A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR NEW LEARNING MODALITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic has quite unexpectedly altered the mode of instruction for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many countries. While teachers of English are struggling to cope with the situation, a noticeable trend in many instances is the attempt to grab the readily available digital tool to deliver instruction. There is also a significant rise in the facilitation of online teaching and learning materials. But unfortunately most of them, particularly videos are found to be ones in which scholar/ teachers regurgitate their knowledge of the English language in a lecture mode in which they talk and talk before the camera with the assumption that their unrelenting endeavour is aiding learners and transforming the pedagogic scenario. Future Learn reported 13000 educators from around the world registered for their free Online course 'How to teach online'. Cambridge University Press and National Geographic Learning like many other leading publishers too have been offering webinars and making available tips and strategies for smooth transition to online learning. These however do employ a fully research based method or principle of teaching English. It is in this context, that the investigator, a practicing teacher educator, drawing on his two decade long experience of teaching using ICT attempted to evolve an integrated model by fusing the techno-pedagogic model, namely RASE developed by the University of New South Wales and the popular 'Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching' currently being promoted by Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The paper shares the rationale for integrating the two models, the process involved and its benefits identified through observation and feedback. It is hoped that the proposed model would provide guidelines for EFL teachers struggling to cope with the new modalities of online instruction.

Keywords: *EFL, ICT, Principles, RASE, Teachers.*

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Introduction

When there are multiple learning modalities being rolled out, it is important to integrate them within an overarching education strategy, anchored to the curriculum.

-UNICEF

With the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, UNESCO (2020) reported that 70% of the world's student population have been hit following nationwide closures of educational institutions. Such unprecedented disruption of academic activities have placed administrators, teachers and students in a quandary and this has prompted many to explore alternatives to regular teaching and learning. Teacher education institutions were no exception in this regard.

The Background

Leading publishers like National Geographic Learning and Cambridge University Press among others have been offering tips for online teaching through webinars. But there was a felt need among teacher educators to identify a model for transacting the teacher education curriculum. The investigator-cum-teacher educator, drawing on own experience of teaching English using ICT attempted

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to evolve an integrated model of teacher education by fusing a recent techno-pedagogic model, namely RASE and the popular 'Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching' currently being promoted by Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This paper reports on the study.

Rationale for the New Model

In teacher training programmes which specialize in language education, right from day one of the programme, teacher educators attempt to prune and refine the communication skills and target language competence of the teacher trainees. But almost all popular language teaching methods have been designed for face-to-face instruction. When the Covid-19 pandemic led to a shift to compelled online pedagogy, identifying appropriate digital content for teaching online, transacting them is digestible chunks with appropriate activities followed by assessment became imperative. So in language education programmes, teacher educators had to identify appropriate language learning strategies for online pedagogy. This necessitated identifying a workable model for instruction.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to a identify an appropriate teaching model for the English Language Teacher Education programme offered online. The specific objectives included (1) Identification of appropriate resources, activities, support and evaluation strategies for online instruction (2) Identification of strategies for improving language competence of teacher trainees.

Method

Following a review of methods used for Online pedagogy, the evidence based course design model of the University of New South Wales namely, RASE Model was identified by the investigator, for transacting the curriculum of the BEd programme. The course of instruction, being English Language Teacher Education, the model promoted by the leading association, TESOL called the 'Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching' was also made use of.

Teacher trainee needs were identified using a survey and informal interviews. Next, the content of the syllabus of the BEd programme was reviewed and matched with the components of both the RASE model (Resources, Activity, Support and Evaluation) and the Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching. Then, the curriculum of the BEd programme was transacted by the investigator and the usefulness and drawbacks if any were identified through semester-end teacher trainee performance and informal interviews.

The sample for the study comprised a total of thirteen English Optional teacher trainee pursuing the Bachelor of Education (BEd) course in a teacher training college affiliated to the University of Kerala. The trainees were in the age group 22-26 and all of them had a smart phone, an email ID and were familiar with using social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp but had limited internet connectivity.

Brief Review of Studies

The World Economic Forum (WEF) reported a dramatic change in education and the distinctive rise of e-learning. Lee (2020) a faculty of Lancaster University expressed a note of concern at the current trend among teachers to record their lectures and using it for online teaching. Lee pointed out that such "onlinification" of face-to-face lectures will not result in positive experiences for academics or students.

