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**A STUDY OF THE AVAILABILITY AND FREQUENCY OF
SHORT REFRESHER TRAINING COURSES FOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS
IN JIMMA ZONE, ETHIOPIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in Jimma Zone, Ethiopia, to investigate the availability and frequency of short refresher training courses for secondary school English language teachers. Data were collected from 36 English teachers (taken from 11 secondary schools) through structured questionnaire and 18 officials (heads and training experts of education bureaus) and 11 school directors via interview. Quantitative data were analyzed into frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed through the techniques of description and interpretation. The findings showed that short refresher training courses, although highly demanded, were nearly unavailable for secondary school English language teachers in the study setting. It is thus recommended that school administrators and educational bureau officials work hard to make such trainings available for teachers. Jimma University can also play an important role in addressing this critical need through its community-based training and problem solving approach. Besides, the English teachers themselves must inquire for these trainings since they are the ones who queue at the forefront of the teaching battle.

Keywords: EFL; Short Refresher Training Courses; Jimma Zone; Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

Background Of The Study

In pre-service trainings (PRESETs), trainee teachers study principles of teaching, teaching methodologies, theories of learning, etc. They can also get adequate inputs and tasks from their methodology courses that help them to deal with the contents of the text books they are to implement. However, they cannot be effective teachers only because they possess teaching recipes gathered from pre-service trainings. In PRESET contexts, teacher trainees usually tend to imitate the trainer's teaching techniques, and most often, work under his/her supervision (Wallace, 1991). Nevertheless, this imitative behavior cannot lead to effective teaching since it is not grounded on well-articulated philosophy and informed decision (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

While PRESET helps teachers to get on to teaching, it does not guarantee enduring effectiveness in their teaching practice. Thus, there should be in-service training (INSET) opportunities for on-job teachers to enable them to revitalize their knowledge and teaching skills. INSETs help teachers to assess and reflect on their teaching practice, share experiences and reinforce the teaching tips they acquired in PRESETs. These trainings also encourage teachers to assess their beliefs about teaching approaches, analyze why they do what they do and evaluate the strengths and drawbacks in their teaching. INSETs thus play a key role in teacher professional development; they create avenues for teachers to think critically, reflect on their actions and enhance their abilities to make reasoned decisions.

In sum, INSETs enable teachers in general and secondary school English language teachers in particular to be aware of their teaching skills and develop their own practical theories which they will marry with appropriate teaching methods and techniques (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Zoltan, 2001). This is particularly necessitated by curricular innovations and changes in teaching approaches. To acquaint teachers with the trends in their teaching contexts and assist them to be able to catch up with new developments, INSETs are crucially needed. Therefore, teachers should get regular INSETs to deal successfully with the waves of change in the teaching field.

Teacher professional development undertakings can take various forms. Firstly, teacher development is a self-initiated life-long process. In this case, teachers can engage in professional reading, write articles to journals, organize themselves into reading groups and conduct action researches to develop themselves professionally. Secondly, professional development trainings can be offered to teachers formally in the form of short refresher training courses. Short refresher training courses in the form of seminars, workshops and in-staff trainings are deemed useful to teachers in general and to secondary school English language teachers in particular. Such trainings can be more efficient, need-based, motivating and feasible than other forms of training. Unlike summer in-service trainings, which aim to upgrade teachers in terms of qualifications and end with graduation, short refresher courses can be given continually, and are pivotal to keep teachers steadily on the track of professional development. These courses have paramount importance in the context of secondary schools in Ethiopia. In this context, English teachers do not usually use English outside the classroom, but are expected to prepare students to use English effectively for academic and other purposes. This situation justifies the need for short refresher training courses (workshops, conferences and in-staff trainings) for serving secondary school English teachers to provide them with the opportunity to enhance their professional skills by assessing their practices and acquainting themselves with contemporary.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Quality teacher development leads to desirable qualitative outcomes such as the creation of a positive school culture, improvement in teachers' instructional skills and possibilities for opportunities for continuous learning. This scheme gives teachers the tools they need to approach classroom challenges with confidence and the chance to access supportive professional communities. Thus, since able teachers establish the foundation of good schools, updating their knowledge and skills should be considered an investment worth investing. Especially, offering refresher courses, pertaining to the English language, as frequently as possible, is essential since such courses have revitalizing effects in terms of equipping English language teachers with adequate knowledge of the subject matter and up-to-date teaching approaches, methods, strategies and techniques (Scrivener, 2007).

