Rhetorics in/of English Language Education in India: A Case of Digital Natives in Higher Education Programs

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Abstract

The study briefly analyzes the ELT situation in India which is replete with challenges emerging from the lack of engagement with the phenomenon of digitality that further shapes the existing nature of learning and the needs of the learner. After locating the position of English Language in the new education policy of India, the paper discusses the General English (GE) courses offered at undergraduate level at the city of Bangalore in India, thereby shedding light on the existing gaps between policy and practice. It is based on this conjecture that the paper suggests the possibility of introducing rhetorical practices in GE courses at undergraduate levels in various institutions in urban India. In order to substantiate this suggestion, the results of a survey conducted with the learners (N=359) of a GE course based on rhetorics at a Southern Indian university is provided. Empirical data along with a brief reflection on the learners' voices are used in the study to examine the efficacy of the structure, administration and evaluation practices of this new course. The study thus opens up possibilities of initiating a discourse around the mode in which English language education and teaching is envisioned, formulated and implemented in undergraduate programs across urban India.

Keywords: Critical Skills, Digitalization, EAP, ELE, ELT, English in India, General English.

Introduction

The principal thrust of curriculum and pedagogy reform across all stages will be to move the education system towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn – and away from the culture of rote learning as is largely present today…. All aspects of curriculum and pedagogy will be reoriented and revamped to attain these critical goals.

(National Education Policy, 2020, p. 12)

The National Education Policy of India unequivocally articulates the shift in paradigm in alignment with the changing needs, challenges and

concerns arising from digitality and its impact on society. In an era where information is widely available (Darvin, 2016), there is a requirement to deliberate on how the changing time impacts the nature of learning, learner and accordingly the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy. This change is not just restricted to "professional courses" which are essentially understood as imparting domain-specific skills (Unni, 2016), but also to other courses, especially Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC). Further, the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) implemented in 2013 by the *Rashtriya Uchchattar Siksha Abhiyan* (RUSA) policy recognizes language courses as an intrinsic part of AEC in all undergraduate programs. Given the multilingual nature of the country, the English language becomes the apparent choice for most educational institutions. Therefore, it is imperative to address the efficacy of English language courses offered to the contemporary learners. Often, an ELT course in India is referred to as General English (GE) or are titled "Communicative English", "Functional English", and "Optional English" (Mohan & Banerji, 1985 as cited in Tasildar, 2019). These GE courses which have been incessantly repetitive than progressive were often designed to cater to the English Language needs through an emphasis on the lowest level of competence like memorization and retention (Gupta, 1995). As a result, there is a clear disjunction between the needs of the learners, the nature of learning and the GE Course offered. In order to mitigate this gap and address the persisting challenges that the urban digital natives confront, the paper discusses the scope of introducing a new GE course and the pedagogical conceptualization and apparatus required for the administration. Further, the perceptions of the learners are also taken into account and discussions are made around the challenges and limitations of this new course in the context of the contemporary education system.

Literature Review

English language education in India

The institutionalization of the English language began with the English Education Act that deliberated on the necessity of English Language Education (ELE) for Indian society. A reflection of this discussion can be traced back to Macaulay's *Minutes on Education in India* published in 1835. Scholars have widely critiqued and engaged with the discursive spaces from which such a policy originated (Evans, 2002; Whitehead, 2005). These scholarships, located within the postcolonial framework, raise concerns regarding the colonial legacy and ideological motivation behind the implementation of ELE (Viswanathan, 2014). Often associated with the agendas of anglicization and evangelization, English language thereby is perceived by the academics and civilians alike as a master's tool and a non-native tongue (Luhar & Choudhary, 2017). In contradiction to this narrative, Macaulay's association of ELE with scientific knowledge (Evans, 2002) found

its advocates in prominent figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rajunath Hari Navalkar (Mahanta & Sharma, 2019). The advocacy for the implementation of ELE was primarily based on the need for inculcation of scientific fervour among the youth and the practical utility of the education within the Indian context (Chauhan, 2004). The aspect of practical utility allowed English language to percolate into the socio-cultural scenario of India for multiple purposes, and thereby gain further acceptability and legitimacy among the people. The observations made by Mahanta and Sharma (2019) on the limitation of engaging with ELE within the purview of ideological motivation is particularly relevant here. According to them, the usage of the language for purposes like governance, cultural interactions, industrial and scientific discourses, resulted in the need to examine the language beyond its colonial legacy. Thus, the process of transition in perspective towards English language, emerged with the focus on the functionality of the language and the requirement of English within the context of India.

The change in perspective towards English language in general and ELE in particular, also paved the way for the discussions on the nativization of the language (Kachru, 1982, 1983). The notion of nativization is further developed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) who argues on the need to decenter the western hegemony by proposing to bring the peripheral methods of teaching to the center. However, his view on the idea of English as an "additional language", as "language of communicational necessity than a symbol of cultural identity" (p. 541) can be contested. Multiple studies (Allen, 1854; Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2013; Gupta, 1995; Roy, 1993) point out that the history of ELE is also informed by the social and economic aspirations of the emerging middle class and the urban elite, which invariably shapes their caste, class, and cultural identity. Connected with this notion of upward mobility and employability, therefore an increasing desire for English language learning and acquisition could be observed in India (Gupta, 1995).

Further to the above stated points, the emergence of India as the world's second-largest English-speaking country (Masani, 2012) with 2,59,678 Indians reportedly speaking English as a Mother Tongue and more than 83 million people using it as second language (Census of India, 2011) indicates that the number of English speakers in India have risen exponentially (Costa, 2019). This ever-increasing number of speakers of English thus opens up possibilities to discuss how this growing competence in English could be channelized in the domain of curriculum and pedagogy. English Language Teaching (ELT) in India has been fraught with a lack of direction and most often courses in English have been intrinsically repetitive and circular in nature than sequential and progressive, designed to cater to those at the lowest level of competence (Gupta, 1995). Though there have been shifts, from a heavily-literature oriented to communication-oriented courses (Gupta, 2004), attempts towards a possible gradation of syllabus have hardly been made. Coupled with this conflict, the emergence of digitalization has further complicated the context of ELT in urban India.

