

English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka: Issues, Concerns and Remedies

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Abstract:

The focus of this study is to explore the factors affecting the proficiency of ESL learners. The sample consisted of 12 schools, 59 teachers, and Zonal Directors of Education from each Education Zone, Colombo, Kandy and Badulla. Schools were selected based on school type (1 AB, 1 C & type 2), popularity and demand, student number, resources, support from stakeholders and a sample of 3 schools from 3 divisions of 3 districts were selected. Primary data were collected from Zonal Directors of Education, teachers who teach English at selected schools through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. In a mixed-method research design, the data were subjected to statistical measures. According to the findings, some policies themselves are responsible for the deterioration of English at schools such as English is not taught from grade one at public schools and the passing of A/L General English is not compulsory to enter University. These decisions have led to low achievement levels of English at schools. Another serious issue is that the lack of resources in socio-economically low-level schools and high number of students in one classroom. Further, there should be avenues for the textbook writers and study guide writers to liaise with each other and the syllabus should be reduced and organized systematically. Although many programs such as seminars and workshops are being conducted at the divisional/zonal level, no programs are being conducted specifically for English. It was also revealed that teacher professionalism positively influences students' English language performance. Further, it was also found that the lack of continuous training and avenues for professional development for ESL teachers are critical issues that must be addressed immediately for the betterment of students. Recommendations have been suggested based on the analysis of data.

Keywords —proficiency, ESL learners, teacher professionalism, continuous training

I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is taught as a second language in Sri Lanka, and it is one of the core subjects offered for the G. C. E O/Level Examination. In some schools, bilingual education is provided. Every student is required and expected to learn English until they complete formal education, but English is not compulsory to enter state universities. With the global development of technology and other related sciences, Sri Lanka has started investing more public money into the education system, targeting an improvement of the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level. Almost everywhere in Sri Lanka, there seems to be a demand for the English language. The MoE, in consultation with other experts in the field, has provided many facilities to improve the

achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination.

Unlike the other core subjects offered, English has received the attention of the stakeholders, the general public, and those interested in improving the achievement levels of the English language. Because the modern corporate world, state institutions, and other employers look for an adequate proficiency of the four skills of the English language, the state and the MoE are concerned about the outcome of the English language taught from grade 1 – 13 at state schools.

The social, political, and economic milieu of Sri Lanka requires an adequate proficiency of the English language because the country can no longer be isolated from the rest of the world. Doing business, studies, travel, leisure, and almost everything, the English language is necessary. There is a good demand for English, and every guardian of school child are

desirous of and love to see their children speaking in the English language. The contemporary Sri Lankan society, for example, is willing and ready to co-operate with schools and stakeholders to negotiate and assist the state in improving English education in the country. Even though the state has invested public money to enhance English language achievement, various stakeholders have expressed their discontent over the dismal results. The analysis of the year 2018 results indicates that we, as a nation, have not been able to achieve Return on Investment. There is an issue noted in the pass rate of the English language at the O/Level Examination, the pass rate of the English language at the O/Level and A/Level is dismal; statistics show that in the year 2018, we did not achieve the expected levels of proficiency at the O/Level Examination.

This study will aim to find out the reasons for the low performance of students for English over other subjects and find feasible solutions to improve English proficiency among school children in Sri Lanka, which is essential for the social mobility of a country. This study will aim to find out the reasons for the low performance of students for English over other subjects and find feasible solutions to improve English proficiency among school children in Sri Lanka, which is essential for the social mobility of a country.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is contended that the conventional methods of teaching English could not receive desired results. It is essential to incorporate practical strategies with theoretical English language learning/teaching principles to enhance learners' communication skills. Applying practical techniques in teaching English results in the development of the abilities/skills of students [1].

