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06

Quality Issues of English Language Teaching in Distance Education Mode in Dual Mode State Universities of Maharashtra

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Abstract:

English language Teaching has always formed the crux of teaching in higher education particularly in rural parts of India. Till date, a good number of studies on ELT in school and colleges in India and Maharashtra have been undertaken but ELT through distance mode has remained an unexplored area of research. One of the major causes of dropouts in higher education has been their poor competence in English. It appears that this aspect has been neither paid attention nor addressed while framing the courses and Teaching English courses in distance mode also for the distant learners. The very objective of the paper is to study the academic aspect of English Language Teaching in the DE mode in State Universities in Maharashtra and to review the achievements of these universities in respect to ELT through distance mode. The present study, being unique, will provide a guideline study for all the state universities in India to develop and improve their functioning for distance learners.

Keywords: Distance Education, ELT, DEIs, ICT,

Introduction:

English is the language of political affairs, trade transactions and employment opportunities worldwide. Needless to say, mastery over English is passport to the world employment market. It is English that makes Indians thrive in the world. Therefore, in the next twenty years, India will be the largest English speaking single country in the world. Despite this significance attached to English in India, Indians approach towards it and its position remains unsettled even after seventy years of Indian independence. Today, quite often than not, one reads/hears slogans that to save mother (regional) languages, English must be banished away. On every literary meet, regional political/non---political organization meetings, the same outcries/ tunes are harped. It is their general complaint that English is given undue importance in India, whereas Chinese, Russian, German, and French are very much respected and are matter of pride in those countries. These show the immaturity of the speakers and betray their lack of knowledge. Such one sided judgments are found at every nook and corner in India. Before one has to arrive at some concrete judgment, one has to take into consideration the pros and cons of entry and stay of English in India.

a. Dawn of Indian Renaissance

When one looks at the benefits India reaped in the long term because of English, it appears that the introduction of English education in India a boon in guise of curse (temporary), as some moderate leaders of the times thought of the British power to be. It was education in English that brought India to the renaissance from the darkness of the feudal medieval ages. The visionary leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy insisted on English education that became instrumental for the emergence of Indian renaissance.

a. Rise of Indian Nationalism

A prominent leader of the British

parliament had said while opposing the idea of English education in India, "We have lost our colonies in America by imparting our education there, we need not do so in India too" (Mukherjee in Krishnaswamy, 14). These fears came true when Indians inspired by English education studied liberal arts, history and philosophy of Europe and learnt how the British had fought against their mighty rulers for freedom and realized the duplicity and hypocrisy of the British rulers in India. The rise of Indian Nationalism was the byproducts of English education. Indians started fighting against their English masters in English language for freedom and self-government that English education had acquainted them. To use Caliban's words from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "You taught me language and my profit on it is that I knew how to curse; the red plague rid you, for learning (teaching) me your language". English education opened doors of education to all irrespective of castes. English education made the caste barriers less rigid and united the people belonging of various castes against the British power.

b. Making of a Democratic Nation

English played an important role in making India a democratic country. Mahatma Gandhi's practice of non-violence reached to the world when it was translated in English. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru discovered India in English. The architect of the Constitution of India Dr B. R. Ambedkar could prepare the world's largest written constitution for India because some of best constitutions of the countries were available in English and he could have access to them. The Former Secretary of State of USA and Nobel winner, Henry Kissinger said, "We know Indian and Indian democracy only because Indians speak English". (India Today, 28 February 1985)

c. Cultural and Literary Identity

Today English is the tongue of India's expression. Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo introduced the principles of Hinduism to the world in English. Dr S. Radhakrishnan spoke on



Indian theosophy in English. The English translation of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali brought him the only Noble Prize for literature in 1913.

When one weighs the losses English caused to India against the benefits heaped upon India, the latter outdo the former. The most important of all, English serves India in the form of a unifying force. It is well said that only English (and cricket) binds India together. English has no longer remained language of the erstwhile White Masters; it has become very much Indians' because India has the largest number of English speakers. One has to dissociate English language from the English nationals. Indians must treat English as a means to an end of making India a super power, a comfortable place to live.

Therefore, Indians need to use English as a means to success. They need not be afraid of the western culture, as Indians have had a long experience of multicultural co-existence due to the Indian culture's heterogeneous and accommodative nature. And one more thing, Indians need not hate or discard their mother/regional tongue to master and use English. The famous dramatist Girish Karnad, during his interviews in Mumbai, had refuted the similar fear of diminishing the regional languages in the wake of the rise of various TV channels in Hindi. He had observed that all the leading TV groups started their services in every regional language of the country. Therefore, what Almedia says is true in case of English in India, "we (should) realize the urgent to give the rightful place to English in life. One's (India's) rightful place in the global village of today much depends on it". (5)

ELT in Distance Mode

In the given situation, English language teaching has acquired a never seen before significance today. The sprouting of English medium schools at the every corner of the Indian towns and villages speak of the same fact. The quality of ELT is matter of independent research.