Negotiating digitality in language education

The plausibility of the education system in India to be informed and shaped by the process of digitization is immense. The *National Convention on Digital Initiative for Higher Education* (2017), organized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), extensively discussed some of the impacts of the digital revolution in higher education. While the possibilities offered by this digital way of educational excellence is promising, there is a lack of discussion and focus around the changing nature and the needs of the learners (Almudibry, 2018). The digital natives, who are the nucleus of the current education system, are accustomed to a peculiar environment, which is defined by digitalization. Familiarity to "twitch-speed, multitasking, random-access, graphics-first, active, connected, fun, fantasy, quick-payoff world of their video games, MTV, and Internet" results in this generation getting "bored by most of today's education, however well-meaning as it may be" (Prensky, 2001, p. 5). One of the dominant characteristics of this generation is their inability to retain interest in a specific area of study, which primarily originates from the accessibility to a plethora of information available in bits and pieces. Mohr and Mohr (2017) point out that the focus of the contemporary education system therefore should be to guide the digital natives to sift, synthesize, and evaluate information rather than to provide information that is already available. This changing nature of the learner and learning process thus will have an undeniable impact on the current education system.

The study by Seaboyer and Barnett (2019) on the characterization of reading habits of the digital natives is insightful to comprehend the impacts of changing nature of learners on the reading process and thereby on ELT and curriculum designing. It is pointed out that "deep reading" which is critical, ethical, creative, difficult, and enjoyable, is intrinsic to the disciplines in humanities and is only attempted by the learners during exam deadlines, especially under pressure. Most of the digital natives are efficient scanners, especially due to their constant interaction with the screen. Neuroscientist Wolf (2018) argues for the implementation of "bi-literacy" to overcome this challenge of lack of critical deep-reading posed by digital natives. "Bi-literacy" is a process in which learners are trained to shift between their habitual activities of reading for information in bits and pieces from multiple sources to involving in a more time-consuming cognitive process of deep-reading based on contexts and needs. Such a process of training, therefore, is relevant in the contemporary situation, if the education system aims to produce informed learners by inculcating in them a culture of deep critical reading along with that of "eye-byte culture" (Rosenwald, 2014). Also, important to note here is that if this eye-byte culture is the inherent way in which current learners engage with the reading and learning process, then it also has a larger implication on the hierarchical model of learning put forward by Bloom (1956). The traditional method of feeding information and

excessive emphasis on memory and retention skills is increasingly becoming insignificant as digital natives can easily access information (Tapscott, 2008). An explorable approach that can be recommended for the contemporary education systems is to design courses that would enable the learner to analyze and critically evaluate information thereby meaningfully interact and navigate through them (Kivunja, 2014).

The global education scenario is replete with multiple narratives to confront the challenges arising out of digitalization (Kelly, McCain, & Jukes, 2008; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Prensky, 2001). However, such deliberations have hardly been the focal point for the Indian higher education system. An apparent reason for this is probably the fact that digitalization is primarily an urban phenomenon in India, and 70% of the workforce resides in rural areas (Chand, Srivastava, & Singh, 2017). It is imperative to mention here that this argument is made not to overlook initiatives like the *Digital India* campaign, which also emphasizes on the need to explore ICT-enabled learning (NMEICT, 2019). Rather, the idea is to point out that digitalization and the discourse surrounding digital learning is still at its nascent stage in India. The discourses around accessibility to digital resources related to the urban-rural divide in learners and education system find significance, while the mode in which digitization impacts the learners hardly finds any mention in the popular discourses (Indian Today Web Desk, 2019), such a scenario is troubling as the learners in urban India are highly impacted by digitization. However, the curriculum and pedagogy hardly take the needs of the learners and changing nature of learning into consideration, an observation often made by ICT researchers and theorists across the world (Kivunja, 2014).

The Case of General English courses

The curriculum and the pedagogy adopted for General English (GE) courses across various private institutions in Bangalore further reiterates the argument made about the challenges of the contemporary education system in India. GE courses have often not evolved with the changing needs and nature of the learning and the learners. GE courses offered at the undergraduate (UG) level for degree courses in humanities and social sciences are based historically on the trends and purposes adopted by ELT in India (Tasildar, 2019). Some of the titles of the course offered across various institutes at Bangalore in India are *English and Communicative Skills*, *General English*, and *Additional English* which runs across either for two or four semesters. Based on the nomenclature, syllabus, and course objective, these courses can be categorized in terms of different existing approaches to ELT.

Literature-oriented English courses depend heavily on the literary text to impart specific skills (Mohan & Banerji, 1985 as cited in Tasildar, 2019). One of the main course objectives is to gain linguistic competence by familiarizing the learner with literatures in English (Sivasubramaniam, 2006). Though, there can be advantages of teaching literature-centric courses, here it

is conceived to be the primary mode through which LSRW skills are meant to be taught (Mekala, 2002). This approach emphasizes on memorization and retention of various literary works as a result of which the key skills of the 21st century i.e. critical reading and thinking skills (Buphate & Esteban, 2018) hardly get any focus. It is also important to note that though the syllabus claims to sensitize students to the concerns of society, clarity regarding contextualization to immediate socio-political context is often absent, like it has mostly been the case in literature-centric English language teaching in India (Marathe & Ramanan, 1993). English language courses with nomenclatures like *General English* and *Additional English* offered by various institutions in the city fit into this category of approach.

Another approach that dominates the curriculum and designing of syllabus is based on the utilitarian aspect of English language in Indian context (Gupta, 1995). This approach to ELT is congruent with the boom of the IT and BPO sector which resulted in the UGC promoting the administration of vocational courses in English language at the UG level (Tharu, 1998). Courses titled *Communicative English* and *Functional English* in the city very well fall within this category. These courses seek to improve LSRW skills of the learner through interactive methods like role-play, group discussion, phonetic practices (Shinde, 2009). It is needless to point out that this approach to ELT remains relevant in India considering the popularity of certificate courses on English language proficiency among the population (English Language Training Market India, 2012). However, the changing nature of employability brought upon by the digital disruption (Warschauer, 2000), coupled with the increasing number of English speakers in the country, raise doubts regarding the effectiveness of this approach for the urban digital natives.

