



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
LANGUAGE, CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY,
AND AUTONOMY
(ICLACTA 2025)**

“Fostering Autonomy in Learning Languages Using Immersive Strategies”

10th AND 11th OCTOBER 2025

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**“FOSTERNING AUTONOMY IN LEARNING LANGUAGES USING IMMERSIVE
STRATEGIES”**

10-11 OCTOBER 2025

SRI LANKA INSTITUTE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

SLIIT- Malabe Campus, Malabe, Sri Lanka

Organized by

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Sciences

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ISBN 978-624-6010-10-2

ISSN 2783 – 8862

Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.54389/LJVM4097>

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Message from the Chancellor



With great pleasure, I warmly congratulate the organizers, participants, and contributors of the SICASH 2025 Multiconference. This significant event unites seven interdisciplinary conferences, each focusing on critical issues shaping our present and future, covering topics such as sustainability, biotechnology, education, law, psychology, language, actuarial science, and healthcare.

The themes examined this year embody a timely and ambitious agenda focused on promoting research, innovation, and collaboration across a variety of academic and professional disciplines. In a time characterized by swift change, technological progress, and intricate global challenges, the dedication to sustainability, equity, and excellence showcased by SICASH 2025 is truly commendable and inspiring.

Such gatherings transcend mere academic events; they act as incubators for innovation and change. By promoting dialogue, fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations, and disseminating evidence-based insights, SICASH 2025 emerges as a potent catalyst for generating solutions that can positively influence our societies, institutions, and the world.

These conferences serve as an essential platform for scholars, researchers, practitioners, and thought leaders to unite, engage in meaningful dialogue, and inspire one another toward innovation and shared objectives. I am confident that the knowledge generated and exchanged during this multiconference will leave a lasting impact not only within academic circles but also in shaping policies, practices, and global perspectives.

I commend the organizing committee for their commitment and foresight in creating such a thorough and progressive program. I wish all participants a productive, insightful, and enriching experience at SICASH 2025.

With sincere regards,

Prof. L. L. Ratnayake
Chairman
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Message from the Vice Chancellor



I am delighted to convey my warmest wishes as the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences hosts the sixth edition of the SLIIT International Conference on Advancements in Sciences and Humanities (SICASH 2025) Multiconference. I believe this year's theme, "Transforming Possibilities Through Research Excellence," is timely, highlighting the power of research to reshape boundaries, inspire fresh thinking, and create pathways that lead to real-world impact. In addition to the main conference, SICASH 2025 hosts seven specialized conferences, providing focused platforms for deeper exploration of specific fields, attracting experts, scholars, and practitioners, enhancing the quality of discussions, and expanding professional networks.

I am pleased to see that SICASH this year brings together a remarkable convergence of minds from Sri Lanka and beyond, including scholars from China, Australia, India, and Dubai. The wide range of disciplines represented, including biotechnology, nursing, psychology, law, linguistics, and mathematics, highlights the conference's commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration. By embracing this cross-disciplinary research approach, the conference demonstrates how every field of study is interconnected, with insights from one area reinforcing and advancing others. I am confident that this collaborative environment will drive innovative thinking and practical solutions while inspiring research capable of addressing pressing societal challenges, shaping policy, and contributing to sustainable progress on both local and global levels, demonstrating SLIIT's dedication to meaningful research.

A special welcome goes to our keynote speakers of international repute, including Dr. Patrick McNamara, Executive Director of the United States-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission, and Dr. Usree Bhattacharya, Associate Professor at the University of Georgia. Their contributions, together with those of the other distinguished speakers across the seven specialized conferences, will bring invaluable insights to participants and set the stage for thought-provoking dialogue.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Dean, academic reviewers, conference chairs, and organizing committees whose dedication and meticulous effort have made this multiconference possible. Their work ensures that SICASH continues to serve as a vibrant platform for advancing knowledge, building networks, and inspiring the next generation of scholars.

I am confident that SICASH 2025 will strengthen SLIIT's research profile and nurture collaborations that extend beyond academia, enabling discoveries that contribute to industry, policy, and society at large.

Prof. Lalith Gamage
Vice Chancellor
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Message from the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor & Provost



It gives me great pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the organizers and participants of SICASH 2025. This prestigious academic gathering organized by the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences stands as a testament to our continued commitment to excellence in academic programs and innovative research.

SICASH 2025 once again promises to be a truly multidisciplinary platform, bringing together scholars and researchers from diverse subject areas to share their findings with both national and international academic communities. It is particularly commendable that the conference has continued to grow in stature and impact over the years, reflecting its resilience and commitment to fostering academic excellence despite the many challenges that arise in today's world.

Among the many specialized tracks of this year's conference, I am delighted to recognize the International Conference on Sustainable Biotechnology (ICoSBi 2025), held under the timely theme "Building a Sustainable Future Through Biotechnology." This focus highlights the critical role biotechnology plays in addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable solutions for the betterment of humanity. ICoSBi 2025 enriches SICASH by broadening its scope and providing a dedicated forum for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in this vital field.

It is deeply encouraging to witness the enthusiasm and willingness of local and international academic communities to contribute to SICASH 2025. The organizing committee deserves the highest commendation for curating an engaging program of eminent keynote speakers, thought-provoking sessions, and high-quality research presentations.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the organizing committee for their tireless dedication in making this event a success, and I warmly thank all participants who have contributed their research to SICASH 2025. I wish everyone a productive, inspiring, and successful conference experience, and I look forward to the impactful outcomes that will emerge from ICoSBi 2025 and the broader SICASH platform.

Prof. N. Rajapakse
Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Message from the Dean



It is with great pride that I welcome you to the SLIIT International Conference on Advancements in Sciences and Humanities (SICASH) 2025. This year marks a historic milestone, as SICASH has transformed into a multi-conference, with each track now established as an independent conference under the larger SICASH umbrella. This evolution reflects both the remarkable growth of the conference and our continued commitment to promoting research and scholarly exchange across diverse disciplines.

SICASH 2025 brings together an exceptional community of scholars, with nine distinguished resource persons from overseas joining us alongside eminent scientists and officials representing leading professional bodies. The endorsement and support of several professional associations further reinforce the credibility and impact of this conference. Their involvement demonstrates the strong alignment of SICASH with national and global academic, industrial, and professional priorities.

