

Training trainers to be reflective practitioners: Issues and challenges

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Reflection is something that all of us do formally or informally. However, developing an ability to reflect that leads to professional or personal development, enabling us to critique our own practices and make better-informed decisions, is a challenge. This chapter describes how, in preparation for a large-scale initiative in Karnataka, India, trainers were encouraged to reflect on their practices through processes such as stimulated recall, discussion groups, written narratives and reflective journal writing. It was observed that trainers are more vocal and critical about themselves and their practices in their journal writings than in their stimulated recall or individual reflective presentations. Training trainers to become reflective practitioners helps them work more deeply with meaning and ultimately transform practice. Also, such reflective practices help in assessing the impact of a programme and improving many facets of the programme itself.

Introduction

Teachers have been attending short in-service training programmes in English language teaching almost every year as part of departmental training programmes in Karnataka, India. Most of these programmes are aimed at either familiarizing teachers with new textbooks, enriching the content knowledge of teachers, or orienting them to recent developments in the field of education. However, my personal interactions with teachers over the years during such training programmes reveal that these training events have tended to have limited impact on them and their classroom practices. The major limitation is that such short training programmes do not help much in enhancing teachers' English language proficiency or in developing reflective practices. Tomlinson (1988), in fact, discusses the dangers of short in-service courses and lists some of the causes of the damage they can cause. He is of the opinion that such courses:

- Provide only theoretical information without helping participants to apply it.
- Provide lots of recipes for the participants to follow but do not help them to develop ideas and materials of their own.
- Only give and the participants only receive.

- There is no follow up to the courses, as teachers receive no further support or encouragement.

He points out that, in short in-service courses, there is a very good chance that many of the participants will lose more than they will gain. Similarly, Freeman (1991) argues that models of teacher education which depend on knowledge transmission, or "input-output" models of teacher education, are essentially ineffective.

Also, many second language teacher education programmes focus only on content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, knowledge about language, second language acquisition theories, teacher professionalism, theories of teaching, teaching skills, etc. This is done at the expense of building teachers' English language proficiency. Hence, a long-term training of 30-days' duration was envisioned in 2016 in Karnataka, India, with a dual focus: enhancing the English language proficiency of in-service primary school teachers as well as honing their English language teaching skills.

In this article, I look at a trainer training programme and discuss how trainers were encouraged to reflect on their training practices. I begin by providing an overview of the programme, present the changes brought about in the programme based on the trainers' experiences of cascading the training at the district level and move on to discuss the reflective training model that was

introduced in the trainer training programme. Tools used for reflection such as stimulated recall, reflective journal writing, etc. are analysed and the challenges of building reflective practices into a training programme are presented in the next section. I conclude by arguing that collaborative reflection, along with individual reflection, may help in sustaining reflective practices among trainers and may contribute to their continuing professional development.

A training module was designed for the programme which was titled “English Language Empowerment Programme (ELEP) for Primary School Teachers.” The module was used to train 204 Master Resource Persons (MRPs), referred to as “trainers” hereafter, who then cascaded the programme for 30 days each at the district level in 2016–17, 2017–18 and 2018–19, thereby empowering nearly 11,500 primary school teachers across the state in English language skills.

Each session in the training programme was transacted in six important stages, namely, “Icebreaker/Warmer, Present, Support, Practice, Insight and Generate.” The sessions would begin with a fun activity, and the MRP was then expected to *present* the learning task, which would be followed by some *support* on the topic or on theoretical concepts. After this, participants would get further *practice* through an activity or a worksheet and then reflect on the *insights* gained, on the learning outcome of the session or on the pedagogical principles and practices introduced. At the end of the session, participants were expected to relate their learning to the textbooks prescribed and *generate* additional/supplementary activities and tasks.

Review of the programme

During the implementation of the training programme, the Department of Education, Government of Karnataka, invited the Azim Premji Foundation and the British Council to review the programme. The Azim Premji Foundation was requested to review the training module and the British Council was requested to examine both the materials and training involved.

