

Challenges Encountered by Undergraduates in Following English Medium Courses at State Universities in Sri Lanka: A Study based on the first year students in Physical Science of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

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KeyWords

Challenges, English Medium Instruction, performance, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a multinational country where the people speak both Sinhala and Tamil as their mother tongue. The majority of the people speak Sinhala and the minorities speak Tamil as their local language. Despite this, English has employed the importance and fame itself due to its value around the world. In this regard, Sri Lankan universities have been offering several undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English medium. In contrast, a rare amount of government schools offer primary and secondary education in English medium. Most of the students have had little opportunities to practice using English in schools and their natural surroundings as their mother tongue is entirely different from English. Therefore, when the students are enrolled to the universities and suddenly they turn themselves into learning in English medium, it automatically drags them into the biggest trouble. They face many problems and sometimes those struggles lead to drop the course even. This study dealt with such problems and analyzed and tried to find some solution for that and it recommended some strategies to overcome it. In this study, fifty students of Physical Science from the Faculty of Applied sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka have been randomly selected and a questionnaire was used as research instruments. The primary data were collected using the questionnaire. Furthermore, the collected data were analyzed by using the SPSS method. This research was based on quantitative data collection method. Eventually, this study proceeds some resolution for those students' challenges as well.

Introduction

As the globe realized the value of English language and it has become an international language. Since Sri Lankan government has taken every effort to provide the school students and undergraduates with various types of assistance to enhance them and produce them as a beneficial generation to the future, sometimes students neglect and fail to utilize its fruitfulness of that. As we all know, English plays a vital role and it rules the universe. According to this arena, each and every undergraduate should realize the value of English. Moreover, most of the first-year students are the freshers to the English Medium in the Faculty of Applied Science, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

When they asked to write reports, records for their subject related materials; most of the time they face many difficulties to write with proper grammar and language proficiency. English language is essential to lead a standard lifestyle and indeed it is a necessary requirement for a country like Sri Lanka which has multilingual dwellers. The past two decades have been significant in the world history due to changes that took place in Science and technology through English Language. The students face a lot of new challenges along with rapid development of Information Technology, communication and other related fields. In such an environment, with new technological and intellectual society, thousands of innovative career opportunities would be created. To win those challenges, it is the responsibility of the Sri Lankan students to empower themselves to overwhelm the modern world, especially as Science faculty students they should have possess well capable knowledge in English, because two third of universe scientific materials, collected documents are written in English language. Luckily the Sri Lankan government provide free education from primary to University education along with Mahapola or Bursary fund system. So, their aim must be to use those facilities properly and acquire the necessary knowledge out of it. Comparatively with other Asian countries, Sri Lanka bestow both school and graduate studies in English medium even in university education system with free of charge. Although those facilities available around the Island, Students suffer a lot to break that hurdle.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka is multi-national country where various languages speaking people live mingle together. Their prime mother tongue is Sinhala most and second variety is Tamil. Moreover, most of the government schools are being taught in their mother tongue, but some are there being taught in English medium apart from their school. These medium followed students are enrolled to the prestigious state universities because of their medium of secondary level education, but other students like who studied in their mother tongue such as in Sinhala and Tamil medium, if they enroll to universities and they supposed to learn in English medium. Furthermore, English functions as pidgin and creole among the Tamil speaking students and Sinhala speaking students in faculty of Applied Sciences. There the crises are arising. This research title is more common in Sri Lankan crisis circle. Most of the experts talked about these challenges but in other ways and some other relevant titles. Therefore, this research paper also will carry out its duty to bring out the challenges which are being faced by students and suggest some relevant solution to overcome it. This research title is more common in Sri Lankan crisis circle. Most of the experts talked about these challenges but in other ways and some other relevant titles. Therefore, this research paper also will carry out its duty to bring out the challenges which are being faced by students and suggest some relevant solution to overcome it.

