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Final Research Report-Research 02

01. Title of the research: Lack of Critique and Toughness of Sri Lankan English Literature
(Case: Advanced Technological Institute, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka)

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02. . Abstract:

This study aimed at addressing the toughness of Sri Lankan English Literature in the absence of criticism for the students who follow Higher National Diploma in English at the Advanced Technological institute, Dehiwala. Those students are enrolled to the institute based on Advanced Level examination and the results of a placement test. For the research sample was collected from targeted groups of students from 2015 part time and full time batches. Though initial idea was to collect data by qualitative methods, in the middle of the study, it was automatically converted to mixed method since one method alone seemed inadequate and not much related. The principle research question was whether the issue of lack of criticism toughens the learning of the subject Sri Lankan English Literature. Data were gathered both from secondary and primary sources, still for secondary data, literature found in the local context was very minimal, a fact well known to the scholars and students in the field. The research instruments used were distribution of questionnaires and interviewing techniques, classroom observations and at the same measure, in class tests were of immense use for the collection of reliable data. Results and finding were analyzed manually and findings of the research indicated that along with the major issue i.e the lack of criticism toughens learning of Sri Lankan English literature, there arose another significant one that is lack of English language fluency of students. After analyzing the results, some remedial measures were suggested and the most significant was to change the entry qualifications of Higher National Diploma in English at the Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Institute.

Key words: Higher National Diploma in English, Sri Lankan English Literature, lack of criticism

03. Introduction:

A. Background and Justification: The Higher National Diploma (HND) in English course provides an opportunity for school leavers with GCE Advanced Level (A/L) qualifications to develop their proficiency in English Language, English Literature and Communication Skills etc. The learners will be directed to follow an area of specialization during the second year in order to strengthen their chances of finding suitable employment. The course also aims at developing their personality, interpersonal skills and general transferable skills which are regarded as important requirements to meet employers' expectations.

The HND in English program consists of two-year course work and a six-month full-time training/project. The two year program is offered in a course unit system in four semesters. Each semester covers 15 weeks. The total program consists of 88 credits.

The subject Sri Lankan English literature, under which this survey is conducted, appears in the second semester of the second year of the HND in English program.

The majority of Sri Lankan students who do not have the proficiency in English find it very difficult to comprehend literary texts as they lack exposure to English. Also, due to the lack of qualified teachers and relevant methodology in teaching literature many cannot reach the target.²

The secondary curriculum in Sri Lanka includes introduction to literature of the mother tongue (Sinhala/Tamil) and English. Thus, the students who choose a foreign language at the university are expected to have prior exposure to literary works, literary criticism and appreciation.³

However, the introduction of literature at early stages of the curriculum in a foreign language causes difficulties as the background knowledge has hindered by the traditional methods employed by school system. The method and techniques used to develop skills in aesthetic subjects such as art, music and dancing were different from those of teaching literary skills. Apart from that, those aesthetic subjects were/ are practical while literature is theoretical. Further, the aesthetic subjects were taught in the first language whereas English literature was taught in their second language. Not only that but also the teachers who were especially qualified in

aesthetic subjects were recruited to teach the particular subject, while the teacher who was recruited to teach English as a second language were expected to teach English literature. The majority of the teachers who teach English literature in schools have had no opportunity to learn English literature at school. Therefore, listing English literature along with aesthetic subjects is discrimination in practical.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate ways to promote English literature among students in Sri Lanka. Many studies have been done on the suitability of the O/L English literature curriculum but, very few studies have been done in Sri Lanka on the approach to teaching English literature in schools.

B. Problem statement:

Why SLIATE students of English show poor performances on the subject Sri Lankan English literature at examination?

Research objectives:

1. To review the existing methods of teaching the subject Sri Lankan literature
2. To look into the reliability of internet sources
3. To investigate the difficulty of reading certain texts
4. To investigate whether giving notes hinder the self-learning
5. To introduce new strategies to teach Sri Lankan English literature

Justification for collaboration & brief information about national and international scenario in the proposed area of research

SLIATE is a statutory board established under parliament act no 29 of 1995 and is the only institution for alternative higher education in the state sector. ATI-Dehiwala is one institution which comes under SLIATE. Entry in the HND in English is required good result for the subject English language at GCE O/L and a pass in the subject English Literature is an added qualification. The subject Sri Lankan Literature in English falls in the third semester. The syllabi consist of 10 poems, 02 short stories and one drama all of which are written by Sri Lankan

writers of English. Critic is hardly found for the texts available in the SLIATE Sri Lankan English Literature syllabi. Prof Rajiva Wijesinghe's "Breaking Bounds-Sri Lankan Writings in English" is a rain drop in the desert of Sri Lankan English Literature.