Approaches to ELT across the world have evolved with changing time and space. A direction that seems insightful to the present study is to explore the practices of teaching composition in the educational institutions across the world. The ability to compose and write concisely is historically understood as a skill that goes beyond the knowledge of correct grammatical structures to the awareness of acceptable English rhetorics (Taylor, 1976). Numerous approaches have been designed to enable skills of composition in native speakers of the language (Donovan & McClelland, 1980). However, due to the growing number of ESL learners in the native English-speaking countries, especially the US, there has been a shift towards designing courses to meet the academic requisites of the US academia as well as the needs of the ESL learners (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). So far, there have been numerous studies that explore the effectiveness of the teaching composition in ESL classrooms (Freedman & Medway, 2003; Pally, 2001; Zamel, 1976). Xu and Li's (2018) study on teaching composition as a part of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program in Chinese universities through the integration of process-genre approach (Badger & White, 2000) is particularly insightful and unique. Their observation on the intersection between reading, writing, and critical

skills, while administering a course specifically located in teaching composition for academic writing (Badger & White, 2000; Gupitasari, 2013) opens up new possibilities such an approach can offer when contextualized in different scenarios.

The study at hand, therefore, explores the possibilities offered by the introduction of a new GE course at the undergraduate level program at a university in the Southern Indian city of Bangalore. The new GE course, inspired by Shea, Scallon, and Aufses's (2013) work *The Language of Composition: Reading. Writing. Rhetoric*, is historically located within the practices of teaching composition. Though the course is inspired from the work situated in a western setting, it is informed by the nuances and debates of ELT in India. The attempt here is to approach ELT in a way that contextualizes and re-contextualizes the language for new speakers, new environments, different pasts, and different futures (Pakir, 1999). Thereby, the new GE course attempts to take into account the changing needs and nature of the urban digital learners for whom English language, like the digital world, is part of their everyday life.

Purpose of the study

A nuanced understanding emerging from the analysis of the issues in contemporary ELT situations in India and abroad has informed the structuring of the present study. Initiated with an aim to identify an approach to ELT that would cater to the undergraduate learners across the disciplines of social sciences and humanities in the context of urban India, the study discusses a course that was designed by amalgamating effective steps identified in the literature for developing comprehension and critical language skills. The study not only provides a description of the new GE course but also contextualizes it within the dominant debates in the field of English Language Teaching and Learning. Further, by providing an empirical support to the new GE course in the form of survey responses from the learners, the present study opens up the possibilities of facilitating the present GE course across undergraduate institutions in urban India.

Description of the new course

The new GE course replaced the literature-oriented approach to ELT that was followed for decades in the university. Inspired by Shea, Scallon, and Aufses's (2013) work, located in teaching composition, the course identifies rhetorics as a genre and thereby explores the rhetorical conventions of the English language to enable critical and compositional skills in the learners. The new GE course, while foregrounding rhetoric, is also informed by the notion of "New Rhetoric" propounded by Burke (1951). Therefore, the contextualization of the course for the needs of the time and digital natives is also informed by the postcolonial and postmodern debates on English

language hegemony (Luhar & Choudhary, 2017) and nativization (Kachru, 1982, 1983) that dominates the ELT situation in India. Further to counter the fixed understanding of conventions of rhetoric and the culture from which the course is inspired, the syllabus includes contents that are both relevant to local and global situations. While the notion of rhetorics as "arts of persuasion" continues as the core concept of the course, deliberations on politics of language from multiple identity positions are incorporated. The inclusion of both written and visual rhetorical compositions is informed by the postmodern framework that engages with language as a system of signs (Hawk, 2018). This opened up possibilities to include visual rhetorical compositions like cartoons, graphic narratives, advertisements, and enable the digital natives to critically engage with contents that are a significant part of their everyday interactions.

Course structure

This course, through a series of developmental processes across the two semesters, attempts to enable the learners achieve critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through the process enumerated in form of a flow chart (Figure 1). The model is developed by taking insights from the existing literature on critical language skills (Pally, 2001; Xu & Li, 2018).
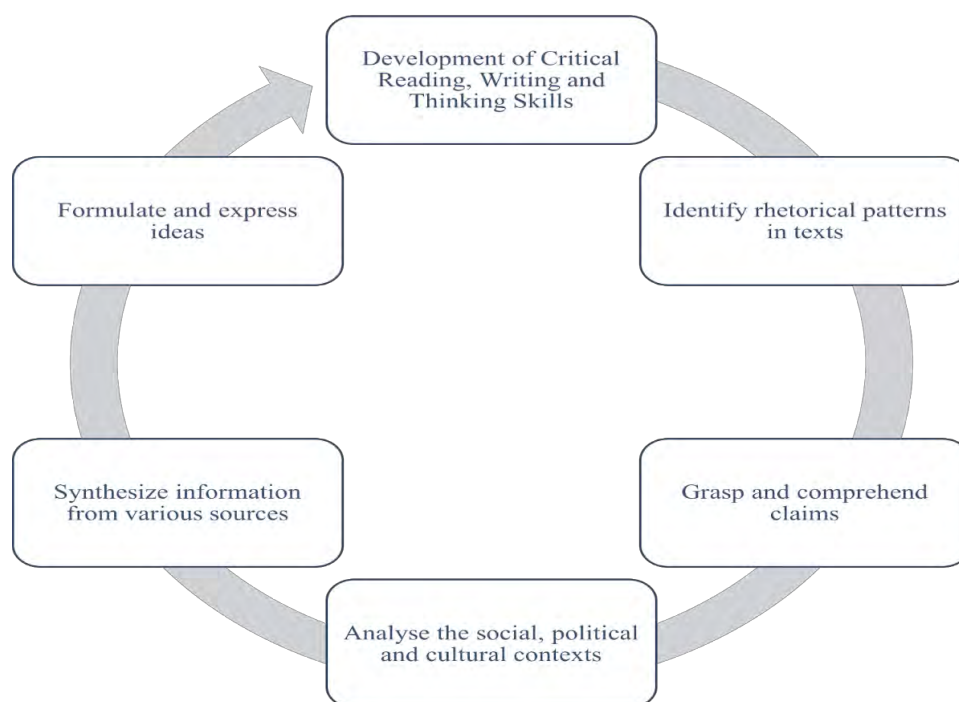

