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# Resources for English Language Training a Managerial Headache

By  
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## **Purpose of Article**

The purpose of this article is to give members of the security assistance training community (SATC), especially security assistance officers (SAOS), an insight into one of most thorny aspects of managing in-country English language training programs (ELTPs); to wit, allocation of resources for English language training (ELT).

## **Importance of English Language Training**

In general, the SATC and international military students (IMs) view ELT from different perspectives. The SATC generally views IM English language proficiency (ELP) as an entrance requirement for follow-on training (FOT) in CONUS technical or PME schools. That is, they view ELP as a means to an end. In contrast, IMs generally view FOT as a means to an end, the enhancement of their ELP. While IMs certainly value attendance at FOT as professionally rewarding in its own right, the biggest prize is the opportunity to improve their ELP. For some IMs this opportunity is the salvation of their military careers. More and more, ELP is the ticket to interesting assignments and promotions. ELP is the difference between being a spectator or a participant. English is the lingua franca, the language of technology, commerce and military matters. It is the language of globalization.

Some countries lack a sufficient number of personnel with a high level of ELP. They have to repeatedly call on the same individuals when ELP is required. Since assignments requiring ELP are generally plumb assignments, the favored position of this "elite" cadre awakens envy and rancor in the heart of their colleagues. Ministries of Defense (MoDs) around the world are striving to close the ELP deficit by establishing indigenous capability to train military and civilian personnel to high levels of ESP.

Countries pay a high price to achieve this capability. Initially, the establishment of an ELTP requires a significant capital investment. Expenditures for the physical plant, training material publications, equipment, and personnel can be a significant drain on an MoD training budget. Frequently, an MoD must reduce its funding of other programs to obtain ELTP funding. Because of fiscal constraints, some MoDs try ELT on the cheap, usually with less than satisfactory results. Providing ELT to large numbers of personnel also takes a significant bite out of the MoD personnel resources. While officers are in ELT, they are not minding the store. One captain from a Central European country told me that, thanks to the large number of officers enrolled in ELT, he gained valuable experience. He told me that as an 01, for a period of several months, he was doing an 04's job and as an 02 he served for a month in an 05's job.

## **Background**

Ministries of Defense, through SAOs, have besieged the Defense Language Institute English Language Center (DLIELC), with requests for assistance in establishing or improving ELTPs. Establishing and managing large scale ELTPs are challenging endeavors. In the Summer 2002 [Volume 24 No. 4 Summer 2002, pp 125-130.] issue of this *Journal*, I cited some of the most common deficiencies of indigenous ELTPs. Among the deficiencies cited was the inappropriate allocation of resources for ELT. This is an issue that deserves a great deal more attention than it received in that article because misallocating resources sabotages the achievement of ELTP goals. It stealthily

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undermines the best efforts to produce a sufficient number of personnel with high ELP levels. To an uninformed observer an ELTP can have all the hallmarks of success: good training materials, excellent instructors, high standards, strong management etc. Yet, in terms of meeting the MoD ELP goals, it may be a failure because it doesn't produce a sufficient number of graduates with the required ELP proficiency levels.

In this article I hope to give the reader an insight into the dilemma faced by MoD planners confronted with two powerful forces, each pulling in the opposite direction. Pulling in one direction (egalitarian) is the demand by the entire officer corps for ELT and pulling in the other (elitist) is the urgent need to train and maintain a relatively small cadre of officers with a high level of ELP. This cadre is essential for the country to participate in international endeavors. If a country does not have adequate resources to cater to the egalitarian as well as elitist needs, the MoD has to make some hard choices. I call it ELT triage.