The most important factors concerning students' performance are teachers of English and the teaching methods they use [2]. Further, the teachers should learn students' attitudes and create positive attitudes towards the foreign language in students and existing negative attitudes towards the language. According to her, negative attitudes may stem from the methods and techniques used by teachers or the materials they use. These are the sources of students' negative attitudes, and as such, the teacher should be able to change his techniques and methods accordingly. In preparation of lesson plans, teachers should investigate students' different learning styles, which would be more effective and student friendly. English teachers should be trained to use conversation analysis in conjunction with the CLT approach to increase students' overall communicative competence [3]. Even though English should be the primary vehicle of communication in

the English classroom and should provide ample opportunities for students to process English receptively to produce and negotiate meaning in the language, an L2 can be learned through raising awareness about similarities and differences between the L1 and L2 [4]. Out of the four teaching methods observed in a private classroom for very young children (toddlers), the most widely used method was TPR, followed by NA, CLT, and Suggestopedia the least. According to this study, it was found that TPR and NA are appropriate for teaching toddlers vocabulary items. In this study through TPR, very young children demonstrated their understanding of commands by responding to simple questions or gestures. Additionally, the teacher used no specific textbook to teach the children other than music, pictures and authentic materials. These materials played a role in supporting the activities in the classroom. The teacher exposed the young children to the English language through routine communication. The CLT method was used to encourage them to interact with others [5].

Saovapa stressed the idea of making decisions to adjust existing theories and practices to suit different levels of students [6]. If the grammar is taught in context and if speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are focused, students can achieve high examination marks and acquire speaking and listening skills [7]. Hence, they have cited the requirement of similar investigations on teaching English to young children for future studies. Most of the approaches and methods of teaching aim to enable learners to learn English effectively, and although most strategies are learner-centered, they are not so [8]. Grammatical skill is not the focus of L2 acquisition [9]. It is understood that language learning and acquisition are dynamic processes requiring social, cultural, and cognitive competencies on the part of the teacher. Early age has a significant influence on one's fluency [10].

The introduction of oral English through the educational reforms had not been successfully implemented in the 17 districts included in their study [11]. Further, most of the principals and teachers were aware of the reforms, but many of them were not provided with adequate guidelines and the necessary training that was essential to implement ABOE.

The researchers recommend specific instructions from relevant officials to update and guide the school administration, to provide required training through seminars and workshops for teachers of grades 1 and 2 [11,12] investigated the current teaching trends and practices in teaching oral English in rural Sinhala medium schools in Sri Lanka. Instructional practices and teaching materials are not effective enough to help students improve their oral communications because teaching methods and materials are somewhat not in line with CLT principles. Aloysius reported

the problems related to English teachers' lack of teaching efficacy in low and high-performing schools and teacher background/parental duties, classroom problems, and insufficient external educational resources [13].

Instructors engage in collaborative practices in evaluation, material development to provide variety and equality in instruction [14]. Teaching the English language in Sri Lanka was a failure. The main reasons cited are teachers' skills, professional knowledge, perceptions, academic practices, etc. According to the research findings, most teachers were unaware and not exposed to any research related to ELT during their careers [15].

The problems teachers face include technological problems and classrooms that do not allow different seating arrangements. It was revealed that there should be equipment and hardware in an ideal language learning setting, sufficient areas for displaying visual materials, furniture should be flexible, and classroom population should be at a perfect level [16].

Teacher commitment is a significant factor that affects the achievement of students. Teacher commitment can be defined as a teacher's psychological attachment to the profession of teaching, the professional institutions and colleagues, parents, and students [17]. Further, Mustafa (2017) described it as an internal force that drives teachers to invest more time and energy in the involvement of work at school [18].

Teacher commitment contributes to professional knowledge, profession, career continuance, students, and image of schools [19]. According to this study, it was revealed that teacher demotivation is a significant issue in Sri Lankan public schools which needs the immediate attention of education policymakers. However, the main motivating factors for teachers include students, the practice of teaching students and the prestigious social position [sic] for English teachers in Sri Lanka [20]. Further, the primary motivating factors for teachers are students and the act of teaching [21].

The organizational commitment had a significant positive relationship with job performance, task performance and contextual performance [22].

English teachers should be successful in their careers and like students. Furthermore, all necessary changes should be made, such as developing the quality of education, the physical conditions of the teacher training institutions and giving importance to the self-development of teachers [2].

The most known and applied language teaching techniques are communicative, problem-based, and project-based innovative techniques [23].

