

A Critical Study of SCOPE, an Initiative of Government of Gujarat to Improve English Language Skills of People

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on an initiative of the government of Gujarat to enrich the proficiency in English using technology of the people of Gujarat. A critical study of SCOPE (Society for Creation of Opportunity through Proficiency in English) is carried out keeping in mind various parameters like course content, availability of experts, computer literacy, assessment, and quality assurance etc.

Today, in the era of globalization, job opportunities in Gujarat have increased considerably which demands reasonable English communication skills. Due to the inconsistent language policy people suffered a lot. One of the initiatives taken by government of Gujarat is SCOPE. It is based on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model across the whole state. SCOPE has roped in Cambridge English Second Official Language (ESOL) UK as an assessment partner. The English language training program has been developed on the Common European framework (Level A1 to C2) of Reference (CEFR).

A variety of listening segments viz. listening video clips, television shows, radio programs, voicemail messages; reading of stories, ads, letters, postcards and articles; speaking of real life dialogues in everyday situations, and exercise on grammatical structures in context with the use of ICT, CDs and DVDs are included in the course. Help of DELLS and SANDHAN, AGIC are taken to boost the programme. Various types of exams are conducted by the authority, viz. BULATS Online Speaking, Reading, and Listening test, Cambridge Placement Test and Gujarat English Language Test etc.

The study will find out success as well as limitations of SCOPE.

Key words: Initiative, Proficiency, SCOPE, DELL, ICT, SANDHAN, AGIC.

Introduction:

English language dominated the world primarily as a result of colonization and migration of people. Today, English is cited as the language of international business and communication. English is considered as window of the world and a gate way to progress. The United Nations has given English the status of being an official language. English language has become the lingua franca. In India, during the colonial period, the knowledge of English was limited up to the elite class. But in the era of globalization knowledge of English has not remained hegemony of particular class and each one who wants to sustain in cut throat competition must acquire proficiency in English. In a multi lingual country like India English as an important Library Language plays a vital role in higher education. The Radha Krishnan University Education Commission observed, "It is a language which is rich in literature –humanistic, scientific and technical .If under sentimental urges, we should give up English, we would cut ourselves from the living stream of ever growing knowledge."(Pahuja, 6)

Gujarat has been considered as one of the industrially developed states of India. Global expansion of business, liberalization policy of the government, investment made by the foreign multi-nationals through MOUs and export-import activities demanded skilled experts in English language for communication. Today, with the rapid expansion of service sector, job opportunities in the state have increased considerably. Call centers need employees with effective communication skills; multi-nationals require marketing staff with fluent English, Medical Transcription Centers, IT, Retail

Management are all on the look-out for persons with reasonable English communication skills. Properly developed communicative competence is essential for employability today. The general impression about the Gujarati community is that they are business minded and the level of education, particularly proficiency in English, is not up to the mark in comparison to several other states. The working proficiency in English among the youth is limited certain areas. After the formation of Gujarat as a separate state, because of the inconsistency in the implementation of language policy a whole generation of the Gujarat suffered a lot. The academicians concerned more about this and various plans have been implemented from time to time, along with the modification in learning-teaching methodology. Need based curriculum is designed and the teachers are trained and guided accordingly to meet the goals. Though efforts have been made to improve communication skills, the results are not as per the expectation and more is required to be done in this direction. All the four skills of language viz. listening, reading, reading and writing are required to be mastered. The advancement in science and technology has been a boon in language acquisition. The traditional syllabi and the ways of learning –teaching language needs to be modified and a paradigm shift in this direction is required to be made if one wants to sustain in this competitive world.

Initiatives of Government of Gujarat

Realizing the necessity of good English skills the government of Gujarat has launched various initiatives to improve the proficiency of the people in English language. In 1970s English was taught from 8th standard onwards, later on it was made compulsory from the 1st standard. At present English has been made compulsory subject from 1st standard to UG classes. The present scenario in the state is that number of English medium

schools are increasing day by day and most of them are self – financed having ICSE or CBSE affiliation. The education in such schools is limited to a certain class because it is very costly. At UG level, though English has been taught to the students, it has been found that general proficiency in listening, writing, reading, and speaking is not as per expectation from the young graduates. The visionary government has taken a praiseworthy step in this direction through the suggestions and recommendations of the expert academicians. Just by passing the university examination, one may not get better job in this competitive world. There is a substantial increase in the number of students going abroad for further study and they need to clear TOEFL and IELTS. Initiative is defined as an act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation; a fresh approach to something (“Initiative”, Oxford).SCOPE is an outstanding initiative by the government of Gujarat. Keeping in mind the online Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based exam pattern, the government has introduced innovative programme known as Society for Creation of Opportunity through Proficiency in English (SCOPE) in July 2007.