### **Stealthy Problem**

During my DLI career, I conducted many evaluations of in-country ELTPs. It was not until the early 1990s that I came to the realization that the misallocation of resources was one of the major reasons for the failure of countries to produce a sufficient number of personnel with high levels of ELP. It suddenly dawned on me that I had on several occasions given high marks to ELTPs in countries that failed to meet their ELP output goals. My approach was to visit several intensive and non-intensive ELT sites and rate the quality of their instruction, curriculum, testing and training management. It was becoming increasingly evident to me that, at times, while captivated by the beauty of individual trees, I failed to notice the withering of the forest. I had proclaimed the excellence of ELTPs which were not producing the required number of officers with a high level of ELP. In a sense, the sum of the parts did not add up the whole. I had looked at process instead of product; input, instead of output. In an attempt to comprehend the nature of the problem, I remember writing this equation:

$$\text{EI} + \text{LOS} = \text{ELPS}$$

**(Excellence of Instruction + Lots of Students = a Surplus of students with a high level of ELP)**

The problem was that all too often the "S" in ELPS stood for "shortage", not "surplus". I resolved to find out what accounted for this incongruity. How could an excellent ELTP awash in students fail to meet MoD ELP goals? To find the equation buster, I went back and waded through a number of ELTP evaluation reports done by myself and others. The equation buster was so obvious that I blushed for not having recognized it previously. Simply put, countries were misallocating resources for ELT, reducing their ability to produce a sufficient number of officers with a high level of ELP. Excellence of instruction did not fully compensate for the misuse of resources. In effect, these countries were shooting themselves in the foot and were complaining that their foot hurt. Enter the DLI expert (me) who was unwittingly complicit by pronouncing the foot to be in great shape.

### **Questions for Allocating Resources**

To effect a rational allocation of resources, a MoD must have a clear vision of its expectations. The answers to the following questions are essential to the establishment of MoD ELP expectations:

- *What are the MOD English language proficiency requirements?*
  - *Do all officers require a high level of ELP?*
  - *If not, how many do?*
  - *By what dates?*
- *How many weeks of ELT should they receive?*
- *What should be the fate of officers who fail in ELT?*

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- *What should be done to ensure that officers retain their level of ELP after ELT?*
  - *What should the balance be between non-intensive and intensive ELT?*
  - *How is a balance to be achieved between ELT for officers who require high level of ELP and the rest of the officer corps that so ardently desires ELT?*

### **Resources Required to Meet Expectations**

- Does the MoD have sufficient instructors, classrooms and training materials to meet expectations?
  - If not, can the MoD acquire the additional resources in time to meet expectations?
  - If resources are insufficient, how will the MoD lower expectations in accordance with available resources?

There are no textbook answers that fit every circumstance, but there are basic considerations that MoDs should take into account in the decision making process. While there is no single right answer, there are right and wrong answers for each country. Choosing the wrong answers can be very detrimental to MoD ELTP output.

### **Resource Misallocation Examples**

Making the right choices about resource allocation is vital because countries have limited resources and can't afford to squander them. Virtually all military officers and government officials aspire to learn English. Yet, to meet immediate international commitments, most countries require a relatively small percentage of their personnel to have a high level of ELP. These personnel constitute a critical mass without which the country is incapable of functioning in the international arena. Typically, when a country lacks the capability to produce this critical mass, DLIELC is asked to conduct a survey. Based on my experience, I suggest that one of the primary goals of a survey should be to carefully scrutinize the allocation of ELTP resources. Misallocation of resources is often a major impediment to the efficiency and effectiveness of an ELTP. By misallocation, I do not mean to imply wrongdoing. I simply mean that the allocation of resources is not compatible with ELTP goals. Below are examples of the common types of resource mismanagement.

The country has not determined its actual requirements for personnel with a high level of ELP. The effectiveness and efficiency of an ELTP can be evaluated only in terms of its ability to meet ELP requirements. Yet, often you will find that host country officials, in their haste to fill the ELT void, establish an ELTP without identifying actual requirements. If you ask host-country officials what their requirements are, they often say that they need people who speak English. If you ask how many, by when, at what ELP level, for what purpose, you will often find out that your hosts have not really developed a coherent plan. Thus, your first task will be to sit down with your hosts, identify ELP requirements, and, by the time you depart from the country, complete a plan to meet these requirements. Without a clear statement of ELP requirements, neither host-country officials nor you can evaluate the allocation of resources.

