



Ideological Constraints against Learning English as Communication: A Case Study Conducted at the University of Jaffna

Sharmi Shanmuganathan¹ & Luxika Raguram^{2,*}

Abstract

The study focuses on some ideological constraints against learning English as communication observed among Arts Faculty undergraduates at the University of Jaffna. Under the influence of ideological constraints against innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) strategies, the curriculum, lesson materials, and classroom management methods used at the university, do not seem to contribute comprehensively to the development of language skills desired in of the 21st century undergraduates. Their challenge against grasping the contents of the existing English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum can be interpreted as the result of an ideological constraint imposed by the ESL curriculum they have followed over a period of 13 years within the national school system, which treats English as an academic discipline rather than a life skill needed for day-to-day communication. Focused on this issue, the data were gathered from a sample of forty second-year general degree undergraduates through a questionnaire, and a one-on-one interview conducted in two phases with five randomly selected respondents. The findings revealed that these students have been treating English as an academic subject throughout their school life which extends for over 13 years. Accordingly, it is perceived that the teaching methodology, affective factors, exposure, and the recognition accorded to the English language, altogether contribute to a constraint against learning English as a life skill. The participants claim that it was only on entering the university that they realised the real-life communicative relevance of English and developed a set of goals to cultivate English language proficiency. In this context, the research aims to develop a mechanism to dismantle the ideological constraints, thereby enhancing the quality enhancement of their English language learning experiences at the university with a focus on facilitating the process of accomplishing their academic and professional communicative goals.

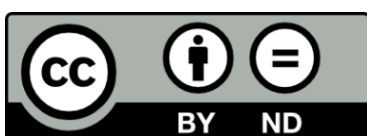
Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, English as a Second Language, Higher education, Language ideologies, Sri Lanka

¹School of Business, SLIIT Northern Uni, Jaffna

²Department of ELT, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna

*luxika@univ.jfn.ac.lk

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5119-8953>



This article is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-ND License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>). This license permits to use, distribute, and reproduce the contents of the publication for commercial and non-commercial purposes, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed anyway.

**Original Article****INTRODUCTION**

Ideological constraints against learning English as a "neutral tool" often stem from the belief that language is inextricably tied to power, identity, historical baggage, and competitive advantage. While proponents argue for its utility in global communication, critics highlight several ideological barriers that complicate this "instrumental" view. These barriers appear in terms of 1) linguistic imperialism and colonial legacy (Kim, 2011); 2) native-speakerism and identity loss (Zeng et al., 2023); 3) sociopolitical and nationalist constraints (Windle, 2023); and 4) pedagogical and structural tensions (Porto et al., 2024). Under linguistic imperialism and colonial legacy, there are possibilities for cultural dominance, which prevents English from being viewed as a neutral tool, exposing it instead as a vehicle for Western cultural values and ideologies. In many post-colonial contexts, there are possibilities for weaponising English as a symbol of past colonial rule to marginalise local languages and indigenous values. The English-only stance tends to suppress a learner's native linguistic identity. Under native-speakerism and identity loss, the ideology that "native-like" proficiency is the only benchmark for success deprives the learners of their cultural subjectivity and turns them into blind worshippers of English at the expense of their own heritage. Moreover, the compulsion to meet these unrealistic native-speaker

standards, leads to a loss of confidence in the learning process. Under sociopolitical and nationalist constraints, English is viewed with suspicion within religious-nationalist frameworks, where it is seen as a threat to national unity or traditional values. On the other hand, while English acts as "cultural capital" for social mobility, a tension develops between the elite who use it for competitive advantage and those who see it as a barrier to equity and inclusivity. Finally, under pedagogical and structural tensions, there is an ideological bias toward Western teaching methodologies (e.g., the communicative approach), which may not align with local educational cultures or needs. The artificial learning environment promotes an "instrumental approach"—learning English solely for exams or jobs—hindering true communicative competence and creating negative associations with the language.