According to Lederman (2020) several commentators have hypothesized that emergency adoption and embracing of technology enabled learning is likely to end up in a pale imitation of exiting online practices. The failure to provide technology-enabled learning of high quality will result in a huge setback for both students and teachers.

Both Lee and Lederman indirectly affirm the need to have a proper method for implementing Online pedagogy. This is because, methods are often regarded as a theory about actions to perform in order to reach a goal. Schluchter (1981) for instance is of the opinion that methods can be viewed as reason based statements regarding target states, and as such they represent rationality.

Stoddart (2015) reported on the use of the RASE model at an Australian university in its move from an incumbent to a new 'learning management system' coupled with use of inflections points in a judicious way to bring about educational change.

Cruz-Ramos etal.(2019) studied the integration of language skills and interaction using the communicative approach under the principles of the RASE model for an online English course for beginners. The results suggested that the use of integrated skills under the techno-pedagogical model aids in the development of communicative competence of learners.

Hagar (2019) shared practical suggestions for incorporating the 6 principles into teaching. Short and Mendoza (2020) tried to apply the 6 Principles to support learning in the time of the Covid crisis when teachers had to abruptly adapt to online teaching. For each principle they have identified Covid-19 related considerations.(1)

The Integrated Model

Identifying a model of instruction especially for EFL appropriate for online pedagogy was imperative following the shutdown of educational institutions and the shift to Online pedagogy. What follows is a brief illustration of two models viz; RASE and Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching. Then, the integrated model utilized by the investigator for online pedagogy will be illustrated.

The RASE Model

Proper student engagement with technology requires an evidence-based course design model. The RASE model with its four components- Resources, Activity, Support and Evaluation fulfills a much needed requirement for proper student engagement. (Churchill, King, & Fox 2013).

The prime focus in on integrating technology resources with teaching. The 'resources' could be digital media tools, lectures and textbooks.

The authentic student-centred 'activities' is intended to engage students with resources and working on tasks that provide the necessary learning experience to realize the expected learning outcome.

'Support' anticipates needs of students enabling them to develop both learning skills and independence. Such scaffolding could be administrative, technical or pedagogical in nature.

To guide students' progress, 'evaluation' which provides structured information, is utilized. It not only ensures that learning outcomes are achieved but serves as a tool to understand what needs to be done.

A visual summary of the RASE pedagogical model is given below:
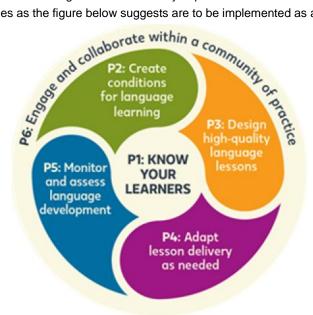

Figure Source: UNSW

The Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching

The Six Principles are based on decades of research and are meant to serve as universal guidelines for effective English-language teaching and learning. The principles are as follows (TESOL 2018):

- Know the learner.
- Conditions for language learning to be created.
- Designing of high-quality lessons for development of language.
- Lesson delivery adaptation as needed.
- Assessing and monitoring of language development of students.
- Engaging and collaborating within a community of practice.

The 6 Principles as the figure below suggests are to be implemented as a whole :

Figure source: TESOL Website

The Proposed 'Integrated Model'

By matching and classifying similar components of the RASE model and the 'Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching,' an integrated model was developed and used by the investigator for transacting the curriculum of the BEd programme.

Component of RASE : Resources

Components of 6 Principles : No.3. Design high quality lessons for language development

The integrated version: 'Resources' for English Language Teacher Education

- Utilization of real life scenarios.
- Suitable digital media resources were identified.
- Use of software and support tools with discretion.
- Checking done to ensure that teacher trainees have accessibility to the resources.
- *Use of visuals, animation, podcasts and videos after matching with learning outcome to introduce an element of interest and eliminate boredom.

Component of RASE : Activity

Components of 6 Principles

- *No.4. Adapt lesson delivery as needed*
- *No.6. Engage and Collaborate within*

The integrated version: 'Activity' for English Language Teacher Education

- Regular use of off class pair/group work.
- Preference for short talks instead of long lectures.
- Adapting of platform for speaking activities and sharing of ideas.
- Encouraging use of online discussion for articulation of ideas.
- Content and learning sequenced in such a way that it is purposeful.
- Preference for student products using artifacts that demonstrate learning progress.
- Insistence on performing writing after class hours and submission of the same via email.
- The teacher educator ensured that students have sufficient and relevant prior knowledge.

