

Teaching English for Grades One and Two: A Study of the Issues and Challenges Encountered by the Teachers in Conducting a Special English Program in the Schools of Wattagama Education Zone

U.B.A.H.N. Perera

Department of English Language Teaching, Sabaragamuwa Unievrstiy, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka

Over the past decade, many countries such as India, Pakistan, and Kenya have started to teach English as a second or foreign language at a very early age. In the Sri Lankan school education system, formal English education starts from Grade 3. Yet, for grades one and two, English is taught under the program, *Activity Based Oral English (ABOE)* aiming at improving English for conversation. Along with ABOE, in 2013, a special English program was initiated to teach English for grades one and two of the government schools in Wattagama Education Zone. The books, *The Radiant Way* and *New Millennium* which were mainly used to improve reading and writing were used as the primary teaching materials. The purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges and issues encountered by the teachers in conducting this program. The data were collected from twenty five (25) teachers of fifteen schools (15) through interviews conducted over the phone and were analysed qualitatively, putting the recordings into a paper, defining themes. The findings revealed the lack of teacher training to teach English to pre- primary/ primary stages as a major issue. The mismatch between the assigned books in certain aspects hindered the teaching process. Changing the materials/text books according to the choice of the teacher without informing the authorities, teaching writing despite the authority's advice not to do so, the lack of importance given to the improvement of listening skill, the lack of a proper syllabus, and facilities were some other issues. The study suggested actions to be taken to overcome these issues which can improve the program to be implemented island wide such as, providing adequate teacher training, setting up a proper syllabus, better supervision system to maintain the consistency of the program, providing adequate facilities for the schools, appointing experts in the field to do a survey of the program to decide whether writing should be introduced at such an early stage.

Keywords: Activity based, Challenges, English as a second language, Primary teaching