Factors affecting the quality and efficacy of English language teaching in-service teacher education and training (ELT-INSET): A case study of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Given the integral role of English teachers in promoting quality English education, English language teaching in-service teacher education and training (ELT-INSET) plays a crucial role in developing quality and professional competence of English teachers. It is in this regard, when the inevitability of ELT-INSET is growing worldwide, our article identifies quality parameters of an ELT-INSET conducted in Bangladesh. This qualitative case study was conducted as part of a doctoral project employing semi-structured interviews with one ELT-INSET programme coordinator, three teacher trainers and 12 trainees (English teachers) of an ELT-INSET. The cross-case analysis of the interview data identified six factors adversely affecting the quality and efficacy of the ELT-INSET. The factors included the absence of needs analysis culture, an ineffective trainee selection mechanism and proper monitoring system, the quality issue of teacher trainers, contents and materials, the lack of required logistics support and finally, the bureaucratic power-coercive ELT-INSET management. The article, by shedding light on those findings, finally informs the policymakers with some implications with which to develop their policy and to enhance and ensure the quality and efficacy of ELT-INSET programmes. The implications might also be applicable irrespective of INSET for other subjects and polities with the same context beyond Bangladesh.

Keywords

Bangladesh, English education, ELT-INSET, professional development

Introduction

Bangladesh, a country of south-central Asia is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Within its 133910 sq. km. land area, the country accommodates 174.49 million people (Country Watch Report, 2017). Bangladesh is identified as a lower middle-income country whose annual per capita income is US$ 1080, with 6.1% of the annual GDP growth rate including only 2% spent on the education sector (World Bank, 2016).

Figure 1.   Allocation of GDP on education in Bangladesh including its neighbouring countries
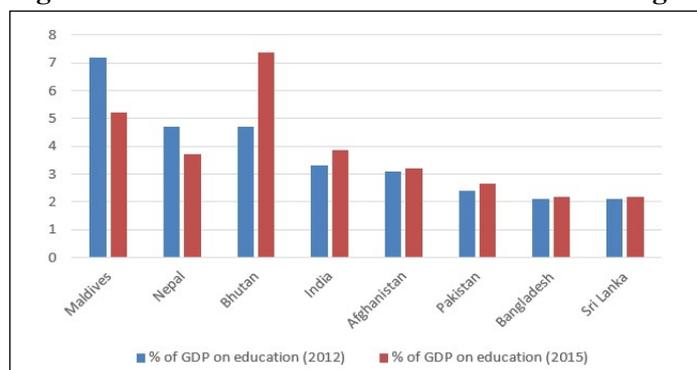
However, Bangladesh has also been labelled as 'Resilient Bangladesh' a 'rising star' (UNDP Country Report, 2014) because of its impressive progress in human development in the last decade by attaining the majority of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The gradual improvement of Bangladesh influenced the nation to focus more on developing its education sector, particularly English language education. Nevertheless, in the backdrop of a persistent nationalistic ideology towards Bangla language right after Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the status and access of English and English language education went underground. Gradually, upon endorsing the discourses of globalisation, English and economic and human capital development, Bangladesh, like other developing countries, started showing an ideological shift in terms of enhancing its commitment in expansion and capacity to ensure the scope and quality of English education over the last two decades (Hamid, 2010; Nunan, 2003; Nur, 2018; Qi, 2009; Shamim, 2008). Concomitantly, the state education system introduced 'English for Everyone' (EFE) (Wedell, 2008) by introducing English much earlier in the National Curriculum (from Grade 1) and projecting a goal of developing students' communicative skills (NCTB, 2012).

However, several studies have showed a disappointing picture of the country's English teaching and learning context (Hamid & Erling, 2016; Nur, 2018; Rahman, 2007). The profile of English teachers and the case of their professional development has been one of the major notes of this concern, because 'teacher quality matters' in students' achievements (Park & Hannum, 2001). The 'enhanced' English education policy, therefore, has often been seen to be lacking awareness of the country's personnel and resource capabilities, and so is challenged substantially due to the lack of quality teaching resources (Hamid, 2010; Nur, 2018).