All these ideological constraints are experienced in one way or another in the domain of learning English as a Second Language (ESL) education in Sri Lanka, which starts from grade three at school. That means that by the time of entering a university, the average school student has spent approximately ten years studying English. However, according to Karunaratne (2009), despite the educational reforms that have been made concerning the national school English language curriculum and pedagogy aim at making English a 'link

**Original Article**

language', it has not been fully accomplished. Rather than serving as a tool of communication, English is still treated as a luxury item accessible to a privileged few residents in highly developed urban environments (Karunaratne, 2009). Those who are outside this fraction of society face gaps in studying English at the university. A detailed analysis of how the university students' school-level English language learning experiences influence their motivation level is considered helpful in understanding whether their learning objectives within ESL courses are met. Providing a motivational learning experience is a significant point to be considered in an endeavour to produce undergraduates who could successfully accomplish their English language goals.

The study was conducted to identify the factors that hinder the learners from using English for communication. Such a study would be greatly beneficial to cater to the undergraduates who enter the university with a poor command of English. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to make changes, if necessary, in the university curriculum and ensure that the undergraduates will understand the 'communicative use' of English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The failure of the national-level TESL programme in Sri Lanka is already a truism. "Even though the students in Sri Lanka learn English as a second

language for several years in the school i.e., from primary to Advanced Level, their proficiency in English remains very low and most of the students find it difficult to express themselves in simple and correct English" (De Mel, 2007). In most rural areas there are few ESL teachers due to the lack of transport and other facilities (Prasangani, 2018). In certain schools, other subject teachers function as ESL teachers. This situation is considered a cause of the students' lack of motivation to learn English and their failure to acquire the expected levels of proficiency (Prasangani, 2018; Samaranayake, 2016). These observations are practically experienced by our research participants at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Jaffna.

It is reported that the English instructors refrain from teaching the prescribed syllabus and introduce the fundamental aspects of English to the undergraduates who do not have the stipulated first-year undergraduate competency level in English. While learners from other faculties such as Law, Medicine, Science, and Management usually cope with the University Test of English Language (UTEL) that helps set the semester-wise benchmarks for undergraduates' English language competency measurements, the Arts Faculty undergraduates do not. Aloysius (2015) claims, "there is a general perception in the educational field of Sri Lanka that the lack of effectiveness in teaching the

**Original Article**

English language is one of the reasons for the failure or the underperformance of students in learning English" (p. 7). The significance of the teachers' role in motivating the learners to learn the language along with a set of long-term professional and academic goals emerges from their claims. This agrees with the premise of Sakka et al. (2022) that the role of teachers is specifically "very strategic and decisive role" (p.1). In fact, a teacher requires an extensive knowledge about the subject as well as of the learner to carry out a meaningful and satisfactory pedagogy.

One prominent aspect of the teacher's role is the designing and implementation of lessons. "Teaching tools must approach students from an angle that seems interesting and relevant to them" (Sellani & Harrington, 2002). Irrelevant materials would not serve any purpose. Teaching materials that have no relevance to the students' likes and dislikes will particularly function as a demotivating agent as they do not direct the learners' progress towards their future goals. "The teacher needs to prepare activities appropriate for the learners' age, level, and sex to keep them motivated" (Sakka et al., 2022, p. 2), since each of these factors plays a crucial role in making the teaching materials interesting and motivating.

Besides materials, evaluation strategies also exert an impact on the learners' motivation which may, in the long run, affect the accomplishment of their 'possible-self-image'. The

backbenchers among them who always "refuse to try a new assignment usually are afraid they cannot do the work, and they cannot risk their "hard-core" reputations by making mistakes in public" (Seven, 2020, p. 69). Therefore, while evaluating learners, it is advisable to create a conducive environment that normalises the tendency to make mistakes. The teacher can instil in them a notion that seeing mistakes in a positive light could help learners "develop self-confidence and faith in their ability to learn by allowing them to make mistakes" (Seven, 2020, p. 69).

Like instructional influence, certain social as well as cultural factors too play a role in determining learner motivation. According to Karunaratne (2009) "students from rural areas because of the low income of their parents are deprived of additional opportunities such as private tuition to learn more English" (p. 253). On the same wavelength, Prasangani (2018) claims that "the disparity between urban and rural is wide in their English learning due to the lack of facilities and teachers" (p. 59). This scenario is also evident in the existing gap between policy planning and implementation. Studies such as Aloysius (2015), Danapala (2008), and Prasangani and Nadarajan (2015) have identified that underprivileged students from rural areas do not receive adequate opportunities to learn English compared to those from privileged backgrounds in urban areas.