The teachers should be provided with the necessary support, especially in in-service training about the new ELTP—content

and practical implementation in classrooms. They need to be informed about the rationale and principles that underscore the practices teachers must implement. Moreover, an essential aspect of in-service training is to make teachers aware of the assumptions that underlie what they do and then review those assumptions regarding new perspectives and practices offered by the ELTP [24].

The field experience seminars, discussion-based courses combined with school-based practicum, provide a space for teacher trainees to discuss the theories they study in their classes and the practice they observe and implement during their placements [25].

Research-based learning experiences could positively enhance pre-service teachers' readiness to teach the English language even when teacher education programs are situated in largely monolingual and monocultural areas [26]. The training of pre-service EFL teachers in English before teaching might improve their career satisfaction and, therefore, their retention in the profession [27].

III. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the proposed study, quantitative and qualitative data analyses were carried out (mixed method). Quantitative data collection was conducted using the questionnaires and the qualitative data collection was done using the in-depth interviews. The researchers utilized the following research instruments for primary data collection.

1. Interviews with the Zonal and Provincial directors of the Ministry of Education.
2. Questionnaires for Principal and teachers
3. In-depth interviews with school principals, teachers, and sectional heads

Primary data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The research team collected data from principals, teachers who teach English, sectional heads, and Divisional and Zonal Educational officials.

A questionnaire consisting of 31 questions was used to collect data from the principals. It contained closed-ended and open-ended questions. Questions 1 – 9 collected some non-privacy intrusive personal data. An interview schedule that consisted of 7 interview questions was also used to record the principals' views. The interviews were conducted after the questionnaire was administered. In this schedule, their opinions were recorded, and they were tabulated for thematic analysis.

The questionnaire used to collect data from teachers contained 31 questions. The first 30 questions were Likert

scale type questions, while question 31 was an open-ended question that gathered qualitative data and individual opinions. Their views were tabulated for thematic analysis. After gathering data from questionnaire, a semi-structured interview schedule was used to record the teachers' views, opinions, and suggestions. This interview schedule consisted of 22 questions—rating scale, closed-ended and open-ended type questions. Teachers' opinions on materials, how the students responded to materials, classroom experience of teachers, how teachers evaluate students, teachers' suggestions on learning/teaching process and their opinion on physical resources were gathered.

An interview schedule that consisted of 20 questions was administered to the sectional heads. This instrument contained three sections (teachers, students and general).

An interview schedule for Zonal, Divisional, and Provincial Directors of Education was used to gather data. We collected data on recruitment of teachers, teacher training and the number of students in each division. In addition, data was collected on school-based assessment as well.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings From the Interviews with School Principals

The principals believed that English language education in the country is at a reasonable level. Still, it is not good compared with other developing countries where English is taught as an L2. They know the English language proficiency among students should be improved. They understand that if students are not fluent in English, it is challenging for them to engage in higher studies and to secure a better job.

A problem identified in a school that falls under the mid-socio-economic level category was that the school categorization is not fair for divisional level English competitions (E. g., categorization of schools that have students above 500 and below 500, regardless of the school type). According to our observations, schools with a high socio-economic status are equipped with smart boards, language laboratories, activity rooms, etc., whereas socio-economically disadvantaged schools lack those facilities. Regardless of the type of school, in most of the schools, the classes are packed. Principals in schools that are in lower socio-economic levels stated that they should be provided with facilities to help students with financial difficulties, differently abled students, and students who need psychological support. Besides, slow learners also need academic support with their studies.

Another important finding from the principals is that the syllabus is too heavy. In some socio-economically disadvantaged schools, there is only one teacher to teach English. In that case, it is challenging to manage all the work by a single person. The pass rate of the O/L Examination of socio-economically disadvantaged schools was very low and no one knows what happens to the rest of the students who fail the subjects. These students have no way of engaging in a proper profession. Some students who fail the O/L Examination go to NVQ classes, but other students are helpless. Although NVQ classes have been initiated in some national schools, these schools are reluctant to take students from schools belonging to schools with lower socioeconomic status. According to some principals, first, the government should understand the problems related to the school's environment, and they should provide facilities accordingly. By way of a suggestion, the principal suggested that the students should be provided with career guidance. Also, NVQ classes should be started in small schools with low results but not in well reputed national schools. The Zonal and Divisional Educational officials should seriously investigate these types of schools' issues and address such difficulties.