Study rationale and aims

Given the country's national capacity of providing English teacher training qualitatively and quantitatively, the international donor agencies with their English language and education projects came forward to contribute, assist and promote ELT in Bangladesh mainly by providing teacher training. Such kinds of aid-based English education and training projects were funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Department of International Development (DfID), the British Council (BC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) across the developing countries in Asia and Africa.

Table 1.   Information of donor-funded English education and teacher training projects in Bangladesh (adapted from Hamid, 2010)

Project name	International donor agency	Local institution	Duration of the project
English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) Bangladesh	DfID, BC	NCTB	1997-2012

English in Action (EiA)	DfID (refunded ELTIP)		2008-2017
English for teaching, teaching for English (ETTE)	BC		2008-2010
Teaching quality improvement in secondary education project (TQI-SEP)	ADB, CIDA	MoE	2005-2011
Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP)	WB	MoE	2008-2014

Alongside these international projects, the need for developing the local government's resources and institutional capacity to provide nationwide continuous training for English teachers as an ongoing process, has been echoing for a long time (Hamid, 2010). The Bangladesh government, while receiving services from the above-mentioned projects, has also been trying to develop its own professional development programmes in terms of INSET. A non-government organisation like Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has also come up with BRAC-PACE, a training intervention for the development of English teachers of rural Bangladesh. The primary impetus behind these initiatives was to lessen the heavy dependency on those short-term, international projects to address the needs of teacher education (Hamid, 2010).

International projects have mostly been showered by positive evaluation and feedback. These teacher education international projects have been commissioned by donors and carried out by experts from donor countries (Brumfit, 1983; Fox, 1975, Hamid, 2010). In contrast, these international 'gifters' (Hunter, 2009) were criticised by the scholars for shifting their emphasis away from 'cultural' to 'educational' affairs be reinstating the notion of 'direct colonialism' in a guise of 'development aids' and 'global markets' (Pennycook, 2017). They argued that those 'gifters' tended to bring "their own agenda and conditions on the planning table" where "there is usually no such sentiment as altruism at the apex of activity in a donor-recipient relationship" (Bolitho, 2012, pp. 35-36) for the 'lenders' (Hunter, ibid). Consequently, multiple international ELT projects with reference to their shared goals, project names and project funders were responsible for promoting "a culture of hostility, whether real or symbolic" (Hamid, 2010, p.305) in Bangladesh and so eventually failed to make a radical and sustainable impact on improving the quality of English teachers in conjunction with English education (Hamid & Erling, 2016).

Insights deriving from above-mentioned issues have prompted the country's government to revisit the necessity of introducing local ELT-INSET programmes. It is here that the scope and significance of this study lies. During the data collection period, the studied ELT-INSET was in the process of receiving its final approval as a locally administered and funded ELT-INSET programme. Therefore, investigating into the quality and efficacy factors of the ELT-INSET at its pilot stage was a well-timed study. In contrast to the evaluation of those aforementioned ELT training projects mostly with positive feedback, the study will also lead the way to introducing a local, critical perspective in examining a locally developed English teacher training programme.

To the author's knowledge, addressing the issue of quality and efficacy of an INSET in the Bangladeshi context has not been attended rigorously. Rather, studies conducted in the corresponding countries including Bangladesh by Al Hazmi (2003), Lamb (1996), Nunan (2003), Chacon (2005), Rahman, Kabir and Afroze (2006) and Khan (2002), provided anecdotal evidences and comments mainly on the extent of ELT-INSET implementation by the trained teachers in their actual classroom contexts. This study, therefore, aims to contribute to addressing that gap by exploring the factors impacting on the quality of an ELT-INSET by assembling images spanning from its inception to the execution. The investigation, thus, also provides some implications for the policymakers. To this end, the study is informed by the following research questions:

    a. What are the factors impacting the quality and efficacy of an ELT-INSET in terms of its management and delivery?

    b. What might be the implications for the policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of the ELT-INSET?