A few of the observations made by the Azim Premji Foundation are given below:

- The content of the module is not levelled/graded – it can cater to teachers with varying levels of proficiency with no systematic progression of content from simpler skills to more complex skills. The focus of the module is on both building proficiency and pedagogic understanding –

without going into sufficient depth regarding either. A proficiency module for teachers should be designed with the objective of capacity building of adult learners while a pedagogy module assumes a certain degree of proficiency of the teacher and therefore gets into specifics of teaching the language. Merging both into one is instructionally problematic.

- There are very few opportunities for teachers to listen to English movies, plays, short talks, advertisements, and also express themselves, make mistakes and feel comfortable in using language. Creating an environment for expressing oneself is very important in learning a new language. There is far too much focus on grammar and rules of language in the module; less on comprehension, speaking and expressing in language.

The British Council conducted a limited number of observations of cascade training sessions and of classroom teaching by teachers who had taken the course, in addition to reviewing the training materials. Some of their findings with suggestions on how teacher education and student learning might be further improved are given below:

- Some of the material in the module seems better suited to adults’ uses for formal English rather than as example activities for use with learners in basic school education. E.g. debating skills, proposing a vote of thanks, making a farewell speech (not specific to their use of English in the classroom. More clarity on who the material is for – teachers for their own development or to use with students in the classroom – will help.
- The level of challenge in terms of both grammar/structure content, texts for reading and exercises or activities in the resource material is high in parts. Sections such as “Futurity – Future tense” require teacher educators to have ready clarifications for teachers. Such language concepts might benefit from a key or definitions in the material which both trainers and trainees could refer to during and beyond the course.
- More use of pair and group work would better model activities for an interactive language classroom.

- Insistence on “English only” ensured practice but impeded teachers’ ability to explain their beliefs about teaching, describe what CPD plans they could make, etc.
- Teacher educators rarely described the learning outcome for their sessions.
- Limited ability (on the part of Teacher Educators) to reflect on training and propose improvements

A few observations on the training by trainers/Teacher Educators were as follows:

- Teacher educators consistently used English.
- Most were able to grade the language they used for the trainees.
- Use of warmers was common.
- At times they provided opportunities for the course participants to use English.
- Most teacher educators provided support and encouragement for the trainees.

As rightly pointed out by the British Council, and as I, the coordinator of the programme, myself strongly felt, the trainers had “limited ability to reflect” on the training and their classroom practices. This concern – why the trainers are not able to reflect upon their own practice – became a puzzle and led to attempts being later made, during the trainer training programme, to develop reflective skills among trainers.

Module revision

Against this backdrop, the Module was restructured keeping in mind the needs of teachers teaching English in lower (Grades 1 to 5) and higher primary classes (grades 6 to 8). Two separate programmes were designed for these two levels, namely, Basic and Advanced. The basic training was to be for those teachers who are handling English in Grades 1 to 5 and the duration of the programme was 15 days. The Advanced level training, which was for 20 days, was for teachers teaching English in Grades 6 to 8. Hence, the original Module designed for the 30-day ELEP was revised. A new module for a 15-day “Basic ELEP” and a revised module for a 20-day “Advanced ELEP” were developed, maintaining reflection as one of the essential components of the training. A full session on “Writing reflective journals” was included in the training module.

In order to orient trainers on the new Modules, a 10-day trainer training programme was organized

at the Regional Institute of English South India (RIESI), Bengaluru, from 10 June 2019 to 19 June 2019. Developing “reflective skills” became the focus of the trainer training programme.

Critical incidents

In ELT, Farrell (2008) defines a critical incident as “any unplanned event that occurs during class . . . if trainee teachers formally reflect on these critical incidents, it may be possible for them to uncover new understandings of the teaching and learning process.” As all the trainers had prior experience of training teachers as part of the 30-day ELEP, the very first day of the 10-day trainer training programme was spent on narrating “critical incidents” from previous training sessions that the Master trainers had facilitated at the district level. The objective of the session was to identify and analyze trainers’ critical incidents and share their reflections.

The following were some incidents identified as critical and narrated by the trainers.

