



**A Needs Analysis in Second Language Teaching
(English Language): A Study on Grade 10,11 Students in the
Sri Jayawardenapura Educational Zone**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the needs of English language learners in grades 10 and 11 who attend schools in the Colombo area specifically within the Sri Jayewardenepura Educational Zone. Statistics demonstrate that a significant number of students failed the Ordinary Level English paper, despite evaluations and curriculum reforms undertaken by the government. A thorough needs analysis was required to determine the causes and provide a solution to this situation. The objectives of this study are to investigate the purpose of students learning English as a second language, to conduct a needs analysis to critically analyze the needs, necessities, and lacks in grade 10, 11 students in Colombo District, and to suggest and recommend ideas to incorporate needs analysis findings. For this mixed-method study, information is collected using questionnaires and interviews, and the quantitative data is represented through graphs and tables, while the qualitative data is shown through a theme-based analysis. Based on the outcomes of this study, it is anticipated that the current curriculum will undergo modifications and adjustments to align with the authentic needs and requirements of students, thereby ultimately achieving a high level of student proficiency.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English language education in Sri Lanka has evolved over time, influenced by socio-economic changes and the country's pursuit of peace, economic prosperity, and equity. Despite curriculum reforms and government evaluations, a significant number of students in Sri Lanka struggle with English language proficiency, as evidenced by high failure rates in the O/L English paper. In 2020, 34.22% of candidates (105,369 students) failed the O/L English exam. Surprisingly, out of the 80,854 students residing in the urban Western Province, known for its perceived English fluency, 16,049 students did not pass the English language examination. (Department of Examinations, 2020) This highlights the discrepancy between expectations and actual performance in this supposedly privileged region. Conducting a comprehensive needs analysis is crucial to identify the causes of this issue and propose effective solutions.

Despite the advantages enjoyed by students in Colombo area schools, such as exposure, opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, and better facilities, they still encounter difficulties in mastering the English language. According to Wijesundara (1999), urban students face challenges with traditional teaching methods, characterized by a teacher-centered approach heavily reliant on textbooks. Lower student achievement levels result from inadequate teacher skills in assessment and evaluation, poor teacher-student relationships, a demanding examination system, and intense competition for higher education. Limited access to resources like smart classrooms, libraries, and the internet hinders students' learning opportunities. Teachers prioritize completing the curriculum rather than developing students' skills. The curriculum's difficulty level varies, disadvantaging students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite greater access to educational facilities, students

from lower socioeconomic classes are unable to fully benefit due to their social, economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. In practice, teachers often neglect students from low-income families and fail to establish trust and rapport with them (Perera, 2009).

The absence of student needs, abilities, and interests being met by the curriculum and the ineffectiveness of English teachers in both low- and high-performing schools due to inadequate teacher-learner relationships are factors provided for this problem. (Seefa, 2017) (Karunaratne, 2003) This study focuses on conducting a needs analysis for urban students, challenging the assumption that they are already proficient in English. The results will provide valuable insights to address curriculum gaps and deficiencies in teaching practices, aiming to enhance student competence in English. The study's findings will help curriculum developers assess the strengths and weaknesses of current curricula and encourage them to create new curricula based on learner wants and needs, with practical curriculum components which are relevant and beneficial for both rural and urban area students. A good understanding of learner needs will also enable teachers to design and evaluate effective lessons and materials.

The objectives of this study are to,

- Investigate the purpose of students in learning English as a second language.
- Critically analyze the needs, necessities and lacks in grade 10,11 students in Colombo District by conducting a needs analysis.
- Suggest or recommend ideas to incorporate findings of the needs analysis to develop an effective English language curriculum and enhance students' proficiency.

Research Questions

1. Why do the students learn English?
What are their intentions?

2. Are their needs and wants fulfilled in the current syllabus? If not, what do the learners wish to learn based on their competency levels and requirements?

