Teacher Education Through Distance Mode: A Review

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1. Introduction

The field of distance teacher education, and within that, distance teacher education in India, has had a fairly long history. Several studies on distance teacher education programmes have been documented in the literature, leading to the development of theories of teacher education through distance mode. Hall & Knox (2009) state that there are relatively few published studies that directly examine language teacher education by distance, but a fairly wide spread of studies that have direct relevance These include studies of distance education in general, teacher education by distance, and language teacher education in blended learning environment. Within the vast spectrum of studies on distance teacher education programmes in India, there is only a modest amount of literature documenting English language teacher education programmes through distance mode, especially those that investigate the efficacy of course delivery.

The discussion of distance language teacher education has been organized and presented under the following four conceptual sections on distance education.
1. Distance education theories
2. Distance education pedagogy
3. Teacher education through distance mode, and
4. English language teacher education through distance mode.

However, as the discussion will show, none of the existing theories, models and discussions on distance education provides an adequate model to measure effectiveness of distance *language teacher* education. A robust model of distance language teacher education is one in which the programme delivers both content knowledge and pedagogical skills through its course delivery mechanisms, and where these components reflect and build on the learner's previous experience. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of a model of language teacher education that most closely reflects effectiveness in terms of the above criteria, and the relevance of this model in distance language teacher education contexts.

2. Distance Education theories

Distance education has been theorized by several experts internationally, with focus on different aspects such as self-directed learning and transactional distance. This section looks at the popular theories that focus on academic aspects of distance education. The theories discussed here are the most widely accepted and discussed models and theories that classify distance education in terms of academic aspects. Learners carry out their responsibilities apart from one another, communicating in a variety of ways. Its purposes are to free on-campus or external learners with the opportunity to continue learning in their own environments, and developing in all learners the capacity to carry on self- directed learning, the ultimate maturity required of educated people In this definition, any system that empowers the learners to carry on self-directed learning by using any type of communication is considered an alternative to regular face-to-face education, and this is considered one of the primary aims of distance education.

3. Transactional theory

This theory, developed by Michael G. Moore, was originally a part of independent learning

developed in 1972 (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia). Moore proposed the concept of transactional distance, i.e. a psychological and communication space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner (1993). In other words, the less minimal transactional distance, the more maximal the learning outcomes of a programmer are. The three elements that are important for maximizing learning experience and minimizing transactional distance, according to Moore, are dialogue (interaction between learners and teachers), structure (the ways in which a programme is structured/flexibility of structure), and autonomy (learners sense of self-directedness to be affected by the previous two factors).

4. Guided didactic conversation

Borje Holmberg (1981) talks about the theory of guided didactic conversation which refers to a kind of relationship between an individual learner and a supporting institution. The learners are responsible for their independent study or self-study, but only with the help of a supporting team including counsellors, administrators, media producers etc. Holmberg (1981) states that the conversation can be both real and simulated, where students and tutors and others belonging to the supporting organization communicate in the two-way traffic through written and telephone interaction, and where students discuss the contents of study materials with themselves in the one-way traffic. What Holmberg means by *real* conversation is conversation through correspondence (any written or printed communication), telephone, and personal contact programme simulated conversation is conversation through study of texts. Simulated conversation is caused by the conversational style of material writers. Holmberg further adds that good distance education is characterised by a guided conversation aimed at learning, and that the presence of the typical characteristics of guided didactic conversation will facilitate learning.

5. Role of intermediary

Another specialist David Sewart (1981) advises against the notion of seeing distance education as just a materials production process. He believes that teaching at a distance calls for the continuity of concern for students in a system of learning at a distance. A package of materials, however well they are designed, simply cannot perform all the roles of a teacher and cater to the varying needs of distance learners. That is why, according to Sewart, the human element or human support must be added to the system along with the materials in order to facilitate the process of learning. In other words, Sewart regards human support as a vital element in the distance teaching and learning process, so that a continuity of concern for students learning at a distance can be maintained.