- Correcting teachers’ language errors:
- The trainer pointed out some mistakes made by a teacher while presenting the report of the previous day’s sessions. The teacher got angry and she wanted to discontinue the training.
- Establishing rapport with the teacher participants:
- A few teachers who attended the training were aged and experienced, a few came in just because the department forced them to attend and there were a few teachers who really wanted to participate and learn. So, it was a challenge to establish rapport with such a diverse group.
- Lack of participation:
- A teacher was reluctant to learn and pay attention to the class. She would not look at the trainer, nor listen to the instructions. She would participate only when she wanted to. She was not punctual either. One day, the trainer lost his temper and warned her not to be late. The trainer was forced to do this tough talking but the incident made him feel sad.
- Using mobile phones:
- A teacher was always busy using a mobile phone. During the training sessions, he was chatting, messaging, etc. One day he was

caught red handed by the DIET Lecture. The Lecturer warned him. This made him arrogant. He complained to the Principal and made it a big issue.

As these issues have implications not only for teacher training programmes but also for classroom teaching, trainers, during the 10-day programme, were encouraged to reflect on, think deeply about those incidents, discuss possible ways of addressing the issues and bringing desirable changes following Kolb's (1984) professional learning cycle model of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. As a teacher educator, I feel the trainers could further reflect on these incidents deeply, ask a few reflective questions, explore the issues to understand the situations better and to gather alternative perspectives. They may be encouraged to carry out exploratory research which will help them engage in reflective practices in future training programmes.

Reflective questions

Following critical incidents, trainers were asked to recall their experiences of training teachers in the previous cohorts and reflect on the following questions:

Reflective questions for further learning were:

- What are my first thoughts about this programme? Are they mostly positive or negative?
- If positive, what comes to your mind specifically? If negative, what are these negative thoughts?
- What were some of the most interesting discoveries I made while being part of this teacher training programme? About myself? About others? About problems?
- What were some of my most challenging moments and what made them so?
- What is the most important thing I learned personally?
- What principles did I follow/incorporate into my training?
- Were my milestones and goals mostly met, and how much did I deviate from them if any?
- What are my greatest strengths/areas for improvement?

- What could I do differently the next time I work with the same group or a different one?

Some of their reflections were as follows:

- This training gave me an opportunity to meet and interact with teachers from the remote corners of my district. As a trainer, I could understand there are different levels of teachers and I could get insights into different ways of their teaching. I was democratic in my approach and empathetic towards them. The main principle I followed throughout the training was “learning to teach and teaching to learn.”
- In the beginning, I was feeling negative because I thought this one-month training would not succeed. I thought it would be difficult to sustain teachers’ interest and my enthusiasm for such a long duration. But I was wrong. I am feeling happy now because it has brought tremendous change in my teaching. I discovered many areas for my professional development. I have read many books and the training has made me more resourceful. I have improved my own reading, writing skills and knowledge of grammar. I have learnt many ways of helping children to read and write.
- ELEP is a real teacher development programme. If I am given a topic and the duration of the training sessions, I can design a module and conduct a training programme. I have gained so much of knowledge, ideas, confidence, courage and clarity. I learnt an important aspect about myself that I am not only a dedicated teacher but also a committed MRP.
- Most of the teachers in my cluster make the students read the lessons aloud and ask them to copy the notes of some old students. They do not give importance to listening, speaking, paragraph writing, creative writing, etc. This ELEP was an eye opener to many of them who learnt about developing language skills in students.
- While cascading the programme, I kept the objectives of the session in mind and went a step ahead to design additional activities for enriching teachers. I conducted assessment at the end of the session to know whether teachers have achieved the objectives. I also made the teachers think how they can adapt the activities to suit their learners.

Although most of the responses were in a question-and-answer form, there were deep insights about their professional practices, what they learnt, unlearnt and re-learnt. These reflections reveal their personal efforts for professional improvement. Schon (1983) points out that such reflective enquiry can happen during practice, after the fact, and can either be done alone or with others. As a teacher educator, I feel trainers should be given opportunities to present their reflective thoughts in small groups which might help them in moving from descriptive reflection to critical reflection. Such critical and deliberate inquiry into professional practice may help in gaining a deeper understanding of oneself, others, and the meaning that is shared among individuals.

Reflective training module

The new module developed for the 15-day ELEP had a few guiding questions/statements that help teachers reflect on their teaching learning practices. These questions and statements were given at the beginning of each unit of the module.

For example, the unit on ‘Teacher professional development’ begins with the following questions:

- Are students excited to be in your class? If not, what can you do to change this?
- What do you think your students expect and need from you?
- What are some of the biggest hurdles in improving your professional practice?
- What do you want everyone to be able to say about you?
- How long has it been since you’ve asked yourself questions like these?

