

# Killing Two Birds with One Stone: SPELT's Professional Development Programs



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**Abstract** One of the major functions of language teacher associations is to provide a range of professional development opportunities for its members (Lamb, 2012; Paran, 2016). Accordingly, the Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT) offers a variety of programs including monthly workshops, the annual conference, and short and long-term training courses. SPELT, like other language teacher associations, is also run by volunteer members. One of the problems faced by language teacher associations is the dearth of volunteers willing to spend time and effort on organizational work (Gomez, 2011). However, in SPELT, an interesting observation through the years has been that many of the participants of SPELT's long-term professional development program (the International Certificate in English Language Teaching or ICELT), offer their services as volunteers for the organization at the completion of their program. Normally, they start as members of a sub-committee and then, as they hone their leadership skills, they move up to important leadership positions in the SPELT working committee. This chapter investigates the impact of the ICELT program on participants' personal and professional skills and attitudes and their motivation and experience of their volunteer work with SPELT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 ICELT participants turned teacher leaders; all of them started their professional journey as ICELT participants and are now serving the profession as leaders through the SPELT platform, and/or in the broader teaching-learning scenario in Pakistan.

## 1 Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the growth of teacher associations for English language teachers around the world. Both TESOL and IATEFL, two major international teacher

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associations, have a wide network of TAs from around the world. TESOL currently has more than 100 TAs as affiliate members; the IATEFL website lists 121 associate members (TAs) in different parts of the world (see [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org); and [www.iatefl.org](http://www.iatefl.org) respectively) [accessed 15/10/16].

Falcao and Szesztay in their opening article in the book ‘Developing a teacher association: An introduction’ (2006, p. 13) highlight two reasons for teachers to join teacher associations. These are: practical benefits, and a sense of belonging to a professional community. One of the major functions of language teacher associations is to provide a range of professional development opportunities for its members (Lamb, 2012; Paran, 2016). Normally, the TAs offer their members both products and services for continuing professional development such as a resource center or library, and workshops and short and long-term courses. Additionally, there is an annual conference that aims to bring together teachers and leaders in the field for mutual sharing of ideas and networking. The TA newsletter or journal keeps the members abreast of latest developments in the field as well as other opportunities for professional and personal growth both inside and outside the TA (see Falcao & Szesztay, 2006). For specific case studies about TAs work in South Asia and the MENA region/Arab Peninsula, please see (Aubrey & Coombe, 2010; Gnawali, 2016; Khan, 2010; Khanna, 2010).

One of the problems faced by language teacher associations is the dearth of volunteers willing to spend time and effort on organizational work (Gomez, 2011). However, a consultancy report on SPELT identified the spirit of volunteerism among SPELT members as one of the key reasons for its success (Ali, 2012).

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part I provides a brief introduction to SPELT and its professional development programs in Pakistan. In part II, the impact of ICELT on participants’ personal and professional development and their motivation and experience of their voluntary work with SPELT, as revealed through the semi-structured interviews of 6 ICELTers—5 current and 1 past SPELT leaders—is presented; all of them started their professional journey as ICELT participants and are now serving the ELT profession as leaders through the SPELT platform, and/or in the broader teaching-learning scenario in Pakistan. This indicates that TAs can help improve the quality of teaching-learning in the classroom through needs-based professional development programs. Additionally, these participants can become an important resource for the TAs as future leaders.

## 2 SPELT: A Brief Description

In Pakistan, the need for a professional association of English language teachers was realized in the early 80s in the wake of the growing demand for improving the quality of English language teaching-learning in the country. At that time, English language teaching was not accorded the status of a profession in Pakistan (Haque, 1983). In fact, the English departments in universities offered only literature-based courses and looked down upon language teaching as an ‘inferior’ activity. The majority of

teachers entered the profession with no specialized training in teaching English as a second or foreign language. Additionally, the curriculum at government run teacher training colleges was outdated and their tutors considered Audio-Lingual Method as the most modern way of teaching English in 1984 (British Council, 1986; Husain & Sarwar, 1989). Unsurprisingly, concern was being voiced in all circles about the falling standards of English in Pakistan. To address this situation, SPELT was born in 1984 as a non-political and non-profit organization with two major aims: (1) to help improve the standard of teaching-learning of English at all levels in Pakistan; and (2) to provide a platform for English teachers in Pakistan for their professional development through the sharing of ideas and learning with and from each other. The mission and goals of SPELT, as recorded in the SPELT charter (1987, p. 1), are as follows:

SPELT's goals are to provide a professional forum for its members and practitioners teaching English as a Foreign/Second language, to facilitate effective communication, and to improve the teaching/learning standards of English in Pakistan.