This year's proceedings feature more than 150 research papers, covering a breadth of fields spanning sciences, humanities, social sciences, health, and education. By granting each track its own identity as a conference, while preserving the spirit of interdisciplinary dialogue, SICASH creates a unique platform where ideas converge, collaborations emerge, and innovation thrives.

I wish to place on record my heartfelt appreciation to our keynote speakers, overseas and local experts, reviewers, and the organizing committees. In particular, I extend my warmest thanks to Conference Chair Dr. Nirosha Priyadarshani and the co-chairs, whose dedication and attention to detail have been instrumental in orchestrating this massive event.

As we embark on this new chapter in the SICASH journey, I invite you to actively participate, exchange ideas, and cultivate partnerships that will extend well beyond this event. Together, let us continue to advance knowledge, inspire innovation, and contribute to the betterment of our societies.

Dr. Malitha N. Wijesundara

Dean

Faculty of Humanities and Sciences

Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Message from the General Chair



As General Chair of SICASH 2025 Multiconference, it is my distinct pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all participants of the sixth annual SICASH Multiconference, hosted by the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences at SLIIT. This year's theme, *Transforming Possibilities Through Research Excellence*, underscores our shared commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering innovation, and promoting meaningful dialogue across disciplines.

This year, SICASH has been elevated to the level of a multiconference, a significant step in its evolution and visibility. This transformation reflects both the growth of the conference and the increasing demand for platforms that support deeper, more diverse academic engagement. By bringing together seven parallel conferences under one unified framework, SICASH 2025 provides a broader stage for scholarly exchange, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the dissemination of impactful research.

Under the shared umbrella of SICASH 2025 multiconference, bring together seven distinguished conferences:

- International Conference on Sustainable Biotechnology (ICoSBi 2025)
- International Conference on Educational Trends and Technology (iCONETT 2025)
- International Conference on Language, Culture, Technology, and Autonomy (ICLACTA 2025)
- International Conference on Law and Justice (ICLJ 2025)
- International Conference on Actuarial Sciences (ICActS 2025)
- International Conference on Nursing and Allied Health for Sustainability (ICoNAHS 2025)
- Psychology International Conference (PSYCIC 2025)

Each of these conferences, while maintaining a focus on its specific domain, collectively advances the mission of fostering rigorous research, promoting interdisciplinary dialogue, and translating knowledge into meaningful societal impact. Each conference publishes its own proceedings, reflecting a strong commitment to scholarly excellence.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all authors for their dedication and intellectual contributions, to the reviewers for upholding rigorous standards, and to our partners, sponsors, and endorsing institutions for their generous support.

Dr. S. V. G. Nirosha Priyadarshani
General Chair
SICASH 2025 Multiconference
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Message from the Chair – ICLACTA 2025



It is with great pleasure, I convey this message to the ICLACTA, which is part of the SICASH 2025 multi-conference. The International Conference on Language, Culture, Technology and Autonomy addresses several issues related to the conceptualizing of the dynamicity of verbal language as a technique of communication, its application in the context of observing and activating culture in the modern world, the exploitation of language-related technologies in developing the receptive and productive skills of language for communication, and the cultivation of autonomy in the absorption and application of language in a wide variety of contexts, using grammar, lexis, syntax, pragmatic knowledge, etc. In our endeavour to realise the key objectives of the conference, we are fortunate to have the valuable presence of our keynote speaker Dr. Usree Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of Georgia, and are grateful to the Embassy of the United States of America in Colombo for sponsoring her participation in this momentous event of the history of SLITT-Uni, Malabe. We have also received abstracts from the subject expert, US Govt. State Department English Language Fellow Mr. Kevin Anderson at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Batticaloa, who functions as a plenary speaker, and presenters of academic papers from several universities in Sri Lanka. Their papers are also related to the theme of establishing learner autonomy in learning English through appropriate technologies in the modern world. All this became possible thanks to the tremendous support received from the Faculty of Sciences and Humanities and the Management of SLIIT-Uni, Malabe. May this timely academic exercise be able to make a lasting impact on learning the English language which, being the international link language all over the world, is crucial in all types of academic and professional pursuits today.

Prof. E.A. Gamini Fonseka
Chair – ICLACTA 2025
Head
Department of Linguistics
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)

Contribution of the Keynote Speaker



Prof. Usree Bhattacharya
Associate Professor
Language and Literacy Education
University of Georgia
Athens

Dr. Usree Bhattacharya is an Associate Professor in the Language and Literacy Education Department at the University of Georgia. She holds a PhD in Education from the University of California, Berkeley (2013). Her research focuses on diversity, equity, and access in multilingual education, with particular attention to how language ideologies sustain educational hierarchies. Further, as director of the Rett Lab@UGA, she leads research on eye-tracking augmentative and alternative communication for individuals with Rett syndrome. Currently, she is heading a project on AI and disability bias within the Lab. Dr. Bhattacharya also teaches courses on AI in education at UGA, exploring how AI can help support more inclusive, technology-enhanced learning environments. In Fall 2024, Dr. Bhattacharya is participating in a U.S. Department of State virtual project to train English teachers of STEM students, focusing on Project-Based Learning and AI technology to help improve speaking skills.

Reclaiming Inquiry: Rethinking Research in the Age of AI

Available online at: www.sicash.sliit.lk

<https://doi.org/10.54389/ZZPX2790>

To speak of “research excellence” today is to navigate an unsettled epistemological terrain where artificial intelligence is reshaping how we recognize, value, and produce knowledge. What constitutes rigor, originality, or discovery when algorithmic processes increasingly thread through research practice? The terms we inherit—authorship, creativity, novelty, discovery—are being recast, their meanings destabilized and renegotiated in ways we are only beginning to articulate. In these remarks, I discuss AI not as a tool or a threat but as a force that exposes the assumptions, hierarchies, and aspirations embedded in research culture itself. Language, as the medium through which we constitute knowledge, becomes the critical site for this reckoning. I argue that universities must meet this transformation with both rigor and imagination—alert to the genuine risks of superficiality, proprietary enclosure, and eroded judgment, while actively reclaiming inquiry as moral practice and intellectual adventure: transforming what becomes possible without relinquishing what remains irreducibly human.

