

**A Study on Attitudes of Undergraduates and Lecturers Towards Objective Fulfillment of Course Units Offered by Department of English Language Teaching, Sabaragamuwa University**

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**Introduction**

English has incorporated in Sri Lankan education domain in the colonial era and currently, English as a Second Language (ESL) plays a major role not only in education but in all the aspects of the society. Moreover, a working knowledge of English has become a requirement in a number of fields, occupations and professions such as engineering, medicine and information Technology; as a consequence over a billion people speak English to at least a basic level. It is one of six official languages of the United Nations.

English has often been referred to as a "world language", the *lingua franca* of the modern era. Since English it is more widely spoken. Although it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language. Being a highly influenced language and having tremendous power as a symbol of states, English plays an important role in the university system in Sri Lanka. If students are not equipped with English language competency in university level, they have to undergo number of difficulties (CRNC, 1968).

Being one of the scholarly institutions, which is highly responsible in producing graduates who are capable of bridging the language gap in Sri Lankan context, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL) has inherited the only all English Language Teaching Department (ELTD) in Sri Lankan university system in the year 2005 at the place of English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU). As a department functions under the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, it serves in two ways: firstly by offering English as a Second language for all the students in their first two academic years and secondly by offering English as a core subject under major or minor streams in Bachelor of Arts special (languages) degree programme. The prime objective of establishing ELTD is to create future English teachers with perfect English knowledge to the society filling the gap already existing in the field. However, none of the researches have been conducted to explore the fulfillment of the objectives of course units offered by ELTD. Therefore, researcher decided to conduct a survey in order to identify the current situation of ELTD at SUSL. The research problem was formulated as whether ELTD has reached its objectives regarding the Core English Language (CEL) and English Studies (ENG). The study was conducted with the prime objective of exploring the fulfillment of the objectives of course units CEL and ENG offered by ELTD discovering the attitudes of undergraduates and lectures at SUSL.

**Methodology**

To achieve the objective of the study, some of the lecturers attached to the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages and undergraduates attached to the Department of

Languages representing all years were selected as the scope of the study using the random sampling method. Based on the objectives of the research, questionnaire survey and interviews were utilized as primary data collection methods. Moreover, books, magazines, websites and related research reports were referred to collect the secondary data.

Moreover, collected primary data through the questionnaire survey and interviews were analyzed graphically using graphs and charts.

## **Results**

The analytical aspect of the research revealed that CEL offered by ELTD as an appreciative course (59.45%) which assists students to improve their language proficiency. Hence, the higher level of absenteeism of the undergraduates for CEL lectures was emphasized by the respondents and some of the reasons for the absenteeism are also discovered. Moreover, inevitability of increasing spoken activities in pedagogical language classroom is highlighted by respondents (57%) to achieve its objectives in an effective manner. Heterogeneity of class has also been a problem. In addition, some lessons are not graded to meet the needs of less proficient learners.

Consequently, ENG which is offered under major and minor streams is also considered as one of the indispensable courses (80%) to experience the great literary creations in the world. Moreover, effectiveness of all the course units offered under ENG has been recorded exceeding 60% of respondents. However, respondents have also revealed the time constraint and the non variation of the CA system are as main difficulties that they are facing throughout their academic career.

## **Discussion**

Findings of the study remarked the unsatisfactory level of students' participation in CEL lectures. It records higher degree of consistency between findings of classroom observation and perception of lecturers. It clearly indicates the absenteeism of male students in the CEL lectures; comparatively they have shown fewer performances than female students. According to the attitudes of the respondents, lack of previously gained knowledge, lack of motivation, common fear for English, family background, incapability of reading and understanding, inability to cope with materials and concentrating CEL as a light subject than the major and minor subjects are discovered as the reasons for higher degree of absenteeism. According to the survey done by Fonseka, G. focusing the special attention on absenteeism, also reveals the higher rate of absenteeism among undergraduates for English lectures.

Generally, the course units CEL and ENG are considered as more effective courses by most of the respondents. However, the significance of focusing the attention on time constraint which appears as a drawback in both courses is highlighted. Hence, the immediate attention towards these issues is essential in order to fulfill the objectives of these courses effectively. "The lack of time is personnel complaint of all instructors. A language say cannot be perfected overnight. (Rajendram, 2005). Jayarathna in 1971, also highlighted the lack of given time to teach English in universities and insufficient knowledge which was given in school time before entering the university.

Moreover, respondents have illustrated the lack of spoken activities in the CEL lectures and importance of increasing spoken activities within the CEL course. Further, non variation of continuous assessments has also been identified as a drawback of the current

system. Most often lecturers tend to assess the students only using written assignments or CA s in both the CEL and ENG courses but it is only one aspect of the language, spoken ability should also be developed within the academic career of undergraduates. If there is no variation in the CA system, students are bored not only with doing CAs but also with learning English. "On the analogy of the child's language acquisition, should the second language learner to be taught speech first and writing next. In other words, it is psychologically necessary or beneficial for speech to be learnt before writing (Vergihese, 1984).

The above statement also remarks the importance of having speaking activities in the language classroom in order to assist them in gaining the proficiency in English language. Moreover, it directly affects in avoiding the shyness and backwardness of undergraduates in the spoken aspect while sharpening the fluency adding value to their lives.

### **Conclusions**

As the results revealed, CEL and ENG courses are highlighted as valuable and noteworthy in the sense of enhancing undergraduates' second language proficiency as well as the knowledge in the literary creations in the world. However, researcher suggest to regulate the CA system introducing interesting activities such as presentations, group assignments, role plays etc. without depending only on written assignments. Further, it is vital conducting a placement test before commencing the CEL and ENG programmes. Moreover, introducing simplified activities and tasks for less proficient learners will greatly assist in achieving the target language. It is highly recommended providing a proper training to all lecturers in order to meet the needs of mixed ability groups because the language of the lecturers should be accessible to each and every undergraduate. Furthermore, proper plan can integrate all four skills to fulfill the learner needs. Hence, achieving the well defined objectives inherent to the course units CEL and ENG are yet far behind due to the difficulties encountered by undergraduates and lecturers, the requirement of immediate solutions is highlighted to the better fulfillment of the objectives of CEL and ENG.

In conclusion, this research will be highly beneficial to syllabus designers, academic personnel and administrative authorities in order to reduce the existing shortcoming and to develop physical and human resources while achieving the objectives successfully. Ultimately, further researches can be conducted and pursued on this line of the research.

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