. The first phase of the ELTR program also witnessed the distribution of two ELTR sponsored books under its Research

and Publication Subcommittee (HEC, 2011). Following is the table that elaborates goals and achievements of Phase I:

Table 1. CPD Courses Under ELTR Phase I (Adapted from HEC Annual Report, 2010-11)

Sub-committees	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
Faculty Development	173	190	207	102	79	751
Research and Publication	39	33	45	74	99	290
Testing and Assessment	-	105	61	-	26	192
Curriculum and Material Development	06	63	67	-	-	136
Online and CALL	-	39	40	34	22	135
Total	218	430	420	210	226	1504

The table displays the achievements of the ELTR Project in the first phase. But some targets were not achieved, e.g. it is evident from the table that, Testing and Assessment subcommittee did not organize any training in the years 2004-05 and 2007-08. Similarly, Curriculum and Material Development did not conduct any training for consecutive two years, i.e. 2007-09. Correspondingly, another subcommittee by the name Online and CALL did not organize any session in the year 2004-05.

ETLR Phase II

ELTR Phase II started with the aim to train 1400 teachers. A glimpse of its activities is as follows:

Table 2. A Glimpse at the Activities of ELTR Phase II (HEC Annual Report 2015-16, p. 59)

PC-1 Activities	Offerings	Achievements	
Indigenous Scholarships/Degree Programmes	a. Indigenous Scholarships		
	1. MS in Applied Linguistics and related disciplines.	150	129
	2. Masters in Applied Linguistics, TEFL, TESL, ELT		
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	3. PGD, ADP in TEFL, TESL, ELT		
	b. CPD Courses/ Fellowships		
	1. CPD Fellowships (up to 4 week)	240	208
	2. CPD Courses (up to one week)	1010	990
	• Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)		
Conferences/Seminars	• Testing and Evaluation		
	• Research Methodology and Skills		
	• Androgogical/Pedagogical Skills		
	• Open and Customized Programs in ELT related areas		
Funding for Research Journals	Funding for National/International Conferences and Seminars on the theme of English Language Teaching and related issues	10	09
	Funding to start a new English Research Journal	05	03
Funding of Research Projects	Provide ELT Scholars with research grants for small scale research projects	05	04
	International Resource Persons' Trainings	To hold/organize IRP trainings to provide international level exposure to English faculty	12

PC-1 Activities	Offerings		Achievements
Self-Access Centre (SAC)	Establishment of SAC in four public sector universities	04	04

The table activities of ELTR Phase II. It is evident from the table that this phase made a remarkable change in the professional development of teachers. The activities and achievements of this phase are described in detail as below:

Indigenous Scholarship/ Degree Program

This scholarship offered a two-year degree program to teachers teaching in public universities. Teachers were offered MS and Masters in Applied Linguistics and related disciplines (TEFL, TESL, EL). The teachers were also given an option of Diplomas such as PGD, ADP in TEFL, TESL, EL. The scholarship was granted for 150 teachers, but only 129 teachers got benefit from it. The teachers who received the scholarship were willing to upgrade themselves professionally by enriching their educational background as well. The degree program not only helped them to develop professionally but also gave them an advantage of a degree. It is for such programs that critics say that participants focus on getting good grades and do not learn anything from the training offered ([Khattak et al., 2010](#)).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

They are divided into two categories:

- CPD fellowships
- CPD courses

CPD fellowships are for 4 weeks, whereas CPD courses are only for a week. Further CPD courses are divided into the following activities:

- Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)
- Testing and Evaluation
- Research Methodology and Skills
- Andragogical/Pedagogical Skills
- Open and customized programs in EL related areas

The target for CPD fellowships was 240, but only 208 received the training, whereas the target fixed for CPD courses was 1010, but only 990 teachers received training. The ratio of taking CPD courses was greater than the CPD fellowship because courses were of a week. This kind of training is easier for teachers to receive as it is for a short period of time (Chaudary, 2014). Whereas the training stretching for four weeks gets a bit longer for teachers, and in such training, the workplace environment does not support teachers because they have workload pressure (Chaudary, 2014).

Conferences/ Seminars

In this activity, funding is done for national and international conferences and seminars. The topic of these conferences and seminars is related to EL and related fields. The participants read their research to others, and in this way, the listeners get the benefit. The target fixed for conducting seminars was 10, out of which 9 were organized. These conferences and seminars give exposure to the teachers as they get to know of various themes related to English Language Teaching ([HEC, 2015](#)).