The charter elaborates that in order to meet these goals, amongst other things, SPELT will “organize academic sessions, professional development programs, and teacher-research facilities” (SPELT Charter, 1987, p. 1). (Further details about SPELT can be found at [www.spelt.ork.pk](http://www.spelt.ork.pk); and Baber, Sarwar, & Safdar, 2005).

SPELT's executive body, known as the Working Committee, comprises 7 coordinators, each with their own sub-committee of 3–5 members. Three coordinators are elected one year and four coordinators the next year. A coordinator is elected for a two-year term but can be re-elected for the same position for another term of two years. After completing their term of office (2–4 years), a coordinator needs to rotate off the working committee for at least two years; however, during this time they are encouraged to serve as a sub-committee member to guide the new coordinator. This allows for continuity in leadership while providing opportunities for new members to join the SPELT working committee on a regular basis.

An interesting observation in SPELT through the years has been that many of the participants of SPELT's long-term professional development programs (International Certificate in English Language Teaching, and the earlier Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English), offer their services as volunteers for the organization during or at the completion of their program. Normally, they start as members of a sub-committee and then, as they hone their leadership skills, they move up to important leadership positions in the SPELT working committee and other organizations in Pakistan.

## ***2.1 Activities for Teacher Development in Pakistan***

As mentioned earlier, SPELT was born in 1984 as a result of a felt need for professional development for English language teachers, particularly to support teachers who wanted to take more informed decisions in their classrooms. This section begins

with a brief overview of SPELT activities for professional development of teachers in Pakistan. Next, details of one of SPELT's long-term programs, the International Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT), being run successfully since 2004, are shared to provide the context for the data and findings presented in the second part of this chapter.

## ***2.2 Monthly Academic Sessions: Developing a Culture of Teachers Learning with and from Each Other***

Teachers are invited to share their classroom practices with each other in a monthly two-hour workshop, termed as "Academic Session". Normally, one practicing teacher presents one or more teaching strategies used in their classrooms successfully. This is followed by a collaborative exploration of what was done and why. This allows the participants to examine their teaching practices with peers in a supportive learning environment, which in turn, helps them develop new understanding of issues affecting classroom language teaching and learning.

Thirty-three years after SPELT was established, the monthly Academic Sessions still runs regularly. This session is open to both members and non-members. As such, it continues to provide English language teachers in Pakistan a shared platform for professional development. Additionally, the academic sessions serve as a training ground for new presenters to polish their presentation skills before they present to a wider audience in teacher education workshops or at conferences.

## ***2.3 Annual Conference***

In September 1985, a seminar was organized to celebrate SPELT's first anniversary; the theme was to evaluate compulsory English courses from Grades 1 to Bachelor's degree level (SPELT, 1985). The evaluation report was subsequently published and made available to teachers and policy makers. Since then 33 international conferences have been held reaching out to more than 2000 teachers each year through the SPELT annual chain conference organized by its four chapters across Pakistan (see also Aronson, 2014; Blok, 2015; Sarwar, 2011, 2016).

## ***2.4 Newsletter/Journal***

A two-page cyclostyled newsletter was started soon after the inception of SPELT; this has evolved over the years into an ISSN registered refereed journal titled 'SPELT

Quarterly'. The aim is to provide the practitioners a mutual space to share context-appropriate methodology and low-cost materials and activities for classroom use.

## ***2.5 Workshops and Courses for Teacher Development***

As mentioned earlier, when SPELT was formed there was hardly an avenue open for professional development of English language teachers in Pakistan. More importantly, most of the one-shot in-service training workshops and teacher training courses organized by the government did not offer specialized ELT training. As part of its mission and to fill this gap, SPELT started offering ELT workshops and short and long-term courses for teacher development. A key function noted by Falcao and Szesztay (2006, p. 17) for TAs is "to take a lead in providing in-service training opportunities". Soon after its inception, SPELT started offering a one-year training course, Practical Teacher Training Course (PTTC), which instantly became popular. However, trainee feedback suggested the need for government recognition of the course, to add to their qualifications portfolio and possible salary enhancement. After exploring different avenues for affiliation in Pakistan and abroad, SPELT got affiliation from the Cambridge University for their Royal Society of Arts Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English (COTE) in 1989; this was replaced by the International Certificate for English Language Teachers (ICELT) in 2004.