The context of the ELT-INSET

The ELT-INSET programmes that has been investigated for this research purpose is administered and funded by the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM). Starting in January 2015 as a pilot mode, the programmes have been conducted periodically at Satellite Resource Centres (SRC) located in the 14 Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) across Bangladesh. The duration of the course is 12 days. Fourteen teacher trainers (TT), previously involved with the ELTIP, are currently cascading the training. At least two teacher trainers are signed with the responsibility of conducting the INSET sessions for 40 English teachers in each centre. Therefore, in each period 280 English teachers receive the training in seven centres. Additionally, a top-level bureaucrat of NAEM (with a background of non-ELT, as reported by the TTs) is appointed as the Course Director (CD). The CD is being assisted by the ELT-INSET course coordinator (a TT) in the process of central direction and supervision of the overall management and execution of the course.

The role of professional development, in terms of INSET courses, is becoming more significant in the teacher education provision. The studied ELT-INSET course aiming at preparing, producing and professionalising the secondary school English teachers in teaching English also reported having a similar purpose. The course, as the course report mentions, has been developed to facilitate and enhance trainee teachers' knowledge, skills, attitude and capacity of teaching English. This ultimate goal, employing theory (classroom techniques, lesson planning, learner evaluation etc.) and practice (demonstrating techniques of teaching, handling of English textbooks, preparing the tests, developing teachers' own English skills) is imparted during the sessions.

Methodology

Design of the study

This study is located within a qualitative research paradigm. Since the main purpose of this study is to investigate the quality and efficacy factors of ELT-INSET, so semi-structured interviews of multiple stakeholders including ELT-INSET programmes coordinator (ELT-INSET PC), teacher trainers (TT), and English teachers (ET) were conducted. We chose interviews as the research tool because we didn't want to tell people what they already know. The semi-structured interview, which is flexible but exploratory in nature (Kvale, 1996), was used to solicit the participants' perspectives and meanings, as well as to define their situations and construct their reality (Patton, 2015; Punch, 2013). In this qualitative research study, it was important to locate appropriate participants who were able to provide suitable data in terms of uncovering meanings and understandings (Ledger, Vidovich, & O'Donoghue , 2014; Morse, 2010) with an intention to discover the maximum, detailed and rich descriptions, insights and understandings, as fully as possible.

Participants

Aligning with the study purpose, the multisite approach of O'Riain (2009), (as cited in Schwandt & Gates, 2011, p. 344-345) was used to develop the participant sample. Therefore, 1 ELT-INSET PC, three TTs, and 12 ETs were invited to participate in this study.

Table 2.   Research instruments and participants

Instrument	Locale	Research participants	No. of participants
Semi-structured interviews	Dhaka	ELT-INSET programme coordinator	1
		Teacher trainers	3
		Trained English teachers	4
	Comilla	Trained English teachers	8

The programmes coordinator was responsible for organising and managing the overall ELT-INSET as well as developing the content of the INSET. Alongside his core responsibilities, the program coordinator had to assist the Course Director in various administrative tasks. While the three TTs were assigned with the task of executing that particular INSET course, the purposively selected twelve ETs for the study purpose had already received training from that INSET. It was anticipated that the inclusion of these three groups of stakeholders would provide fresh, hands-on experiences and valuable insights and perspectives regarding the ELT-INSET and thus will contribute in developing and articulating a nuanced understanding of the studied case (Beitin, 2012).