Figure 1. Model for developing critical reading, writing, and thinking skills

While both the semesters closely follow the development process of critical engagement, individual semesters are designed with specific focus. The first semester is structured to focus on the instructor and learners' analysis of the rhetorical composition through different methods of reading. The focus on different reading methods aims to inculcate in the learners the practice of deep-reading along with scanning which they are mostly familiar with in the digital world (Rosenwald, 2014; Seaboyer & Barnett, 2019; Wolf, 2018). The different methods of reading and analysis is adopted to make the learners deliberate on the politics of production and consumption of rhetoric. This allows the learner to engage with the rhetoric through multiple perspectives thereby providing possibilities of grasping, understanding, evaluating the information available, by meaningfully and critically engaging with them. The second semester takes forward the learning acquired in the first semester by enabling learners to analyze and challenge rhetorics from their immediate spaces of engagement through an informed understanding of rhetoric. Rhetorical compositions from varied disciplines, genres, and themes are incorporated here to sustain interest of learners from various disciplinary backgrounds. This also enables the possibility to engage with compositions that are part of their everyday lives from varied areas, both global and local. Thus, the aim of the course is to enable critical reading, writing and thinking skills in the learners and thereby advance towards the channelization of the key skills of 21st century into the curriculum and pedagogy of GE in India. The curriculum also takes into account the nature of learning and needs of the learner and equips them not only to the requisites of academia but also that of the digital world.

Assessment patterns

The assessment pattern of the new course is designed to further support the goal of the new GE course and thereby initiate the employment of critical thinking and analytical skills. The assessment pattern of the university includes both formative internal assessments and summative assessments in the form of examinations. While formative internal assessments are flexible, allowing possibility for take-home creative assignments, summative assessments are essentially conventional time-bound exams. The assignments designed for the course closely follow the development process envisioned to enable critical thinking. Also, it complies with a gradational system wherein the learners employ critical skills to analyze texts and contexts and take the learning forward by indulging in the creation and production of rhetorics across varied genres, mediums, and contexts. However, designing assignments for summative assessments involve challenges posed by most of the time-bound examinations. In order to assess learners' abilities to apply the skills gained through the course, they are provided with rhetorical compositions and situations that are not directly introduced as part of classroom discussions or reading materials. Thus, the possibility of focusing solely on memory and

retention skills, like in the case of literature-oriented approach to GE course, is avoided. The question papers are structured to include components to assess skills of rhetoric analysis, close-reading, synthesizing information, and production of an effective rhetorical piece, which further support the objectives discussed.

Methodology

This study is primarily quantitative and cross-sectional in nature and the data were elicited in the form of a survey questionnaire by the practitioner-researchers at the end of the academic year in which this course was administered (2018-2019). The google-form was taken to the classes by the practitioner-researchers and the learners were made to respond to the same using their mobile phones. Information relating to the disciplinary specialization and gender orientation were elicited through the first few questions. The rest of the questionnaire comprised 13 questions (Appendix 1). Among these, the responses to the first 12 questions had to be given on a Likert-type scale of 1-5 ranging from *never* to *always* and the 13th question was open-ended where the students could make personal observations about the course. Among the 12 questions, three questions elicited responses on the nature and the relevance of the new course content. Two questions elicited responses on the effectiveness of the course in imparting LSRW skills and the mode in which these skills were facilitated. Responses to applicability and relatability in terms of pedagogical structuring of the course and content distribution were elicited through two questions. Three questions elicited responses on learners' perception of the role of instructor and method of instruction. And, two questions elicited responses on the learners' perception of the effectiveness of the modes and methods of assessment.

Only the students who had completed the course across both the semesters were considered for this study. Efforts were made to include a representative number of learners from across the humanities and social science disciplines in which this course was offered. Three hundred and fifty-nine (N=359) complete responses were collected from the learners.

Cronbach Alpha test was conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Further, T-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were also conducted to analyze the impact of learner variables on the responses.

The questionnaire generated a high alpha value (α=0.84) thereby establishing that it was a highly reliable questionnaire. Statistical analysis was also conducted to analyze the impact of variables of gender and disciplinary specialization on the reception of the course. In terms of distribution of respondents across these variables, the number of learners who identified with female gender (N=248) were more than double of the number of learners who identified with the male gender (N=104) and the rest of the learners chose not to mention their gender (N=7). The distribution of learners in terms of gender actually implicates the general admission pattern of higher education in India