The country has opted to provide too little ELT to too many personnel. Most military officers and government officials crave ELT because a high ELP level offers many career opportunities not otherwise available. English is the world's lingua franca and, for this reason, virtually all military officers and government officials aspire to achieve fluency. Fluency is a ticket to a bright future. The universal demand generated by the appetite for ELT can sometimes be incompatible with the need for producing a small cadre of personnel with a high ELP level. Inevitably, there is a lot of political pressure to accommodate the aspirations of everyone. There is nothing inherently wrong with this egalitarian approach provided that the country has the resources to offer ELT to all comers and still

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meet its requirements for a critical mass of personnel with a high ELP level. The problem is that most countries do not have the resources to provide ELT to everyone and simultaneously produce the required critical mass of personnel with a high ELP level. Often, the result of the egalitarian approach is that too little ELT is provided to too many people. This produces a glut of people whose low ELP is of little utilitarian value to the country.

In the mathematics of ELP, ten people with OPI ratings of 1/1 do not equal one with a 2/2.

**ELP math: 10(1) = 1**

If a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) position requires an incumbent with an OPI rating of 3/3, the country can not assign three officers with a 1/1. One officer with a rating of 3/3 is useful; 3 with a rating of 1/1 are useless.

**ELTP math: 3(1) = 1**

The MoDs sometimes have to say “no” to officers clamoring for immediate entry into ELT so resources can be allocated to meet urgent ELP training requirements. You should empathize with the MoD dilemma. It finds itself between a rock and a hard place. Aside from meeting its ELP requirements, host country officials have to keep in mind that depriving personnel of the opportunity to study English will devastate morale. Yet, training five thousand officers to an ELP level sufficient to point at the word soup on a menu and say “Me want soup” is of little benefit to the country, especially if it soaked up the resources necessary to train 300 officers to a level of ELP sufficient to negotiate treaties or serve as staff officers on joint exercises with other nations. In some military establishments, depriving officers of the opportunity achieve a high level of ELP is equivalent to putting their careers on death row

The country has established a network of under-funded non-intensive ELTPs. The advantage of establishing many non-intensive ELTP sites is that they can accommodate a large number of personnel. The drawback is that they typically produce a large number of personnel who are not really functional in English. It is axiomatic that training an individual to a level of non-functionality is wasteful, unless the initial ELT is followed by additional ELT to raise the individual’s ELP to a level of functionality. The motto should be, “Do not give a little unless you are going to give a lot.” All the “littles” you give to the many may sap the resources necessary to give “a lot” to a few. Many countries habitually waste resources by using non-intensive ELTPs to train many individuals to a level of ELP that does nothing to benefit either the individual or his country. Each non-functional graduate of a non-intensive ELTP has absorbed precious resources that were, in effect, squandered. The key to the effective and efficient operation of non-intensive ELTPs is to use them as feeders to intensive ELTPs. You should be aware that one of the unintended consequences of prolonged study in a non-intensive ELTP is the erosion of student motivation. This erosion is due to the slow rate of ELP progress. Progress is the primary motivating factor in language study. Lack of progress can transmogrify the target language into a negative stimulus for the would-be learner. The learner can actually develop an aversion to the target language. One of the most powerful incentives that can be offered to students in non-intensive ELTPs is the opportunity for study in an intensive ELTP provided that they achieve a certain score in the allotted period of time. If students are to sustain their motivation in non-intensive ELTPs, they must know that there is a pot of gold at end of the rainbow. You should make it clear to host county officials that by sowing non-intensive ELTPs all over the landscape, they may reap a bumper crop of stunted output. This is a very poor allocation of resources. Hammer home that non-intensive ELTPs should be utilized to feed intensive ELTPs.