Locale of the participants

The study's data collection was conducted in two districts of Bangladesh: Dhaka, and Comilla. The ELT-INSET PC and the TTs were based in Dhaka while the trained 12 ETs were from both districts. Aligning with multisite approaches (O'Riain, 2009, as cited in Schwandt & Gates, 2011, p. 344-345) of qualitative study, practical concerns in terms of familiarity, gaining access, cost and time issues were also considered while selecting the locale of participants.

Data collection procedure

Data collection procedure followed two steps. First, the training institution was contacted to secure consent as well as the list of trained ETs and their affiliations. The ELT-INSET PC and the TTs were approached through the proper 'gatekeeper' of the institution for their consents. Then potential schools (following the list) were contacted to gain approval from the concerned authority (school principal) to grant or deny permission to conduct the research in the vicinity of his/her institution. With the help of the principals, the trained English teachers were approached. In both cases, participants were briefed with the purpose of the study. Upon receiving their verbal consent, participants were given consent forms. The signed consent forms were obtained prior to commencing the interview sessions and in this way, ethical considerations of the study were addressed.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the individual stakeholders on the agreed date and time in order to capture the multitude of participants' views on the studies issue. The ELT-INSET PC, the TTs and three ETs used English while the rest 9 ETs preferred to be interviewed in Bengali (the mother tongue of Bangladesh). Each of these interviews was digitally recorded, transcribed and translated into English, where necessary.

Data analysis

Cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2014) was followed in several stages to analyse the collected interview data. After reading the interview transcripts meticulously, appropriate keywords were highlighted and selected. These selections were then inserted into the NViVo10, the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software package for the next steps of analysis. While reporting the findings of the study, confidentiality of the research participants was considered by using codes in place of their identities.

Findings

Some core questions followed by relevant amplificatory probing questions encouraged the participants to elicit and elaborate their experience, comments and insights (Kvale, 1996; Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003) on quality and efficacy of the studied ELT-INSET provision.

The stakeholders (TTs, and ETs) started their talk by welcoming the initiative of locally arranged ELT-INSET provision. However, the majority of them eventually expressed their discontent regarding its quality and efficacy.

> Bangladesh government has decided to execute subject-based teacher training. ETs don't need to come to us for training. Rather we (TTs) go to their door to provide training through the satellite mode of training. This is really wonderful. We are very happy and enthusiastic. But the fact is that the training quality is very low. I mean the way it is conducted is not satisfactory. (TT 2)

Consequently, participants addressed issues of inconsistent needs analysis and monitoring culture, ambiguous trainee selection procedure, internal bureaucratic quandary, and quality of TTs. Constraints impacting the extent of effective ELT-INSET execution also included other tangible factors namely inadequate logistic support. The following sub-sections display these findings respectively.

The absence of a needs analysis mechanism

Participants of this research condemned that ELT-INSETs in Bangladesh which are sporadic in nature, lack contextual analysis in terms of trainees, their working environment, students, and therefore fall short in quality. Prior to the commencement of new training sessions, trainers, as well as training management repeatedly and tirelessly used the two-decades old needs analysis report. Three reasons including financial constraints, lack of a concrete policy of training management and the attitude of the trainers have all been identified by the TTs regarding the absence of conducting contemporary needs analysis. As a consequence, the concurrent needs of the trainees remain unnoticed while devising training contents. By the same token, participants also admitted that training contents are not up to the requirement. The below extracts are the embodiments of this finding:

> There is no particular needs assessment of the trainees. ELTIP did a baseline survey before they started their ELT training course back in 1997-1998. But at NEAM we are unable to do this due to some factors, like financial constraints. Again, this system is not very much practised in Bangladesh. Plus, we don't have that much scope to tailor the session to a great extent. I mean we are advised to follow the pre-designed training modules for conducting the sessions. Some of our colleagues, they prefer to follow the same materials again and again. This is also because they don't have any formal training or experience in designing or developing training materials for ELT. (TT 1)