## ***2.6 Features of the ICELT Program***

The ICELT course has two components: 50-h face to face teaching (Phase 1), and follow-up support for the participants throughout the academic year to translate their learning into classroom practice along with classroom-based assignments (Phase 2). The course also focuses on participants' language enrichment through language awareness tasks and assignments.

During Phase 2, the course participants get an opportunity to observe their tutors teaching in their respective classrooms. This, along with classroom observation by peers and tutors, allows them to observe exemplary teaching, and obtain feedback on how to adapt techniques and strategies, and learning resources to their classrooms. The classroom-based assignments also encourage reflection on their teaching and assessment practices in light of their new learning.

Part I of this paper has provided the background information about SPELT's mission and its major activities such as SPELT's one-year long professional development programs—ICELT and COTE in the context of English language teaching in Pakistan. Part II of the paper presents the findings of a small-scale research study based on semi-structured interviews of 5 ICELT and 1 COTE graduate; all of them have been involved variously with the organization's major activities and

management since completing the SPELT programs, and currently hold or have held key leadership positions in SPELT.

### **3 The Study**

The aims of the study were to find out, first, the impact of the ICELT program on participants' personal and professional development and career enhancement, and second, their motivation and experience of active and long-term volunteer work with SPELT in different leadership positions.

#### ***3.1 Methodology***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 graduates of the ICELT (or earlier COTE) program using purposive sampling. All of them are either serving or have served SPELT in different capacities; 4 are current SPELT coordinators (out of a total of 7), one is a sub-committee member, and 1 is past coordinator. The interviewer knew all the participants very well, having taught some of them in the COTE and ICELT program and/or worked with them in the SPELT Working Committee. Interestingly, it seemed that our earlier relationship of mutual trust and respect helped the participants to open up to me as a researcher, even though they were warned that despite anonymity and confidentiality of data, it may be possible for their close associates to recognize them, an issue highlighted earlier in small-scale case study research (Shamim & Qureshi, 2010).

Details about the study participants are given in Table 1.

#### ***3.2 Findings and Discussion***

According to the participants, their primary motivation for joining the ICELT program was their need for continuous professional development. Some were persuaded to join the program by their colleagues—ICELT graduates—and some senior SPELTers visiting their schools. Roheena and Ayesha, both content teachers at the time of joining ICELT, are working as skilled English teachers and teacher educators, but also helping their colleagues and students by integrating the teaching of English with content subjects.

**Table 1** Study participants' roles before and after completing the ICELT program

Participant	Current role(s)	Pre-ICELT role	Post-ICELT role(s)	Future development plans
Roheena	Teacher of senior classes at a prestigious private school; teaches preparation classes for IELTS and TOEFL; Teacher trainer	School teacher (Math and Social Studies)	'extraordinary' teacher, teacher educator, textbook writer, curriculum reviewer, presenter at conferences and contributed articles to the SPELT journal	Continue to improve her professional skills as English teacher and teacher trainer
Meher	Principal of a prestigious private school; ICELT Course Director	School teacher (English)	Skilled teacher and teacher trainer; presenter at conferences	To complete her Ph.D.
Ayesha	ELT Consultant; coordinator, principal, workshop leader and ELT	School teacher (Teaching History, Geography, Pakistan Studies and Social Studies at the secondary level)	Skilled teacher, teacher educator, textbook writer, curriculum reviewer, presenter at conferences	To improve her skills as teacher and teacher trainer, particularly for Content Integrated Language Learning
Zainab	Teaching adults at a prestigious language school; Visiting faculty at a University <sup>a</sup>	House wife	Skilled teacher, teacher educator	To continue to learn through attending PD programs
Zakir	ELT Consultant (trainer)-has his own consultancy firm	Classroom teacher, teaching senior level classes in a private school	Skilled teacher and trainer	To improve his skills as teacher and teacher trainer
Samina	Teacher Associate (EAP) at an international university in Karachi, Pakistan	Part-time teaching (intermittently) in schools; busy 'raising 5 kids'	Skilled teacher and teacher trainer; presenter at conferences	Pursuing online DELTA course and M.Phil.