According to some principals, some policies themselves are responsible for the deteriorating condition of English at schools. English is not taught from grade 1 at public schools. A pass of the A/Level General English is not requirement to enter university and do in higher education. These decisions have led to low achievement levels of English at schools. Further, trained teachers are preferred more than the fresh graduates who only have the subject knowledge, and they believe that the graduates must be trained, and then they should read for a post-graduate diploma/degree. Otherwise, mere subject knowledge does not work. Or else, they should get training from the NIE (or from any other place where teacher education is provided).

B. Findings From the Interview with The Sectional Heads and Teachers

English is introduced in grade one. The class teacher communicates in English in a homely environment and uses small extra textbooks where the teacher provides the child with a small exposure to the English language. English is taught as a subject in grade three. Although this can be a success in reputed schools, teaching English by the class teacher is not that effective because all class teachers are not proficient in English. So, the weightage of English, time allocated for English, the importance they give for English depend on individuals. As we observed, this is not practiced

successfully in most of the schools under low socioeconomic levels.

Some students do some lessons with enthusiasm, but not all A/L students negatively affect English as it is not compulsory for university entrance. As it is not mandatory, they are not enthusiastic about learning English and consider it useless. The difference in students' knowledge due to different family backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds of parents and discipline of students matter when it comes to teaching a language.

A proportion from the oral component should be considered in O/Ls (e. g. : 70%-written and 30%-oral), reduce the number of students in a class to a maximum of 25, separate English teachers should be assigned to grade 1 and 2 to teach English, and proper training should be provided, English should be taught from pre-school and for that, at least two trained teachers should be assigned to make a strong foundation of English, More emphasis should be given to listening. Speaking activities in preschool, grades 1 and 2, reading English books should be encouraged early. Whenever a new syllabus is introduced, the teachers must be trained first. Because when the content of a particular subject is unique, sometimes, the teachers are not aware of the updated information related to the specific subject.

Updating knowledge is very important when teaching students. e. g., teachers may be trained in the latest methodology. The universities should take a proportion of the marks from the A/L General English for university entrance (at least 30%).

It will be good to introduce a series of textbooks for grades 1 to 13 and revise the current books with updated content to cater to the young minds innovatively and methodically. They also suggested that language is a medium used to communicate with others. Students need extensive listening and reading with writing skills, exposing them to more listening activities and developing their language functions.

C. Findings From the Interview with Zonal / Divisional Directors

According to the Zonal Directors of Education, there is no authority to recruit teachers by the Zonal Director. Recruited teachers are sent to schools with vacancies by the Zonal Director. Although there is an adequate number of teachers within the Zone, some schools have a scarcity of teachers. Some teachers are reluctant to go to given schools and ask for other schools which do not have any vacancies as they want to be close to their homes. Because of the difficulty to reach the school (transport), teachers refuse to go to those schools.

Although there is a methodology according to the school-based system to recruit teachers in the vicinity, they ask for transfers to another province after marriage. That is also an issue. During 2015 and 2016, students were recruited to the NCOE by provincial secretarial divisions based on 'grama sewa' divisions.

The Zonal Director in Badulla has started a unique programme in a model school to improve English. In it, the primary students are kept after school, and they do activities such as drawing arts. There, the art teacher, and teacher of English introduce simple words in English. When the art teacher teaches how to draw, the English teacher commands the words they draw in English (words like a circle, red, etc.) Two non-leading schools were selected as a model in Badulla town. A unique project is being conducted to improve English in those two schools, Rathanapala Vidyalaya and Rahula Vidyalaya. This project aims to make the children ready to speak about themselves at the stage of grade 5 without any difficulty in English and Tamil together with art, music and dancing. The objective is to make the students rich in aesthetic skills while improving their English knowledge also.