The country has established an intensive ELTP, but limits attendance by any individual to just a few months. This approach is generally implemented for two reasons. The primary reason is to accommodate the large number of people who are clamoring to enter ELT. Because resources do not permit providing a lengthy period of intensive ELT to many people, attendance is limited to a relatively short duration. While this approach may be politically savvy, it has the obvious drawback of

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producing a lot of people with an ELP level that is of little or no utility to the country. The secondary reason for truncated intensive ELT is to cater to the wishes of unit commanders, who are reluctant to release personnel for ELT. With respect to the latter problem, it is easy to make the standard, pro forma recommendation that unit commanders renounce their parochial interests and joyfully release their personnel for ELT. This universal problem is rooted in the on-going competition for resources endemic to defense establishments around the world. Recommendations probably are not going to solve it. However, your recommendations can lead to a solution to the primary problem. You can help host-country officials understand that arbitrarily limiting the duration of intensive ELT is detrimental to their national interests. It behooves you to point out to these officials that the duration of ELT should be a function, not of arbitrary time limitations, but of actual ELP requirements. If there is a requirement for three personnel with an ECL of eighty, it is of no benefit to train five personnel to an ECL of sixty. If a country is engaging in this practice, you have to explain how inefficient it is and endeavor to elicit a big “Whoops” from host-country officials. If all you get is an “Ahem” try again until you get a “Whoops.”

The MoD sets high ELP standards for all officers. This is becoming a trendy phenomenon. Whether it is wise or not, depends on the country’s needs, but I suspect, in many instances, it is a misguided policy, which is detrimental to the country’s enlightened self-interest. Intelligence is necessary, but not sufficient, for an adult to achieve a high level of proficiency in a foreign language. That is, not all intelligent people have the aptitude to achieve a high level of ELP in a foreign language. Thus, if the country enforces high ELP standards for all, many talented, intelligent officers will be forced to leave the military. Such standards tend to be compromised in order to retain effective officers. It probably makes no sense to toss a brilliant armor officer out of the army because his ELP is not up to snuff. Commanders will find a way to circumvent such standards.

The MoD fails to make attendance in ELT classes mandatory, permitting either individual students or their commanders to decide if they will attend class on a given day. In this environment, it is a common practice for commanders, who often are short of qualified staff, to assign tasks to ELT students. Often the accomplishment of these tasks requires the students to miss classes. Typically, these students fall so far behind their peers that they can’t catch up. They tend to drop out of ELT. This practice wastes instructor resources. I have met many such drop outs and they are often bitter and resentful that they could not take full advantage of their ELT. They find themselves unable to compete for plumb jobs because of their lack of ELP.

The country underutilizes its English language instructors, who teach very few hours per week. The rationale is that professors need ample time to prepare their lectures and conduct research. In some countries, this tradition sometimes carries over to ELTP instructors. Indeed, in these countries, there are even laws that limit the number of hours professors or instructors can teach. When you tell ELTP instructors in many countries that DLIELC instructors teach 30 hours per week, they are astonished. Many overseas instructors are not required to teach even half that number of hours. Thus, in countries that have scant resources, this crippling constraint on the use of the most important ELTP resource is imposed. Host-country ELTP managers may complain to you about a severe shortage of instructors even though their instructors teach no more than 10 hours per week. The complaint is incongruous to us. Your first instinct is to recommend the host-country instructors be required to teach as many hours as their DLIELC counterparts. Depending on local circumstances, this recommendation may be detrimental to the ELTP and to the well being of the instructors. In many countries, ELTP instructor pay is miserable and the instructors are compelled to work other jobs at other locations. In order to make ends meet, some of them wind up teaching more than 30 hours per week. Adding ELTP hours to the instructors’ schedule could force the instructors to choose between their ELTP positions and other jobs they hold. If you are going to recommend that host-country instructors teach more hours, you should also recommend that the instructors be paid a living wage. Be very circumspect about

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tinkering with people's livelihood. One of the immutable laws of making recommendations to foreign governments: Try not to come between a man and his next meal.