One of the significant changes made in the delivery of the training was encouraging the trainers themselves to handle the training sessions. Hence, the trainers transacted the module content on vocabulary, listening, spoken English, reading, grammar, writing, learning styles and strategies, teacher professional development, and approaches and methods of teaching English.

As they are not used to asking reflective questions, trainers conveniently skipped these questions given at the beginning of each unit and began their sessions with the activities instead. This was another puzzle for me. Why are the trainers not asking reflective questions? Are they not comfortable analyzing their own and other teachers’ classroom practices? Are they not willing to question “taken-for-granted” routines? What is

important in developing reflection in trainers – skills, attitudes or dispositions?

Keeping these questions in mind, I tried to bring some change in the programme in order to take the trainers through the process of developing reflection.

Process and methodology adopted in the trainer training programme

For the first time in a training programme at the Institute, trainers (MRPs) were encouraged to transact the content of the entire module in small teams. They were encouraged to consult the members of the faculty at the RIESI for support and planning their sessions. The team work facilitated a lot of discussion, reflective thinking, and enabled them to understand the content of the Module.

The members of the faculty (teacher educators) observed their sessions, assessed their performance and also gave individual feedback based on the criteria suggested (see Appendix for the observation schedule).

- Did you make sure that you had a good understanding of the topic that you were supposed to teach? Being a trainer is different from being a teacher. If you do enough homework, you will be confident to take questions from teachers and answer them.
- Try to relate your classroom experiences with the content of the Module. Seek answers in a democratic way; don’t be so authoritative. If you have a video record of your session, you can watch the recording, analyze your body language and the gestures used.
- If you have to teach something (for example, process writing, portfolio, jigsaw reading, etc.) with conviction, you need to try it out first with your students. See if it works or does not work. If not, modify, make necessary changes to the activity. When you experiment in your classroom and know how it works, you can discuss the topic/teach the concept/conduct the activity with more confidence and also share your own classroom experience, provide concrete examples. Therefore, before you cascade the training, try out some of the activities with your students to get a first-hand experience.
- Your session was lively. You conducted the activities well. Maybe, you can try to involve

a greater number of participants. You were able to give appropriate examples for different types of listening. You sang rhythmically and with good intonation. Can you rephrase the sentence ‘We are butterfly?’

Constructive, critical feedback, as shown above, was given on each of the trainers’ strengths and areas for improvement. The trainer training sessions were either audio or video recorded and shared with the trainers for their analysis and self-assessment. The trainers were motivated to record their own sessions and share them with the other trainers. Many of the trainers even chose “critical friends” as observers of their sessions and sought feedback from them. However, discussion among the teacher educators themselves, prior to the trainers’ training their peer group, to gain a deeper awareness of the focus in the training programme would help in achieving the objective of developing trainers’ critical reflective skills.

Stimulated recall

Stimulated recall is a type of retrospective report. It usually uses video and audio recordings of the participant in action, which they are later shown to use as a prompt and asked to reflect on (Lyle, 2002). However, in this trainer training programme, a set of questions, as shown below, was used for the purpose.

- What worked really well in your class?
- What did not work or could have been more effective? What was missing or needed?
- Who captured your attention in the class today? Why?
- What is important for you to do tomorrow/ this week?

Trainers had to reflect on their session the next day based on the questions. It was used to help them recall their concurrent thinking during their teaching and to understand the cognitive processes. Trainers were encouraged to share their experiences of the training session, the input provided and the outcome of it.

Excerpts from trainers’ reflective narratives are given below:

- When I was allotted this unit, I was so nervous. Mentor’s suggestions, my preparation and planning made me feel confident to handle the class. I made some grammatical errors while framing questions. Because of time constraint, “let’s make contract” didn’t work well.