Now more than ever, teachers are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in their instruction. It is, indeed, imperative for the English teachers, particularly teachers in Ethiopian secondary schools, to be aware of the fact that they should make concerted efforts to bring about commendable changes in students' language proficiency. This can be achieved by teaching students effective learning strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). To this effect, English teachers should be able to establish their own approaches so that they teach students to use the language to communicate in the real world and for their academic achievements. One way of realizing this is offering short refresher trainings to English

teachers sufficiently and steadily in order to encourage them to make meaningful and conscious decisions in their teaching.

In summary, if “all” students are to have a chance to achieve a high standard in their learning, they must have teachers who know what to teach, how to teach and when to teach. However, Miles (2004) reports that some international studies reveal that teachers are under a growing pressure to perform classroom activities only to the neglect of involving in professional development undertakings. Likewise, experiences witness that the English language proficiency of both students and teachers in Ethiopia is deteriorating dramatically. Many people ascribe the deterioration mainly to deficient knowledge and poor teaching methodologies of English teachers.

Teachers’ inadequacies in their mastery of the English language and their teaching methods can be ameliorated through short refresher training courses. Teachers are likely to change ritualistic teaching behaviour when professional development trainings are directly linked to the program that they are teaching and the assessment methods that they are using. However, the need for teachers’ continuous professional development seems to remain unmet, and research on this topic is scares. Although there are few international studies (e.g. Adey, 2004; Chávez, 2006; Miles, 2004) on teacher professional development training, research that focuses on the availability and frequency of refresher courses in the Ethiopian context seems lacking. This research gap needs filling, and this study is geared towards this end. The study aims to investigate the availability and frequency of short refresher training courses for secondary school English language teachers in Jimma Zone of the Oromiya Regional State, Ethiopia. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are the views of English language teachers in secondary schools in Jimma Zone regarding the importance of short refresher trainings?
- What short refresher trainings are available for English language teachers in the schools in focus?
- How frequently are these refresher courses offered?
- To what extent does the frequency of refresher trainings address teachers’ expectations?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study attempted to:

1. To identify the views of English language teachers in secondary schools in Jimma Zone about the importance of short refresher trainings?
2. To find out if short refresher trainings are available for English language teachers in the schools in focus?
3. To identify the frequency with which these refresher courses are offered?
4. To examine the extent to which the frequency of refresher trainings addresses teachers’ expectations?

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Setting and Sources Of Data

This study was conducted in 2009 on 11 secondary schools in four of the 16 districts and two town administrations found in Jimma Zone. Of these schools, Jimma Preparatory School (Grades 11 and 12), Jiren High School (Grades 9 and 10) and Seto Semero High School (Grades 9 and 10) are found in Jimma Town. Asendabo Secondary School in Omonada District, Agaro Secondary School in Agaro Town and Limu Genet Secondary School in Limu Kosa District are comprised of Grades 11 and 12. Deneba High School in Sekoru District, Nada High School in Omonada District, Toba High School in Limu Kosa District, Ambuye High School in Gumaye District (Grades 9 and 10) and Sekoru Secondary School in Sekoru District (Grades 11 and 12) were also included in the study.

Data were collected from officials of educational bureaus (N = 18), school principals (N = 11) and English language teachers (N = 36). School principals, heads of district/town administration educational bureaus and training experts of these bureaus provided qualitative data through face-to-face interviews, while teachers participated in the study by filling out questionnaire intended to obtain quantitative data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used in order to find a better picture of the issue under investigation.

