

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE "DISTANCE MODE" IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO TEACHER TRAINEES?

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION, NIE.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Education.

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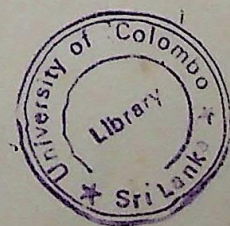


ABSTRACT

The crucial problem facing English Language teaching in Sri Lanka today, is the Lack of competent teachers. The traditional methods of training English Language teachers have failed. Therefore, it has become imperative to find alternative ways of improving the standard of English of the teachers.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to critically evaluate the English Language Improvement Programme of the Department of Distance Education of the NIE, to assess whether the distance mode had been effective in teaching English to teacher trainees.

For purpose of data collection in this study, a combination of Expost Facto and Survey Methods were used. Current theoretical and methodological frameworks in ELT and the concepts and current trends in distance education relevant to present investigation were identified through a literature survey and interviews with department officials. Based on this information two questionnaires were prepared. The students' version of the questionnaire was administered to the entire batch of 1992 students who followed this programme. (125) Out of these 90 students responded. The tutors questionnaire was administered to the 35 tutors who were working with this



batch of students. In addition 10 tutors randomly selected were interviewed to further clarify certain data gathered through the questionnaires.

The 20 modules too were examined. The questionnaire and interview data and the perusal of modules helped to investigate whether the programme under study was structured on a sound theoretical basis.

The teacher - pupil interactions at three centres were recorded, transcribed and analysed to evaluate the process of teaching and learning in the programme. A statistical analysis of the marks of a language proficiency test administered at entry and exit levels, helped to assess whether the students have improved their language competency at the completion of the course.

The statistical analysis proved that the programme had been effective in improving the language competency of the learners. The findings also revealed that elements of current theoretical and methodological frameworks in DE and ELT could be discerned in the LIP. However, without considering the needs of the learners, a curriculum and a syllabus of an existing programme had been adopted by the present programme; the advisability of adopting such procedure in programme design is questionable and calls for further investigation.

It is suggested that a needs analysis of English Language Teachers be conducted and based on these needs a curriculum be designed to suit the needs of the clientele as well as the objectives of the programme of ELT for teacher training. A pilot testing of such a programme, in one district was also felt feasible.

DECLARATION

This study further revealed that the self-learning component of this programme had not been very successful. It was the face to face component with tutor/pupil interaction in small groups, which had contributed largely to the success of the programme.

However, in the present ELT context in Sri Lanka when the cost-effectiveness of programmes is considered, intensive, direct teacher - pupil interaction in small groups is not feasible. Therefore, it was suggested that more student/student interaction, with less tutor intervention and more support from media should be fostered.