> The quantity and quality of the ELT training is not satisfactory. I mean the scope of CPD for the ETs is very low. I needed this sort of training earlier. Moreover, there was no needs analysis before attending the training. It seemed to me a routine work from the government. They don't know what we need, but they are there to train us. So this sort of training does not fulfil our expectations and gaps. (ET 8)

Ambiguous trainee selection procedure

The ambiguous patchwork of trainee selection has been regarded as another problematic agenda that restricts the extent of training quality. TTs shared that they simply *assume or you can say we predict their needs from our professional experience (TT1).* They criticised the selection system for its bureaucratic nature in terms of involving non-academic officers such as district education officers (DEO), Thana (sub-district) education officers (TEO) rather than the TTs. This inconsistent system, as reported by the TTs, was also seen to be manipulated by other stakeholders (ETs and School Principals) for their own benefit. While one participant *(ET 7)* said as *what I feel is that I have received the training at the very end of my teaching career,* another one *(ET 11)* with more honesty replied that *I take Hindu Religion and ICT classes at the school, but I don't know why I was sent to the training.* The overall process, thus, seemed to be a loophole to add quality to the training. The extract displays this as:

> Often we face some problems for this whole process of trainee selection. During the sessions we find some trainees are not participating properly. So when we ask them, they reply that, "I don't teach English, I am a Science teacher. But the Head teacher has asked me to attend the training". This hampers the flow of our training sessions. After the sessions, some trainees also share the same story that sometimes Head teachers send teachers who are not teaching English in the school at all. This is all because of intimacy or nepotism. But I personally feel for an appropriate trainee selection system before the training commences. Then the training course will be more effective. (TT 1)

Lack of proper monitoring system

Next, the TTs added that the absence of a monitoring system significantly confined the training's effectiveness and sustainability. The TTs explained that monitoring system with the tool of evaluating the trainers, training sessions (materials, contents) while conducting the training session is important to maintain the overall quality of the training. Additionally, lack of a post-training monitoring system also hampered the extent of implementation and efficacy of the training in the practice context. The following extracts attest this notion:

> Unfortunately we do not have any monitoring system after the training programme. To me monitoring should be conducted effectively across the training session as well. Trainers' evaluation along with assessing the training design is very essential to maintain the quality of the training itself. What has been done so far is submitting an overall report to the authority by the training course director. Moreover, there is no follow-up system. But without monitoring we cannot improve the present condition of the ELT practice. We must listen to the trainees, what and how do they find after training, what challenges they face while applying the training knowledge in their classrooms. (ELT-INSET PC)

Quality of TTs

The stakeholders pointed out the quality of trainers as a warranting issue for quality training. The participants argued that a quality trainer serves as a bridge to meet the quality of training by bringing changes in terms of attitudes, profession, pedagogy, and practice of an ET. However, some of the participants were critical regarding the quality of the trainers. The TTs honestly admitted their lacking

of formal training on designing or developing training programme and materials. ETs also shared the same perceptions. Perceptions, such as:

> If you look at the profile of our TTs of English here, you will be surprised to know that some of us, we do not have proper academic ELT background or enough training to be a TT. To some extent, they are lagging behind in terms of adopting new ELT technique, pedagogies etc. They are not very much updated. (TT 1)

> Trainers should be more expert, professional and efficient in giving training. We had two trainers who seemed not be fully prepared, seemed nervous and to have lack of confidence while doing the sessions. So specialized and efficient trainers should be appointed to conduct and manage this very important ELT training. (ET 4)

Another TT clarified this situation further by bringing the quality of training provision for trainers into the discussion. He claims that the quality of ToT (training of trainers) programmes itself experience a lack of quality trainers and quantity of training opportunity and therefore were branded as '*occasional' (TT 3)*, '*wastage of money, time and effort' (TT 1)*. Moreover, the majority of the sessions conducted by these '*seasonal trainers' (TT 1)* turn out to be theory-based lectures, which in turn fails to bring quality change among the student trainers.

