The Impact of Remedial Training on EFL Teachers' Interest, Proficiency and Classroom Performance: *the Case of School in Sidama Zone, Ethiopia*

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to assess the interest, performances and activities of EFL teachers and students of Sidama Zone schools after having additional training before a year. 40 EFL teachers (20 from primary and 20 from secondary), 10 students and 10 school principals (5 from each level) were selected using simple random sampling techniques from the five districts of the area. Three tools: questionnaire, interview and observation were used to gather data. The findings of the study disclosed that there was significant progress in the interest of the teachers to teach and students to learn English in comparison to the not trained EFL teachers. But, there was no change on the performance of the learners and the teachers which might be associated to the limited period since the training. Furthermore, trained EFL teachers were performing special activities to improve the learners' ability of English as compared to the not trained ones who were engaged in the regular activities. The findings also disclosed that there is unwise use and scarcity of resources to support the English language improvement activities. Thus, the findings need collaborative effort to bring further improvements in the learners' ability of English language as it is the medium of instruction second cycle primary and secondary level.

 Key Words: Interest, Proficiency, EFL training, remedial training, Ethiopian schools

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1. Introduction

Modern education was introduced to Ethiopia nearly a century ago. However, the education and training offered during these long years had limited positive impact on the lives of the people and national development. Ethiopia has recently experienced massive improvement in access to education. Primary school enrolment has increased five-fold since 1994, and there are now more than 14 million children in school compared to five million in 2000. Secondary school enrolment has also shown a modest improvement, with a 3.2% increase in the net enrolment rate between 2005/06 and 2009/10. These are extraordinary achievements in terms of increasing enrolment, but education quality still remains a daunting challenge.

One of the issues which is related to the quality of education is the quality of the language of instruction. Education presumes exchange of ideas between teachers, students, and members of the school community. Although there are individuals who can think in a second language most people think in the language of their mother tongue. Thus, children have to be taught in their own mother tongue if the learning and teaching process is to be interactive and efficient.

It is also proper to learn one or two foreign languages that are spoken widely in international communication and relations. The English language is important not only for international relations, but because it is also the medium of instruction from secondary school on. For this reason, it is given as a subject from Grade 1 upwards. The reason why English is taught as a subject from the first grade is because the language is not spoken at home and students' only encounter with the language is in school. Thus, early familiarity with English helps students when they advance to secondary school where the medium of instruction is English.

2. Statement of the Problem

English language is getting due attention in Ethiopia as it is the medium of instruction in the upper level of education. That means, though the medium of instruction primary schools is mother tongue, English language is being taught seriously as the learners need it when they reach to advanced levels like secondary (grade 9 to 12) or second cycle primary (grade 5 to 8) levels.

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Beginning from grade 9, the medium of instruction is English language in every schools Ethiopia.

However, research in English language proficiency has disclosed that the learners' performance can be labeled as poor. Especially, when they reach to the secondary level, as they are expected to access and deliver every information/ knowledge in English, their challenge becomes more serious. As a result, their English language competence has a decisive role in determining their academic success.

Similarly, studies have revealed that the factors that are associated with learners' problem relate to their English language ability. The teaching of English as a subject in the first cycle of primary is seriously under -resourced. Likewise, the teaching of English as a subject and its use as a medium of instruction during the second cycle of primary is also seriously under-resourced. In both instances, teacher under-preparedness is a major challenge. (Kathleen Heugh, et.al, 2006). Other studies also reflect on the wrong perception of the learners and teachers towards the language as a significant factor which impede the success of the teaching and learning of English language.

Since the schools in HU technology village experience the same problem, an intervention capacity building training was delivered EFL teachers before a year. Thus, the study will assess the prevalence of the problems and the impact of the training on the overall performances of the teachers.

3. Objectives of the study
3.1 General Objectives
The general objective of the study was to assess the status of English language instruction in Sidama Zone schools.

3.2 Specific Objectives
The Specific objectives were:

- To evaluate the perception of English teachers towards their and their students interest and ability in English language,
- To assess the perception of English teachers towards their knowledge of methods to teach English language
- To identify activities which are being done to improve the learners' English language ability, and
- To assess the impact of English language improvement training on the teachers' performance.