which sees a greater number of females joining non-professional courses than males (Sharma, 2018). The distribution of the learners across disciplines is presented in the form of a pie chart (Figure 2). See Appendix 2 for results of the study.
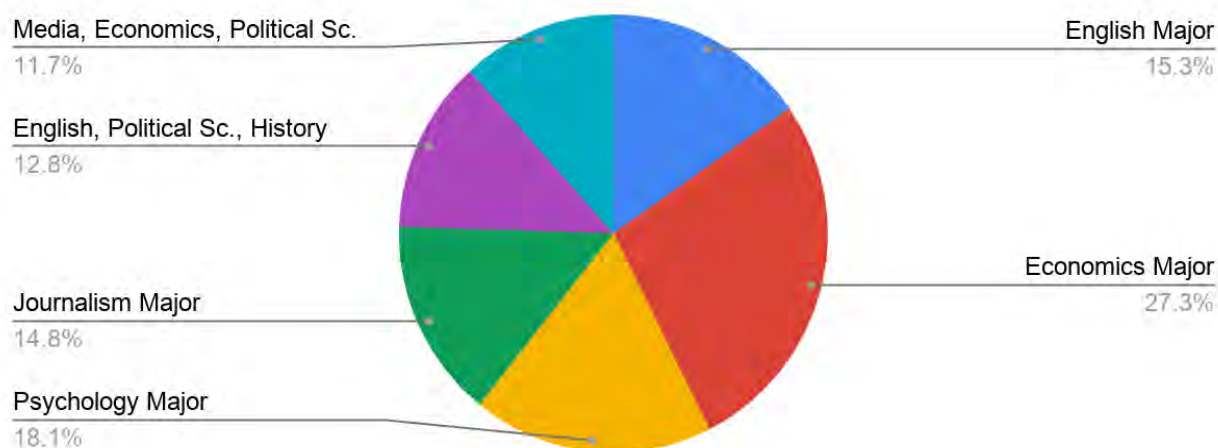

Figure 2. Disciplinary background of the learners

       Three questions which elicited responses on the nature and relevance of the course content explored the learner's ability to produce and analyze rhetoric (M=3.74, SD=0.96), think and raise questions about the socio-cultural practices (M=3.57, SD=1.10), and, enquired whether rhetoric was perceived to be important in everyday life (M=3.72, SD=1.07), post completion of the course. These three questions were integral to analyze the learners' orientation towards a course that centered around rhetoric and its multiple engagements. The results indicate that the outcomes envisioned for the course were actualized in practice. The positive inclination displayed by the learners towards the course could be associated with the novelty involved in the nature of the course as it threads into less familiar terrain of rhetoric that has hardly been engaged in the context of ELT in India. The observation made by one of the learners majoring in Psychology about the course in the final open question not only substantiates the data further but also provides insights into skills acquired through the course. The student said, "I feel that an interest in the topics being discussed is crucial to understand and produce a rhetoric. This course focused on the nuances of reading, writing and convincing and the course in itself was a very effective rhetoric for trying to produce a rhetoric. Understanding the rhetoric elements helped gain insight into what to include in an essay, which was very helpful.". The learners' attempt to critically evaluate and analyze the rhetorics of the course reflects the awareness that rhetoric is an integral part of their everyday experiences and the meta-awareness of the need to consciously evaluate and critically analyze any information and content available. This consciousness developed among the

learners though may not be homogeneous but definitely represents that the course design initiated and encouraged the learners to engage in critical thinking at large. In order to probe further into learner variables, t-tests and ANOVA tests were conducted. While there were no statistically significant differences based on the gender of the learners, ANOVA test results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the responses of the learners based on their disciplinary specializations ($p < 0.05$). The learners with single-majors were more satisfied as compared to the ones with triple-majors. One of the possible explanations about the varying degree of interests towards the content and topics discussed might be because of the influence of disciplinary orientation.

The influence of disciplinary orientation is further explored through the following questions in the questionnaire. The response of a learner majoring in Economics is particularly relevant here; "This course is different from what have been taught to us before. I think this is more interesting than the normal poetry and novel reading as we become aware of real-life issues and problems." Therefore, though the course may have limitation(s) in terms of catering to the interests of all learners, it was able to move away from the traditional literature-oriented ELT approach and generate interest among the learners by situating the content within the immediate context(s) of the learners. Thus, the negative results generated (M=2.97, SD=1.18) on the effectiveness of conventional materials and modes used for teaching English over the present course further substantiates the claim. Another question that needs to be deliberated in relation to the effectiveness of the course is the ability to impart LSRW skills. The responses to this question indicate that the learners did not associate the acquisition of basic LSRW skills with this course (M=3.23, SD=1.02). Overall, thus, the average response for both these questions were low (M=3.10, SD=1.10) and t-test and ANOVA test results indicating that there was no statistically significant impact of either gender or disciplinary variable on the responses. The low rating on the course's effectiveness in imparting LSRW skills implies two aspects of the course. Firstly, the course is designed keeping in mind the advanced speakers of English language, considering the increasing number of speakers of English language in India (Census of India, 2011). Thus, an over-emphasis on listening and speaking skills, as is adopted in the approaches towards Communicative English oriented GE courses, is absent here. Secondly, the course situates the development process of critical thinking skills by exposing the learners to different methods of reading and writing, as mentioned in the description of the course, thereby enhancing their critical skills.

The section in the questionnaire on structuring and application of the methods generated mixed responses (M=3.43, SD=0.87). While the learners' perception of the ability to apply methods of reading and analysis generated positive responses (M=3.58, SD=1), the response on smooth transition of the course from semester I to semester II was rated relatively low (M=3.27, SD=1.06). Though there was no significant impact of the variable of gender

on the responses, ANOVA test results showed that there existed statistically significant differences in responses among the discipline specific groups ($p < 0.05$) with the Journalism and Psychology major students indicating a more positive orientation towards the transition. This concern on the transition of the course can also be observed in an open response, where a learner majoring in Psychology pointed out, "In semester 1, we focused more on the technicalities. But coming to semester 2 and having to read up a lot of extra and varied things was challenging. It is still difficult at times to connect all the dots i.e. the technical aspects of analysis and the much broader knowledge that we're expected to have. Maybe gradually introducing social, economic, political etc. material from the first semester itself would have definitely made the transition smoother." While the course contextualizes the rhetorical compositions from the situation they emerged, the focus on compositions from across the world in the first semester to compositions from indigenous contexts in the second semester could be challenging for the learners. Therefore, there is a need to deliberate further on the structuring and transition of the course. Also, this indicates the important role played by the facilitator of the course in the smooth transition from semester I to II.