**Original Article**

“The attitude of students about their future job prospects also affects their own motivation for learning English” (Aloysius, 2015, p. 67). In Sri Lanka, the advantage of learning English has often been related to securing a white-collar job (Danapala, 2008; Fernando, 2005; Wijeratne, 2015). This scenario could possibly affect the learner motivation specifically when they decide that English is not a requirement for their dream job. Interestingly, a survey on the undergraduate opinions about choosing a job, carried out at the University of Jaffna by Anojan and Nimalathan (2013) reveals that the family and relatives impact the career choice of the undergraduates. Therefore, the language learning motivation of these undergraduates is indirectly affected (either positively or negatively) by the social contexts they hail from.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since research on ideological constraints against learning English as communication cannot totally rely on measurements and quantities and developing any premises in that regard demands both quantitative and qualitative data, we chose a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach. However, the weight placed on the approaches adopted in establishing the significance of the research problem and in drawing conclusions on strategies and solutions adopted in resolving it depends on the type of research problem. Based on this

weight, we used an exploratory sequential research design. The study was conducted with a group of 40 second-year general degree undergraduates of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Jaffna, representing approximately 22% of the total population (N=180), which could provide adequate data for an exploratory study. The sample was selected using the simple random sampling method. A questionnaire was distributed to them. Of the participants, 5 were selected for interview using the purposive sampling method. Since all the participants belonged to a uniformed age category and year of study forty participants were selected owing to the time and logistics constraints. Second year undergraduates were uniquely focused to obtain in-depth data from participants who would have experienced at least one year of learning and/or applying English at the university. This experience would possibly assist them in answering our interview questions in-depth and provide comparative answers to questions about their learning experience and/or usage of English at school.

After collecting both of these sets of data, we carried out a manual tabulation of the questionnaire data using the graphs generated by Google Forms and thematic analysis of the qualitative data which fragments the texts according to their themes, codes them in small portions, and collates

**Original Article**

them into significant segments (Rosario, 2023, p.2). We translated the interviews, identified the most significant comments made by each participant and tabled them separately. They were categorised under codes such as teacher, materials, methodology, exposure, peers, and education system which, in turn, were amalgamated under three themes such as learner-based factors, language-based factors, and learning situation-based factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss the findings related to the impact of the English language—its nature and functionality—on the participants' actual self that motivates them to shape their actual self to suit their 'self-goals.' It was interesting to note that prior to their tertiary education, all the participants, irrespective of their learning environments in schools, possessed similar ideas about English, such as it being a subject, which is not considered compulsory to pursue any stream in the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) studies or get selected to a state university. However, a gradual shift from this ideology is perceived in their attitude to English most probably during/after their advanced level education, and a year of learning at the university has further broadened their perspective about English, leading to a crucial attitudinal transformation primarily in their motivation to

accomplish their self-made language learning goals. This can be interpreted as a development where the learners' opinion about English as a subject has been replaced by a new opinion about it as a skill or a tool of communication in accordance with the learning experiences received.

The respondents have expressed that the international recognition of the English language, coupled with the potential technical benefits it renders to a Sri Lankan learner, which they were exposed to at the university, motivates them to set positive language goals. On the other hand, they claim that their incapability of recognising these aspects of English prior to their university entrance has resulted in their ignorance of language learning benefits. The sub-themes below elaborate on these findings. The first two sub-themes incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data. In other words, the qualitative data helped explore the factors behind the statistics obtained from the questionnaire. The third sub-theme i.e., the exposure to the language, uses qualitative data analysis exclusively since it was derived newly from the elaborate responses provided by the participants during the interview about their language learning experiences during their school and university education.