4. Significance of the Study

The study has a number of beneficiaries. First, the student and the EFL teachers are immediate beneficiaries. Since the results of the study suggest possible actions to be taken in order to improve the teaching and learning of English language in the area, EFL teachers will pick up the suggestion and implement them in their classroom, thereby their learners will benefit by getting their English language skills improved. The outcome of the study will help other subject teachers as they are also suffering from their learners' poor ability of English language which hampers their success in the teaching and learning process.

5. Review of Related Literature

In Ethiopia, English language plays a significant role in the social, economic and political development of the nation as it is a tool through which intermediate and advanced level education is being imparted. Although most of the government organizations use major languages such as Afan Oromo, Amharic and Tigrigna, depending on the particular region, English is still viewed by many as essential for progress in one's life (Dereje, 2012).

Anecdotal evidences show that with the recent boom of universities and then their graduates, proficiency in English has emerged as a critical factor in graduate unemployment. All of international organizations, some of the non-government organizations and most of the well-paying governmental organizations such as Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Telecommunications, Commercial Banks of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Insurance Corporations demand candidates good

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mastery of English. These imply the significant role the English language plays in Ethiopia both to its economic development and to individual students' future educational and life careers. These could imply that fluency in English has become an agent of social differentiation which has, in turn, led to increase the demand for quality primary English Education.

In countries where English is necessary for access to secondary education, it appears vital for governments to ensure that primary English is taught effectively to provide equal chances to all citizens (Sure and Ogechi, 2009). Confirming the significant role FLs render to different countries, Hunt et al (2005) (citing Conius, 1630), note that a nation's fate will depend, in the end, on the quality of the education its children get in language. The attainment of the quality of education and Ethiopia's anticipated growth can then be determined by the quality of EFL delivery its primary school children are exposed to which again depend on the conditions entailed in the primary EFL education policies.

Policies that foster success of the program, therefore, mainly depends on the appropriacy and adequacy of the curriculum and teaching material, teachers' expertise and teachers training and resources employed as these components are crucially associated with primary school children (Cameron, 2003; Driscoll, 2005). Similarly, different advocates of the teaching of foreign languages, especially at primary levels (for example, Stern, 1969; Nikolove and Djigovic, 2006) suggest that the specifications of the organizations and teaching of primary English with regard to beginning age, time allocations, approach and methods, teacher training and materials development to be researched, documented and debated as such results and documents are found to be crucial to refine and/or formulate policies that could positively dictate the quality of classroom situation.

6. Methods and Materials

6.1 Research Design

The research design was a survey which was intended to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through various data gathering instruments.

6.2 Setting and Population

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The research was conducted in the schools which are in Hawassa University Technology Village catchment area. The study included both primary and secondary schools in Dale, Hula, Hawassa Zuria, Boricha and Wondogent Woredas/ districts of Sidama Zone, in SNNPRG. Specifically, English language teachers, school principals and students of both levels were included in the study.

6.3 Sampling Techniques

Different sampling techniques were employed from selecting the setting to the participants. Accordingly, five Woredas/ districts were selected purposively from Sidama Zone on the basis of their proximity to the researcher, and the research centers of the university. One primary and one secondary school were selected from each Woreda/ district. The 40 EFL teachers (20 from primary and 20 from secondary) and 10 school principals (5 from each level) were selected using simple random sampling techniques. 10 students were also selected randomly. To include EFL teachers who received special training, purposive sampling technique was also employed.

6.4 Instruments of Data gathering

Basically, three data gathering instruments were used in the study. These were questionnaire, interview and observations. The questionnaire was administered to both group EFL teachers (who received and not received special training). In addition, questionnaire was administered to the school principals. The interview was administered to the students in the schools. The research conducted observation on school ELIC rooms and collected data through taking notes and pictures.

6.5 Data Analysis Procedures

The data which was gathered through different tools from the subjects was analyzed in two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data was contains numbers and percentile of the respondents' reaction in various themes. The numbers and percentiles were displayed in bar graphs for clarity. On the other hand, qualitative data which was collected through observation and interview was discussed thematically in different major topics which

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were designed considering the objectives of the study. Furthermore, pictures were included in the analysis to describe the situations precisely.