According to Zonal Education Directors, teachers do not receive Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to teach English syllabus. According to those Directors of Education, teachers should be adequately trained to teach communicative English. Those officials said that only graduate students are recruited to teach English. The Director of the Zonal Education office stressed that it is required to have special training, a minimum of one year for the degree holders before they are recruited as teachers in schools because teaching without training is not effective on students' end. He also stated that the commitment of teachers is not satisfactory because of the low salary.

When it comes to school English textbooks, the level of grade 3 English textbooks is higher than the grade 4 textbook. The Zonal Director sees this as the writers want to add more and more things to the book to upgrade their recognition in academic circles. He also stressed that the syllabus is extensive and should be reduced and organized systematically. Another problem for low performance in English in schools is the lack of communication in English.

The Zonal Director complained that teachers do not update themselves by using library facilities/reading books, etc. Recently, activities have been introduced by the government for grade 5 students for their Scholarship Examination, which is to be done using mobile phones, which are student friendly. In those activities, the students can find answers to the

questions without getting bored. Such activities should be encouraged, and they would be more productive and student friendly. According to the Zonal Director, there should be teachers' societies for teachers' development, and teachers should be transferred on a 5/10-year basis.

D. Specific Findings

1. It was revealed that the level of grade 3 English language textbooks is higher than the grade 4 textbook. There should be systematic, gradual, and acceptable units, themes and lessons in the textbook and workbook. Lessons, themes and activities may be revised when textbooks are revised the next time.
2. It is not correct to have two different sets of writers to write the textbook and study guides. There is no harm in writing the textbook and workbook by various authors, but there should be avenues for the textbook writers and study guide writers to liaise. It appears that there is no coherence between these two. Doing things in isolation has created missing some links.
3. The syllabus is vast, and it should be reduced and organized systematically (49 periods are allocated to complete the competencies, but it is challenging to cover all the lessons before an examination).
4. Although many programs such as seminars and workshops are being conducted at the divisional/zonal level, no programs are being conducted specifically for English.
5. The present system of assessing students' performance at the G.C.E. O/Level and A/Level has created social and economic issues.
6. It was also reported that there was a mismatch between what is tested at the O/Level and what is taught at school.
7. Tests do not have washback effects and students tend to be misled when they read the past O/Level papers and get ready for examinations (O/Level and A/Level).
8. Some teachers reported they did not receive proper instructions about workshops intended for knowledge sharing regarding new curricular changes. This has affected many teachers and as a result, they could not help their O/Level students.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis:

Teachers discussed instances they consider as barriers when participating in professional development (Table 1). It was noted that 34% of the teachers agreed that there was a lack of relevant professional development related courses for them to access. Nevertheless, 61% disagreed with the statement that there was a lack of support from the management/principal. Following that, 58% of teachers disagreed with the fact that there was inadequate educational material. Thirty percent of the teachers expressed that they had difficulties in travelling, travelling was a barrier when trying to participate in professional development programmes. Twenty nine percent of the teachers surveyed said that they struggled with time management as they had family responsibilities.

Table 1: Barriers to Professional Development

Barriers to Professional Development	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
Lack of prerequisites	21.4	43.0	35.7
Too expensive	28.6	37.5	34.0
Lack of support from management/principal	6.8	27.6	32.0
Conflicts with work schedule	22.4	27.6	50.0
Family responsibilities	28.6	28.6	42.9
Lack of relevant professional development	34.0	30.4	35.7
Lack of incentives	33.3	21.1	45.6
Difficulty in travelling	29.3	32.8	38.0

Regarding instances that hinder English teaching processes, 42.1% of teachers said they have inadequate educational materials, and 42.4% said that they lacked physical infrastructures such as school buildings, classrooms, school grounds, proper lighting, and clean toilets (Table 2). However, 70% of the teachers said that there is no lack of adequate teacher training and 66% said there was no lack of support from subject specialists and coordinators. Seventy six percent of the teachers reported that they received help from divisional and zonal education administration.