- It was an opportunity to do SWOT analysis. I need to improve my fluency in English language, ability to elaborate concepts with more clarity, prepare Teaching Learning Materials (TLM).
- My strength is honest effort and hard work. I did all the groundwork like preparation of charts, PPT, etc. for the session but I was nervous while presenting before the trainers.
- There are certain areas which I should seriously work upon. I should think of making my language crisp, clear and more effective. I should also be careful about the pace of delivery. I need to slow down my speech a little. I need to think how effectively I can transact the same content with less talk, less explanation. I need to have more clarity about the pedagogy, the philosophy of teaching listening.
- My strengths: sense of humor, interaction with the participants and their participation
Areas for improvement: I need to learn how to engage all the members in group activities. I also have to improve my knowledge of functional grammar. Merely speaking good English cannot make one a good teacher, All that is required is skills of teaching and love for learning new things.

These reflective sessions made the trainers understand what they did well, what they could have done to make the session more effective, and also in understanding the nuances of conducting in-service training programmes, the principles and practices of designing a teacher education programme, and the importance of reflective practices. As a teacher educator, I feel more time could be spent on retrospective reports to help trainers reach higher levels of reflection.

Reflective journal

According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), a journal is a teacher’s written response to teaching events or a recorded account of teaching experiences. In addition to stimulated recalls, each trainer had to submit a reflective journal/ self-report to the programme coordinator. The following are a few excerpts from the reflective journal:

- What I learnt from my teaching is that as an MRP, I should not stick to one topic, I should be able to handle different topics when I cascade the training. After my class, I came to know about the different strategies

of exploring pictures. I understood that pictures could be used to elicit “wh” questions, “yes/no” questions, comparing and contrasting, helping students to understand the meaning in the context, etc.

- I handled the topic “prose performance.” I first tried to understand what were the best available strategies to transact a prose piece. I also questioned myself how prose could be effective in developing competencies in listening comprehension, speaking, sentence formation, vocabulary building and also in reinforcing the power of imagination and creativity among students. While transacting, I was confident, clear and focused.
- Basically I am not an English teacher but due to some reason, I am handling English subject in my school. While conducting the 2nd activity, it was so clumsy and the class was noisy, I felt it difficult to manage the class for a moment. To go near the stage seems to be like going near a wild animal. But if you go with good preparation, that wild animal seems to be a pet dog.
- I need to minimize my talk and give more opportunity to the participants to talk and I need to involve everyone. I am a little confused by the contrasting feedback given by the observers. Some observers said that there is no need to add our inputs, stick to the Module completely. Others suggested to us not to stick only to the module, have your own ideas and inputs on the topic. I need a little clarity on this. When an MRP is completely deviating from the topic or is doing something absolutely wrong, it is good to intervene and make corrections. But it is not so good to abruptly intervene, to stop someone and say skip this part or don’t do this activity, etc. This brings down the level of confidence of the participant.
- I don’t say that I did the best but I tried the best. I spent extra time preparing TLMs such as charts for my session which helped in giving some explanation of each stage. The activities that have been designed to be reading activities ended up as speaking activities. I was successful in making the participants read the texts and in eliciting responses. But I failed in making every participant engage simultaneously in the activities. I should have given the learning experience to everybody in the class. I need

to improve my communicative competence and classroom management.

The journal entries reveal that trainers have used the journal to describe and analyze how they conducted the activities, to identify some of their concerns about the sessions and also to think of alternative procedures to use in the future. Trainers’ journals also indicate that they are more vocal, critical about themselves and their observers in their writings than in their stimulated recall or individual reflective presentations. The training programme could devote a few specific sessions on ‘developing reflective skills’ where the trainers can share their reflective notes, journal entries, etc. in small groups.

District-level teacher training: Cascade approach

The district level teacher training was conducted in the cascade mode between July and September 2019. Trainers trained at RIESI conducted the teacher training programme for 15 days and provided opportunities for 1650 teachers for their professional learning. They had to send reflective reports everyday by email to the coordinator at RIESI and the Nodal officer at the Department of State Education Research and Training (DSERT) sharing details and experiences of their sessions. Though there were questions that prompted trainers to reflect, the reports were generally descriptive in nature. The following examples illustrate this point:

For the question “How many teachers got opportunities to participate/ share their views in the session?” the report said all the teachers participated with interest. And for another question “Which activities were most effective/least effective and why?,” it was mentioned in the report that all the activities were effective. The trainers were asked to suggest improvements to the module and say how the module could be supplemented with additional content, activities, worksheets, examples, etc. However, many reported that teachers like the module and the activities given there.