Review of literature:

In the year 2000, it was found out why literature is used in English language teaching. According to him, Literature is a small-scale version of an entire society, a little window that permits us to look into the cultural values, traditions, and lifestyles of people. He further adds that as a person's word reflects character, literature reflects the unique character of a group of people who share a language.

Literature can help to stimulate the imagination of students, to develop their critical abilities and to increase their emotional awareness. If we ask students to respond personally to the texts we give them, they will become increasingly developed as a result of stimulation.

Ghosn (1998) mentioned some benefits of learning literature:

(1) Authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning, and it presents natural language at its finest, promoting vocabulary development in context;

(2) Literature stimulates oral language and involves the child with the text while exposing him or her to some aspect of the target language culture;

(3) Literature can promote academic literacy and critical thinking skills and has the potential of fostering private interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

(4) Good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition and attempts to come to some understanding of life. In many countries around the world, literature is highly valued and there has been an increasing awareness of the significance of integrating it in teaching English as a foreign language curriculum. For this reason, students of English may experience a real sense of achievement.

3.1. Methodology:

As sources of collecting data, samples were collected from full time and part time students of 2016 batch. The main source of collecting primary data is the distribution of questionnaires and

conduct of interviews. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews and tests (assignments) will be basic while secondary data will also be of immense use. These include the books, internet sources, already published and unpublished researches, seminar proceedings, symposiums and criticisms of prominent authors.

Research Design

The fundamental aim of this research is to investigate the challenges faced in teaching English literature at SLIATE, HND in English program. The two main functions of the design are

- a. Identification/ development of procedures required to undertake the study
- b. Emphasizes the importance of quality in those procedures to ensure their validity, objectivity and accuracy

Place and time period: ATII Dehiwala,

Materials: The material surveyed directly in this review was gathered and selected between May 2015 and May 2017, through a combination of means, including Internet searches on key words, suggestions from colleagues, bibliographical trails, and personal knowledge and experience and distribution of questionnaires and focus group interviews, tests (assignments), seminar proceedings, symposiums and criticisms of prominent authors falling into both primary and secondary data collecting methods. Finding relevant material has not been an easy process, because attempts to search systematically for material on Sri Lankan English literature made few results. Many were found on teaching learning process and those were excluded because the main focus of this is clearly in the field of criticism on Sri Lankan English literature. Of course, the fact that relevant material was not found through systematic searches does not mean that the research topic is irrelevant or has been ignored.

Experimental Methods: Classroom experiments were done by way of tests.

Sampling techniques: As this research is a longitudinal, it consists of detailed investigation and therefore, 30 respondents will be selected from HND in English program at ATI, Dehiwala; half from the part time and the other half from full time program focus groups. In the focus group, under semi-structured interviews, researcher acts as a facilitator and initiator. As the researcher is

the real life facilitator for the group, this may not be a difficult task because the focus group can be selected based on the theme of the research and the interest of the respondents.

Methods of data collection:

The material surveyed directly in this review was gathered and selected between May 2015 and May 2017, through a combination of means, including Internet searches on key words, suggestions from colleagues, bibliographical trails, and personal knowledge and experience and distribution of questionnaires and focus group interviews, tests (assignments), seminar proceedings, symposiums and criticisms of prominent authors falling into both primary and secondary data collecting methods. Finding relevant material has not been an easy process, because attempts to search systematically for material on Sri Lankan English literature made few results. Many were found on teaching learning process and those were excluded because the main focus of this is clearly in the field of criticism on Sri Lankan English literature. Of course, the fact that relevant material was not found through systematic searches does not mean that the research topic is irrelevant or has been ignored.

3.2. Population

The ideal research setting is one in which the observer obtains easy access, establishes immediate rapport with informants and gathers data directly related to the research interests. In that respect, the researcher was blessed as the field of data gathering was her own familiar lecture room. As this research is longitudinal, it consists of detailed investigation and therefore, 30 respondents were selected from HND in English program at ATI, Dehiwala; half from the part time and the other half from full time program for the focus group interviews. In focus group, semi-structured interviews, researcher acts as a facilitator and initiator. As the researcher is the real life facilitator for the group, this may not be a difficult task because the focus group can be selected based on the theme of the research.