One of the challenges in administering the course at the university has been the change of the instructors every semester. This is further reiterated through the responses elicited on the importance of the role of an instructor (M=3.75, SD=1.29), method of teaching used by the instructor (M=3.44, SD=1.31), and the impact of change of instructors across the semesters on the course (M=3.96, SD=1.22). Though there was no impact of gender on the responses, ANOVA test result indicates that there was a statistically significant impact ($p < 0.05$) of the disciplinary orientation on the way the role of the instructors was perceived. While learners specializing in English (M=4.04, SD=0.98), Economics (M=4.05, SD=0.88), Journalism (M=3.79, SD=0.83), and Psychology (M=3.72, SD=0.52) responded strongly towards the importance of instructor and method of instruction for this course, the same pattern of response was not noticed among the EPH (M=3.02, SD=1.10), and MEP (M=3.16, SD=0.65) students. The recorded high mean for two of the questions i.e. the role and the change of the instructor (M=3.75, M=3.96 respectively) indicates the general orientation of the learners towards a highly instructor-oriented approach, a phenomenon that is common in the Indian ELT context. And, for a course that is learner-oriented, such a scenario is challenging and less desirable. The argument here is not to completely evade the traditional patterns of teacher-oriented practices but rather to point out the need for a smooth integration of learner-oriented approaches to the ELT scenario by exploring the possibilities of training instructors and orienting learners. The recorded high standard deviation in this category further validates the argument made, as factors like preference for a particular instructor and teaching method strongly influence the perception of the course by the learners. The comparatively lower rating (M=3.44) elicited on teaching methods is also echoed in the open response of a learner majoring in English,

"The course structure seems to be quite innovative, but the teaching methods do certainly effect its impact. A more coherent class discussion where an equal amount of both class participation and teacher guidance is present, would certainly be helpful.". Therefore, there is a necessity to devise standardized teaching strategies and methods for the course. There is no denying the fact that facilitators of the course play a crucial role in enabling the learners with critical thinking skills. However, caution should be taken on the tendency of the learners to depend on the instructors, thereby mirroring the traditional teacher-oriented practices that focuses on enabling memory-retention skills. Thus, training sessions for the instructors are advisable in order to enable them to provide skills to the learners that would be transferable in nature.

Assessments are crucial to understand if the skills discussed and practiced have been acquired by the learners. Two questions elicited responses on learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of assessment patterns employed. One inquired about summative assessment, that explored the possibility of the learners being challenged by not following traditional methods of testing memory and retention skills (M=3.19, SD=1.15). And, the other explored learners' readiness towards new kinds of assessment patterns as adopted for the paper (M=3.69, SD=1.06). While the learners' response towards new patterns of assessments were favourable, opening up possibilities for experimentation and innovation in this area, the comparatively lower rating on the aspect of being challenged indicates two possibilities. Either the learners have acquired the skills that the course aimed to enable them with or that the assessment strategies have to be reworked to meet the requirement of the course. Overall, the average responses in the assessment category can be considered neutral (M=3.44, SD=0.91). Therefore, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusive understanding on the assessment pattern from the empirical data. Also, as observed in the entire study, there was no statistically significant impact of the gender variable on the responses; however, the impact of disciplinary specialization as revealed through the ANOVA test results point out that single-major students reported better satisfaction with assessment patterns. This is to suggest that in overall terms the single-major students received the course better.

Conclusion

The present study, conducted with an objective to discuss the possibility of designing and administering a GE course suitable for the digital natives, successfully provides an instance of a course that could significantly influence the pedagogical approaches to ELT in the higher education context in India. This course makes provisions to consider the evolving nature of learners and learning in the domain of curriculum development and pedagogical practices. There is no refuting the fact that the content of the course is subject to evolve over the period of time. However, pedagogical inquiries as the present one are

relevant owing to the dormancy of approaches to ELT courses in Indian higher education context. Here, it is imperative to mention that pedagogical inquiries like the one in this study have certain limitations and challenges. One of the limitations of the present study is that it is based on cross-sectional, empirical data, which narrows the possibility to further analyze the observations made. A longitudinal observation-based data could be generated in the future to support the claims and focus-group interviews can be conducted to gain further insights on the perceptions of the learners about applicability and relevance of the new course. Further, since the course enables skills that have wider applicability, learners can be interviewed to gain insights on how the skills acquired through this course helped them in other courses they enrolled for and also in various projects and internships. Also, the section on assessment and testing demands specific attention enabling scope for future research in the area. Studies can be conducted to design and develop suitable assessment patterns for a course that attempts to enhance the critical thinking of the learners. The approach adopted in the course to test the skills acquired by exposing the learner to rhetorical compositions that are not part of the classroom discussions needs to be further developed and contextualized by assessing the needs of the learner.

The course introduced evidently provides new direction in terms of the GE courses that have otherwise been repetitive and relatively stagnant in India. The attempted reconceptualization of the GE course initiates the possibility for a paradigmatic change in the manner in which ELT is envisioned, formulated, and implemented in India. Such initiatives that attempt to rethink, reevaluate, and reconceive established educational systems are discernable, especially in a world where technologies, identities, cultures, and learners are ever-evolving and fluid. In such a world, the educational system needs to evolve if it has to stay relevant to its learners and their ever-so-changing learning needs.

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Note on Contributors

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

English Language and Composition Survey

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions.
Select only one option for each question.
Choose the option which you feel fits best according to you.

* Required

1. **Name** *

    _____

2. **Register No.**

    _____

3. **Class** *
   Check all that apply.

   - [ ] ENGH
   - [ ] EPH
   - [ ] ECOA
   - [ ] ECOB
   - [ ] JOH
   - [ ] MEP
   - [ ] PSYH

4. **Gender** *
   Check all that apply.