Sampling Procedure

Different sampling techniques were used in the study to select the districts, the schools and the study participants. Firstly four out of 16 districts were chosen using simple random sampling, where as Jimma and Agaro town administrations were selected through availability sampling technique. This method was also used to choose heads and training experts of educational bureaus. Following this, all the secondary schools found in these districts and town administrations were included in the study. And, all the principals and English language teachers in the selected schools were recruited to participate in the study.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Structured questionnaire and interview guideline were used to collect data. Questionnaire was employed as a principal tool since quantitative data were required to answer the research questions. Questionnaire was also deemed useful since it helps to collect data on a variety of issues in a reasonably short period of time (Selinger & Shohamy, 1989). On the other hand, interview guideline was used to collect qualitative data utilized to cross-check the qualitative findings. The guideline contained items that were related to the items in the questionnaire since both instruments were used to address the same research questions.

METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used since the data required both methods. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. Qualitative data were analyzed qualitatively using the techniques of description and interpretation.

FINDINGS

To study the availability and frequency of short refresher training courses for secondary school English language teachers in Jimma Zone of the Oromiya Regional State, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaire and interview respectively. In this section, analyses and interpretations of the data are presented. Firstly, the quantitative data are analyzed and findings explained. Then, the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data follow. Discussion of the major findings is also made in a subsequent section.

Quantitative Findings

As mentioned earlier, quantitative data were collected from 36 English teachers through questionnaire. The findings of the questionnaire survey are presented below.

Table 1. Qualifications, service years and official positions of teachers

SN	Variables	F	%
1	Qualifications		
	Master's Degree	0	0.00
	1 st Degree	22	61.11
	Diploma	14	38.89
	Others	0	0.00
Total		36	100
	Service years		
	0-5	11	30.56

2	6-11	4	11.11
	12-17	3	8.33
	18-23	10	27.78
	> 23	8	22.22
Total		36	100
3	Official positions		
	Department head	2	5.56
	School principal	1	2.78
	Vice principal	1	2.78
	Unit leader	1	2.78
	No official position	21	38.33
Total		36	100

As depicted in Table 1, the majority of the participants, 22(61.11%), held first degree (BA or BED) qualifications, while 14(38.89%) of them had diplomas. It is also shown that 11(30.56%) and 10(27.78%) of them, respectively, fell in the service categories of 0-5 and 18-23 years, whilst 8 (22.22%) constituted the service category of > 23. Regarding official positions, 21(38.33%) of the participants did not assume any official positions in their respective schools.

The findings show that most of the participants had the qualification required for teaching in secondary schools (Grade 9 to Grade 12). However, they must update themselves regularly with knowledge and teaching skills in order to catch up with developments in their profession. On the other hand, 14 teachers were teaching in secondary schools with diploma qualifications. These teachers obviously need regular on-job trainings to equip themselves with knowledge and skills that enhance their teaching effectiveness. The fact that the majority of the teachers did not hold official positions appears to indicate that they are most often engaged with teaching. To make this commitment worthwhile, however, it is necessary to ensure that their teaching is successful. This can be achieved by offering to them short refresher training courses.

Table 2. Teachers' specializations and subjects they were teaching

Variables	English		Amharic		Afan Oromo		French		History		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Specializations												
a) Major	33	91.67	1	2.78	1	2.78	1	2.78	0	0	36	100
b) Minor	2	5.56	15	41.67	7	4.67	7	4.67	2	5.56		
Subject they were teaching	31	86.11	3	8.33	2	5.56	DA	DA	0	0	36	100

Note: DA= doesn't apply

Table 2 shows that 33(91.67%) of the participants majored in English, while others majored in Amharic (1), Afan Oromo (1) and French (1). It is also shown that three teachers were teaching English without majoring in it. These can be the teachers who minored in English and the one who majored in French (Table 2). However, even minoring in English cannot be sufficient to teaching secondary school English in Ethiopia because English is learned as a foreign language in the country, which poses a considerable challenge upon students requiring effective teacher scaffolding. It can be hard to make the teachers change their major subjects so that they teach English. Thus, the remedy can be short refresher trainings intended to enable teachers who specialized in other subjects to teach English with improved theoretical knowledge, instructional skills and attitude.