Trainers did not share many personal reactions to things that had happened during the teacher training sessions. They did not share problems they had encountered during the cascade training or ideas for further course of action. Though they made entries on a regular basis, these were mainly descriptive in nature. The “descriptive reflections” did not shed much light on their beliefs about training teachers, teachers’ language abilities, their own strengths and limitations as trainers, their

satisfaction with their roles and responsibilities, avenues for professional development, etc.

There could be several reasons, as listed below, for writing descriptive reports.

- The reports were shared with the higher officers.
- Lack of time as they had to send these reports at the end of each day's training.
- They might be used to writing such descriptive reports giving details of the sessions and the programme to other stakeholders.
- As it is a collective report of three trainers, there might not be much scope for writing individual reflections.
- The prompts given may not be appropriate in guiding them to write reflective reports.

It is still a challenge to get reflective reports with critical insights on various aspects of a teacher training programme from the trainers. Also, trainers do not seem to maintain any reflective journals individually during the training programme. Documenting reflections is still not valued by the trainers. There is a greater need to integrate reflection as a key theme in the entire training programme. It may be valuable to design interesting tasks and activities to develop reflective skills in teacher trainers. The various levels of reflection could be discussed at length during the training sessions citing relevant examples.

Conclusion

Teacher trainers need to view reflection as a tool for continuing professional development. They need to share their insights and learning with others and document reflections-in-and on-action. Such reflective practices will help them analyze, evaluate and change their own practice and become proactive and confident in their work. It may also be

useful to facilitate individual reflection in group and critical collaborative reflection which may help them in reflecting on immediate concerns of training teachers and enable them to become agents of change and transformative professionals.

It may be easier to sustain reflective processes when they are carried out collaboratively with other trainers and supported by facilitators who can structure the learning processes. Trainer development programmes that focus on reflective practices will help trainers develop their own theories of educational practice, understand and develop a principled basis for their own work. They will be able to better influence future directions in education and take a more active role in educational decision-making.

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Appendix: ELEP training session observation form

Name of the trainer:

Qualifications:

Name and Address:

Has the trainer attended ELEP: YES/NO (If yes, when?)

Unit/ Topic:

Date:

Please rate the trainer's ability to handle the classroom in a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = poor 2 = fair 3 = acceptable 4 = good 5 = excellent).

Sl No.	Performance	Indicators	Rating 1/2/3/ 4/5	Comments
1	Planning and preparation	Has the trainer planned for the class? Is there a clear lesson plan that he/she follows? Has the trainer prepared well for the class (practiced reading the lesson well, referred to dictionaries and other materials?)		
2	Interaction with the teacher participants	Is the trainer able to interact naturally and in a friendly way with the students? Is there a good rapport between the trainer and the students?		
3	Usage of classroom language	Is the trainer able to give clear instructions? Does she ask a variety of questions like Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs), and Concept Checking Questions CCQs)? Is she able to speak fluently? Is she able to speak in English without major/too many grammatical errors?		
4	Pronunciation and tone	Is the trainer's pronunciation clear? Is her tone learner-friendly?		
5	Confidence and enthusiasm	Does the trainer look confident enough to train teachers? Does she/he involve her/himself in the lesson completely? Is she interested in the subject? Does she show a positive attitude toward the class/teacher participants?		
6	Methodology followed	Is the methodology followed learner-centered? Is the classroom activity-oriented? Is the focus more on skills development?		
7	Materials used	Is the trainer able to use a variety of learning materials other than the textbook? Do the materials match with the lesson objectives?		
8	Scope for group, pair and individual work	Does the trainer involve all the students in the classroom activities? Does she conduct group/ pair work? Are students actively participating in the class?		
9	Assessment and feedback	Is the trainer able to observe students, pay individual attention, and track their progress in learning? Has the trainer		

		understood the concept of formative assessment?		
10	Achievement of learning outcomes	Does the trainer have clarity about the lesson objectives? Have the learners achieved the learning outcomes fully/partially?		
	Total (50 marks)			
	Overall performance (Extremely good, Good, Satisfactory, Needs improvement, Not at all satisfactory)			

Please provide descriptive feedback to the trainer based on the following points:

Three major strengths of the session.

Three major areas for improvement.

3. What else might help the trainer to improve his/her teaching/English language ability?

Observer's name and signature