**Original Article****English as a Subject**

A series of ESL learner experiences related to school education were examined to obtain a clear understanding of the transformations their attitude toward real-life English language proficiency requirements has undergone after university entrance. There, under the sub-theme 'English as a Subject', it was possible to identify the varying ideologies about the English language prevalent in society as well as within the school system. It was noticed that English functions as the official link language in Sri Lanka between the speakers of Sinhala and Tamil, and it is officially introduced to schoolchildren from Grade 3, is taught up to Grade 13, spanning a period of roughly ten years. It is also considered one of the six compulsory subjects at the public examination, the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L), and a pass in English is a requirement to join Grade 12 that caters to the public examination, the G.C.E. A/L. However, this requirement is not strictly observed while offering successful candidates admission to the state universities in Sri Lanka. This is probably believed to decelerate the students' focus on English at the G.C.E. A/L. Both these circumstances as identified by Karunaratne (2014), are disadvantageous to the learner. Until the students appear for the G.C.E. O/L examination in English, the teachers are pushed to prepare the students in English (Aloysius, 2015, p. 78), and during the G.C.E. A/L, the focus is

completely shifted to the mainstream subjects as English is not a requirement for university admission. Against this backdrop, the teachers are expected to complete the lessons in the relevant textbooks for each grade. However, these textbooks focus primarily on 'reading and writing' (Karunaratne, 2014, p.7), which are essential for the examination. Even though there are listening and speaking lessons included in the textbooks, the teachers tend to avoid them as their focus is on the written examination. That means listening and speaking are not tested in school examinations.

On the contrary, the expectation of the stakeholders, the employers in particular, as well as society by and large, is to improve English language communication among the citizens of Sri Lanka so that its function as a 'link language' can be achieved. This expectation has already been discussed by Prasangani (2019), Prasangani and Natarajan (2018), and Ratwatte (2012). According to Aloysius (2015), "Karunaratne (2014) argues that the objective of the English language teaching curriculum in Sri Lanka i.e., to develop students' communicative competence in view of promoting national harmony and securing job opportunities for the young generation has not been achieved" (p. 79).

The school experiences of the participants, which resemble the findings of the previous researchers, confirm the contradiction discussed above. They describe their perception

**Original Article**

of the English language during their school education in statements such as: "It is a subject that requires a 'pass' grade at the G.C.E. O/L." (RB1); "It could be learned by memorising." (RC1), and "Inability to learn English is not a problem" (RA1). Respondent E admitted that he learned English during his G.C.E. O/L studies as it had been considered a determinant of his rank and was "ashamed" of getting a low rank because of "this subject." Hence, the respondents admitted that during their primary as well as secondary education their goal was to get through in the "subject" of English.

From the responses, it could be surmised that these participants believed English, like any other subject, could be mastered by memorising certain sections such as grammar. The analysis revealed that their overall perception of their proficiency is negative. Most of the participants believe that it is a difficult subject to learn. It seems that the learners would neither make efforts to understand the significance of a language which they perceive to be difficult to learn nor realise the significance of the opportunities to learn it. This could be explained from the question which illustrates the respondents' perception of the English language during their school journey. To the question "Is English difficult to learn?", most of them responded 'yes'.

Moreover, from the qualitative data we could identify that overall, none of them possessed a positive attitude

towards English, which has been for them a 'subject' in their school curriculum in the first place. Their approach towards English as a subject not very significant in pursuit of their higher studies could possibly be the determinant of their negative proficiency. The interview data illustrate that the sole aim of the participants was to get through the G.C.E. O/L and G.C.E. A/L examinations and get selected to a university. The demand for higher grades and an ambitious z-score coupled with the exclusion of English from the z-score hunt seem to have resulted in the participants' ignoring of English. Our observations from their responses suggest that, had they been given any opportunity to break the ideology about English as a subject, they would have approached English as a language, enabling them to realise its communicative use during their schooling. Eventually, this scenario would have led them to form a positive attitude at the end of their schooling.

The Shift in Perception: English as a Language

The second sub-theme 'the shift in perception' was formed based on the experiences of the participants after their school education. According to the interview data, it could be concluded that a shift in their perception of English was initiated by the experiences they gained in society after completing school education. Their perception of English shifted

**Original Article**

from the notion of it as a subject to that of a language or a means of communication. Subsequently, their university learning experiences have provided them with ample opportunities for the application of English as a language in society. The participants seem to have understood that, more than mere textbook learning, there is a vast existence of the English language outside their classrooms. Although it does not seem that they have realised this fully, a change in their perspective towards English could be clearly seen. In particular, the seeds of this change seem to have been sown immediately after their G.C.E. A/L studies.