Plenary Speaker



Mr. Kevin Anderson
US Govt. State Department English Language Fellow
Eastern University
Batticaloa
Sri Lanka

Kevin Anderson began his TESOL career in 2011 in Boston, Massachusetts, where he worked at a private language institute. In 2015, he moved to Doha, Qatar, where he taught at the Community College of Qatar until 2024. There, he taught foundation English and college composition courses while also gaining experience in educational management, assessment design, curriculum development, accreditation, and educational technology. In 2024, he joined the U.S. Department of State's English Language Fellow Program. During his first year, he was based at the Peradeniya National College of Education, where he taught general English and TESOL methodology. Now in his second year of Fellowship, he is based at Eastern University in Batticaloa. He holds master's degrees in TESOL and English Literature.

Fear of Peers: A Case Study of Speaking in the Sri Lankan Context

Available online at: www.sicash.sliit.lk

<https://doi.org/10.54389/UALC4719>

This paper examines the relationship between Sri Lankan students and the core skill of speaking English. Drawing on an informal needs analysis of 240 pre-service English teachers and American Corner students, the paper examines students' self-reported needs and emotional relationship with speaking in English. Results shed light on the demotivating factors associated with speaking in front of others. Moreover, the paper acknowledges the myriad challenges of assessing speaking but also highlights the need for educators to differentiate between speaking activities that prompt students to read out loud and activities that encourage students to interact extemporaneously.

Keywords: speaking; learner motivation; language anxiety; affective filter

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/PLJZ1957>

Students' Perceptions towards Learning English Online via Zoom: with Special Reference to Young Learners in an Urban Context

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional education globally, prompting a rapid shift to online learning. In Sri Lanka, platforms such as Zoom introduced a new mode of instruction known as “Learn from Home,” especially for subjects like English as a Second Language (ESL). This study investigates the perceptions of Grade 11 students from one government and one international school in Nugegoda toward learning English online. Using a mixed-methods approach—comprising a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (n = 100) and semi-structured interviews—the study explores students' views on learning English online, particularly their experiences with the four language skills, and the influence of IT literacy and study time. Quantitative data were analyzed using One-Way ANOVA and post-hoc tests via SPSS, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Findings show that students with higher IT literacy and longer study hours reported more positive perceptions. Reading was the most positively perceived skill, while speaking and writing were the most challenging. Students appreciated some features of Zoom but expressed dissatisfaction with limited teacher attention and peer interaction. The study highlights the importance of digital readiness, interactive engagement, and skill-specific instructional strategies in online ESL learning, offering insights for educators and policymakers.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; ESL learning; IT literacy; Online education; Zoom platform

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted a global educational shift, introducing the Learn from Home (LFH) concept. Sri Lanka, previously unfamiliar with this mode of instruction, rapidly adopted online platforms like Zoom. This study investigates students' perceptions of learning ESL via Zoom during this abrupt transition, focusing on students in an urban Sri Lankan context. The study is grounded in the reality that English is critical for academic and career advancement in Sri Lanka. It focuses on Grade 11 students from both an international

school and a government school. These students were preparing for their GCE O/L exams and had varying experiences with online ESL learning.

The research aims to fill a gap in the literature, which previously focused more on tertiary students in foreign contexts and often used only quantitative data. This study instead offers a mixed-methods approach, evaluating young learners' perceptions specifically toward learning English online, including a focus on the four language skills.

Therefore, the study investigates students' perceptions of online ESL learning via Zoom, including their attitudes towards the transition and their experiences with language skill development. To achieve this aim, the following specific objectives are to be accomplished.

- To explain students' perceptions of online ESL learning
- To determine attitudes toward the sudden transition to online classes
- To analyse how students perceived learning individual skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

To reach the specific objectives, the research examines the following questions:

- What are students' perceptions of learning English online during the pandemic?
- How did they perceive the transition from classroom to online learning?
- What were their views on learning each English skill online?
- Did students perceive language learning differently from other subjects?

Materials and Methods

A convergent mixed-methods approach was adopted to comprehensively understand students' perceptions of online ESL learning. This design enabled the integration of numerical trends with contextual insights, supporting triangulation and enhancing the reliability of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Semi-structured interviews via Zoom explored students' deeper reflections. Open-ended questions were aligned with the research objectives. Interviews continued until data saturation, and transcripts were thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines.

A realist paradigm informed the research, seeking to interpret participants' perceptions within their sociocultural context. The cross-sectional study was conducted during a defined period of the COVID-19 pandemic, capturing real-time experiences of online ESL learning.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing One-Way ANOVA and post-hoc tests to examine associations between variables such as IT literacy and study time. Qualitative data were coded and thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and nuanced student experiences.

The study was conducted in two schools, one international and one government—located in urban Nugegoda. Grade 11 students preparing for the GCE O/L exam were purposively selected, ensuring participants had consistent access to online learning. Using the Qualtrics sample size calculator, a representative sample of 100 students (33 from the international school, 67 from the government school) was identified. A 26-item five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, adapted from Altunay (2019), was distributed via Google Forms. Items covered personal suitability, effectiveness, teachability, study habits, and skill-based perceptions. Demographic data on IT literacy and study hours were also collected. The instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing to ensure reliability.

Results

One-Way ANOVA showed a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between students' IT literacy and their perceptions of online ESL learning. Higher IT literacy correlated with increased comfort in using Zoom features and more favorable ratings for online class suitability, effectiveness, and teachability.

Furthermore, concerning the study time and perceived effectiveness, the post-hoc analysis indicated that students who spent more time studying English daily perceived the learning environment as more effective and conducive to skill development, particularly in writing and reading. The following were noted concerning the individual language skills:

- Listening: Frequently affected by technical issues such as poor audio and external noise.
- Speaking: Viewed as difficult due to limited real-time interaction and speaking anxiety.
- Reading: Perceived as the most accessible skill due to clear instructions and digital resources.
- Writing: Often hindered by delayed or limited teacher feedback.

Five major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview responses:

- Unwillingness to speak due to anxiety and lack of engagement.
- Lack of attention from teachers, especially in large virtual classrooms.
- Technical issues, including unstable connections and device limitations.
- Feedback inefficiency, particularly for writing and speaking tasks.
- Monotony and low interaction resulting in reduced motivation.