6 . Distance education pedagogy

This section discusses some studies that throw light on distance education pedagogy. These studies deal with the following issues:
- Difference between andragogy and pedagogy and its application in distance education
- Three generations of distance education pedagogy
- Pedagogical issues relating to ODL
- Pedagogical possibilities for online learning
- Relationship between pedagogy and technology, and
- Cell phone as a support in distance education pedagogy

The andragogy model proposed by Malcolm Knowles (1980) is based on Knowles belief that adults learn differently from children. Considering the origin of the word pedagogy (Greek *paid* meaning child, *agogus* meaning leading), he states that pedagogy means the art and science of teaching children. Knowles defines andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles 1980). However, he encourages distance education practitioners to see pedagogical model and the model of andragogy as two ends of spectrum rather than as dichotomous.

7. Models of language teacher education

At the core of such attempts is a holistic approach incorporating of reflection, collaboration, cooperative learning, etc. in the design of a programme. Hardly any such models have been found which are specific to the distance learning context. However, Y. Wang et al. (2010) reports on an investigation examining the design and implementation of a holistic language teacher training model in a cyber face-to-face learning context (an environment supported by advanced Synchronous Learning Management System). The three components of the model proposed the PRC (Practice, Reflection and Collaboration) model – are the two-stage practice design (platform training in stage 1 and online teaching practice in stage 2), the reflective cycle and the cyclic design, and the collaborative learning design. The graphical representation of the model has been presented as shows.
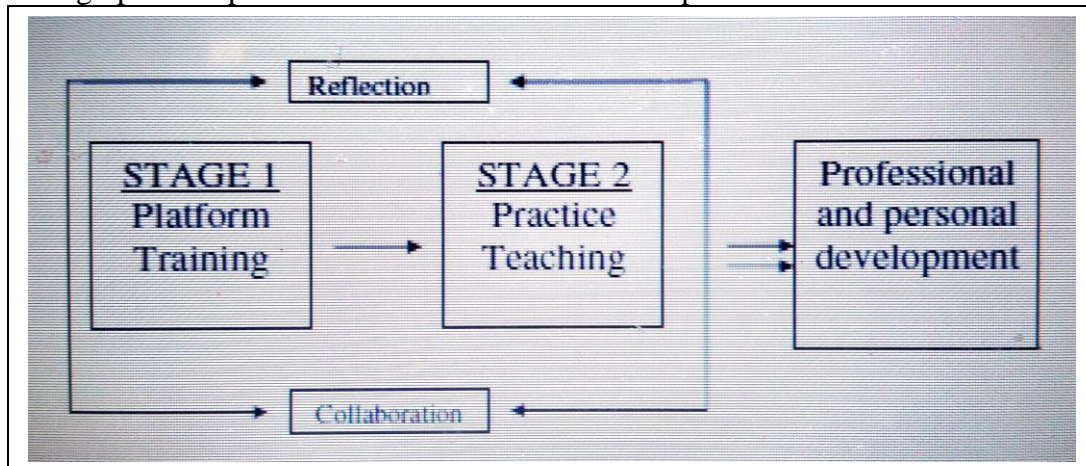
The PRC Model

The study responds to the question of what an effective teacher training programme should incorporate in such an environment. It suggests that since teachers face new challenges and demands which are specific to e-learning environment, a holistic model is very crucial for e- teacher training. It claims that mechanisms like various forms of reflection in the model are powerful in responding to the trainee teachers needs. Though the whole study proposes a model for language teacher education in distance learning environment, the e-learning environment is very different from that in the context of English language teacher training in India where e-teacher training is not prevalent.

As literature on models of distance language teacher education is scarce, models proposed for other contexts have also been considered for relevant insights. Wallace (1991) suggests that three models of professional education have surfaced historically – the craft model, the applied science model, and the reflective model. In the craft model, trainees learn by imitating the experts techniques, and by following the experts instructions and advice. Wallace considers it as a static approach as it does not respond to the dynamicity of the society and to the developments of subject areas. He offers the critique of applied science and reflective models by following the original works of American sociologist Donald A. Schon. The applied science model, on the other hand, describes a one-way knowledge transmission