Table 3. Perceived importance short of refresher courses

Items	F	%
Do believe that short refresher courses are important for on-job English language teachers		
a) Yes	36	100
b) No		
c) Cannot decide	0	0.00
TOTAL	36	100
Why do you think do on-job English language teachers need such training courses?		
a) To share experiences among themselves	12	33.33
b) To obtain new inputs from trainers	13	36.11
c) To update the knowledge they acquired in pre-service training	11	30.56
d) Others	0	0.00
TOTAL	36	100

The importance of short refresher training courses can be emphasized at macro level, i.e. at the level of theoretical discussions, research discourses and policy designs. However, it is equally important that teachers believe in the worthof such trainings. Likewise, the participants were asked to indicate their beliefs concerning short refresher training courses for on-job English language teachers (Item 6) and to justify their views in this regard (Item 7). All of them responded in favor of these courses. They believed that such courses are important to enable English language teachers to share experiences among themselves (33.33%), obtain new inputs from trainers (36.11%) and update the knowledge and skills they acquired in pre-service trainings (30.56%). These findings imply that the respondents were aware of the vitality and short refresher trainings and would need them.

Table 4. Refresher Training courses made available previously

Item	F	%
Short refresher trainings organized in the recent past (within the last two years)		
a) Yes	21	58.33
b) No	15	4.67
TOTAL	36	100
Name of the training		
a) English Language Improvement Project (ELIP)	21	100
b) Advance Your English	0	0.00
c) In-staff Training	0	0.00
d) English Teaching Forum	0	0.00
e) Others	0	0.00
TOTAL	21	100
Organizer of the training		
a) Ministry of Education (MoE)	17	80.95
b) Oromiya Regional Education Bureau	1	4.76
c) Jimma University	3	14.29
d) Jimma Teachers' College	0	0.00
e) Schools themselves	0	0.00
f) Others	0	0.00
TOTAL	21	100

Table 4 summarizes the responses to the items concerning training courses organized for English language teachers in the recent past (Item 8), the name of the training courses (Item 9) and the coordinating organization (Item 10). The results show that 21(58.33%) of the teachers had attended a training course called English Language Improvement Project (ELIP); 17(80.95%) of the 21 teachers indicated, this training was organized by the Ministry of Education (Item 10).However, 15(4.67%) of them did not attend this training.

It is encouraging that the majority of the respondents had opportunities to participate in ELIP training, which unfortunately was a short-lived campaign. However, the fact that the remaining 15(4.67%) did not have this chance implies that short refresher training courses are inadequately available.

Table 5. Periodic plan, frequency and preferred time of trainings

Variables	F	%
Availability of periodic plan for the above training(s)		
a) Yes	0	0.00
b) No	1	4.76
c) Don't know	5	23.81
d) Nonresponses	15	71.43
TOTAL	21	100
Frequency of this training		
a) Once in a semester/term	1	4.76
b) Once a year	11	52.38
c) Once in five years	0	0.00
d) Cannot remember	9	42.86
e) Any other	0	0.00
TOTAL	21	100
Perceived adequacy of training frequency		
a) Once a year	3	8.33
b) Twice a year	29	80.86
c) Three times a year	4	11.11
TOTAL	36	100
Preference of training time		
a) Beginning of each semester	7	19.44
b) End of each semester	23	63.89
c) As planned by the organizing bodies	6	16.67
TOTAL	36	100