3.3. Research Instruments

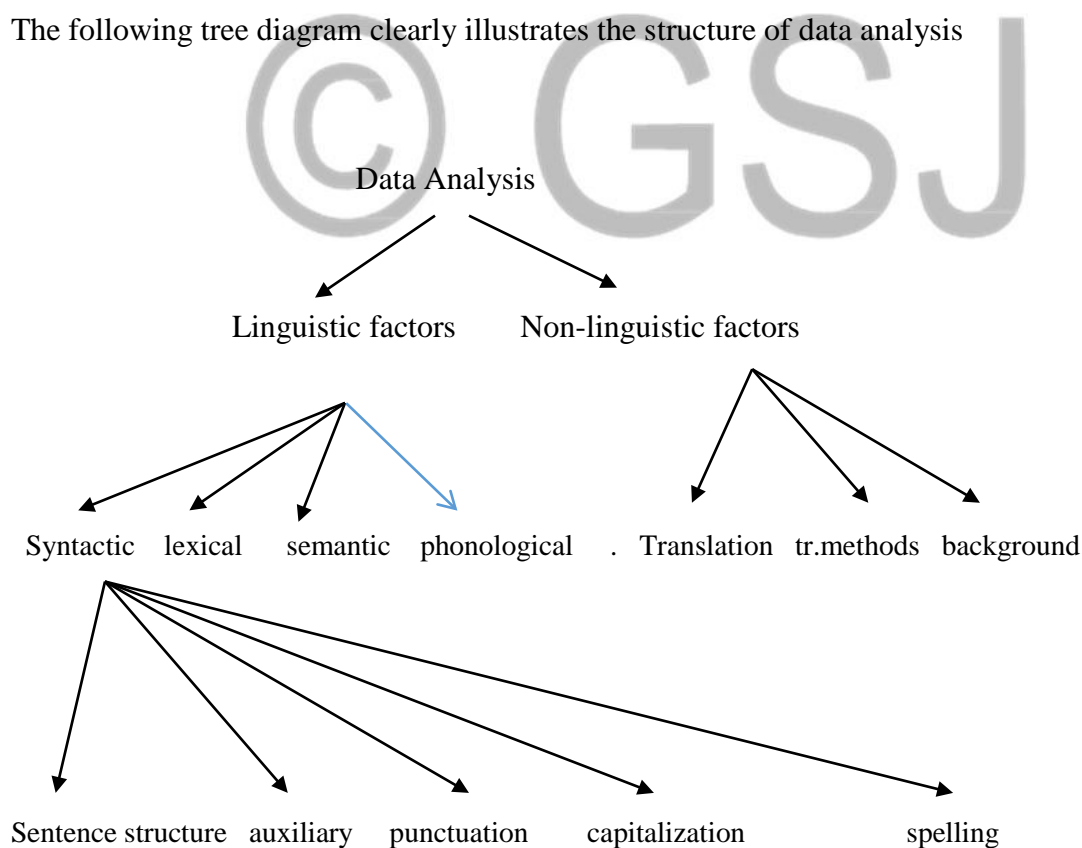
Prior to the in-depth interview session, each student was asked to answer the demographic information and give consent audio-record the interview session. There were five groups consisting of both part time and full time students together. Interviews were conducted in

English and where necessary the researcher practiced code mixing and switching to deal with students who are feeble in expressive skills in English.

The researcher then moved towards the distribution of written questionnaires. After the approval was granted by director of the ATI, Dehiwala, and the questionnaire which was distributed among students had two types and pre- tested. The one such was consisted of fourteen questions for which they had to underline the most relevant answer and those questions were followed by three open ended questions. Therefore, the first three questions were open ended questions in this particular questionnaire. Upon the collection of filled questionnaires, the researcher found that the information furnished by those respondents were not adequate for the purpose of the survey and therefore, another different type of questionnaire was set and distributed among different crowd from the same batches i.e. HND in English 2016, full time and part time batches. This time, the two paged questionnaires constructed on 5-point Likert scale was pre-tested on 10

Data analysis:

The following tree diagram clearly illustrates the structure of data analysis



Results and discussion:

Linguistic and non-linguistic factors were discussed.

Linguistic factors

In the gathered data, under linguistic errors, many were found under sentence structure which belongs to syntax. Syntax deals with the combination of words in phrases and sentences. Language is rule governed and the rules came into existences as a result of the study of syntax.

“A sentence is a group of words that makes complete sense. It can stand on its own without the need of any additional words to complete its meaning. It is an independent, self-contained, completely understandable utterance. Each word in a sentence does its own particular job. It performs a particular function in the sentence in which it is used and, at the same time, it relates to other words in the same sentence”¹. Once the accepted structure goes wrong in a sentence, it doesn't convey complete meaning and therefore, sentence is said to be wrong. Further, the sentences with mistakes are not sentences but utterances. The syntactical errors found were analyzed as follows. The analysis of errors found are listed below as errors in sentence structure, conjunction and determiners, prepositions, capitalization, pronouns, active and passive voices, articles, adverbs, comparison of adjectives, spelling, punctuation marks and modal auxiliary verbs. Non-linguistic factors such as translation methods, teaching methods, background knowledge, and lack of skilled teachers were at a critical stage. It is well known that studying English literature is a difficult task that faces many Sri Lankan students. Literary language is quite different from spoken language, so many students face serious problems in studying literature especially at the beginning of their educational journey. These difficulties could be as follows.