7. Results and Discussions

This section presents the details of discussion with the major findings. The presentation employs two approaches. First, both qualitative and quantitative data is organized thematically and discussed in texts. In addition, graphs and tables are presented for further intelligibility.

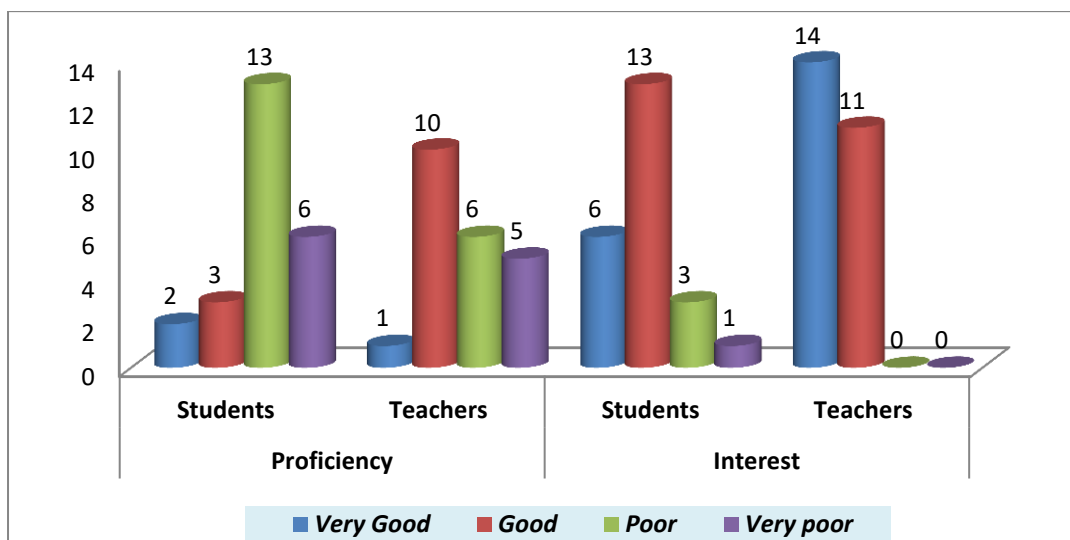## 7.1 Views of Students' and Teachers' English language towards their Proficiency and Interest

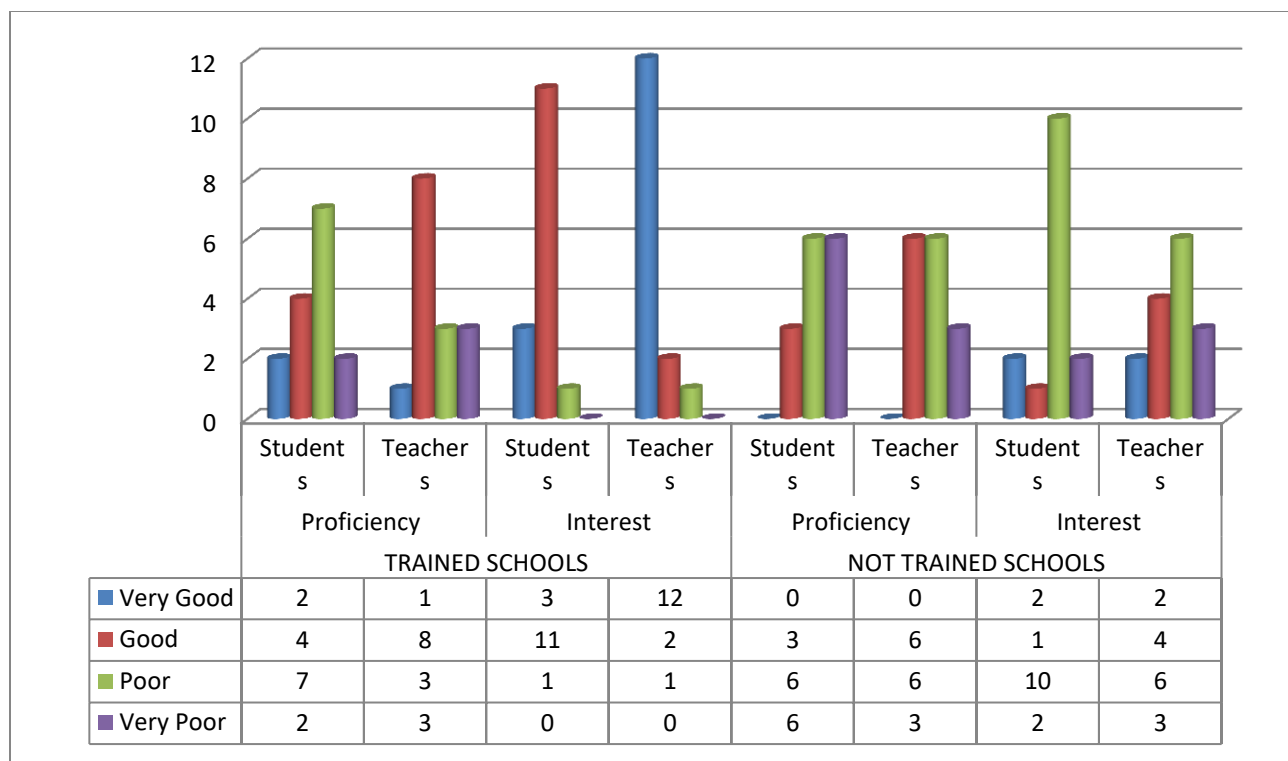*Fig 1: Proficiency and Interest of Teachers and Learners*