The study participants were also asked to indicate if there was a periodic plan for the stated training (Item 11), the frequency of this training (Item 12), their preferred frequencies for short refresher training courses (Item 13) and their views about the appropriate season for such trainings. Regarding the 11th item, 5(23.81%) of the teachers who participated in the ELP training did not know whether there was a periodic plan for this training, while 15(71.43%) of them did not respond to the item. Conversely, no participant reported that ELIP training was initiated in accordance with a regular plan. While 11 of the 21 teachers indicated that ELIP was conducted only once a year, 9 of them could not remember its frequency. In addition, the majority of the English teachers, 29(80.86%), indicated that they need short INSETs twice a year (Item 13), and 23 (63.89%) of them preferred that the trainings be offered at the end of each semester/term (Item 14). It can thus be noted that the frequency of ELIP is not sufficient since most participants require short refresher training courses at least biannually.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews with school and district/town administrative educational officials based on broad questions intended to generate data on the informants' views about assumptions about refresher courses, their beliefs concerning the benefits of short refresher training courses and the frequency with which such courses are offered to secondary school English language teachers.

Scholars posit that short-term refresher trainings such as workshops, conferences and in-staff trainings should be offered to teachers in general and secondary school English teachers in particular as continually, adequately and meaningfully as possible. This is so to motivate and keep them alert

professionally as teachers should be life-time learners in order to make their students active learners. This claim was the essence of the first interview question. The results elicited through this question confirmed that the informants strongly agree on the importance of short refresher training courses. Some justifications given in favour of this issue are presented below.

First, an informant coded as 'Sojat' explained how relevant the courses can be. "Yes, I believe it is very much important to offer refresher courses to teachers in general and to English language teachers in particular as it is a key for other subjects. That is why the government is also trying to up-grade teachers' level of proficiency by giving chance of summer courses and others in-service training course for teachers. It also has significant implication for the students' successful learning." The implication of Sojat's response is that these courses are critically important for teachers directly and for students indirectly.

Another informant coded as 'Alemneh' confirmed the above claim by saying: "I believe these refresher courses are very important for students." In addition, an informant coded as 'Sisay' said: "We are living in contemporary world in which everything is in progress from time to time. So graduating from university by three or four your training can never grant us adequacy. So, I accept the notion." For this informant, refreshing English teachers through regular INSETs is a valuable undertaking.

Making short refresher trainings available for teachers in general and English language teachers in particular has gained special attention and become an issue of discussion among experts in the field of language teaching. It seems why an informant coded as 'Zelege' forwarded that he agrees to the above assertion in the following manner: "These days it has come to be the new agenda, because it is after all, a language that everybody plans to be successful in. It is extremely important for students and teachers too."

The second interview question inquired about the informants' beliefs about the vitality of short refresher courses to keep teachers within the realm of professional development. Here, 'Sojat' reiterated: "Yes I believe refresher courses are very much important to teachers in general and to English language teachers in particular. That is why the government is trying to up-grade teachers' level of proficiency by giving summer and other in-service training chances." This informant seems not only to express her belief but also to mention the government's intention to foster teachers' professional developments through refresher courses. She strengthened her argument by adding: "It is important to upgrade these teachers. This is directly helping students' level of understanding. So when we work for students' success, we, teachers also will be successful."

Another informant coded as 'Sileshi' also supported the above point by saying "...in high schools the medium of instruction is English. Therefore to render quality education; to let teachers advance themselves and to cope up with situations, we have to equip our teachers with necessary knowledge, attitude and skills." This response endorses the view that short refresher courses are essential instruments to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills and confidence. Similarly, an informant coded as 'Mohammed' stressed the vitality of short refresher courses: "We need highly trained and motivated English teachers. To motivate them these refresher courses help us very much."

Nevertheless, other informants stressed the challenges hindering them from coordinating such courses. For example, 'Abera' expressed: "We believe they [secondary school English teachers] should get opportunities to refresh themselves. I say this because graduation doesn't guarantee teachers to make creative and fresh every time, but that is determined by budget. That is our major challenge. We don't also know how to overcome problems aligned to finance." 'Tadesse' shared 'Abera's' concern: "It is right to think these ways about refresher courses, motivate teachers and that is part and parcel of our objective. I think it has positive contribution but with financial challenges." 'Zelege' added: "Yes, not only language teachers but also woreda [district] officials need to be trained because it empowers all but budget is absent."