Many incumbent and aspiring employees tend to take-recourse to English for better opportunities in distance mode of either state dual universities or Open University system. Realizing the significance of the ELT, with the financial assistance of UGC the researcher undertook a study of the ELT mechanism and practice in the distance mode in the state conventional universities (technically known as universities functioning in dual mode) in Maharashtra.

It was the researcher's hypothesis that ELT in the distance education in the state conventional universities has remained unheeded. Distance Education received a step motherly treatment in comparison to regular mode and therefore, to a large scale it seems to have remained as a neglected activity in state universities in Maharashtra.

The researcher has set following objectives of the present study.

1. To study the English Language Teaching in the DE mode in State Universities in Maharashtra
2. To study the academic aspect of the English Language Teaching in DE mode in State Universities in Maharashtra
3. To review the achievements of the State Universities in Maharashtra in the English Language Teaching of distance education
4. To see to what extent ICT is used for ELT in distance mode

To seek answers to these objectives, following questions were asked in the questionnaire prepared for the DE institutes of the state universities.

The questionnaire prepared is given below:
Quality of ELT in Distance Mode in State Conventional Universities

Sl. No.	QUESTION	Response	Statistical Analysis
1.	Quality of ELT in DE mode in State Universities in Maharashtra		
2.	Academic aspect of the English Language Teaching in DE mode in State Universities in Maharashtra		
3.	Review of the achievements of the State Universities in Maharashtra in the English Language Teaching of distance education		
4.	Extent to which ICT is used for ELT in distance mode		
5.	Other questions related to the study		



6	Whether teaching faculty appointed to ELT courses for academic support of the External Education programs. If yes, provide details	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
7	Whether there is separate unit for training (only when for External Education programs)	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
8	Whether the curriculum is different from that of regular mode courses	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
9	Whether study material is provided for ELT learners	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
10	Whether the evaluation programs are centralized	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
11	Whether the moderation of answer sheets made	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
12	Whether the counselors of ELT are given training If yes, duration of training	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
13	No. of students admitted in the ELT in the academic year 2017-18	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
14	Whether feedback mechanism is used for ELT students	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
15	Whether any placement mechanism established for DE students. If yes, furnish its nature, functioning and its output	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

For the study purpose, the researcher set all the state conventional universities in Maharashtra as its coverage and sought the data from the officers /key post holders of DE unit in state universities evolving a comprehensive and focused questionnaire.

The questionnaire prepared for this purpose consists of 15 questions addressing various key issues of DE in state conventional universities. The issues are institutional data, administrative setup, academic aspects, infrastructure, evaluation provisions, financial aspects, students' data, student support services and quality issues.

To the surprise of the researcher, he found that only 04 universities (University of Mumbai, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, Shivaji University, Kolhapur and SRTMU, Nanded) are functioning in its capacity as dual mode. The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire brought the following observations.

Observations after the Analysis:

1. No DE units in the state enjoy academic and financial autonomy. Not all the DE units have appointed a director of the cadre of Professor.

2. The distinction of DE learners is not maintained in terms of curriculum as there are no Boards of studies for DE courses and the course curriculum of Regular mode is offered for DE learners.

3. No university offers any special course

in ELT except in Shivaji University where a MA in Language Technology is offered

4. Only University of Mumbai and Shivaji University have appointed faculty to look after the academic matters of courses offered in English.

5. All the universities provide study material to the learners.

6. Only University of Mumbai and Shivaji University give training to the counselors of ELT but the records of duration of training is not available.

7. As far as the use of ICT (online learning, video lectures, online syllabus and online notice board) is concerned, the university of Mumbai makes the maximum use, second is followed by Shivaji University and others are confined to only online syllabus and notification.

Recommendations for ELT

1. These universities functioning in dual mode need to offer more courses (particularly short term courses on the line of EFLU (English and Foreign Language University Hyderabad) for teachers of the vicinity).

2. The counselors need to be given a sufficient training preferably on the line of EFLU.

3. Assignment of these courses be focusing their skill achievement of language teaching.

The present study will invite attention of the state higher education policy makers to the underdeveloped area for its betterment in terms of their administrative and academic matters. The present study, being unique, will provide a guideline study for all the state universities in India to develop and improve their functioning for distance learners.

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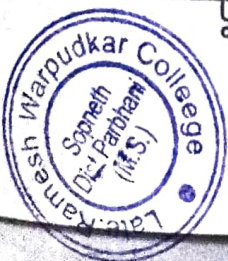
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