Statement of the Problem

Students at most of the government schools in Sri Lanka are being taught in their mother tongue. However, some are there being taught in English medium apart from their schools. These medium followed students are enrolled to the prestigious state universities because of their medium of secondary level education, but other students who studied in their mother tongue such as in Sinhala and Tamil medium, if they enroll to universities and they supposed to learn fully in English medium suddenly. There the crises are arising like obtain lower results in, problem of understanding the lessons, anxiety of interactions when perform the presentation and Language oral test.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the challenges that the undergraduate students face when they tent to continue their studies in English medium at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, SEUSL
- To explore the factors which contribute to the challenges faced by the students in following their course of study in English medium
- To suggest some remedies and recommendations to overcome the challenges in following English medium courses at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, SEUSL.

Theoretical Review

This part reviews previous studies related to the current study. Most of the course of studies at universities in several countries are taught and instructed in English medium. It seems common in many countries where English language is not the mother tongue. In this sense, English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become significant in many higher educational institutions not only in Europe but also elsewhere mainly as a reaction to globalization. Moreover, it currently lies at the centre of the strategy of internationalization of several higher educational institutions around the world (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013; Gustafsson & Jacobs, 2013; Wilkinson, 2013). However, a large number of non-English speaking undergraduate students at universities around the globe encounter difficulties in following English medium courses.

A similar study was conducted by Flowerdew and colleagues (1992, 1994, 1996 and 2000) on a series of studies of second language lecture comprehension among Hong Kong Chinese students in which Flowerdew and colleagues (1992, 1994, 1996 and 2000) find that 50% of the participants prefer to follow their studies in their mother tongue and they face difficulties in understanding lectures in English. Similarly, as far as undergraduate students at state universities in Sri Lanka are concerned, a local study was carried out by Navaz (2016) investigating the improvement in language proficiency among the science undergraduate students by following their courses in EMI and the challenges faced by them in EMI classes. In this study, the findings show that half of the participants preferred to follow their course of study in their mother tongue. Poor English language proficiency affect their performance (Navaz, 2016).

According to Sri Lankan education system, primary and secondary educations are given in the mother tongue Sinhala and Tamil at most of the government schools. Therefore, the students possess lower English language proficiency. However, most of the undergraduate programmes in Science, Management, Engineering and Medicine are offered in English medium at state universities in Sri Lanka. Lower English language proficiency affect their learning and performance. Moreover, EMI in lectures does not help the students to improve their English language (Navaz, 2016)

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted with the aim of investigating the challenges and problems faced by the students of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka when they follow a course of study through the medium of English. This study was a survey research, and quantitative method was used for data collection. After the data collection procedure is over, the data were analyzed as descriptive analysis.

Population and Sample

The total population of this study focuses on 217 both Physical Science and Biological Science students of the Faculty of Applied Sciences. The sample population of this study was 50 students.