All the participants reported that they attended private classes after school in institutions that offer certificate/diploma courses in English. A participant mentioned 'the fear of getting selected to a university in the Southern Province' as the cause behind the decision to join a private institution and learn English after he completed schooling, which is connected to the dynamics of local languages in Sri Lanka. For a first-language speaker of Tamil without any Sinhala language proficiency, communication is an issue in a region where Sinhala is predominantly spoken. However, as stated previously, this issue was converted into a motive to learn the language. It appears that these participants had begun to gradually realise the need for English for communication only after completing

their school education, as the entire sample population was willing to take up the opportunity of learning English in the university. The primary reason behind this notable fact is their dissatisfaction with their learning at school, as revealed by the participants in the first session of the interview. "Seniors said English language is important in the university (RB2)," "from the learning experience I thought I should give priority to English" (RA2), "I wanted to use this chance to learn English because my future aim (of being a lawyer) is connected to it" (RC2) were among the other reasons that were mentioned by the participants. Although these reasons differ at a deeper level, at the surface level all of them pinpoint a possible realisation by the participants that the status of English goes far beyond what they perceived while in school. This change of thought could also be attributed to the wide range of opportunities they would have received to use the language (as revealed from their interview responses) in the university.

From the questionnaire data, it was possible to identify variations in participants' exposure to the English language both prior to and following their entry into the university. During their schooling, their exposure to the language was seemingly limited to the English class. As discussed in the first section of the paper, their approach to English was more like that towards a subject rather than to a language. This



Original Article

led to the memorisation of grammar and the essays for the English examination at school, and a complete ignorance of the subject at other instances of their school life. Figures 1 and 2 summarise the domains in which the participants used English prior to and after university admission.

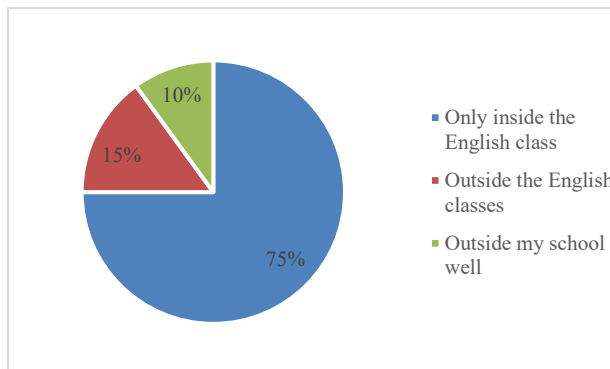


Figure 1. Domains of English Use before University Entrance

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2024

As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of the participants used English only inside their classrooms. From the interviews, the data revealed that classroom use of the language exclusively involved English periods while English Day competitions covered the next and the least use. The implication is that participants equated the English period in school to the 'use of the English Language'. Only a quarter of the total population used English outside to communicate with people. However, the interview responses highlighted that this usage was limited to talking to guests who visited their schools.

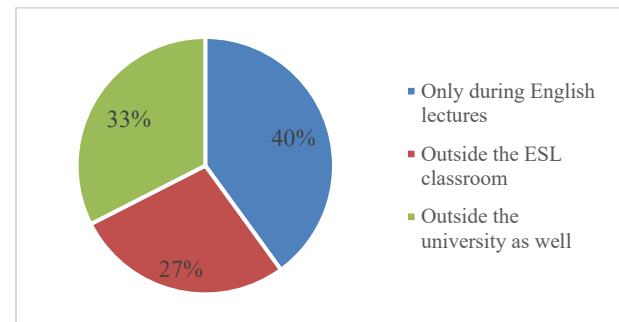


Figure 2. Domains of English use in the University

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2024

Figure 2 stands in contrast to Figure 1, in that it records an almost equal distribution of participants. Significantly, classroom usage drops down to 40%, while the other two domains together cover a significant majority. Further, the interview responses highlighted that participants engaged in continued communication with Sinhala speakers outside their faculty, which was a major source of communicative input that played a part in the shift of their perception of the language. Thus, from these findings, it could be stated that the world outside the school, with university playing a major part, has contributed to a shift in the participants' perception of English from that of a 'subject' to that of a 'language'. The change is broad and crucial. Yet, it has gradually happened through a slow and steady process.