Discussion

This study reveals that students' perceptions of learning English online via Zoom are shaped by several interrelated factors. Students with higher IT literacy reported greater ease and confidence in navigating online tools, aligning with Mantiri et al. (2019) and Menggo (2021), who emphasized the critical role of digital competence in virtual ESL contexts. Consistent with Agung et al. (2020) and Serhan (2020), it was evident that students who spent more time studying English online had more positive experiences. This suggests that both commitment and self-directed learning significantly enhance online language acquisition.

While reading and writing benefitted from structured digital tools and asynchronous learning opportunities (Fitria, 2020; Soliman, 2014), listening and speaking were constrained by technical issues and limited interactive opportunities—echoing findings by Ngo & Linh (2021) and Blake (2016). Speaking challenges were also amplified by anxiety, consistent with Maharani and Roslaini (2021).

The themes of feedback inefficiency and monotony align with global findings (Rakhmanina et al., 2020; Altunay, 2019). Students' appreciation of features like chat functions and breakout rooms suggests the potential for creative pedagogical strategies, as noted by Nurieva and Garaeva (2020). Yet, the overall experience underscores the need for personalized feedback, peer interaction, and responsive instructional design. The final research question—whether students perceived language learning differently from other subjects—was addressed in interviews. Students indicated that language learning, especially speaking and listening, felt more personal and interaction-dependent than subjects like Mathematics or Science, which relied more on visual instruction. This reinforces the need for ESL-specific strategies in online settings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex factors influencing students' perceptions of online ESL learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. IT literacy emerged as the most significant determinant, affecting students' ability to

engage with digital content and platforms. Study time was another strong predictor of positive attitudes and outcomes. While reading was the most positively perceived skill, speaking and writing were seen as challenging due to reduced interaction and limited feedback. Students appreciated certain Zoom features, but concerns about monotony, teacher attention, and technical issues prevailed.

To improve online ESL learning, several strategic measures should be implemented. First, schools should integrate digital literacy training into ESL curricula to ensure students are equipped to navigate online platforms effectively. Teachers must also enhance feedback mechanisms—particularly for speaking and writing—by incorporating timely, personalized responses that support skill development. Additionally, interactive strategies such as breakout room discussions and gamified learning activities can increase student engagement and reduce the monotony often associated with online classes. To address listening challenges, educators should provide asynchronous audio materials and offer guidance on creating distraction-free home learning environments. Finally, a formalized Learn from Home policy should be introduced to establish clear expectations for participation, communication, and assessment, ensuring consistency and accountability in virtual ESL instruction.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/XIVI6400>

A Study on the Challenges Faced When Interpreting Expressions Made in Sri Lankan Sign Language into Sinhala

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Abstract

Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Like other world languages, it has systematic grammatical and morphological structures. It is the primary mode of communication for individuals with hearing impairments. In Sri Lanka, many deaf children born into deaf families, use Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) as their mother tongue. As such, deaf signers use SLSL fluently, embodying its cultural and community-specific nuances. However, it is observed that when translating ideas conveyed through SLSL into Sinhala, numerous challenges arise. Against this background, this study attempts to identify the key linguistic, cultural, and technical obstacles encountered in translating from SLSL into Sinhala and explore strategies for mitigating them. In this context, the data were collected from fifteen professional and community-based sign language interpreters via semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and Google Forms surveys. The findings emphasize the challenges posed by the variations in the signing pace, regional and abbreviated variants, semantic shifts, form–movement variations, grammatical incompatibility, lack of deaf cultural awareness, detection difficulties, community signing preferences, and unstructured signing. These challenges lead to misinterpretation, loss of meaning, and communicative breakdowns. Recommendations, include standardizing SLSL through a national corpus and lexicon, establishing accredited interpreter training programs, integrating deaf cultural competency modules, promoting public awareness, and leveraging technology such as video annotation tools. Implementing these measures is supposed to facilitate high-quality SLSL to Sinhala interpretation, ultimately empowering deaf individuals and fostering inclusive communication in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Deaf Culture; Sign Language Interpretation; Sri Lankan Sign Language; Translation Challenge

Introduction

Language is both a cognitive tool and a vital social connector, enabling individuals to articulate complex thoughts and engage meaningfully within their communities. For Deaf individuals, sign languages provide a rich linguistic structure that can fully express abstract concepts, emotions, and complex ideas just as spoken

languages do. Sign languages use visual-spatial modalities, including manual gestures, facial expressions, and body postures, to encode semantic and syntactic information (Klima & Bellugi, 1979). Among the many sign languages worldwide, Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) is the primary language of the Deaf community in Sri Lanka, particularly for those born into Deaf families where SLSL is typically acquired as their mother tongue.

Despite the fundamental role SLSL plays in the lives of Deaf individuals, it faces significant challenges within the broader societal and institutional framework in Sri Lanka. Unlike spoken languages, SLSL has not received formal recognition from the government, and it lacks standardized resources such as textbooks, dictionaries, and curricula that are commonplace for spoken languages. This lack of official recognition contributes to social exclusion, limiting the educational, social, and professional opportunities available to Deaf individuals. Furthermore, the absence of a national sign language corpus impedes the development of consistent and standardized interpretation practices, particularly in formal settings like legal proceedings, healthcare, and education.

In these domains, sign language interpreters play a pivotal role in bridging communication gaps, facilitating access to essential services for Deaf individuals. The accuracy of interpretation is critical, as any misinterpretation or omission of information can lead to significant consequences. In educational settings, inaccurate translation can hinder learning, while in legal and healthcare contexts, it can compromise the rights and well-being of Deaf individuals. Therefore, the quality of sign language interpretation directly affects the lives of Deaf people, influencing their ability to participate fully in society.

Translating ideas from sign language to a spoken language is not merely a process of lexical substitution. It requires a deep understanding of the linguistic structures that underpin both languages. For example, Sri Lankan Sign Language uses topic-comment structures and spatial referents that differ significantly from Sinhala's subject-object+verb word order and linear clause structures. (Napier, 2002). Additionally, sign language communication is inherently visual and spatial, involving non-manual markers such as facial expressions and body posture, which do not have direct counterparts in spoken languages. These structural and visual differences create unique challenges for interpreters as they must reconcile two divergent grammatical systems while preserving the meaning context and cultural nuances.