Funding for Research Journals

The purpose of this activity is to fund English journals written on the subject of EL. In research journals, the researchers share their writings in the form of research papers which are a great source of information for

teachers and researchers. The target fixed for publishing journals was 5, but ELTR managed to issue only 3 journals. The reason for the incomplete target is that Pakistan is a developing country, and the culture of doing research is not very common, and research is mostly in science subjects. Research culture is still promoting in the field of English (Chaudary, 2012).

Funding for Research Projects

The aim of this section of the ELTR project is to provide research grants to EL scholars. This grant is issued for research that is on a smaller scale. Usually, the researchers do not carry out research due to a lack of funding, so HEC provides funding to those researchers. ELTR aimed to fund 5 research projects, but four projects were funded. The reason is that there is a certain criterion that a researcher has to follow only then ELTR would fund the project ([HEC, 2016](#)).

Trainings by International Resource Persons

The main objective of this training is to provide international exposure to the local faculty. The trainers are called from foreign countries so that they can train the local teachers with the experiences and new pedagogical techniques. These trainings went extremely successful. The target of 12 trainings was fixed, and all were achieved—resource persons from countries like USA, England, Australia, Canada, and UAE visited the universities in Pakistan and educated the teachers with recent academic practices ([HEC, 2016](#)).

Self Access Centers (SAC)

The goal of this segment of ELTR is to provide internet and computer access to public universities of Pakistan. The target of the ELTR project was to provide 4 universities with Self Access Centers, and it achieved its target by establishing SACs in four public universities of Pakistan. These smart room classes were established in the English department of the respective universities, and they were necessitated with computer and internet facilities. The initiation of SACs enabled the English scholars to do research and publish their work ([HEC, 2016](#)).

Apparently, the targets that were set by the ELTR project were accomplished; although all targets were not achieved, they were very close.

Challenges Faced by HEC in Implementing ELTR Program

Training Large Number of Teachers

It was challenging for HEC to train exclusively English teachers, but they accepted the challenge. As it was difficult to provide training to a large body of English teachers teaching in college and universities at a time so, in Phase I, 1504 teachers were scrutinized and considered eligible for training. Likewise, in Phase II, 1400 teachers were selected for training. T

Providing Resource Persons to EL Teachers of Far Flung Areas

It was not easy for ELTR to invite a large number of teachers to their head office (Islamabad) or regional offices. This was again a challenge for the organizers of the training. There were teachers belonging to far-flung areas of Pakistan. They could not be called to the regional offices for days or weeks. In this case, ELTR managed its resource persons to reach such teachers who could not travel to receive training at the HEC head office.

Lack of Motivation of EL Teachers

Sabeen Shahid is ELTR's Program development Officer. She acknowledges the efforts made by ELTR to train English Literature teachers to teach English Language teaching skills. In one of her interviews, she discusses the challenge which they confront while training the teachers. She says that once teachers get a job, they do not

consider professionally upgrade themselves. They do not understand the importance of training. The teachers should be motivated that they need to get training in English language skills in order to compete with the global challenges and for the upward mobility of students. She came up with the notion that the promotion of EL teachers should be conditional to in-service training. Another incentive that could be given to teachers can be monetary.

Maintenance of Training Record

Fauzia Shamim, professor of English at Karachi University, conducted research in the initial years of the ELTR project to comprehend the state of EL teachers in the university. She wanted to know either the teachers were implementing their training in classroom practice or not. Unfortunately, she was unable to locate any data on the conduct of the initial years of ELTR. Shamim (2008) maintains that the project focuses more on the number of trainees and courses held, and it does not maintain a firm record as to what impact these trainings have on the students and EL teachers. It has been challenging for HEC to maintain authentic data of ELTR and make a proper record of the whole information and make it public for people as well.

Lack of Evaluation and Monitoring

Another challenge that HEC encountered while implementing the ELTR project was a lack of monitoring and evaluation. HEC did not monitor the trainees who received ELTR trainings. The result is that teachers do not practice the knowledge and skills learnt in ELTR trainings in their classrooms. Moreover, no feedback is taken from them once they finish their training. It is challenging for HEC to maintain monitoring and evaluation of ELTR trainees.