   - [ ] Female
   - [ ] Male
   - [ ] Prefer not to say
   - [ ] Other

5. **How effective do you think the course English Language and Composition I and II is to enhance your language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)** *
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

20

6. Does the course make you aware, think, and, raise questions on society and its practices. *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

7. Do you think reading fiction (poetry and prose) will be more effective than reading articles (like we are doing in the class). *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

8. Do you think English Language and Composition I and II are well connected and coherent? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

9. Do you think you were able to apply the methods (rhetoric analysis, close-reading, rhetoric production) introduced in the 1st semester to analyse the readings provided in the 2nd semester. *
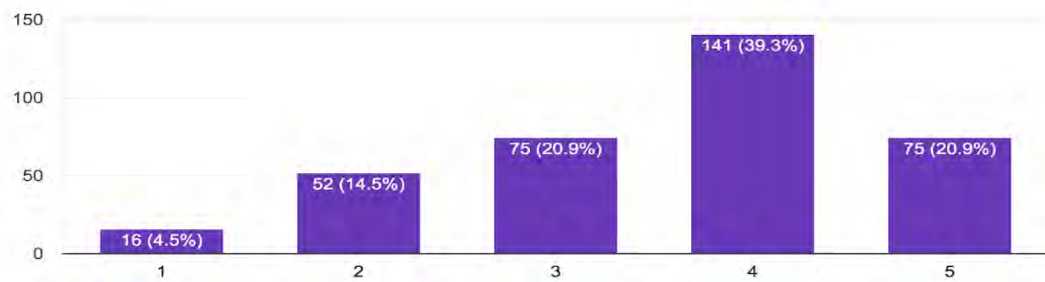*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

10. Have your reading and writing skills been challenged by not answering direct questions? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

11. Do you appreciate challenging modes of assessment ? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

21

12. How important is rhetoric according to you in your everyday life? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

13. How important do you think the role of a teacher is in this course. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

14. Do you think the method (interactive lectures and discussions) adopted by the teacher for this course influences the way you understand rhetoric. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

15. Do you think the change of the teacher/instructor impacts the mode in which the course is perceived. *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

16. After completing the course (English Language and Composition I and II) are you in a position to produce rhetoric and understand the politics behind that production? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

17. As the course takes into account subjective opinions, offer your views for the improvement of the course.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

22

Appendix 2: Graphical Representation of Responses

How effective do you think the course English Language and Composition I and II is to enhance your language skil...(Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)
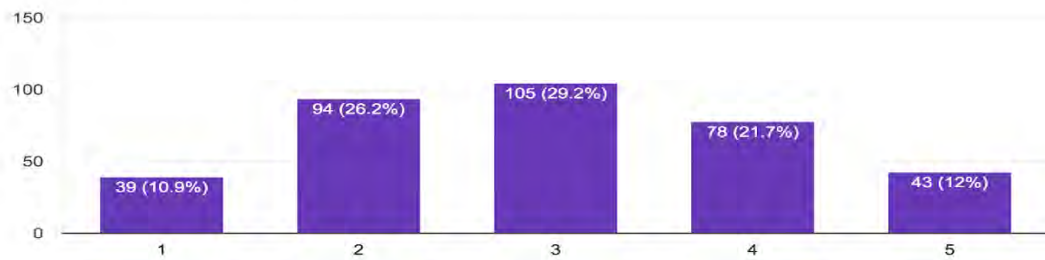359 responses
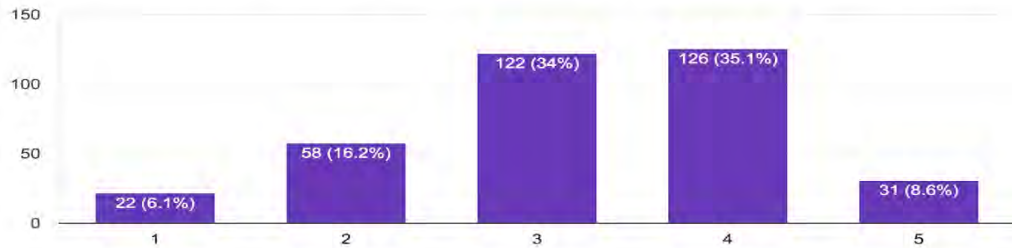
Does the course make you aware, think, and, raise questions on society and its practices.
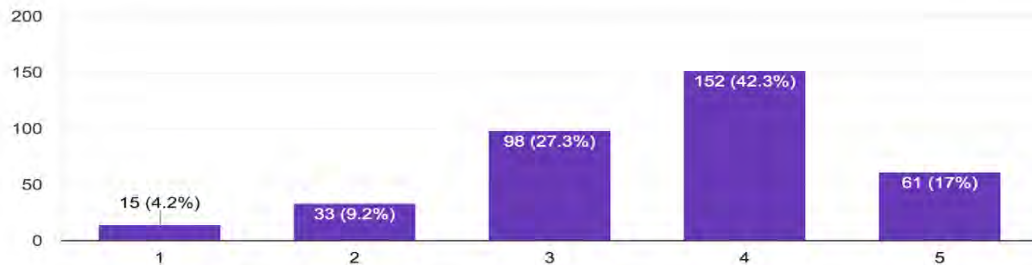359 responses

Do you think reading fiction (poetry and prose) will be more effective than reading articles (like we are doing in the class).
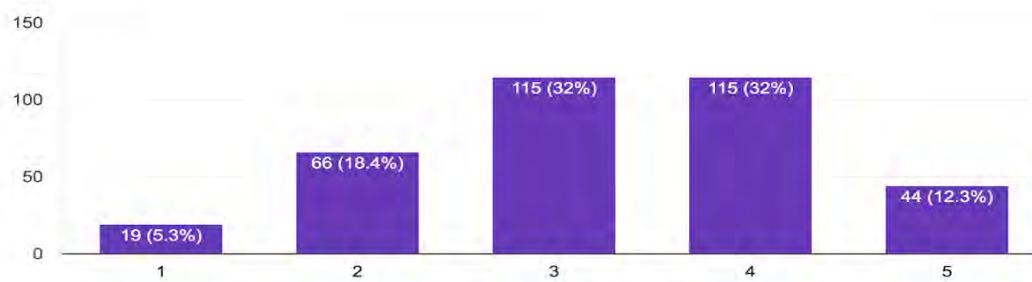359 responses

Do you think you were able to apply the methods (rhetoric analysis, close-reading, rhetoric production) int...readings provided in the 2nd semester.