<sup>a</sup>Zainab has recently taken retirement due to ill health. She now devotes her time to her voluntary work in SPELT only

### 3.2.1 ICELT: A Life-Changing Experience

Roheena described her experience of ICELT as a ‘life changing experience’. According to her it brought about a “190° turn” in her career and transformed her from an “ordinary to an extraordinary teacher”. For Zakir, completing the ICELT “was a sort of ‘U-turn—rewarding professionally, [but] not in terms of monetary gains”. He describes himself as “still a classroom teacher” [after completing ICELT] but with confidence to teach well, “I had my beliefs about teaching-learning earlier also but there was much to learn-lots of learning and making sense of them through ICELT”.

Meher shared that, “ICELT opened up my mind—I became a ‘specialist’ teacher; the course equipped me with skills to diagnose learners’ problems in learning English and select and devise appropriate needs-based strategies to help them”. Similarly, Samina describes her experience of the ICELT program as a “big leap” in her personal and professional life, “a real eye-opener”: “This was the first time I realized that it’s not enough to have good language skills to teach English; in fact, you need training to become an ELT professional, knowing not only a variety of activities to use in your classroom, [which she had learned from attending workshops] but actually learning the background theory why [to use them] and where they are coming from”. For Ayesha, the ICELT program provided “space for fresh breathing” and subsequently, opened for her “new horizons—a world to explore”, as will be discussed in the next section.

Zainab shared that the COTE experience impacted her a lot. This was because, “In COTE I got an understanding of what I was doing and why”. Zainab shared that she had never imagined herself as a teacher, “But when I got into it I enjoyed so much—if it wouldn’t have been for SPELT training I would not have enjoyed it so much”. Remembering her first class, Zainab said it was a sea of faces, but her training helped her to do some classroom activities which the students enjoyed. Also, in every class the students were very receptive when she tried to do something she had learned in the course, “I changed tasks—didn’t go by the book—the students enjoyed—I enjoyed.... In the faculty meeting when a teacher complained that students copy the exercises from previous students, I said ‘Why don’t you change the tasks?’ I demonstrated how this could be done—everyone was amazed—this was a morale booster—gave me more confidence”.

The career trajectory of all the ICELT graduates shows both lateral expansion of knowledge, skills and experiences, and an upward movement on their career ladder. For example, after completing their ICELT program, they started conducting SPELT-organized workshops and short courses; also they have presented regularly at the SPELT annual conference and contributed articles to the ‘SPELT Quarterly’ based on their classroom experience. The inner confidence gained from SPELT training and peers provided them with greater confidence to continue to implement innovative methodology in their classrooms even after the course, despite occasional setbacks. More importantly, these experiences helped them develop life skills that have assisted them subsequently both in their personal and professional lives. For example, Meher claimed that the ICELT was like a roller-coaster ride, “exhilarating but very challenging at the same time. [But] It developed in me the grit to face



challenges, to deal with the problems by facing them rather than evading or running away from them". For Ayesha, the experience of working on the assignments was also very challenging but enriching at the same time, particularly the opportunity to tutor and learn collaboratively with her peers, "Whatever I got to learn [I thought] I must teach to others; that's my learning approach".

The participants' displayed some personal traits as well as general trends in their career development. First, they were all motivated to join the course as they were not satisfied with their current teaching practices or needed a new direction in their careers. Second, they are all life-long learners who see ICELT as a major breakthrough in their professional development journey. Hence, after completing the course, all the participants have continued to enhance their knowledge and skills through using further opportunities for professional development, both formal and informal. Some have undertaken higher education or aspire to do so to improve their qualifications but more importantly, to continue to improve themselves as ELT professionals. Third, they've all experienced role expansion and career enhancement post ICELT, moving from being teachers to teacher leaders. As such, they have engaged in curriculum review, textbook development and training of English teachers through the SPELT platform and elsewhere. This indicates that all of them are life-long learners constantly looking for and using opportunities to implement and improve their current knowledge in diverse settings. Meher's<sup>1</sup> motto in life sums up the dominant belief among the study participants: "Success is not that you are number 1, number 2, or number 3. Success is that you continue to grow".