Scrutiny of Participants' Background

Ever since the initiation of the ELTR project, it has been facing criticism. One of the challenges ELTR faced is examining the background of participants. It is the requirement of the training to do the analysis of trainees' background because, in training, there are a variety of participants belonging to diverse educational settings. The trainer should be informed of the credentials of the trainees so that s/he can mould the training according to the level of participants, that is, their educational background and teaching context.

Training College Teachers Along with University Teachers

Another challenge for HEC was to train college teachers along with university teachers. Colleges usually do not enjoy such resources that universities have. A very evident example is the establishment of Self Access Centers (SACs) in universities under the ELTR project, i.e. computers and internet facilities have been granted to universities, and in contrast, colleges have been deprived of such facilities, but even then ELTR aims to provide training to the teachers of colleges as well.

Faulty Infrastructure of Training Centers

HEC had to confront the challenge of the poor infrastructure of training institutes. When the training of ELTR takes place in some college or training institute, at that time the trainer and participants have to cope without the required equipment like computers and multimedia. There are institutes that do not have a backup system of electricity, so training gets hampered by load shedding and power outages. This lowers the morale of the instructors as well as the participants.

Limitations and Problems of ELTR Project

An in-depth review of the ELTR Phase II project shows some limitations and problems related to the project:

1. There is no attention paid to monitoring the implementation of the wide range of skills that the higher education faculty learn through the ELTR project. The trainees should be made accountable for

practising what they have learned. This should be done through monitoring visits by the ELTR project team and by asking the concerned institutions/departments to report about the trainees ([Khattak et al., 2010](#)).

2. The college and university teachers are trained together and provided with the same training programs, neglecting the fact that their working environment, learning needs, examination system and syllabi are different ([Khattak et al., 2010](#)).
3. The university faculty has facilities, funds and physical resources to take up research. However, the college teachers do not have any provision of facilities to participate in research activity. Research holds a key position in education today because it gives rise to curiosity and enthusiasm to look for and find better solutions to educational problems. In Pakistan, very few of all higher education faculty are research scholars. The majority of college teachers are classroom practitioners in Pakistan ([Memon, 2007](#)).
4. Information Technology (IT) facilities are not available in colleges in Pakistan. Therefore, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) cannot be carried out in colleges. Today, the educational community relies on computers to enhance teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum, with EL being no exception. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is considered the solution to a number of English Language teaching and learning problems in present times. The interactive use of computers to encourage the acquisition of language concepts and production skills is highly valued in modern language education ([Sayers, 1984](#)).
5. Both the college and university EL faculty are given the assessment training under the same program neglecting the fact that colleges follow an annual system of examination at a higher secondary level, whereas universities follow the semester system. Assessment is a major component of professional development, not only the level of assessment but the way it gets integrated into cycles of teaching and learning. The assessment skills hold a very important place in teaching practice as they assist teachers in judging the impact of changed practice on their diverse student learners after participating in PD training.
6. The top four in-service training needs of college teachers and university faculty in Pakistan are:
 - (i) Assessment skills
 - (ii) Use of information technologies in an educational setting
 - (iii) Communication Skills
 - (iv) Classroom management skills ([Ghazi et al., 2010](#))

In the ELTR project, there has been no attention paid to develop classroom management skills among the trainees.

7. [Poskitt \(2005\)](#) has presented an outline of procedures for the planning of an effective PD project:
 - (i) some needs analysis
 - (ii) a description of the present situation
 - (iii) some decided future outcomes
 - (iv) an action plan (the success of which depends on an effective timeframe)
 - (v) some built-in evaluation
 - (vi) a recognition of the continuity of the cycle of professional development

It is observed that important tasks like institutional need analysis, built-in evaluation and recognition of the continuity of the PD cycle have been neglected in ELTR Phase II.

8. Self-Access Centres (SAC) for Language Learning will be set up in 4 universities during ELTR Phase II. SACs are specially designed centres with educational facilities both for student and teacher learning. These centres are partially directed where learners have access to educational resources ranging from photocopied exercises with answer keys to computer software for language learning. SACs can be as simple as a classroom set aside with dictionaries and shelves of paper-based exercises to a state-of-the-art digital centre with various types of Computer-and-Internet based resources. Setting up of simple

(containing paper-based learning material) SACs in all the higher education institutions should be considered by the reformers as they are low in cost as compared to digital SACs. This will assist the English Language learners in learning the English Language in less prestigious public sector higher education institutions (HEC, 2015).