The third question was intended to generate data from the informants on the frequency of short INSETs for secondary school English teachers. In response, one of the interviewees uttered: “So many times back we mobilized them [teachers] for courses like ELIP and CPD [Continuous Professional Development]. We also motivated them to speak in English.” From this informant’s reaction, we can deduce that refresher courses are rare phenomena. Other informants also mentioned training programs like CPD and ELIP as refresher courses. These instances indicate that short refresher training courses are not offered adequately to English teachers of the target high schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Short refresher trainings motivate teachers to teach effectively (Demelash Mengistu, 2006). For instance, Zoltan (2001:27) emphasizes the motivational effect of refresher courses in his writing: “Besides, motivational training might be a very good investment in the longer run, and it may also make your own life in the classroom so much more pleasant. Consequently, the availability of refresher trainings for a particular group of on-job teachers is an important research issue. It was thus with this assumption that this study attempted to investigate the availability and frequency of short refresher courses offered to secondary school English language teachers in an Ethiopian EFL context.

The study found out that while the teachers who participated in the study shared the task of teaching English to secondary school students, they differed in fields of study, qualification and teaching experience. This has two implications. Firstly, younger, under-qualified and non-English major teachers need regular short-term trainings to operate successfully within the increasingly changing circumstances in the teaching profession. Secondly, teachers with better qualifications in English and longer years of teaching the subject can share to others knowledge, skills and experiences. In this case, the differences mentioned above can lead to cooperative development (Duquette 1994) if conducive situations are created.

Yet, experience-sharing opportunities can become more effective if new contents are provided since language learning should provide new and meaningful inputs (Krashen, 1982). Thus, forums which make the realization of experience-sharing and new input provision possible are critically important for on-job secondary school English language teachers. This can be achieved best by coordinating and implementing regular short refresher training courses. The creation of forums where teachers’ experiences are effectively unpacked, analyzed, shared and aligned with new inputs requires organizers (school and educational bureau officials) and beneficiaries (teachers) to hold the view that such training courses are crucial to keep the latter alert in the womb of professional development.

The study revealed that all teacher participants believe that short refresher training courses are important to enable English language teachers to share experiences among themselves, obtain new inputs from trainers and revitalize the knowledge and skills they gained in PRSETs. The officials, who participated in the interview, also share this view and the justifications forwarded by the teachers. This belief concurs with the conviction advanced by scholars (e.g. Adey, 2004; Edwards, 2010 as cited in Harun & Al-Amin, 2013) regarding the vitality of professional development trainings.

The findings regarding opportunities to participate in short refresher trainings indicate that the majority of the teachers participated in ELP trainings coordinated by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the British Council. However, ELIP was not sustainable enough to address teachers’ training demands. Training programs cannot attain their goals if they do not sustain. Besides, ELP was meant for all teachers, regardless of the subjects the taught, and not tailored for secondary school English teachers. Therefore, the adequacy and close relevance of ELIP training to respond to secondary school English language teachers’ needs can be questioned.

The study also demonstrated that most of the teachers insisted that short refresher courses be offered continually either once or twice a year. However, the findings indicated that even ELIP was not offered regularly and sustainably. Its frequency was insufficient to address the demands of the teachers for refresher trainings. The interview results also disclosed that such trainings were not adequately

available for reasons related to budget deficiency. Thus, the teachers' needs for short refresher training courses went unmet.

In conclusion, short refresher training courses were hardly available for secondary school English language teachers in the study area. This obviously has an adverse effect on the teachers' knowledge, teaching skills and motivation to teach. Therefore, school administrators and education bureau officials should do all they can to make these trainings continually available. Jimma University can also contribute its share to this endeavor through its community-based training and problem solving approach. In addition, the English teachers themselves must inquire for trainings since they are the ones who queue at the forefront of the teaching battle.

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