Non-Linguistic factors

Methods of translation, Lack of clear aims and objectives, Use of inappropriate methods of teaching English literature, Random selection of texts, Lack of background knowledge about the author's life and the prevailing social climate, Lack of criticism, Mother tongue interference

Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

Conclusion

Literature in English was introduced to the SLIATE English curriculum with sea of hope inclusive of both world literatures and Sri Lankan English literature. The aim of it was to improve students' English language proficiency, inculcate the habit of reading, and promote cultural understanding. All those noble aspirations can only become reality, if the related areas are properly functioning such as ample criticism; proper teaching, appropriate selection of texts, background knowledge of authors etc. are found easily.

Findings of this survey indicate that lack of criticism for Sri Lankan English literature along with other reasons leave much to be desired. The gathered data reveals that great emphasis is given to comprehension of texts rather than devices, themes and cultural validity. Lecturers are seen more as examiners giving assignments with little opportunity for reference and classroom discussions. The lecturers use the literary texts extensively in the development of four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing at the surface level but did not use it in the development of other skills. However, they all strongly agreed that Literature was an effective tool in developing critical thinking and creativity. Both students and lecturers stated their strong desire to develop their own literary knowledge and skills. Therefore, the teachers should be given opportunities to develop their knowledge on using Literature to develop employability skills of students because many educationists have identified Literature as an effective tool.

Hence, there is an urgent need to address the lack of critique, lack of support, inadequate time, lack of interest and importance given to Sri Lankan English literature at present. Integrating English literature in the curriculum pave way for equipping students with a number of skills including development of critical thinking, analytical skills, formulating and expressing independent opinions, presenting one's own interpretations independently, improving language competence, such as reading, speaking and writing skills.² There are no established or accepted approaches to the teaching of literature. In language teaching of course one can list a dozen or so approaches or methods. A literary text is a multi-layered artifact and hence needs complex skills of understanding. Inference, interpretation and evaluation are the highest levels of this reading process. These heights cannot be reached without the fundamental skills of comprehension for

which the basic skills of reading for gist, guessing meaning from context and understanding contextual reference are crucial. Any practical approach to teaching literature must enhance fast reading skills.³

Recommendations

Adequate time and critique for reference should be provided for both students and teachers. To make the expected outcomes a reality, support from all parties concerned must be present without fail. A variety of assessment tasks can be used such as; dramatizations, recitations, group presentations, debates, creative writing sessions, posters/ drawings, simulations, role plays, questions of different types.

Freedom should be given to the teachers in selecting quality inputs and additional activities to develop the competencies of the students. The syllabuses should not be filled with bulk of texts with subject content which cannot be covered in the stipulated period. However, facilitators should be free to modify or adapt learning teaching strategies creatively to achieve the learning outcomes, competency level via the subject content prescribed in the syllabus.

Limitations of the research

The researcher herself had to travel a lot across the country to collect data from lecturers of English at SLIATE as technology based data collection was not possible, lacks confidentiality and takes time. This was limited to five ATIs as time factor being so crucial. As the study was performed at Government owned higher educational, institutes some of the planned activities were not done due to non-allocation of lab facilities and the researcher herself didn't have enough to provide. Due to challenges that have to be encountered in relation to travelling and time being a crucial factor, ATI-Dehiwala was the area of research while 5 lecturers who teach English Literature at some other ATII scattered all over the country were distributed questionnaires set different to the one set for students out of 13 ATII where HND in English program is conducted due to some practical difficulties.

Dearth of local studies on the same was a big barricade in finding relevant Literature. This was the area of highest difficulty for the researcher to carry on the research further, still it was managed as some books and articles written on Sri Lankan literature were found.

Further, within the scope of this research, researcher found it very important to limit the survey to certain extent. The study was limited by some geographical boundaries, that is Advanced Technological Institute, Dehiwala located at the heart of Dehiwala city, Colombo, Sri Lanka mainly due to the long distance to other ATII which are spread all over the island and time factor been unjustly crucial. Provided, done could have been better in the long run. In distributing and collecting questionnaires which will be in custody of SLIATE English lecturers, will not be an easy task as they are scattered around the country unlike the students at ATI, Dehiwala who are physically living in one place for the academic purpose. Therefore, basically, distance, time data collection and sample procedure limited the survey.

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