Various studies (Aloysius, 2015; Herath & Ranasinghe, 2011; Perera, 2006) identify the TESL-related challenges within the national school system of Sri Lanka. Among them, teacher-related factors occupy a major position. Through this study, it was identified

**Original Article**

that teacher-related drawbacks had resulted primarily in the failure of learners to use English as a language. Even after the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches, students' inability to communicate in English continues. Therefore, the findings achieved in this study are meant to endorse the arguments of previous researchers in this regard. Teachers do not pay attention to the communicative elements included in the prescribed textbooks, and their major focus is to teach reading, writing, and certain grammatical aspects which are essential for the students to get through the examination (Aloysius, 2015; Karunaratne, 2008; Perera, 2001). As explicitly stated by all the participants, the ultimate focus of their teachers was to make them pass the G.C.E. O/L examination. The focus was accomplished via several methods, including teaching the selected few sections relevant to the G.C.E. O/L, grouping students based on their proficiency, and paying less attention to weaker students compared to those who could get an 'A' grade in the examination. This partial treatment could possibly lead to the conclusion that rather than taking English as a language that all students should be able to use and communicate in, teachers take it as a subject that determines their professional excellence and the school's prestige.

It is undeniable that valuable initiatives such as 'English as a Life Skill' and

'Speak English Our Way' were introduced to create awareness among school students regarding the significance of English as a language. However, these programmes did not yield the intended outcomes (Aloysius, 2015; Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022; Karunaratne, 2008). Among the several reasons identified by these researchers, the primary reason that connects to my study is the inability of the teachers to utilise the resources given to them. This, in turn, questions their understanding of CLT.

"A teacher using the CLT approach is more of a facilitator than knowledgeable in the language. Teachers using CLT are expected to create in the classroom a language learning environment in which students can communicate meaningfully with one another, they are also expected to facilitate interactions among students" (Aloysius, 2015, p. 48). However, the studies conducted in this light including mine suggest that teachers do not make sufficient use of the CLT oriented textbooks; they engage in teaching-learning mainly to make students pass the examination (Aloysius, 2015; Karunaratne 2008; Perera, 2001). As mentioned in the report of the Presidential Task Force at the time of initiating the 'English as a Life Skill' programme, "what we have been doing so far was "Teaching about the language" and not "teaching how to use it." As a result, "the teaching and learning of the rules and structures of

**Original Article**

the English language has produced in Sri Lanka a generation of students whose communicative skills are so curtailed that they hardly realise the utility value of English. Consequently, students are reluctant and hesitant to speak English today ” (Aloysius, 2015, p. 49).

The methodology and the materials are other two elements that are intertwined with the teacher as a facilitator of the formation of a positive ‘actual self.’ Accordingly, from our study it could be revealed that the participants were mostly not in favour of utilisation of the materials (primarily the textbook) and the methodology. Although the textbook includes tasks based on all four skills, teachers seem to focus on grammar and writing. Our participants were not provided with adequate opportunities to use English as a communicative language (which should have been carried out in the CLT approach). Consequently, their ‘fear’ of ‘using the language’ in real-life remained unexamined.

Besides these factors, the place of the English language in the education system has also been a determinant of the negative proficiency. Although formal English education is introduced from grade three and English is included as one of the core subjects in G.C.E. O/L, the significance given to the English language is low. English is considered a subject that does not hold the same prominence as mathematics and science. This attitude was overtly present in the interviews we