Table 2: Barriers to English Teaching Process

Barriers to English Teaching Process	Yes (%)	No (%)
Inadequate educational material	42.1	58.0
Lack of physical infrastructure	42.4	57.6
Lack of teacher training	6.8	70.7
Lack of support from subject specialists	34.0	66.0
Lack of support from parents	55.2	44.0
Lack of support from colleagues	8.6	91.4
Lack of support from divisional/administration	24.1	75.9

Managing the classroom is one main challenge that teachers face throughout their time at school (Table 3). Hence, when inquired about how they handled a classroom, 71% of the teachers said they had no problem starting a lesson, as they did not have to wait for quite a long time for students to quieten down. Seventy six percent of the teachers said that they also did not lose time due to students' interrupting the ongoing lesson. Fifty seven percent of the teachers believed that while teaching did not face many disruptive and external noises in the classroom, 78% said that their students in the classes took care to create a pleasant learning atmosphere so they could go on with the teaching process without any issues. In comparison, 93% said that the students highly appreciated their teaching.

All the teachers responded saying that they had the freedom to decide on the methodology to be used in the classroom and that autonomy helped them in the teaching process (Table 4). Among these responses doing short tasks such as exercises or problems in groups that go for 10 to 30 minutes was conducted sometimes. Another 48.3% of the teachers said that it is a common practice in the classroom to divide students into groups for activities. Eighty percent of the teachers said that assigning students to conduct a more extended project in groups such as writing a document, drama and project reports was undertaken. Another 67.2% said that they gave students to prepare and give a speech or presentation 49% said that assigning group work for students was done regularly.

Table 3: Classroom Management

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
When the lesson begins, I have to wait a quite long time	27.6	70.7
I lose quite a lot of time because students interrupt the lesson	22.4	75.9
There is a lot of disruptive noise (external) in the classes	41.4	58.6
Students in this class take care to create a pleasant learning atmosphere	77.6	22.4
Students appreciate my teaching	93.1	6.9

Table 4: Group Activities for Students

Activities	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)
Preparing and giving presentations	2.0	48.3	48.3
Longer projects in groups	8.6	79.3	10.3
Doing short tasks	2.0	67.2	29.3

Regarding the learning materials, they covered relevant listening skills (55.2%), speaking skills (65.5%), reading skills (52%), writing skills (53.4%), relevant grammar items (57%) effectively to some extent (Table 5). Seventy eight percent of the teachers said that the themes and topics included in the textbook were interesting, and the lessons were exciting and motivating. Seventy four percent believed that the textbook was supportive of active participation and co-learning to some extent, while 61.4% of the teachers believed that the activities that the current textbook suited the proficiency level of the students (61.4%), the quality of teaching aids was satisfactory (69.1%), and the availability of teaching aids was satisfactory to some extent (67.3%).

Covering the syllabus is an important task that falls on the shoulders of teachers. When inquired about whether the syllabus was manageable within the given time, 49% of the teachers believed it was manageable.

Table 5: Learning Materials – Textbooks

Statement	Not at all (%)	Some extent (%)	A great extent (%)
Themes/topics are interesting	7.0	78.0	20.7
Lessons are interesting and motivating	8.4	78.0	19.0
Supportive of participation and co-learning	4.0	74.1	26.0
Cover listening skills	22.4	55.2	22.4
Cover speaking skills	19.0	65.5	15.5
Cover reading skills	5.0	51.7	47.0
Cover writing skills	4.0	53.0	47.0
Cover grammar items	5.7	57.0	41.1
Suit the proficiency level of students	5.2	74.1	20.7
Clear instructions	4.8	61.4	36.8
Teaching aids quality is satisfactory	14.5	69.1	16.4
Teaching aids availability is satisfactory	18.2	67.3	14.5

How students perceive the teaching process, the methods used, and how they respond help understand more about the students (Table 6). Fifty seven percent of the teachers believed that the students’ response to teaching was good, and 58% said that students’ response to the course materials was fair. However, 22.4% of the teachers said that some teachers expressed that the time allocation for each lesson and the time allocation for activities was unsatisfactory. Moreover, 46.6% of the teachers reported that the time allocated to use or teach any other supplementary material was inadequate.

Students’ knowledge is evaluated through term tests (Table 7). Further, 48.3% of the teachers said that currently, the terms tests evaluated the listening skills, 45.8% said that speaking skills were evaluated, 86.4% said that reading skills were evaluated, and 91.5% reported they evaluated the students’ writing skills. It was found that the tests were set at the proficiency level (48.3%), and the selection of the test items was appropriate (61%). Moreover, 56% of the teachers said that the methodology adopted for testing was considered reasonable.