The above figure demonstrates views of the level of proficiency and interest of students and EFL teachers to English language. Accordingly, the graph indicates that the students' proficiency was almost 'poor'; whereas the teachers' performance is rated as 'good'. On the other hand, the most of students' interest to learn English was 'good', and the teachers' interest ranges from 'very good to 'good'. This shows that there is a mismatch between interest and proficiency/ ability, especially on students, which calls for further intervention.

7.2 Comaparison Between Trained and Not Trained EFL Teachers

| | TRAINED SCHOOLS | | | | NOT TRAINED SCHOOLS | | | |
| | Proficiency | | Interest | | Proficiency | | Interest | |
	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers
Very Good	2	1	3	12	0	0	2	2
Good	4	8	11	2	3	6	1	4
Poor	7	3	1	1	6	6	10	6
Very Poor	2	3	0	0	6	3	2	3

Fig 2: Comaparison Between Trained and Not Trained EFL Teachers

Fig 2 compares the interest and proficiency of trained and not trained schools teachers. It shows that there is insignificant difference in proficiency between the trained and not trained schools teachers and students. However, the students and the teachers' interest showed a clear difference which the trained schools tended to positive while the non- trained ones approached to the opposite. This implies that the training created interest in EFL teachers which they shared it for their learners so that they will also be in the same status. This negligible change in their perception towards their proficiency might be associated to the limited time since the training.

7.3 Reasons for Students' Poor Proficiency in English language

Both the teachers and the learners were asked about the reason behind their poor proficiency in English language. Their reasons are categorized as teacher-related, student related and environmental factors. Reasons which are related to the students are poor background, low interest to learn and lack self confidence. And, teacher related cause of learners poor

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performance in English are teaching English in Amharic and in local languages, giving attention to grammar, not to other skills, teacher centered method (lecture), poor proficiency of teachers' in English language and limited knowledge of teachers on teaching methods. The last category is environment related factors which include absence outside school environment to practice the language (limited access to use even in a class) and low administrative support in availing resources which important to improve the students English language competence.