conducted, as the participants admitted that they could not allocate time for English as they had to focus on other core subjects during G.C.E. O/L and later in their G.C.E. A/L, they hardly sat in the English class as they had to allocate most of their study time to concentrate on their mainstream subjects. That way the findings of my study in this light support the ideologies of past researchers who set out to explore the situation of ELT in Sri Lankan schools (Aloysius, 2015; Wijesekera, 2012; Karunaratne, 2009; Perera 2006). Either directly or indirectly these scholars have mentioned the lack of understanding about the language as one of the primary causes behind the challenges faced in English language pedagogy in Sri Lanka. Moreover, this lack of understanding has been intertwined with other major factors that make ELT challenging in the Sri Lankan educational context. For instance, Raheem (2004) claims that “teacher inadequacies arising from lack of experience, ill-developed pedagogical practices, and lack of proficiency” play a significant role in the failure of ELT. This could be attributed to the inability of teachers to distinguish English from other subjects they teach in the G.C.E. O/L or G.C.E. A/L. Had this distinction been clearly comprehended, teachers may have reflected it in their methodology and materials of teaching. These findings reiterate the crucial transformation that should happen in schools: teachers need to rethink their approach to teaching

**Original Article**

English and make their students do the same.

In addition to teachers, socio-economic factors need to be reshaped. According to Gunaratne et al. (2021), “schools with a high socio-economic status are equipped with smart boards, language laboratories, and activity rooms whereas socioeconomically disadvantaged schools lack those facilities” (p. 1214). Similar comments were given by our participants during the interview sessions. Economically backward schools being unable to provide resources (including teachers) for their students is a common scenario that has been prevalent for a long time (Aloysius, 2015; Gunaratne et. al., 2021; De Silva & Palihakkara, 2020; Perera, 2001). Consequently, these students are unable to enjoy learning in a conducive environment.

Apart from the aspects related to the learning situation (teacher, methodology, materials, socio-economic factors), learners’ interests in learning the language is a distinct factor that seems to have an impact on the motivation of a learner. Our participants were not motivated simply because they did not consider English relevant to their lives in Sri Lanka. Our lesson from this finding is to ponder the means by which the idea that English is important in Sri Lanka could be cultivated while learners are in school. They spend approximately 10 years learning English, which adequate to cultivate this thought and make it grow in the correct direction. This could

reduce the number of learners limited proficiency at the end of their schooling. Another conclusion we could arrive at based on the findings is that the cultivation of this thought is possible only if various factors (such as teachers, methodology, socio-economic elements, and materials) are made to function simultaneously and appropriately.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on exploring the ideological constraints that learners face related to learning English for communication. We found that the participants did not possess any positive views about their English proficiency while they were inside or outside school. Despite various initiatives such as ‘English as a Life Skill’, ‘English Language Day Competitions’ and ‘Speak English Our Way’ their actual principles and purposes have not been appropriately comprehended and utilised. Various factors contributed to this scenario: the teacher, methodology, materials, and affective factors. All these factors were found to have worked together to fuel another negative opinion: that English is a subject like any other (as opposed to a language). Further, the increased significance given to other subjects in the G.C.E. O/L examination has also influenced classroom practices and widened the gaps in language proficiency. The study has also revealed that other factors, such as the socio-economic background of the



Original Article

learners and the unavailability of resources in the schools, have also resulted in their negative perception of the English language. Finally, the learners' interest and effort towards learning have also played a role in reducing their active participation in the classroom

Based on the key findings obtained, we put forward certain recommendations that could be applicable to English pedagogy in schools. To begin, English teachers' understanding of English as a means of communication needs to be enhanced through professional training workshops. All four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing need to be equally incorporated into pedagogy and additional resources besides the textbook could be utilised to provide a better learning experience for students. Refining the curriculum for testing English language could be a crucial step that needs to be taken to streamline the process. Thus, examination methods could include the evaluation of communicative competence through speaking and listening tests. Accelerating student awareness regarding the significance and relevance of the English language in their real-life scenarios including their careers would also facilitate and support these steps.