Table 6: Students’ Response to Teaching

Statement	Unsatisfactory	Fair	Good
Students' response to teaching	5.2	37.9	56.9
Students' response to the course material	5.3	57.9	36.8
Time allocation for each lesson	22.4	37.9	39.7
Time allocation for activities	22.4	46.6	31.0
Time allocation for supplementary material	46.6	31.0	22.4

Table 7: Students Evaluation

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	some extent (%)
Listening skills	48.3	27.6	24.1
Speaking skills	46.0	34.0	20.3
Reading skills	86.5	5.1	8.5
Writing skills	91.5	5.1	3.4
Pitched at proficiency level of students	48.3	3.4	48.3
Appropriate test item selection	61.0	1.3	37.3
Appropriate methodology for testing	44.1	1.0	56.0

Issues that arise with the learners were also researched through the questionnaire (Table 8). Sixty seven percent of the teachers highlighted grammar was necessary, 76% believed speaking skills were necessary, 53.4% reported that vocabulary was essential. The teachers believed that these areas needed more support and teaching.

Table 8: Areas in Language which Need Extra Help

Language area	Percentage
Grammar	67.2
Listening	45.0
Speaking	76.0
Reading	36.2
Writing	52.0
Vocabulary	53.4

Nevertheless, 93.1% of teachers reported that the students needed extra help in learning English (Table 9), and 78% of the teachers said that it would be more effective if the extra help could be given as audio-visual material and through smart boards. Further, 58.6% believed that extra help through supplementary material was needed, 57% said that revision work or remedial work was required, and 55.2% believed that singing, drama and debates (55.2%) were also required for effective teaching.

Table 9: Extra Help for Students

Statement	Percentage
As supplementary material	59.0
Revision work	57.0
Singing and drama	55.2
Audio visual materials	78.0

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Generalizability of Results

When considering about barriers to professional development, lack of professional development is a main consideration that should be addressed. According to the teachers, the term tests evaluate only reading and writing skills. Evaluation of listening and speaking skills is not satisfied and the teachers are in the opinion that extra help should be provided for the students in addition to the textbook in order to develop their speaking and listening skills.

We do not claim that our survey findings can be generalized to a large population of students as future research studies are required. However, it proves that future classroom-based research is needed to find sustainable solutions to the problems, issues and concerns related to and inherent to the teaching of English in Sri Lanka. It was also noted that the sample in the study contributed to low statistical power as we could not run as many statistical measures as we needed. Future studies involving large samples of students representing all the provinces/districts are required to research and find the root causes of low English language achievement at public examinations in Sri Lanka.

B. Professional Competencies of Teachers

A full investigation to explore the professional competencies of teachers of English are also needed. Our sample indicated that the teachers have various educational and professional qualifications. Still, a full investigation is required in order to ascertain teachers' professional

competencies, challenges teachers face, diversity of qualifications, the relevance of qualifications, and the strengths and weaknesses of the courses they have followed before and after teachers are recruited. We noted many issues and concerns teachers face, but our study could not investigate every issue and document them.

C. Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is an issue of interest to educators, teacher educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in education. Our education system depends on teachers' commitment to teaching; their motivation, willingness to undergo professional training, and initial teacher qualifications impact the learning/teaching of English. Hence, these aspects should also be researched.

The researchers believe that the participation of all stakeholders is essential in the exercise of enhancing the standard of the English language in schools. This study presents the positive and negative impact of strategies, policies, and philosophies in improving the English language standard in schools to produce students who would be a part of the country's economic development.

We present the following recommendations based on our analysis of data. It may not be possible to implement all these recommendations, but some of the following suggestions may be implemented.