3. Which aspects/skills do the students think they lack in the teaching-learning process and why do they think so?

4. How do the students prefer to learn English? What are their suggestions?

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design: The study focused on conducting a needs analysis for grade 10 and 11 students in Sri Jayawardenapura Educational Zone, aiming to evaluate learner needs and modify the curriculum accordingly. A mixed method was employed to analyze qualitative and quantitative data.

Sampling Method: The participants included students and teachers who served as primary data sources for the study. A stratified random sample of 60 students (grades 10,11) from three schools within the educational zone was selected.

Data Collection: Data collection involved the use of questionnaires and interviews as the primary methods. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions and was administered in both English and Sinhala. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, allowing students to freely express their opinions in their preferred language.

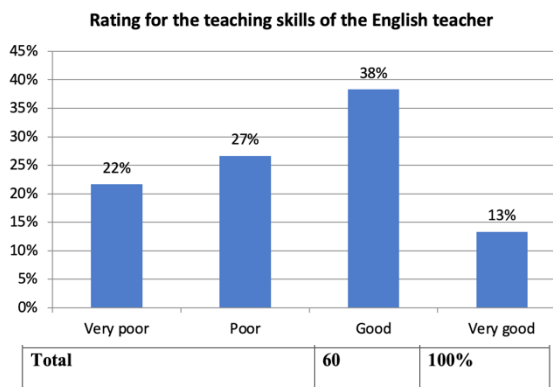
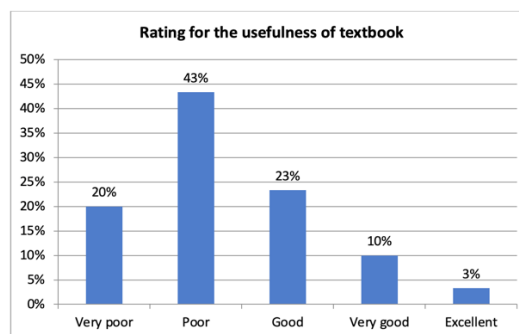
Data Analysis: The study employed a comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data collected from questionnaires and interviews. The findings were presented using tables, figures, and interpretive narratives. IBM SPSS software was utilized for quantitative data

analysis, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

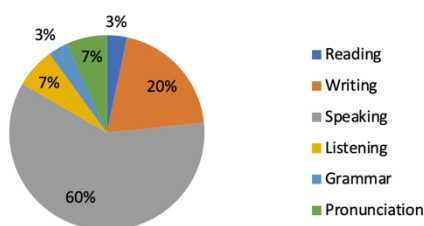
The study revealed that the majority of students expressed a need for English language acquisition for educational purposes. However, their self-evaluations indicated deficiencies, particularly in pronunciation, listening, and grammar knowledge. Although reading and writing abilities were assessed as average, there is room for improvement.

Conversations and discussions were identified by students as the most effective learning activities, while multimedia resources such as songs and video clips were preferred. Surprisingly, textbooks were perceived as unproductive, highlighting the necessity for a revision that aligns with students' needs and proficiency levels. Teachers' teaching skills were negatively viewed by a notable percentage of students, who felt their input was rarely sought and that reliance on the syllabus and textbooks was excessive. Dissatisfaction with instructional materials was also expressed.



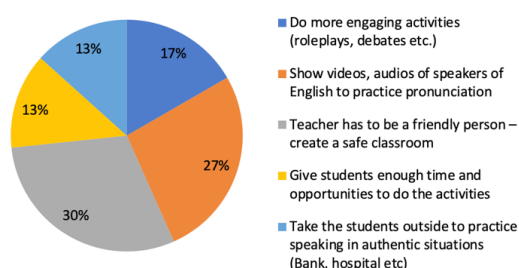
| | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Total | 60 | 100% |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|

Aspects of English neglected in school education



Overall, students perceived English education in schools as unsatisfactory, with spoken English and listening skills identified as neglected areas.