Findings of this small-scale study indicate that SPELT's long-term teacher training programs—COTE and ICELT—have had a high impact on study participants' personal and professional development as well as their careers. In fact, it brought about a seismic shift in their beliefs and attitude in their own role as ELT professionals in particular and towards teaching-learning in general. What explains their transformation from an 'ordinary' to an 'extraordinary' teacher? One of the main features of the ICELT Program is the active support provided to the participants by their peers and course tutors during their school-based implementation of their new learning. This seems to have given them the confidence to experiment with innovative methodology and learn both from their successes and failures during post-lesson reflection. Farrell's study (2008) with 60 Singaporean teachers about their school placement experience during their initial teacher education program indicates that teachers value greatly the support they get from the school personnel during their practicum. Follow-up support in the implementation phase has also been identified as a major indicator of professional development programs' impact on teachers' self-efficacy and student learning outcomes (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2003; Waters, 2006).

A limitation of the present study is that it did not include student learning outcomes. However, the evidence quoted above from teacher interviews indicates participants' improved levels of confidence and feelings of self-efficacy. This helped them to share their learning with their peers and others as teacher educators as well

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the study participants.

as engage in curriculum review and textbook development. This expansion of roles from teachers to teacher leaders opened new avenues for the participants both for sharing their learning as well as their own continuous professional development (see also Shamim & Anderson, 2010).

Thus, the ICELT model in Phase 1, followed by peer and tutor support for the implementation of their new learning in the classroom in Phase 2 seems to be a key impact on participants' changed beliefs and improved classroom practices.

### **3.2.2 Motivation and Experience of Working with SPELT**

SPELT, like other language teacher associations, is run by volunteer members. This section describes ICELT graduates' motivation and experience of their volunteer work with SPELT.

As mentioned earlier, a clear majority of ICELT participants volunteer their services for SPELT during and/or after completion of their course. Their motivation is often rooted in their experience of working closely with SPELT tutors during their one-year course of study. They normally join the SPELT working committee (the executive body), as a sub-committee member to understand the workings of the organization and to be mentored to work as coordinators subsequently. Their commitment to SPELT as volunteers is evident in their willingness to continue serving the organization for a second term and/or as a sub-committee member (or in some other capacity) in the SPELT Working Committee (see Table 2).

The majority of the study participants were already members of SPELT when they enrolled for SPELT teacher training programs. However, they became more actively involved in its activities either during or after completing the program. A question at this stage is: What explains the participants' sustained volunteer work with SPELT? The participants' motivation and experience of working with SPELT is presented in the next section.

### **3.2.3 SPELT Is a Place to Learn and Relax**

There was general agreement that everyone felt respected and cared for in SPELT. For example, the participants appreciated the fact that in SPELT even new and junior members are treated as equals. This helps to make SPELT a "safe haven, a place that allows you space to become aware of and develop your personal and professional strengths... I'm at ease here, at home" (Samina). According to Roheena, "SPELT is a place to relax, my 'maika' [parents' home]". Additionally, as Zainab shared, working with SPELT has given them confidence to deal with different kinds of people and situations: "[It] taught me how to juggle people, things, and situations".

**Table 2** Study participants' leadership roles in SPELT

Participant	Year of completing ICELT	Current role in SPELT	Past role(s) in SPELT	Future plans
Roheena	2011	Academic Coordinator (2014–2017)	Sub-committee member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To improve SPELT marketing and communication strategies</li> <li>– To serve as Academic sub-committee member</li> </ul>
Meher	2005	Journal Coordinator (2016–2017); member conference sub-committee (2017)	Conference Coordinator	Wants to continue as Journal Coordinator for 2nd term (2018–19)
Ayesha	2013	Finance sub-committee member (2014–17)	Volunteer	Wants to continue as sub-committee member only due to other engagements
Zainab	1990	Finance Coordinator (2016–2017)	Program Coordinator; sub-committee member	Wants to continue for 2nd term (2018–19) to institutionalize procedures
Zakir	2008	Member Program sub-committee (2015–17); member conference sub-committee (2017)	Academic Coordinator; Conference Coordinator	Wants to continue his association with SPELT in other ways (even if not actively involved for personal reasons)
Samina	2013	Working Committee Coordinator (2014–2017)	Sub-committee member	Continue as Academic sub-committee member