1. We propose the introduction of English from grade 1. An approach to activity-based learning or activity-based oral English may be practised at the initial stages.
2. Trained teachers of English with relevant training and professional qualifications may be assigned to teach English. More emphasis should be placed on activities related to listening and speaking. Those teachers should be trained teachers, and special CPD programmes should be provided to them.
3. Continuous training should be given to teachers of English. For instance, an annual opportunity to upgrade their knowledge and develop their professional skills should be available.
4. The panel of material designers on writing textbooks, workbooks, and supplemental materials for all the grades can discuss the educational objectives. They could agree on a gradual process without preparing educational materials, textbooks, and workbooks in isolation. All the panels should meet as one group or as a common pool at every stage. Then go back to work in their panels and again liaising with the

shared resource pool to see if there are overlaps on the process or any other unforeseen glitches.

5. We suggest using unorthodox teaching approaches and classroom techniques along with the appropriate materials. We believe that they may assist students studying English in rural contexts in improving their oral proficiency.

6. There should also be periodic evaluations for teachers to upgrade the quality of teaching.

7. There should be avenues for the professional development of teachers throughout their teaching careers.

8. The term tests should be continued, although there is a trend to exclude term tests. If not, students' results would be much lower. All these tests should come under formative evaluation and should be considered formative evaluation and give more weight for the same (50 marks for formative tests and 50 marks for year-end evaluations. 40 marks for formative assessments, and 60 marks for year-end evaluations for all the subjects). Such a change will reduce rote learning and give students more weight to gradually improving most neglected skills under KSAM.

9. More resources are given to well-reputed schools as the number of students are high in those schools. That is equality based on student numbers which should be replaced by equity.

10. A certain proportion of the marks from A/L General English should be taken into consideration for university entrance—at least 40%. The teachers of English revealed that their English periods are given to other main subjects as higher education requires better grades for the core subjects.

11. If everyone is conversant in their link language (English), they can communicate with each other. English should be made as an EB for teachers and all government officers to claim increments and be permanent in their positions instead of the current trend of getting through the second language (Tamil/Sinhala). Many teachers complained that the existing EB is very stressful as they must learn the same using the time needed to prepare lessons for the next day. However, everyone likes and wants to improve their standard of English, which may be productive and valuable.

12. Time allocation for English in school is not sufficient. Therefore, in addition to classroom teaching, co-curricular programs should be conducted in English in schools and expose students to an increased usage of English.

13. Although bilingual education should be introduced to all schools, using the English teacher to teach the subjects

they do not know has created issues. This could be eliminated if all the teachers are made knowledgeable in English.

14. There should be a link among the training programs conducted by the Ministry of Education, Provincial office, Zonal office, Divisional office, ISAs, and teacher training. All these training programs should be implemented at school once a term as teamwork.

15. The students in schools belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged communities should be provided with career guidance as there is a tendency for them to leave schooling to support their families. Similarly, there should be provided for all the students to obtain counselling as many students face issues related to their families, which make them vulnerable to unethical behaviour/experience various problems.

16. NVQ classes should be started in all schools that give students access to employment even if they do not get an opportunity to further their education.

17. There should be a systematic method for systematic evaluation based on final public examination results. It is pertinent to introduce summative and formative assessment methods and reasonable weightage and solid mechanisms to be added/considered for the public examination system in the country.

18. Giving more weightage to public examinations has much negative impact as they do not value their classroom teaching and depend on private tuition. This could be eliminated by adding a minimum of 40% for an authentic formative evaluation conducted by schools. This practice adds marks for creativity, group work, leadership qualities, and learning from each other.

19. It was revealed that the formation of sentences should be included in workbooks as most of the students cannot write essays. The grammar lessons should be more organized.

20. The learning/teaching process should teach reading as a habit among students as most do not read as a habit. Students should be encouraged to read English short stories at a young age.

21. The state should provide more training programs to teachers in the latest pedagogy, technology, and equipment (E. g., audiobooks, e-books, supplementary materials).

22. In the earlier book (English as a Life Skill Program), there were many activities to improve spoken skills - 45 activities. They are not included in the current textbooks.

Hence, the inclusion of activities to improve communicative skills is suggested.

23. The classroom population should be at an ideal level so that each student receives teachers' individual attention.

24. There should be a link among the training programs conducted by the Ministry of Education, Provincial office, Zonal office, Divisional office, ISAs, and teacher training. All these training programs should be implemented at school once a term as teamwork.

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