Furthermore, SLSL is not a monolithic language. Regional family and individual variations influence it, which can further complicate interpretation. Variations in sign production and vocabulary usage across different regions or Deaf communities mean interpreters must navigate differences in grammar, vocabulary, and signing conventions. These variations can lead to semantic distortions, omission of key information, or culturally inappropriate translations. Inaccurate interpretations can perpetuate misunderstandings, reinforce stereotypes, and create barriers for Deaf individuals in accessing their legal, educational, and healthcare rights.

Given the increasing demand for qualified interpreters in Sri Lanka, driven by a growing awareness of Deaf rights and the need for greater inclusivity, it is crucial to understand the specific challenges that arise in SLSL–Sinhala interpretation. This study aims to:

- Identify the primary linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges faced by interpreters in translating Sri Lankan Sign Language into Sinhala.
- Illustrate how these challenges manifest in real-world interpretation contexts, emphasizing the impact these issues have on Deaf individuals' access to essential services.
- Propose evidence-based strategies to enhance interpretation quality, improve interpreter training programs, and advocate the standardization of SLSL and its resources.

By examining these challenges and offering actionable solutions, this research aims to improve communicative accessibility for Deaf individuals in Sri Lanka. It also seeks to promote the recognition of SLSL as a legitimate language, fostering greater inclusivity and ensuring that Deaf individuals' linguistic rights are upheld in both formal and informal contexts.

Materials and Methods

This study uses qualitative methods to explore the experiences of sign language interpreters. Fifteen interpreters aged 25 to 55, with 2 to 20 years of experience in educational, legal, and healthcare settings, were purposively selected. Participants were recruited through Deaf associations, interpreter networks, and Deaf schools.

Data Collection Instruments

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In-depth interviews conducted in SLSL and Sinhala to explore interpreters' subjective experiences, specific challenging instances, and coping strategies.
- **Questionnaires:** Administered exclusively via Google Forms.
- **Field Observations:** Non-participant observations of live interpretation sessions (with consent) were conducted, including visits to observe and interact with Deaf schools across Sri Lanka. These observations helped triangulate self-reported data and provided valuable insights into the real-time challenges faced by interpreters and the Deaf community in various contexts.

Results

Interpretation challenges cluster into fifteen themes, as identified by interpreter experiences and observational data:

Rapid Signing Pace

Many Deaf children who learn Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) from birth learn signs as quickly as people speak. This fast signing can be hard for interpreters to follow, making it difficult to understand and translate accurately into Sinhala in real time. To improve, interpreters should practice with fluent Deaf signers, starting at a comfortable speed and gradually increasing it. This helps interpreters develop better processing and prediction skills, reducing mistakes and missed information.

Translational Mismatch

Deaf children need to know that what they sign is correctly changed into spoken words. If the interpreter's translation is wrong or unclear, the child might repeat the sign, which can be frustrating. To avoid this, interpreters should learn more sign language words and work closely with Deaf children to understand their signs better. This helps them to give correct and precise Sinhala translations.

Unstructured Signing

Just like learning to read and write needs proper teaching, using sign language also needs formal education. Deaf children who do not learn Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) in properly often create their own signs at home. These "home signs" can be hard for interpreters to understand. By spending time in Deaf communities and learning the correct SLSL signs, interpreters can better understand these personal signs.

Regional Sign Usage

Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) changes from place to place based on local culture and environment. For example, in Kurunegala, some people use the sign for "laundry" to mean the colour blue. These regional signs

can confuse interpreters who do not know the local versions. Having a standard sign collection along with a record of regional signs can help interpreters understand and correctly translate these differences.

Abbreviated Sign Forms

Deaf children sometimes shorten signs to make them quicker and easier, just like people use short forms in speech (like “can’t” for “cannot”). If interpreters are familiar with these common short forms, they can guess the whole meaning and avoid mistakes in translation.

Participant Reluctance

When a Deaf child does not want to sign or is forced to, their facial expressions and eye movements may show that they are uncomfortable. This can make their signs unclear. Interpreters should watch for these signs of reluctance and try to create a safe and friendly space. This helps the child sign more clearly, which is important for correct translation.

Interpreter Communication Skills

To translate sign language into Sinhala well, interpreters need to be good at understanding themselves, working with others, and handling cultural differences. If an interpreter speaks too forcefully or shows too much emotion, message’s meaning can change. Staying calm and balanced helps them clearly pass on what the Deaf person is saying, without adding their feelings.

Conceptual & Cultural Understanding

To translate signs correctly, interpreters need to understand how Deaf people think and what their signs really mean in context. Some signs are closely connected to culture, like the difference between “donation” and “worship.” If the interpreter doesn’t understand the Deaf community’s background, they might get the meaning wrong. Talking to family members or getting a cultural explanation before interpreting can help fill these gaps.

Grammatical Alignment

SLSL and Sinhala have different grammar rules. For example, SLSL often uses topic-comment structure and space, while Sinhala uses subject-object-verb order and shows tense with word changes. Interpreters can reduce grammar mistakes by practicing both languages and attending grammar training.

Lexical Disambiguation

Some signs in SLSL look very similar but mean different things—like “I,” “me,” or “my,” or “morning” and “night.” These slight differences in handshape or direction are important. Interpreters must practice spotting these small changes to avoid confusion when translating into Sinhala.

Form-Movement Variations

Deaf children sometimes change how they sign—like using a different handshape or movement—to make signing easier. However, these changes can make it hard for interpreters to understand. Watching facial expressions and surroundings, and knowing the correct sign forms, helps interpreters understand the real meaning.

Semantic Shifts

Some signs can have more than one meaning. For example, one sign might mean “friend” or “Friday” depending on the situation. Interpreters must use clues like facial expressions, the setting, and culture to determine the correct meaning. Creating collections of these signs with notes can help them learn.

Conceptual Misunderstandings

Sometimes, Deaf children misuse signs because they have not learned the correct ones. This can cause confusion. Interpreters should work with the children to gently correct mistakes and explain the right signs. This helps both the child and interpreter improve communication.