The issue of trainers' quality also emerged the issue of procrastination in improvising training materials, contents and design which eventually cornered the scope of offering a quality ELT-INSET.

> ……It becomes a problem for me; because sometimes I have to face an odd situation while conducting joined sessions. Sometimes some of my colleagues argue with me to stick to the old materials; they discourage me to incorporate the new ELT trends. So from a trainer's perspective I want to say that they (some TTs) should be trained enough to be an effective TT and be updated with the current ELT practices. Otherwise the efficacy of our INSET will not be upgraded. (TT 2)

Lack of resources

Having a lack of proper and adequate support in terms of funding and logistics provision, has been identified as another contextual constraint in rendering the quality of training programme. The TTs openly discussed that though they have intentions and planning to make training programmes more effective and practical, however, they have to arrange or borrow a projector, multimedia, laptop from the local government office (TT3) on their own. This dearth of support was seen to restrict their intentions and the extent of enactment. Same concerns were expressed by the ETs.

> While conducting the training session, we face problems regarding proper logistic support. Sometimes at the TTCs we have to arrange or borrow a projector, multimedia, laptop from the local government office. Sometimes due to funding shortages we cannot make copies of handouts and so the trainees are being asked to share with each other. This is very pathetic. This type of hurdles limits the quality of training. (TT 3)

> There were also some problems regarding logistic support. Like, one day the laptop of the TT was not working during his session. On the day of our simulation class, the TT was not able to provide us with the laptop. Then luckily one of the trainees' laptop was used to handle the situation and we completed our presentations. (ET 6)

Power-coercive strategy in ELT-INSET management

Finally, TTs also mentioned some in-house, bureaucratic hurdles they face while undertaking the overall training scheme. They pointed out that appointing a Course Director (CD) from a non-ELT

background for the purpose of supervising the overall training programme does not make any major difference, rather seems to be *either unable or unwilling to realise our mission, planning, potential (TT 2)*. Therefore, the *conflicting interest of the management* along with its *inactive role as a support distribution channel* results in inefficiency in the process of executing effective training programmes, as reported by *TT 3*. The TTs also shared their experience of being professionally humiliated by the other senior committee members. This works as a legacy to demotivate their working spirit and enthusiasm.

Discussion and implications for policymakers

To keep pace with globalisation, to promote the country's human capital and economic progression, the notion of teachers' professional development policy should be strengthened and treated as 'a process, not an event' (Fullan, 2001). The scope of this article does not permit the detailed investigation of this entire policy. Instead, we study a locally owned and administered ELT-INSET since the aim of the research is to uncover meanings and understandings, rather than generalisable findings (Ledger, Vidovich, & O'Donoghue, 2014), further research employing a large number of study participants and encompassing a diverse case with multiple data collection tools, is desirable.

The findings of this study, nevertheless, suggest a point of reference for policymakers regarding ELT-INSET in Bangladesh and other Asian countries as mentioned in the introduction section. Policymakers need to examine their own contexts to determine the changes required for maintaining the quality and efficacy of their own teacher education programmes. A set of policy implications at the level of policymaking of organising and executing the ELT-INSET can be drawn for Bangladesh and beyond. A point to be noted here is thatextensive analysis of data suggested that the nature of the factors affecting the quality and efficacy of ELT-INSET is interconnected and so is the nature of the policy implications.