### 3.2.4 Caring and Sharing in SPELT

Zainab was appreciative of the support she received from SPELT leaders and fellow SPELTers: “Throughout my struggles [both personal and professional] I was treated very well. They make you feel at home”. Similarly, Ayesha explains that her continued motivation for being an active SPELTER comes from the opportunity it provides to work with experienced members of the team, their welcoming attitude and their willingness to mentor novice teachers/younger colleagues.

Moreover, serving SPELT gave Zainab a chance to get away from problems at home: “I felt this was important—maybe I neglected my children a little but the excitement, the sense of belonging, being part of a group gave me energy”. In the same vein Meher shared that she almost dropped the ICELT course due to personal problems, but the tutors and the Course Director encouraged and supported her, and as a result, she was able to get back on track. Recalling this experience, she shares, “this has taught me a lesson for life—never give into pressure, face the challenges and find ways to deal with them”. To this day, she practices this when faced with any management or other challenges in her job and/or life in general.

### 3.2.5 SPELT Provides a Platform to Spread Your Wings Endlessly

The participants were unanimous in their view that SPELT provides a platform for continuous ongoing professional development through attending workshops and courses and participating in teacher training projects for a variety of teachers from the very disadvantaged to the elite private schools. Also, there are opportunities for textbook writing, curriculum review etc. For example, Ayesha shared that recently she was invited to be part of the textbook writing team for classes VI–VIII for the Sindh Textbook Board, the body responsible for producing textbooks for government schools in the province of Sindh. As such, she got the opportunity to attend a training program for content writers conducted by the British Council. This gave her the confidence to write a story and 3 poems for these textbooks. Also, she did language enhancement projects for teachers of different school systems.

Samina shared that she has learned a lot of management skills through her work with SPELT. For example, “I wasn’t aware of what minutes [of a meeting] are. I learned all these basics: how to acknowledge and respond to emails, go through files”. She has gained confidence through her work with SPELT: “I can contribute, I can participate, be quick on my feet, [I’m now] not afraid of making mistakes... I’m not afraid at all of taking decisions—I do not panic... I can now spread out my wings”. However, she acknowledges that none of this would have been possible without support from her mentors in SPELT. She feels she can never stay away from SPELT now despite her many engagements. “I give full credit for where I am right now to SPELT”. She shared that after she rotates off the Working Committee in a few months’ time—“I won’t be so active maybe, but this is a part of me—I don’t think that ever at all [sic] I am not associated with SPELT”. Similarly, Meher’s role as conference coordinator, in particular, has given her an inner confidence in her

own skills and abilities: "I know what I am and what other people say doesn't bother me". This self-awareness along with honing of her leadership skills as a member of the SPELT working committee has helped her both in her personal life and career enhancement.

SPELT also provides opportunities for networking. For example, Zainab shared that "During my volunteer work with SPELT I got a lot of recognition and opportunity to meet with, for example, the GM of OUP".

### 3.2.6 Identifying and Nurturing Potential Leaders

It seems that SPELT leaders, particularly those who are also ICELT tutors, identify potential leaders from ICELT participants and then nurture them as prospective leaders. For example, Zakir shared that he was identified as a "good resource for SPELT" during the ICELT program. According to him, the tutors saw his commitment –"I had lots of questions during sessions". Hence, he was invited to join the SPELT Working Committee, "[and then] "I made my way towards success". He feels that he already had the skills for being a leader, but they were nurtured and polished during his work with SPELT. Also, affiliation with SPELT provided him with opportunities to apply all his learning and continue to improve himself professionally as a trainer through attending workshops. Zakir acknowledges the role of SPELT in his personal and professional development, "I owe a lot to SPELT".