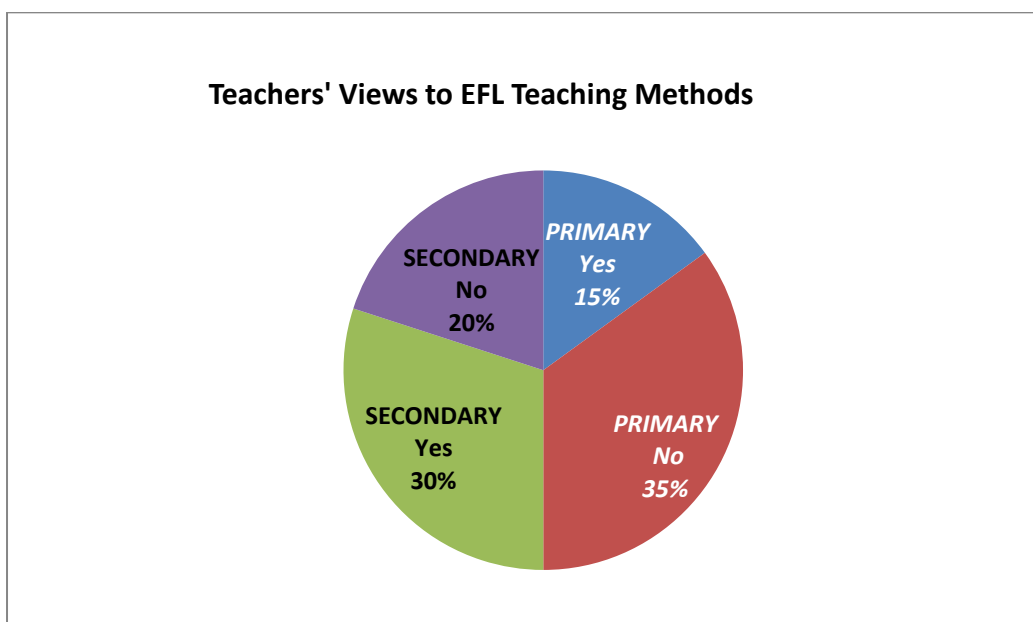**7.4 Views towards their Knowledge of English language Teaching Methods**

Fig 3: EFL teachers' Views towards their Knowledge of Teaching Methods

The EFL teachers asked about their knowledge of language teaching methods. The above pi chart illustrates the reposes of the two (primary and secondary) level EFL teachers. In the secondary level from 50% teachers 30% of them confirmed that they know the methods, however, 20% revealed that they have gaps. The problem is more serious when it comes to the primary level where only 15% of 50% confirmed they are familiar with the methods, but 35% of them disclosed that they didn't know the methods. This implies that the primary school EFL

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teachers need intensive training in EFL teaching methods that the secondary school EFL teachers in the area.

7.5 Teachers Activities to improve Learners' Performance in English language

TEL teachers were asked about the activities which they often carryout to improve the learners' English language competence. Most of the teachers commonly listed activities such as grouping learners and giving tutorial accordingly, giving make up classes, improving students' participation and designing dialogues in classrooms. However, EFL teachers who received training listed activities like celebrating English day weekly, encouraging learners to present model dialogues on stages (flag ceremony), designing and motivating learners to present programs in school mini medias through English and arranging debates and role plays in question and answer contest in schools. This indicates that those who were trained specially are attempting to bring changes in the teaching of English language.

7.6 Impacts of the Previous Training on the Teaching and Learning of English

The following table clearly illustrates the impact on the previous training on some of the basic indicators. These are confirmed by school principals and supervisors.

No.	Indicators	Impacts
1	*Attitude and Perception to the language*	• Improvements are being perceived: • Developing confidence (after orientation and awareness creation work) • Claiming the administration to provide resources to English language improvement • Feel interested to learn and participate in ELC
2	*Language Teaching Methodology*	• Teaching skills like listening and speaking (previously skipped) • Using students' arrangement (1*5) to practice EFL learning activities. • Setting interactive environment in a classroom

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3	*Providing Additional Skill based Exercises*	• Suggesting students to listen other channels like BBC, etc. • Extending further practice (3 words per day with their meanings
4	*Organizing Learners*	• Setting mixed ability group in a classroom.

7.7 Establishing English Language Improvement Centers (ELCs) in Schools

7.7.1 Establishment of the Club

One of the strategies set to improve the quality of English language proficiency in schools is organizing English language improvement centers (ELICs) in the schools. The schools attempted to establish the centers. Specifically, according to the data from the observation, the establishment is not uniform across the schools. That means the secondary schools are better in establishing the centers than that of the primary schools. In some schools, the centers are not established totally, whereas as in some others, the centers are not only inappropriate for such activities but also dangerous for the health of the students as there are some corrosive chemicals.