SCOPE: An Innovative Scheme through ICT

In this paper a focus is made on the following aspects.

- salient features of SCOPE in Gujarat
- its implementation frame work
- its success
- its limitations

The researcher has used survey method to study the present topic. Survey method helps in fact finding enquiries of different kinds and interpreting conditions that exist or existed. The present research deals with the SCOPE initiative of the government of Gujarat. The relevant and necessary information has been collected from reference books, journals, reports,

newspapers, magazines, periodicals, websites and SCOPE office etc. The data collection tools like questionnaire and unstructured interviews have been used.

SCOPE is established in 2007 by the government of Gujarat to build English language proficiency in the youth of Gujarat and thereby create employment opportunities for them. It has been the most successful Public Private Partnership (PPP) model in the state with an established network of 630 centers through five Zonal Training Partners (ZTPs) for the purpose of providing English language training to candidates. SCOPE programme is centred on three challenges of education - Access, Equity and Quality. To enhance the employability and to showcase the proficiency of English, SCOPE has roped in Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) UK, as an assessment partner. Cambridge ESOL's exams are the world's leading range of certificates for learners of English. (CambridgeESOL) The English Language Training programme is being developed on the Common European Framework (Level A1 to C2) of Reference. SCOPE has fully adopted Computer based and Online Exams called BULATS i.e. BUssiness LAnguage Testing Service (for Listening, Reading and Speaking) and CPT i.e. Cambridge English Placement Test (for Listening, Reading). (BULATS)

Fee from level A1 to level B2 training is kept at Rs. 1500/- (taxes extra) under PPP model. This includes training to candidate, course material, assessment & certification. SCOPE has provided infrastructural support in terms of LCD projector and computer to many of the centers for enhancing the quality of training. SCOPE's OAS (Only Assessment Scheme) is for college students only wherein they can pay a nominal fee of Rs. 300/- for 'A' level exam and Rs. 400/- for 'B' level exam. Providing course material or training material is not mandatory. However, colleges have option of providing them training and material at a fee of Rs. 700/- for 'A' level and Rs. 1000/- for 'B' level exam which is much cheaper than prevailing

rates of other private institutes. The figure 1 shows orientation meeting at SCOPE.



FIGURE 1: Orientation meeting at SCOPE

The listening test is designed to enhance students' comprehension of aural input through exposure to a variety of listening segments (video clips, television shows, radio programs, voicemail messages, etc.). The reading section is designed to expose students to different text types (stories, ads, letters, postcards and articles) with emphasis on reading strategies: guessing words from context identifying main idea, keywords, etc. The Speaking section consists of real life dialogues set in everyday situations, with an emphasis on functional language for daily use. The Grammar section introduces the grammatical structures in context and provides practice in them. Animated, humorous examples illustrate the use of the grammatical structures and facilitate their acquisition. Explanations and examples are also provided.

By the end of March, 2013, SCOPE had crossed a mark of 3,50,000 enrollments. (Patel) Out of this, the candidates enrolled under OAS and DELL (Digital Education and Learning Labs) scheme (college mode of learning) are more than 2,00,000. The centres of ZTPs (Zonal Training Partners) are graded at every quarter by an external agency which is called Quality Assurance Cell. SCOPE is also the implementing agency for DELL setup in government and grant-in-aid colleges

across the state. In this scheme, the complete infrastructure including furniture, computer systems, server, LAN, softwares, AV facility is provided. An agreement was signed between SCOPE and GTU. GTU becomes a centre of SCOPE and all colleges under GTU becomes centre who can send their faculty for getting training of scope's English teaching and can become trainer to train students in their respective colleges. Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd. (TCGL) has also collaborated with SCOPE to create a workforce of guides, taxi drivers, etc capable of speaking and understanding English language. (SCOPE)



FIGURE 2: Students learning at SCOPE

Under the research, the data has been collected through primary survey and secondary sources. The enrollment of the candidates at the state level, share of private centres and OAS, DELL, male female ratio has been analyzed. The enrollment, level obtained, educational qualification of the candidate has been critically studied. The functioning of the centres, the existing infrastructure have been analyzed.