According to Nobre (2011), recruiting and retention of volunteers for an organization needs to be systematized with special attention being paid to some 'extrinsic' factors such as a sense of achievement, acknowledgment, recognition, rewards, belonging to a good team, and personal/professional development (Szesztay, 2006 as cited in Nobre, 2011, p. 32). These, in addition to intrinsic reasons for serving the organization, provide the benefit of 'having your cake and eating it too' (Underhill, 2006 as cited in Nobre, 2011, p. 32). Nobre suggests that the extrinsic rewards might include systematic and planned opportunities for the volunteers to develop a range of skills through engaging with the TAs work such as financing and marketing. The TAs may also consider issuing certificates for volunteers' work in different areas for their career enhancement. Additionally, the TA might provide scholarships and funds for them to undertake courses in areas of identified needs. TAs can also provide networking opportunities to its volunteers that may not be possible in more traditional contexts. Finally, "an efficient volunteer will have excellent professional exposure (national and international exposure) which might work as a springboard for several other challenges and new professional perspectives" (Nobre, 2011, p. 33). It seems that SPELT provides its volunteers with opportunities for personal/professional growth and networking. At present funds are not provided for the volunteers to attend workshops and courses to develop other required skills such as financial management. However, the 'reciprocal relationship' identified by Gnawali (2016, p. 177) is evident in ICELT graduates long-term association with SPELT as current or past leaders. On one hand, they serve the organization in various capacities including organizing events and activities such as teacher development workshops

and the annual conference; on the other, they develop the required teacher educator, management and other skills ‘on-the-job’. In this regard, the mentoring role played by senior members of SPELT, and their constant encouragement and confidence in the participants’ capacity to undertake SPELT-related projects have played a key role in participants’ long-term affiliation and active volunteering for SPELT.

It is noteworthy that the majority of SPELT members are women. It has been observed that, in Pakistan, women are expected to fulfill their household responsibilities as mother and wife first. Also, volunteer work by women is frowned upon by family and friends, as this is a non-income generating activity. In this scenario, SPELT is perceived as providing a support network to its female volunteer members and leaders (6 out of 7 current SPELT coordinators are women). The space for ‘caring and sharing’ provided by SPELT seems to give the members a sense of belonging and identity leading to their personal and professional well-being (Mendes et al., 2016).

All the study participants have had an active involvement as volunteers with SPELT since completing their ICELT program.<sup>2</sup> The ICELT graduates’ initial involvement with SPELT can be explained by their respect and admiration for their course tutors who, according to one participant, provided them the support that they had never received from their teachers before. Samina’s comment sums up the participants’ views well: “Their passion for teaching and professionalism left a deep mark on me—they reminded me of my mother who is also an educationist”. Additionally, the open and welcoming attitude of the SPELT leaders and particularly, their mentoring role, seems to have played a key role in the participants’ motivation to offer their services for the organization. However, their long-term association as volunteers can be explained by their reciprocal relationship (Gnawali, 2016) with the organization: it provides them a ‘safe haven’—a professional and social network for discussing personal and professional matters. Thus, while on the one hand they serve the organization, on the other, it serves them by providing them with rich opportunities for networking, and continuous professional and personal development facilitated by peers and mentors in a conducive environment. This in turn, gives them recognition as ELT professionals both at home and abroad.

## 4 Conclusion

Several opportunities for teachers’ professional development were initiated by SPELT as a result of the felt need of its members. The focused goals were capacity building and the improvement of standards of English in Pakistan. Some positive outcomes of these initiatives, particularly the one-year long training programs, include the participants’ professional and personal growth, career enhancement, and volunteer work in various leadership roles in SPELT. The chapter presents the trajectory

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<sup>2</sup>Some of them have been dormant for a while due to personal reasons. However, they have kept themselves associated with SPELT through their network of SPELT friends and associates.

of 6 participants—all of them are serving either in the current working committee or being groomed to take up key leadership positions in the organization through their work in various sub-committees. An examination of the motivation and experience of the participants reveals that COTE/ICELT was a life changing experience for them. The participants' career trajectories and particularly the expansion of their roles from a teacher to teacher educator, curriculum reviewer, and textbook writer are testimonies of the impact of SPELT's long-term teacher training programs on their personal and professional lives. All of them were encouraged by the SPELT leaders and provided with opportunities to engage with the organization in different capacities, during or on completion of their course. As a result, they felt both motivated and confident to participate more actively in managing the TA as leaders. This helped them to continue their personal and professional development on the SPELT platform. All this while, they mutually sustain and support each other as SPELTers, which may be the secret of SPELT's survival despite all odds.

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