Figure 2.   A set of implications drawn out from the findings (interconnected in nature)
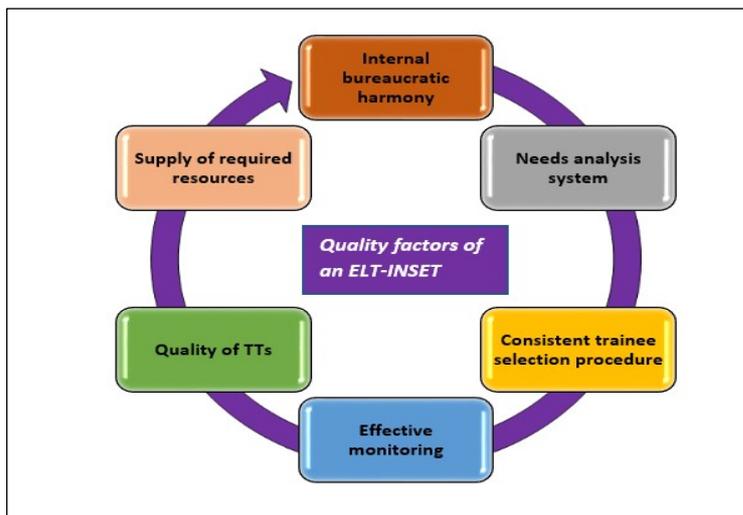
To start with, a concurrent needs analysis should be conducted prior to commencing an ELT-INSET. Introducing and maintaining needs analysis on a regular basis will also be able to facilitate the uniformity and transparency in trainee selection, the second reference of implication. The needs and expectations of trainees should constantly be adjusted with the course delivery, contents, and materials and vice-versa. Otherwise, the incongruity between what the trainees need and how, and to what extent those needs are addressed will deteriorate the quality of the training. Addressing needs analysis and trainees selection procedure will also motivate and lead the TTs to improve the training contents materials accordingly.

The third implication, the effective monitoring system in terms of the while- and post- training period, should be carried out to ensure the quality of the training as well as the trainers. Based on effective monitoring, further provision of training for the trainers should be mandated both qualitatively and quantitatively. This is because the professional development of a TT, which is 'built-in-part of improving education in general' (Smith, 2003) is significantly relational in enhancing the

quality of the INSET as well as the professional development of a trained ET. The implementation of all these aforesaid points of suggestions will be eased if the authority gains the capability of supplying the required supports, namely logistic, technical and financial. In other words, the provision of appropriate and adequate resources will be able to play a substantial role in maintaining the quality and efficacy of the ELT-INSET.

Finally there is the need for synchronising the internal bureaucracy where policy recommendations in some way intersect with each other. The absence of needs analysis, trainee selection and monitoring system, lack of professional development of the TTs and the resourcing support are the instances of outcomes of a 'power-coercive strategy' (Chin & Benne, 1970, as cited in Kennedy, 1987) that misses the mark of reciprocity and accountability among the policy planners and implementers. Lack of communication and understanding between the policy stakeholders in top-down models of ELT-INSET management puts them as 'solitudes' (Flink, 2000) doing 'fragile dialogues' (Unterhalter, E., Ross, J., & Alam, M., 2003). Bureaucratic decisions disputing the quality of PD programmes reported by this study's participants, is reflected in a range of studies, notably Zein (2015), Reeves and Dew (2012), Chodidjah (2010). A shift of the authorisation for administering, designing and preparing an ELT-INSET from the non-ELT background policymakers and bureaucrats (as reported by the study participants) to the ELT teacher educators may be preferable. Bates (2004) also asserted that educational administrators in the form of shadow government should pave the way for enhancing the autonomy of the teacher educators or trainers instead of regulating teacher education from a mere administrative corner.

Conclusion

The extent to which this current study identified the factors adversely affecting the quality and efficacy of an ELT-INSET, a summary can be drawn up by saying that the overall quality of English teacher training and education in Bangladesh would be jeopardised unless appropriate measures are taken instantaneously. Compromise in this regard will simply lead to continuing the emergence of multifaceted issues in the teacher education sector which will, in turn, impact the overall goal of English education, as it is doing right now. The article, based on the insights derived from the critically examined ELT-INSET quality issues, thus concludes with reminding the policymakers of Bangladesh and other polities with the same context that;

> To improve education, we have to change schools; to improve schools, we have to change people in schools; and to improve people, we have to change our way of trying to trigger the change. (Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993)

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