Ethical Standards

Good interpreting is not just about language—it also requires strong ethics. Interpreters must keep things private, stay neutral, and treat everyone respectfully. Learning national interpreter rules and regular ethics training helps them stay professional and trustworthy.

Detection Difficulties

When interpreters do not recognise a sign or when the sign is shortened too much, important parts of the message can be lost. To improve their understanding, interpreters should regularly watch and follow along (shadow) with fluent Deaf signers and participate in group video practice where others can give feedback.

Conclusion

This study has shown that interpreting Sri Lankan Sign Language (SLSL) into Sinhala involves complex linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges. Rapid signing pace, regional and abbreviated forms, unstructured signing, grammatical mismatches, and limited awareness of Deaf culture often led to misinterpretation and communicative breakdowns. These issues affect the accuracy of interpretation and restrict Deaf individuals' access to education, healthcare, and legal services.

The findings highlight the need for both linguistic and institutional responses. Standardizing SLSL through a national corpus, strengthening interpreter training with Deaf culture modules, and integrating technological tools can enhance interpretation quality. At the same time, public awareness and policy recognition of SLSL are essential to ensure that the language and its interpreters gain professional and social legitimacy. By addressing these challenges through coordinated educational, technological, and policy measures, Sri Lanka can move toward more equitable communication, empowering the Deaf community to participate fully and inclusively in society.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/NXJK6713>

Is epilepsy solely a medical condition? A Review of “Fit Thamai” (2019), a Sri Lankan Autobiographical Short Film Representing Epilepsy

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of epilepsy in Channa Bawantha’s autobiographical Sri Lankan short film titled *Fit Thamai: Channa’s Untold True Story* (2019). Employing content analysis and a discussion of the medical, personal tragedy and social models of disability, the study highlights the importance of well-rounded representations of epilepsy in the attempt to challenge misinformation and stigma that surrounds epilepsy. The strengths identified in this short film are both its autobiographical narration and its emphasis on the importance of people with epilepsy sharing their epilepsy experiences with each other, as this creates friendship and camaraderie among people with epilepsy. Also, the short film shows different reactions to epilepsy as well as different treatment approaches towards epilepsy in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it creatively contributes a uniquely Sri Lankan meaning to the word ‘fit’ (a word used interchangeably with seizures) alongside the range of other meanings conveyed via this word. However, the short film also posits people with epilepsy as ‘sick’ persons, or as patients, and equates epilepsy to a personal tragedy. It also treats epilepsy as exclusively medical in nature and ignores the socio-cultural factors in Sri Lanka which lead to the stigmatisation and misinformation surrounding epilepsy. Furthermore, the short film seems to unwittingly generalise Bawantha’s experience with epilepsy treatment as well as his symptoms to the wider population of Sri Lankans with epilepsy. Therefore, this paper emphasises the need for representations of epilepsy in Sri Lanka which are backed by more in-depth understanding, reflection and analysis of epilepsy lived experiences.

Keywords: Epilepsy; Disability; Representation; Models of disability; Sri Lanka

Introduction

This study focuses on the representation of epilepsy in Channa Bawantha’s short film *Fit Thamai: Channa’s Untold True Story* (2019). Bawantha’s short film is autobiographical, which is significant in that there is a paucity of Sri Lankan representations of epilepsy, especially from the perspectives of Sri Lankans living with epilepsy. Medically, epilepsy is defined as a “chronic illness and disability characterized by recurrent, unpredictable

seizures” (Marathe, 2019). However, personal stories of lived experiences of epilepsy show that the day-to-day experience of living with epilepsy is not limited to the medical diagnosis or to whether the condition is medically controlled or not. Many socio-cultural factors shape the lived experiences of epilepsy and make epilepsy a disability, as opposed to an impairment.

The topic of epilepsy as a disability invites an exploration of the discourse of disability. Here, I use the word ‘discourse’ in the same manner Michel Foucault does. According to Hall (1997), Foucault defined a discourse as “a system of representation” or “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (p. 44). The various models of disability (for example, the medical model and the social model) provide the means and the language to discuss disability from diverse perspectives, in turn determining the contours of the discussion surrounding disability.

However, while a discourse determines what belongs within the discussion of a certain topic, it also “limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Disability models, too, while providing the language and statements for the discussion of disability, can restrict and leave certain realities faced by disabled people out of the debate.

This paper argues that the representation of epilepsy in *Fit Thamai* frames epilepsy as solely a medical condition that constitutes a personal tragedy which can be successfully averted if prescribed medication is taken on time and with commitment. It ignores any socio-cultural realities that create misinformation and stigma around epilepsy, which are factors that cause distress and hardships in the lives of people with epilepsy. Therefore, *Fit Thamai* fails to acknowledge any social factors that lead to disability being experienced as a social construct. This study analyses the representation of epilepsy through the three different models of disability – the medical, personal tragedy, and social models of disability – which are described below.

The Medical, Social, and Personal Tragedy Models of Disability

According to the medical model, a disability is a health condition that is an enduring biological dysfunction that causes a significant degree of impairment to the person living with that health condition (Koon, 2022). Therefore, the medical model describes a disability as something inherently ‘wrong’ within a person with an impairment. According to Koon (2022), such an interpretation of disability is necessary for the explanation and justification of money expended on “researching, treating and accommodating disabilities” and payments made directly to disabled people (p. 3749).

While the medical model fails to acknowledge any socio-cultural factors that shape the lived experiences of people with impairments, the social model sees a disability as a social imposition on an already existing impairment. Therefore, a disability is seen as external to the body of the person living with an impairment. Proponents of this model position disability as a social construct, a barrier that is a product of an unequal and unjust social system that fails to accommodate the needs and wishes of people with impairments. The social model argues for social and attitudinal changes towards people living with disabilities and advocates for the removal of any social barriers that prevent people living with impairments from participating in society (Berghs et al., 2019). In addition, this model also challenges “medical understandings (or medical models) being the sole way in which disability is understood” (Berghs et al., 2019, p. 1035).

Unlike the medical and social models, which distinguish between impairment and disability, the personal tragedy model equates impairment to a disability and a ‘tragedy,’ from which people ‘suffer.’ Furthermore, as in the medical model, the personal tragedy model considers impairment/disability to be an inherent

characteristic of the impaired person who needs medical intervention and 'rectification' (French & Swain, 2004).