References

- Aloysius, M. (2015). *Problems of English teaching in Sri Lanka: How they affect teaching efficacy* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bedfordshire]. University of Bedfordshire Repository.
- Anojan, V., & Nimalathan, B. (2013). Factors influencing in career choice of second year undergraduate students: A case study of the Faculty of Management Studies & Commerce, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(11), 16–25.
- De Mel, S. (2007, September 22). The politics of education and unemployment. *Daily News*.
- De Silva, V. A., & Palihakkara, H. (2020). Towards a model to improve English language standards in schools: Impact of socio-economic factors of stakeholders. *English Language Teaching*, 13(12), 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n12p43>
- Dhanapala, K. V. (2008). Motivation and L2 reading behaviors of university students in Japan and Sri Lanka. *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, 14(1), 1–11.
- Fernando, D. (2005). "Why learn English to talk to kalu suddas?": Investigating second language learning motivation among Arts Faculty students in a Sri Lankan university. University of Kelaniya.
- Gunaratne, M. D. M. K., Chamalika, H. K. L., Fernando, S., & Jeganathan, T. B. (2021). English language teaching in Sri Lanka: Issues, concerns and remedies. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Engineering Development*, 4(5), 1211–1222.
- Herath, H. M. T. S., & Ranasinghe, A. (2011). Labour market prospects for business graduates in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 1(1), 26–30. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IJSSH.2011.V1.5>
- Indrarathne, B., & McCulloch, S. (2022). *English language teaching, learning and assessment in Sri Lanka: Policies and practices in the school education system*. British Council.
- Karunaratne, I. M. (2009). *Teaching of English: A sociological study*. A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.



Original Article

- Karunaratne, S. K. (2014). Student perceptions on learning English for personal and career development. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 2(10), 250–256.
- Kim, H.-K. (2011). Native speakerism affecting nonnative English teachers' identity formation: A critical perspective. *English Teaching*, 66(4), 53–71.
- Perera, M. E. S. (2001). *The role of classroom interaction in second language acquisition in Sri Lanka* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wollongong]. Research Online. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/1805>
- Perera, M. E. S. (2006). "Why not? But I can't": Influence of a 'culture of poverty' on learning – A case study. *Sabaragamuwa University Journal*, 6(1), 23–34.
- Porto, M., & Zembylas, M. (2024). Pedagogies of discomfort in the world language classroom: Ethical tensions and considerations for educators. *The Modern Language Journal*, 108(2), 412–429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12919>
- Prasangani, K. S. N. (2018). English language education in Sri Lanka linked with the learners' motivational factors. *Humanising Language Teaching*, 1–11.
- Prasangani, K. S. N., & Natarajan, S. (2015). Sri Lankan urban and rural undergraduates' motivation to learn English. *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*, 26–33.
- Raheem, R. (2004). English language teaching in Sri Lanka: Future perfect? In R. Raheem & A. Hamlyn (Eds.), *Innovation in English language teaching: Selected papers from the 2nd SLELTA International Conference* (pp. 29–44). British Council.
- Ratwatte, H. (2012). Kaduva, karawila or giraya? Orientation towards English in 21st century Sri Lanka. *VISTAS Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 7(8), 180–203.
- Rosairo, R. (2023). Thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Agricultural Sciences – Sri Lanka*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.4038/jas.v18i3.10526>
- Sakka, W., Nasmilah, N., Khan, A., Mumu, S., & Hamidi, B. (2022). Interplay of teacher talk and learners' motivation in learning English: A psycholinguistic study. *Education Research International*, 2022, Article 9099268. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/9099268>
- Samaranayake, S. W. (2016). Oral competency of ESL/EFL learners in Sri Lankan rural school context. *SAGE Open*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016654202>
- Sellani, R. J., & Harrington, W. (2002). Addressing administrator/faculty conflict in an academic online environment. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 5(2), 131–145.
- Seven, M. A. (2020). Motivation in language learning and teaching. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(2), S62–S71.
- Wijeratne, W. H. P. (2015). *A study of second language identity and motivation among undergraduates in Sri Lankan universities* [Master's thesis, St. Cloud State University]. The Repository at St. Cloud State. https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/eng_etds/21
- Wijesekera, H. D. (2012). Dreams deferred: English language teaching in Sri Lanka. *VISTAS Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 7.1-12.
- Windle, J. A., & de Araujo Rosa, J. (2023). Navigating critical language education at the crossroads of neonationalism and neoliberalism: The role of border talk. *TESOL Quarterly*, 57(3), 752–774.
- Zeng, J., Ponce, A. R., & Li, Y. (2023). English linguistic neo-imperialism in the era of globalization: A conceptual viewpoint. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1149471. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1149471>