Since the launch of the programme in July 2007, till date more than 2,50,000 students have been enrolled under SCOPE programme in the whole state. Although introduced late, the share of enrollment under OAS and DELL is more than half of the Enrollments as compared to private centres. A higher percentage of females getting enrolled as compared to males are observed. The maximum enrollment, i.e. more than 89000 candidates is observed in the year 2011. It is observed

that people of various educational backgrounds are undertaking this training. However in case of private centres, the maximum percentage of students is of Class X and XII. In colleges the students enrolled are those undertaking their graduation studies. There is a flexibility of date of online examination as many students are studying working. (SCOPE)

Results and Discussion

The research shows that SCOPE is the first of its kind programme launched by the government of Gujarat with a vision to improve the proficiency of people, especially youth in English. The partnership of the government with the prestigious Cambridge University ESOL Examinations has brought the global view to the entire initiative. The levels and the grading system by Cambridge University is internationally acclaimed and accepted.

Initially in the year 2007, it was launched on the basis of public private partnership model but then gradually it was also introduced in the government and grant-in-aid colleges of the state in the form of Digital Education and Learning Lab (DELL). In DELL the training is provided with the help of Computers, microphone, headphones etc. In case of the Private centres the training is imparted generally with the help of course books, workbooks, and CDs of World Link Series by Thompson. Along with that Projectors are also used for training purposes. SCOPE has also introduced another segment of the programme called Only Assessment Scheme (OAS) in the colleges. Under this scheme only assessment and certification is done. Training is not imparted under OAS. (Anchaliya)

Different awareness measures are also taken by SCOPE authority from time to time to create awareness among the people regarding SCOPE. SCOPE authority has also established a Quality Assurance Cell (QAC). This cell has developed certain parameters on the basis of which every centre

under SCOPE is evaluated.

SANDHAN (AGIC-All Gujarat Integrated Classroom) is an initiative by OCHE (Office of Commissioner Higher Education) and KCG (Knowledge Consortium of Gujarat) Department of Education-Government of Gujarat. SANDHAN is creating a platform which provides an excellent opportunity for the use of the Audio-Visual medium for the telecast of lectures in a very innovative and interesting manner. SANDHAN maintains the time table and telecasts the SCOPE series everyday so that the students may be benefitted. (SANDHAN)

The government has made optimum efforts and publicities the SCOPE scheme through several means but there is a cool response from the youths to take the maximum out of the programme. The course content used for imparting training seems not suitable to learner's background. The course books and workbooks used for training purposes are developed keeping in mind western culture. So it is bit difficult for the learner to get easily acquainted with the course material especially in the semi urban or rural areas.

Conclusion

The scheme implemented by the government has created awareness among the youth and many students have been benefitted .Yet, many things are required to be done. The following steps may boost up the interest of students for SCOPE and thereby enrolment of the students.

- SCOPE authority should develop their own course content, relevant to the learner's background and culture.
- SCOPE authority should create a pool of proficient trainers. There should be a full time professional trainer, with knowledge of IT, so that s/he can manage virus, software and hard ware related problems while teaching and during online

examination. The finance for the same may be fully supported by the government. It was found during primary survey that half of trainers are not SCOPE certified and also the colleges are facing the problems of lack of trainers.

➤ There should be proper criteria of physical environment of the centers especially of private center so that students may get proper environment.

➤ The strength of the administrative staff may be increased to cope up with the work load of the whole state.

➤ The administrative decentralization and financial autonomy to certain extent and regular audit may be introduced.

➤ SCOPE content should be made one of the compulsory/optional subjects at the first year UG programme.

➤ As computer literacy is necessary like CCC and CCC+ for jobs, certain levels (A to C) of SCOPE (depending upon the type of post) certificate should be made compulsory for the governments jobs in Gujarat.

The success of SCOPE would benefit the society in a great manner. The research would be helpful for the policy makers/decision makers, faculties of SCOPE programme for the better implementation and results which in turn would be beneficial to the learners and the Society.

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