Findings

The Level of HEC's Success in Achieving ELTR Goals

In order to understand how successful HEC has been in achieving its goals which were supposed to be accomplished through the ELTR project, the data is presented in two tables, presented separately for Phase I and Phase II. The set goals of HEC are mentioned in the tables. Each activity of the ELTR had a set goal, i.e. how many trainings would be conducted or a number of participants would attend the trainings. The next column reveals the actual number of trainings conducted or a number of participants who attended the training. In this way, the table illustrates the achievements of the ELTR project. The table establishes that some of the trainings went successful, but there were some which were not fully accomplished.

Table 3. Accomplishments of ELTR Phase II

Activities of ELTR Phase II		Accomplishments
1)	Indigenous Scholarships/ Degree Prog.	129/150
2)	CPD courses	
a)	CPD fellowships	208/240
b)	CPD courses	990/1010
3)	Conferences/Seminars	09/10
4)	Funding for research journals	03/05
5)	Funding for research projects	04/05
6)	IRP Trainings	12/12
7)	SAC	04/04

Challenges Faced by HEC in Implementing ELTR Project

HEC faced various challenges while implementing the ELTR project. The project started in 2004 with the aim to train public sector EL teachers of colleges and universities. 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 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 sending resource persons to far-flung areas of Pakistan to train EL teachers.

At times it became 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 continue working in the same way, and professional development is not required. Train such teachers has been a challenge for ELTR project resource persons. Another challenge confronted by HEC is the maintenance of training record. Complaints have been lodged against the HEC that it has been unable to provide substantial data on the first six years of ELTR (Shamim, 2008).

The biggest challenge that HEC encountered was that of a lack of Evaluation and Monitoring. HEC did not do any monitoring or evaluation of its trainees. As a result, the knowledge and skills imparted to the participants of ELTR training remained with them and were not transferred to the students. Another major challenge for HEC was to scrutinize participant's background, i.e. need analysis of the participants was not carried out before training them, and the details were not shared with the trainer so that they could mould the training content according to the need of the participants.

In trainings many a time, teachers from all over Pakistan come to take training. In such cases, teachers who belonged to big cities had ample exposure to technology and other resources, but the teachers from small

cities had less exposure to modern technology due to lack of facilities. At times the participants were mixed in belonging to universities and colleges. 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 would train about research, the college teachers would again be in trouble because they do not have the provisions to carry out research in colleges. Hence, it becomes a challenge for the ELTR project team to train college and university teachers together.

Finally, a challenge that hinders the trainings of ELTR is the faulty infrastructure of training institutes. At times trainings are held in such kind of institutes where there are inadequate arrangements for training like in case of load shedding no backup system, faulty equipment, unavailability of the internet, comfortable sitting arrangement etc. Challenges faced by HEC in implementing ELTR training are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Challenges Faced by HEC

Training a large number of EL teachers
Providing resource persons to far-flung areas
Lack of motivation of EL teachers
Maintenance of training record
Lack of Evaluation and Monitoring
Scrutiny of participant's background
Training university and college teachers together
The faulty infrastructure of training centers

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze HEC's ELTR project. The project under discussion was divided into two phases: ELTR Phase I and ELTR Phase II. The analysis faced some limitations. Firstly, data from the first six years of the project's process was not available to the satisfaction of the researcher. The second limitation of the research was that it incorporates the data of the ELTR Project either from the annual reports of HEC or from researches conducted earlier. When the regional office of HEC in Lahore was contacted for data collection, they asked the researcher to visit the Head Office in Islamabad. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 situation, the researcher could not visit the HEC Islamabad office to get access to the required reports on the project. Therefore, the researcher had to utilize all the data that was available on the HEC website. Regrettably, the annual reports available on the internet started from the year 2009 onwards. The researcher analyzed the Annual Reports of HEC for the years 2010-11, 2014-2015 and 2015- 2016. The rest of the reports were not available on the HEC website, and one of the annual reports of the year 2013-14 did not contain information on ELTR. The study concludes that

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