Suggestions to improve student involvement in learning English



Student interviews revealed limited opportunities for English practice at school, leading to dissatisfaction. Teachers acknowledged students' overall competency as satisfactory but emphasized the need for increased exposure to the language in authentic contexts. Additionally, they noted a lack of emphasis on creative writing skills, authentic language usage, and alignment with examination requirements. Deductive grammar instruction and reliance on translation were identified as factors affecting students' language proficiency.

In conclusion, students expressed a negative perception of their English skills, highlighting the necessity for improvements in teaching methods, curriculum design, and practice opportunities. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating interactive and authentic learning activities, addressing neglected areas of spoken English and listening skills and revising textbooks to better cater to students' needs.

3.1 Teachers' answers to the interview questions

Question: Do you think that the existing English curriculum itself is sufficient for students to be competent in English? Why?

Answers: The majority of teachers believe that more attention should be given to grammatical aspects and spoken English within the curriculum. Currently, the curriculum primarily focuses on comprehension and passages, but there is a need to shift towards incorporating activities that enhance oral skills, which are fundamental. Speaking and listening skills are significantly overlooked in the current curriculum. Furthermore, creative writing skills are not adequately practiced, and there are limited instances where the language is presented in authentic contexts. Another critical point is that the curriculum does not align well with the content tested in the O/L examination.

Question: Why do you think a considerable number of students fail English subject at GCE O/L examination even though they learn in urban area schools with all the facilities while being in an English-speaking environment?

Answers: One possible reason for the inadequacy in practice and exposure may lie in the fact that students are not exposed to enough practical applications. Another contributing factor could be the tendency of students to initially think in their native language and then attempt to translate their thoughts into English. For instance, Sinhala follows an SOV grammar structure, whereas English uses SVO. Consequently, many students struggle with the grammatical aspects. They lack exposure to authentic language usage and struggle with contextualization, as grammar is primarily taught deductively. Moreover, the heavy workload within the curriculum leaves little room for teachers to conduct additional activities. Consequently, teachers perceive the current curriculum as lacking productivity in effectively

aiding students' language development.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the esteemed English-speaking community in Sri Lanka, a significant number of students in the Colombo area encounter challenges in mastering the English language. Schools provide insufficient English exposure, allocating only 40 minutes per day for language learning. Regrettably, teachers prioritize completing the syllabus rather than fostering an optimal language acquisition environment. To address this issue, it is imperative to organize English-focused co-curricular events and prioritize the development of speaking skills. Research reveals that speaking abilities are neglected, leading students to favor their mother tongue over English. To enhance students' articulation skills and increase their exposure to English, schools should conduct English-based co-curricular activities such as dramas, debates, and elocution programs alongside regular classroom instruction. Adequate teacher training is vital, as some educators lack the necessary expertise to deliver interactive and engaging English lessons. Furthermore, incorporating advanced resources and technical facilities in language classrooms can greatly enhance the learning experience. Employing innovative, eclectic teaching methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching and Community Language Learning, along with creating a student-friendly and student-centered classroom environment, is essential. Activities such as role-plays, interviews, visual aids, debates, language games, group discussions, and pair-work can promote interactive practice and enhance student motivation. To minimize mother tongue interference in language learning, complete immersion in the target language and its culture is highly effective. Exposure to a wide range of content, such as reading English books, newspapers, and articles, as well as watching English movies without subtitles, is crucial. Immersion focuses on naturalistic interaction with

the language rather than rigid grammar exercises or textbooks. The aim is to acquire the language experientially, moving beyond theoretical knowledge.

Future research endeavors should encompass both urban and rural students, conduct comparative needs analyses, evaluate teacher competency, and solicit diverse perspectives from various stakeholders. Seeking guidance from experts in advanced education systems and addressing the existing gaps in needs analyses hold promise for improving English education in Sri Lanka.

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