Epilepsy, when placed within these models of disabilities, can be considered a disability. However, within the medical model, a clear-cut categorisation may not be possible because whether epilepsy is a disability or not would depend on the diagnosis and the severity of the condition. In other words, if the medical model is adhered to, epilepsy would be a disability if it meets the conditions of being a biological dysfunction that is both enduring and causing a significant degree of impairment to a person with epilepsy. Where the personal tragedy model is concerned, given the misinformation and stigma surrounding epilepsy in Sri Lanka (Murugupillai et al., 2016; Seneviratne et al., 2002), epilepsy is likely seen as a personal tragedy in Sri Lanka. When seen in relation to the social model, epilepsy is certainly a disability in Sri Lanka. Research has found that, in rural Sri Lanka, children with epilepsy dropping out of school is common (De Alwis et al., 2008). A lack of teachers trained in classroom epilepsy management, as well as the absence of educational infrastructure that helps accommodate the needs of school children with epilepsy, have been identified (Murugupillai et al., 2016). Sri Lankan women with epilepsy face discrimination within the context of marriage (Gamage, 2004). Gamage also claims that epilepsy is "legally a valid reason for divorce in Sri Lanka" (p. 39). Therefore, in Sri Lanka, epilepsy is certainly a disability, especially when seen from the perspective of the social model of disability.

Materials and Methods

The content analysis method was employed in this study, involving careful analysis of the script of the short film *Fit Thamai* (2019) with the view of identifying how the short film represented epilepsy to its audience. The script of the short film was transcribed manually and analysed with reference to the above-mentioned models of disability. In this content analysis, the themes identified include (1) the importance of first-person, autobiographical narrations of epilepsy experiences and (2) the significance of people with epilepsy sharing their lived experiences. Scarfe and Marlow (2015), in Scarfe's autoethnographic study into her epilepsy, observe a lack of first-person narratives of epilepsy. Scarfe and Marlow also suggest that speaking openly about personal epilepsy experiences could be a coping mechanism for individuals with epilepsy. Another theme identified is that of different reactions to and treatment approaches sought for epilepsy in Sri Lanka. Rhodes et al. (2008) write that epilepsy has been associated with "spirit possession", which places it within the "realm of supernatural, magical and supernatural belief," providing alternative understandings of epilepsy (p. 390). Similar alternative understandings of epilepsy characterise Bawantha's epilepsy lived experience too, as portrayed in the short film. These themes can be classified as some of the strengths of Bawantha's short film. Bawantha's short film also borders on representing epilepsy as a tragedy or a tragic anomaly, similar to how disability is defined within the personal tragedy model. Furthermore, there is a generalisation of personal epilepsy treatments and symptoms to the wider population with epilepsy. This is contrary to the observation made by Valentine (2025), who is a scholar living with epilepsy, that "people with epilepsy can have very different experiences of epilepsy" (p. 3). Another notable factor in the short film is its absence of a discussion of socio-cultural factors that lead to the stigmatisation of epilepsy. These themes were analysed in relation to the medical, personal tragedy, and social models of disability.

Results

One of the strengths of *Fit Thamai* is that it is a first-person narration of an experienced epileptic. As mentioned above, such autobiographical narrations of epilepsy experiences are sparse in an international as well as a Sri Lankan context. Research studies into epilepsy in Sri Lanka report that there is a lack of information and misinformation among Sri Lankans living with epilepsy as well as their caregivers (Murugupillai et al., 2016; Seneviratne et al., 2002). According to Murugupillai et al. (2016), "lay people" believe that epilepsy is a "communicable disease" (p. 9). Representations of epilepsy based on true stories and narrated in the first person

are useful in imparting accurate information about epilepsy and the lives of people living with this condition.

Apart from addressing the dearth of first-person narratives of the Sri Lankan epilepsy experience, the short film also highlights the significance of people with epilepsy sharing their epilepsy journeys. Autoethnographic studies like Scarfe and Marlow's (2015) have highlighted the significance of people with epilepsy sharing their stories openly, in that this act could enable them to cope better with their experiences. *Fit Thamai* is woven around Bawantha, sharing his personal experiences with an unnamed boy he sees falling off a bus. Bawantha correctly assumes that the fall was caused by epilepsy, although the boy at first is reluctant to reveal his epilepsy to Bawantha. Bawantha's epilepsy journey is relayed to the audience in the form of flashbacks, and Bawantha's new friend listens to these recollections and is inspired to both disclose his own epilepsy as well as not fear or be ashamed of his condition. Therefore, the short film emphasises the value of people with epilepsy sharing their stories.

Fit Thamai also highlights both (a) different reactions to, and treatment approaches sought for epilepsy in Sri Lanka and (b) the importance of a strong and well-informed support circle. Bawantha's mother resorting to religious/spiritual means to cure her son's condition is evidence that, arguably, some Sri Lankans' interpretation of epilepsy goes beyond that of it being a health condition that should be only medically treated. Bawantha describes his mother as turning towards religious/spiritual remedies for his epilepsy, while his father seeks medical advice from Western medical doctors as well as native doctors. The short film portrays the protagonist's father as searching for information about epilepsy, visiting doctors and expanding his knowledge about the nature and treatment available for epilepsy. His mother resorts to religious ritualistic practices like going to the temple and invoking blessings on her son. All these recollections from Bawantha's childhood that are portrayed in the short film attest to the fact that, in Sri Lanka, some people place epilepsy within "the realm of supernatural [...] belief" (Rhodes et al., 2008, p. 390) while receiving treatment from doctors/the medical establishment. Bawantha's experiences are also similar to cultural experiences detailed by Lopez and Zu (2021) with regard to their personal epilepsy lived experiences in the Mexican American and Chinese cultures, respectively. Also, in addition to portraying different treatment approaches to epilepsy in Sri Lanka, the short film indicates that Bawantha had a very supportive family circle around him.

According to Lopez and Zu (2021), not much research has been conducted into the epilepsy lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC). In light of this observation, *Fit Thamai* is a significant short film in that it is descriptive of a uniquely Sri Lankan epilepsy experience, shaped by local medical and socio-cultural norms and attitudes, including treatment practices and approaches native to Sri Lanka.