Component of RASE : Support

Components of 6 Principles

- *No.1.*Know your learner
- No.2. C*reate conditions for learning*

The integrated version: 'Support' for English Language Teacher Education

- Providing appropriate and timely feedback.
- Creation of rapport at the beginning of each class.
- Focusing on trainees becoming independent learners.
- Adopting a caring, inviting and enthusiastic tone each day.
- Regular tracking of difficulties experienced if any by trainees.
- Setting up of a 24X7 channel of communication with the trainees.
- Showing special consideration for trainees with learning disability.
- Regular messaging with trainees to drive out the sense of isolation.
- Communicating what is expected performance by trainees each day.
- Utilization of Blogs and social network spaces for collaborative work.
- Consciously putting oneself in the shoes of the trainee to get a feel of the isolation.
- Showing a willingness to listen to the concerns of trainees even as they try to overcome the tough situation.
- Finding additional time to provide individual based oral feedback for performance with the intention of motivating them and creating a feel, that they are cared for.
- When transacting complex concepts, utilization of more than two illustrative examples, encouraging whole class posting of responses online and providing essential support for application and practice.

Component of RASE : Evaluation

Components of 6 Principles: No.5. Monitor and assess student language development

The integrated version: 'Evaluation' for English Language Teacher Education

- Use of alternative assessment such as video presentation.
- Identification of concerns trainees have about assessment.
- Providing suggestions for achieving specific learning goals.
- Encouraging trainees to use online rubrics for self assessment.
- Encouragement to utilize grammar/ spelling error correction tools.
- Communication of target learning goal or skill for tasks to be completed.
- Identification of tools and resources not just readily available, but accessible too.
- Adoption of flexibility in marking and deterring from deduction of marks for late submission of assignments.

- Encouragement to submit products in the form of visuals, PPT, short videos or podcasts which reflect understanding of concepts learned and skills acquired.
- Introduction of variety in assessment formats by utilizing Multiple choice questions, filling up of concept map templates and encouraging the submission of digital portfolios.

Findings

The usefulness of the innovative approach employed for training was identified through informal interviews and semester-end performance.

- Immediate feedback given by the teacher educator for each response given by trainees during synchronous teaching motivated the trainees to respond promptly rather than remain passive.
- The inhibition usually shown by trainees during face-to-face sessions, to respond owing to fear of ridicule was conspicuously absent in the synchronous online mode.
- Unlike face to face sessions, the teacher educator needed additional time to prepare for teaching online as the content to be taught had to be discreetly broken down into digestible chunks.
- The learning experience provided was extremely focused, devoid of the continuous chat/lecture mode common in face-to- face teaching.
- The establishing of a channel of communication in a private chat mode between the trainee and the teacher educator was an added advantage as students could clarify doubts after class with the feel that they are cared for 24X7.
- Poor internet connectivity often affected timely delivery of resources supplied by the teacher educator.

Limitations

An obvious limitation of the study is the small sample on which the study was conducted. The learning conditions, the issues related to accessibility and affordability to a large extent affected the transaction of the curriculum. The duration of study was limited too and so the findings of the study cannot be fully generalized.

Further Study

The usefulness of the Integrated Model developed by the investigator needs to be tested for efficacy both in Hybrid mode courses and full time Virtual Teacher Education programme which is now being explored. The scope for adapting and using components of the RASE model with essential components of the 'Six Principles of Exemplary Teaching' for other subjects of study in the Bachelor of Education programmes may also be studied.

Summing Up

The integrated model found to be practical, utilized by the teacher educator is in no way exhaustive and only suggests what can be done in a distant learning mode using technology tools in the time of the Covid pandemic which has drastically changed education for ever.

Through hindsight the investigator realized that success of the model of online instruction is heavily dependent on digital accessibility. It is hoped that the use of the RASE model would open the eyes of teachers who erroneously assume that talking to the camera equals quality teaching.

Demand for online learning platforms are on the rise and universities are commencing online courses to cope with the shutdown. Many teacher educators are still unaware of how exactly to go about teaching online. It is hoped that the integrated model would be useful for teacher educators in general and English language educators in particular who are struggling to cope with the new modalities of online instruction.

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formats the need of the hour. Fortunately, many agencies such as Cambridge Assessment, the British Council, TESOL, National Geographic Learning etc. have all commenced making available a barrage of teacher development resources free of cost. These could be utilized by EFL teachers.

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