The country has not established an ELT maintenance program. After a country invests significant resources to train an individual to a high ELP level, it behooves the country to maximize its return on this investment. Either through the use of rewards or sanctions, the country should require those trained to a high ELP level to maintain this level. The country should periodically administer tests to ensure that personnel maintain their ELP levels. The trusty old American language course placement test is well suited for this purpose. Ideally, the host-country would motivate its personnel to maintain their ELP through positive incentives. Money, promotion eligibility, preferred assignments, and travel opportunities are incentives that make it worthwhile for personnel to invest the time and effort to maintain their ELP. In addition to incentives, when resources permit, the country should provide opportunity in the form of non-intensive ELP maintenance courses to facilitate ELP maintenance. The country might even provide additional incentives to personnel who significantly improve their ELP level. At any rate, the more personnel with a high ELP level, the more options the country has to meet ELP requirements. By establishing an ELP maintenance program, the country ensures that it has a relatively large pool of candidates from which to choose for assignments requiring ELP. When a country has only a small pool of candidates with ELP, it is often compelled to send an otherwise less than fully qualified or desirable individual to a course or assignment requiring ELP. It is not a rarity for a country to have to send a mediocre officer to a PME course because none of the more talented officers has the required ELP level. If soaring is a requirement for an assignment or a course quota, the country needs a pool of powerful eagles from which to choose candidates. Unfortunately, because of the ELP factor, some countries are at times compelled to send puny sparrows. The most successful maintenance program would combine sanctions, rewards and training.

### **Allocation of Resources for Instructor Training**

In my opinion, one of the most important benefits you can bring to an ELTP is to convince host-country officials and the SAO that money should be allocated to send instructors to DLIELC. Through attendance at a DLIELC instructor course, instructors can have the opportunity to:

- Recharge their batteries. There is high rate of burnout among ESL/EFL instructors. A periodic break from their daily routine reenergizes them;
- Exchange ideas, not only with DLIELC instructors, but with instructors from all over the world; and
- Become familiar with the ALC. Many international instructors are not familiar with the ALC and they may not be favorably impressed by their initial exposure.

Those who have an initial aversion to the ALC generally fall into one of two categories. In the first, are those whose university training prepared them to work more in the arena of ELE than in that of ELT. Given their academic backgrounds, these instructors tend to have an initial antipathy toward the ALC because of its pedestrian contents. Nowhere in the ALC are there excerpts from Shakespeare, Milton or Keats. In the second category, are the bona fide EFL/ESL instructors who tend to sneer at the ALC because it does not represent the approach that is the flavor of the month. Exposure to the ALC often overcomes the objections of those in both groups. Whether or not a country adopts the ALC is not just a rarified academic debate; there are very practical consequences. Based on my experience, I will state quite unabashedly that the odds of an MoD establishing a highly productive without the ALC are not very good. There are no materials comparable in efficacy to the ALC and countries that adopt the ALC system take the first step towards ELT self-sufficiency. Those countries that remain in the clutches of the academic skeptics suffer from indecision, vacillation, and inertia—hardly attributes conducive to ELT self-sufficiency. I personally have never seen an overseas ELTP that, in my opinion, would not benefit from adopting the ALC.

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- Develop fluency and gain confidence in their language skills, making them more apt to use English as the medium of instruction in their classrooms when they return. Their enhanced fluency also elevates their status in the eyes of their peers and superiors.

- Better interpret America and Americans to their students. Based on their DLIELC experiences, they can portray a version of Americans more accurate, and generally a lot more favorable, than the Hollywood and tabloid versions.

### **About the Author**

Mr. Molloy is a retired Department of Air Force Civilian. He spent almost 38 years at the Defense Language Institute English Language Center. During his tenure, he served as Chief of the General English Branch, Chief of the Evaluation Division, chief of Institutional Relations and Chief of the Programs Division. He spent some twenty years overseas as an English Language Training instructor, advisor, or manager. In addition, he did ELT consulting work on twenty countries and for several major corporations.