8. The reflective practice model of professional development

As shown in the figure, the professional development process has been divided into two stages to attain the goal of professional competence the pre-training stage (whichever stage the trainee is at, prior to the decision to undertake the training) and the stage of professional education or development. Inclusion of the first stage in the model implies that teacher education programmes need to take into account what the trainees bring to the training or development process, as the reflective model acknowledges the fact that trainees do not enter process where educators convey scientific knowledge to trainees following which trainees are expected to apply the knowledge in their practice. Wallace considers this „the traditional and probably still the most prevalent model. The weaknesses of this model include a separation between research and professional action, a tendency to deny enough value

to trainees experience, and inability to give a solution to the complex professional dilemmas as promised by the model. Wallace suggests the alternative model for teacher education, which is the reflective model which takes into account various elements to consider the relationship between theory and practice for professional development. He uses the following diagram to represent the model. process where educators convey scientific knowledge to trainees following which trainees are expected to apply the knowledge in their practice. Wallace considers this „the traditional and probably still the most prevalent model. The weaknesses of this model include a separation between research and professional action, a tendency to deny enough value to trainees experience, and inability to give a solution to the complex professional dilemmas as promised by the model. Wallace suggests the alternative model for teacher education, which is the reflective model which takes into account various elements to consider the relationship between theory and practice for professional development.

He uses the reflective mode into the programme with blank minds. The second stage highlights the reciprocal relationship between the two key elements - received knowledge and experiential knowledge - along with the continuing process of reflection on the knowledge in the context of practice or professional action.
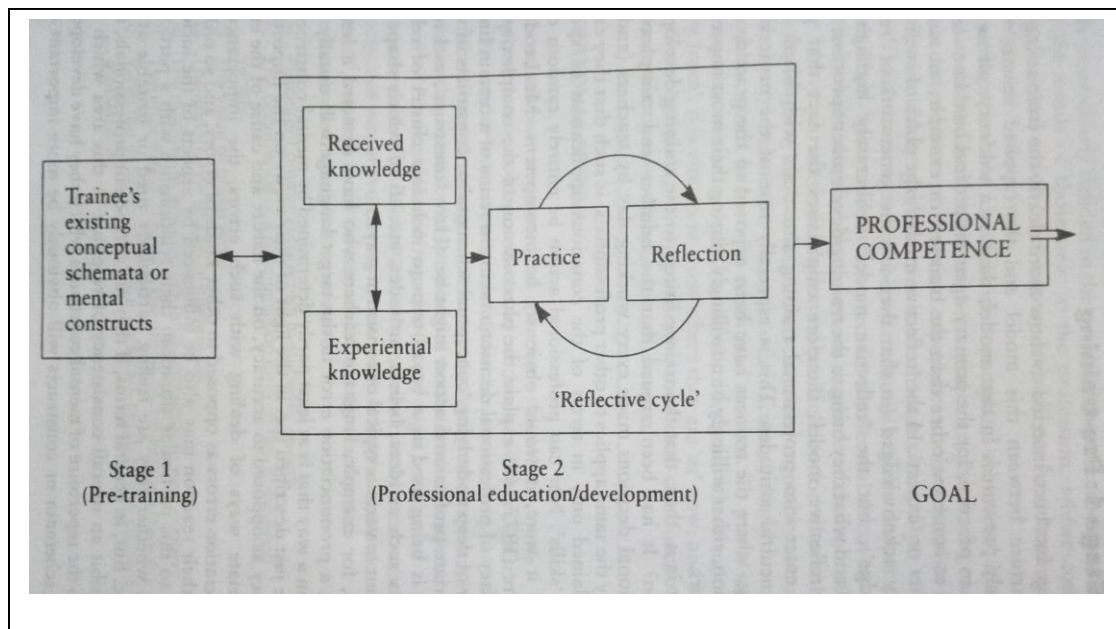
9. Conclusion

To conclude, the independent study theory highlights the importance of promotion of self- directed learning in learners by means of any communication. The transactional theory proposes maximizing learning experience by minimizing transactional distance, which can be achieved by working on three elements – dialogue, structure and autonomy. The theory of guided didactic conversation focuses on the importance of student support services on the part of the institution by creating real and simulated conversation for facilitating independent study. David Sewart reinforces the perennially felt need for increasing human support to facilitate learning. All these elements contribute to the effectiveness of a distance education programme. This chapter has attempted to present a few studies which are directly or indirectly related to the effectiveness of course delivery of English language teaching programmes through distance mode. It has tried to discuss some important theories of distance education that have a bearing on the effectiveness of distance education programmes. In the chapter, a number of studies related to teacher education through distance mode have been discussed to showcase present trends and perspectives in the investigation of distance teacher education.

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