7.7.2 Major activities of the Club

The major objective of the centers is providing different real life practical activities to students in English language. And, EFL teachers are required to encourage the students to practice the four skills in various settings. Accordingly, the clubs have 25 to 60 members depending on the number of students in the schools. They often carry out the following activities:

- Select activities from the students' text books and practice freely in the room;
- EFL teachers design role plays on the context of the community and students play in English language representing various characters;
- Develop news, and rehearse in ELC rooms in front of the group members and then present in school mini-medias;
- Perform dialogues and conversations on daily issues groups/ in pairs; EFL teachers sometimes monitor and encourage with feedbacks
- Prepare in advance and make debates in ELC rooms on selected title.

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- Use flag ceremony to demonstrate sample dialogues and role plays.

7.7.3 Resources of the Club

As the participants in the club are doing a number of activities to improve their English language skills, they need various resources which range from paper and pen to audio visual materials. But, as far as the researcher's observation is concerned, in most of the schools, the members of the clubs are carrying out activities with no audio visual resources that support their performance. In addition, the ELIC rooms were observed as almost having only student chairs. The coordinators, EFL teachers, told to the researcher that the activities are designed by them, and students practice them orally following the instructions from the EFL teachers.

On the other hand, some schools were not using available resources wisely. As a result, the resources were being used for unintended purposes, and the students didn't get opportunities to exploit the resources to improve their English language ability. For example, the school was complaining about the scarcity of resources, whereas, in the same school, a radio cassette player was with the school guard attending various radio programs for himself.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

The main objective of the study was to assess the trend of teaching and learning of English language in Hawassa University technology village schools. The study also focused on comparing the schools whose EFL teachers received special training, and those which didn't get the training. Specifically, the major findings are concluded in the light of the specific objectives: to evaluate the perception of English teachers towards their and their students interest and ability of English language, to assess the perception of English teachers towards their knowledge of methods to teach English language, to identify activities which are being done to improve the learners' English language ability, and to assess the impact of English language improvement training on the teachers' performances.

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In assessing the perception towards the performance and interest of the learners and EFL teachers, most of the learners' performance is low, whereas the EFL teachers' is average/ good. Also, the learners' interest is average, and the teachers' is very good. On the other hand, when we compare the same issue between specially trained EFL teachers and no-trained ones, there is a clear difference in their interest which favors the trained ones. But, the difference in proficiency is not as such considerable.

The other basic issue is related to the EFL teachers' knowledge of various English language teaching methods. The assessment was carried out based on the level they are teaching. Accordingly, the data confirmed that most of the primary school EFL teachers have a knowledge gap of English language teaching methods. In addition, though the number is few, secondary school teachers have also limitations in the area. As a whole, the problem is more serious in a primary level in comparison to the secondary level.

The EFL teachers were engaged in activities such as   grouping learners and giving tutorial accordingly, giving make up classes, improving students' participation and designing dialogues in classrooms as a major way of improving the learners' English language skills. But, especially trained EFL teachers were conducting activities like celebrating English day weekly, encouraging learners to present model dialogues on stages (flag ceremony), designing and motivating learners to present programs in school mini medias through English and arranging debates and role plays in question and answer contest in schools in addition to the common ones which were performed by non-trained ones. This shows that the trained EFL teachers were handling classes and English language improvement programs differently.

Finally, the establishment and activities of ELIC were assessed. All schools have the center/ club with 25 to 60 members. The assessment clearly disclosed that clubs were contributing to the improvement of English language as they were places where many of the special activities, like dialogues on flag ceremony, English Day and debates are being carried out. However, though there is unwise use of resources, the centers are experiencing serious scarcity. In addition, considerable number of the centers is in dangerous places, like laboratories.

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8.2 Recommendations

Based on the major findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The special training delivered to EFL teachers has brought a change in their interest to teach English language; at the same time, the teachers shared their interest to their student. Therefore, as the training has a positive impact, it should be offered to more EFL teachers with varieties of topics to bring changes on the English language proficiency of the teachers as well as the students.

- School principals should encourage EFL teachers who participate in special activities (like English Day) of promoting learners' ability of English language.

- The primary school EFL teachers need more awareness about English language teaching methods. Therefore, appropriate training should be designed considering the level they are teaching.

- The schools have resource limitations to conduct practical sessions of language learning. Thus, the school administrators, governmental and non-governmental organizations should work together to alleviate resource scarcity in the schools. Equally, school administrators should encourage wise use of the available resources.

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