359 responses

Do you think English Language and Composition I and II are well connected and coherent?

359 responses

Have your reading and writing skills been challenged by not answering direct questions?
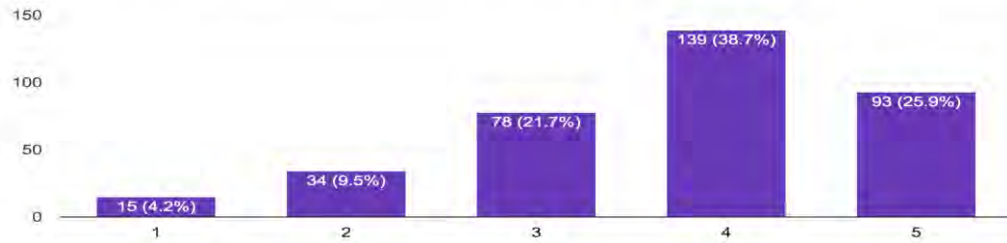
359 responses
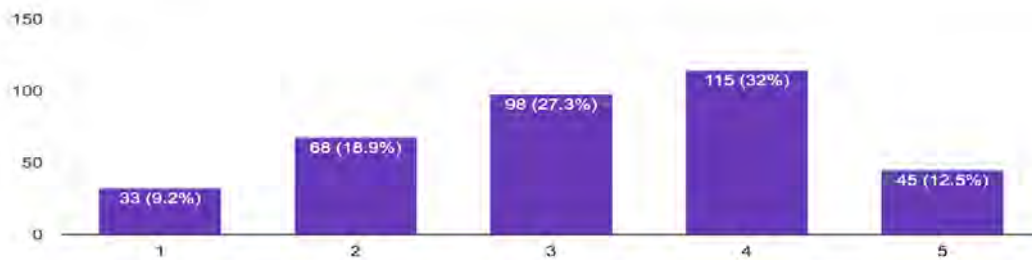
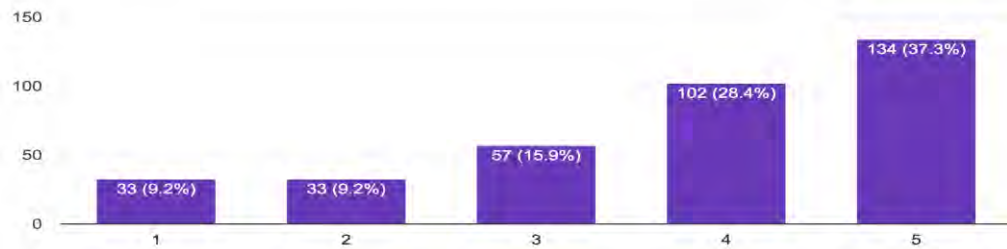## Do you appreciate challenging modes of assessment ?

359 responses
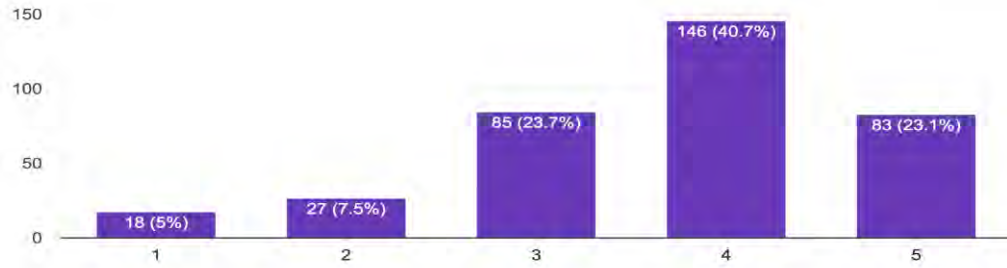
How important is rhetoric according to you in your everyday life?
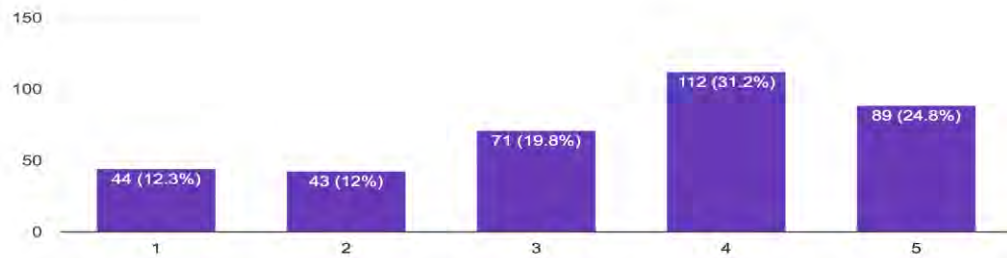
359 responses

How important do you think the role of a teacher is in this course.
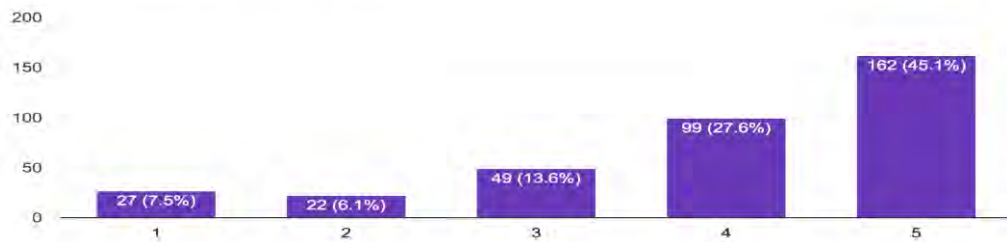
359 responses

Do you think the method (interactive lectures and discussions) adopted by the teacher for this course influences the way you understand rhetoric.

359 responses

Do you think the change of the teacher/instructor impacts the mode in which the course is perceived.

359 responses

After completing the course (English Language and Composition I and II) are you in a position to produce rhetori...d the politics behind that production?

359 responses