Research Instruments

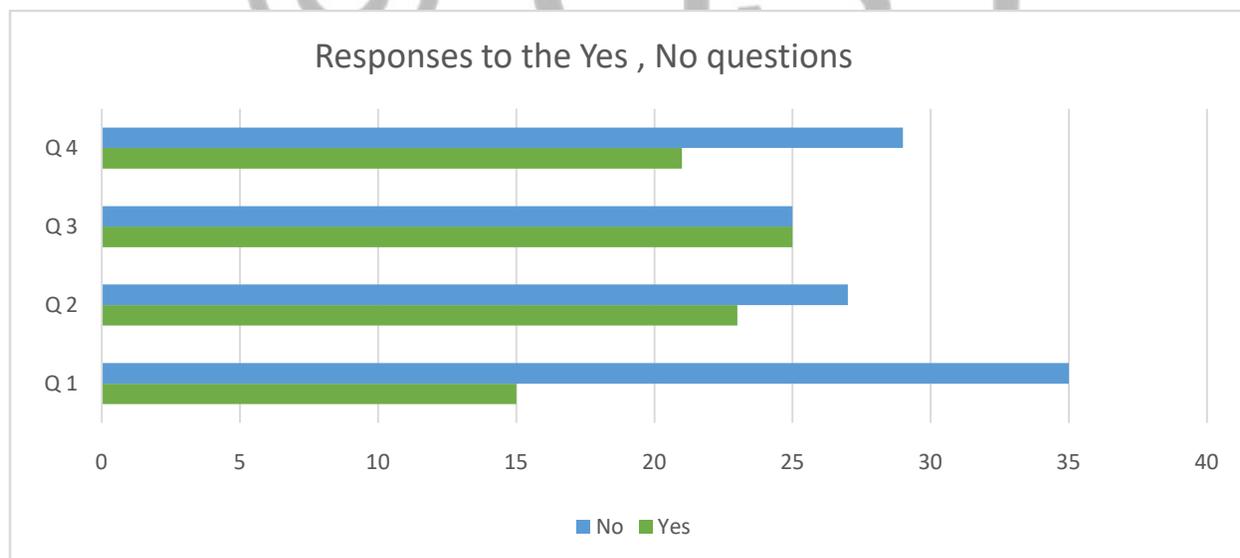
In this study, one research instrument was selected for data collection which was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. It focused on collecting opinions among both Physical Science and Biological Science students regarding the challenges faced by the students when they follow a course of study through EMI.

Data collection and analysis

This instrument, questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. After the data collection is over, the data were analyzed statistically using graphs under the descriptive analysis.

Research Findings and Discussion

The questionnaire was designed to gather opinions concerning studying in English medium when the mother tongue is Sinhala or English Inguge, and the challenges which contribute to obtain higher results. According to the data analysis of the questionnaire, the first 4 questions were close-ended and yes-no type question. The results show that the first question focused on whether they are interested to learn English at school. Out of 50 respondents, 35 of the respondents responded "no" and 15 of the respondents responded "yes". The second question on the other hand was on whether the students go for English private classes to enrich their English language ability when they were schooling. 27 of the respondents responded "no" and just 23 of the respondents responded "yes". The third question concentrated on whether the students spend time to learn themselves English language at home or hostels after entering to the university. Partial amount of 25 respondents responded both "yes and no ". The fourth question was on whether students are satisfied with their examination results with lack of English knowledge. 21 of the respondents responded "yes" and 29 of the respondents marked "no". The following graph shows the responses of the respondents to yes-no type questions.



The last question was open-ended question which was set to collect the opinions regarding the challenges which contribute to obtain lower results in their fields of study along with English Language. In this sense, according to the analysis of the factors, the results show that 35 of the respondents reported that they give prominence only to the content of the questions while answering in their exam paper, not to the grammatical errors in English language and they do not give prominence to learn English language. The next factor was lack of English foundation background. 29 of the respondents said that they did not have basic English proficiency to learn English

language. Use of traditional classroom and teaching methodology was another factor which contributes to the lack of interest when they were schooling, in which 23 of the respondents pointed out it.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and findings of the study, this study can be concluded that students' lack of interest in learning English is one of the primary factors for facing challenges in understanding EMI in lectures. Further, There were some suggestions brought out for the next generations too. Firstly, the parents and the teachers should make the students to realize the value of English language. Secondly, when the students enter into General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) Advanced Level (A/L), they must be compulsorily taught the General English book which is issued by government by free of charge. If the students feel to enhance their language skills they can go for additional English course if it is possible to their finance. Another important thing is, they should follow a free-course in English like NCE (National Certificate in English) at Technical Colleges in their area once after the students sat for the A/L examination without wasting their time. While considering about the education system of universities, the ESL mentors can provide the intensive course for three or six months according to their ability. Probably, it is available in number of universities in Sri Lanka. Additionally, nowadays there a lot of online sources around us to learn the language, so the students utilize their time and resource as well.

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