The title of the short film is significant too, in that it places a pun on the word 'fit.' Bawantha first uses the word 'fit' to refer to his epileptic seizures. He tells the unnamed character that he had 'the fit.' This word, in the context of the title, also means 'physically fit,' especially as the short film's title first appears on the screen with a balled fist in a posture symbolising strength and victory. A possible third meaning of the word is that of friendship, as, in Sinhalese, the phrase 'fit thamai' denotes a sense of camaraderie. In her book *Representing Epilepsy: Myth and Matter* (2010), Stirling (2010) writes that 'fit' is "a small yet complex term" with many possible meanings, and a "satisfyingly ambiguous term" that "signifies a sense of excitement and danger which can be either pleasant or painful." She writes that it was a word in common usage in British, American and Australian medical journals in the 19th and early 20th centuries, "as it did and does in other cultural contexts" (Stirling, 2010, pp. xxii-xxiii). Examples where 'fit' was used to refer to a seizure, or an epileptic seizure in particular, can be found in Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*. Within this history of the use of the word 'fit' to signify a range of meanings, the title *Fit Thamai* contributes a different meaning to the word 'fit.' Not only does this word carry more than one meaning within the film, but it also has a meaning that goes beyond how it is

used in the English language.

Areas for Critical Reflection

In Bawantha's representation of his own journey with epilepsy, he posits his 'epileptic' self as an aberration/anomaly and a successfully overcome personal tragedy. Bawantha portrays himself as having achieved many successes despite his epilepsy. For example, at school, he is an athlete, actor, traditional Kandyan dancer and sports prefect. In addition, he is enrolled in a sports degree programme. While his achievements are, no doubt, admirable, he seems to mention his academic and extra-curricular achievements to emphasise that he succeeded *despite* his epilepsy. In this framing of his own impairment, he seems to posit his epilepsy as a personal tragedy which he escaped through perseverance and hard work. This view resonates with an ableist perspective. Ableism is described as

a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human (Campbell, 2001, as cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 5).

Therefore, it could be argued that Bawantha has internalised an ableist perspective towards his own epilepsy and portrays his achievements as what made him achieve the standard of 'ideal human' while his 'epileptic' self was a tragic, abnormal, sub-standard version of himself.

Bawantha's self-representation also resonates with Cameron's (2013) argument of disability as a role required to be performed by a person with impairment. This perspective on living with a disability posits disability as a role that may require the disabled person to be involved in a "performance of disability as passive acceptance of reduced status or as involving the strenuous denial of the significance of impairment" (p. 5). In *Fit Thamai*, Bawantha's university girlfriend distances herself from him after she sees him having a seizure while rehearsing a play. In this instance, Bawantha's voiceover says, "I love acting. I find it mentally relaxing. I have vented my feelings through playing various characters. However, playing *the character/role of a sick person* meant that I had to lose certain things as well." The very fact that Bawantha equates his 'epileptic' self to the role of a 'sick' person suggests that Bawantha has passively accepted and internalised the notion that his epilepsy diminished him to a sub-standard version of himself. In addition to that, he sees himself playing the role of an ill individual.

As described earlier, the medical model positions a person with an illness/impairment as a patient who should be medically cured/treated. In *Fit Thamai*, Bawantha views himself as such, and this is not surprising, as his epilepsy was medically treated, and his seizures medically controlled (the short film does not indicate specifically if he was off medication). His words, "If there is an illness, there is a treatment," indicate that, for him, epilepsy was an impairment, but not a disability. To see epilepsy as a health condition that requires solely medical attention can be viewed as inaccurate, as many social factors contribute to the stigmatisation of epilepsy in Sri Lanka, a stigma that cannot be medically remedied. Therefore, it can be argued that *Fit Thamai*, by limiting the discussion of the Sri Lankan epilepsy experience to the medical realm, ignores the social stigma that is fuelled by misinformation that exists within Sri Lanka about epilepsy. It is this very same stigma that makes epilepsy a disability in Sri Lanka.

Fit Thamai concludes with Bawantha saying, "Life is a challenge. To live is to face this challenge. Everything that has happened to me since I was small has made me who I am today. When I look back at my journey, I feel indescribable joy at who I am today." This statement contributes to further silence and disregards any socio-cultural factors that create misinformation and stigma surrounding epilepsy. Furthermore, it silences any

accessibility issues faced by people with disability. For example, the unnamed boy in the short film falls off the bus, probably because he has a seizure just as he was getting onto the bus or because he was travelling on the bus footboard. To interpret this scenario as a life challenge as opposed to an indication of how unsafe and inaccessible public transportation is to both disabled and non-disabled people in Sri Lanka only serves to disregard the problem at hand. To label problems faced by people with epilepsy or any other impairment/disability as 'life challenges' is to not pay attention to the issue at hand, which eventually leads a person with a disability to involuntarily accept any social injustice/discrimination as their fate, destiny or karma.

Fit Thamai also arguably generalises Bawantha's epilepsy symptoms and impact of treatment to the larger population of people living with epilepsy. When Bawantha sees the other character fall off the bus, Bawantha runs to him and asks the boy whether he experienced dizziness, profuse sweating and rigidity in his body before he fell off the bus. The boy dishonestly says no, at which Bawantha looks relieved, deciding that the boy fell off the bus not due to an epileptic seizure. This representation of the symptoms of epilepsy could serve to further the notion among the audience that epilepsy symptoms are limited to these three symptoms, whereas, in reality, according to Spiers (2021), epilepsy is a "spectrum disorder, with at least 40 variations that have different symptoms and causes" (p. 51). In addition, the short film also generalises the impact of treatment. Bawantha's seizures were successfully medically controlled. However, not all epilepsy types react the same way to medication. Epilepsy, in some people, is drug-resistant (Chen et al., 2018). Therefore, generalising one epilepsy lived experience to another living with epilepsy is problematic.

Conclusion

This study analysed the representation of epilepsy in Channa Bawantha's short film *Fit Thamai: Channa's Untold True Story* (2019). Some of the positive aspects of this short film are its autobiographical narration of a Sri Lankan epilepsy lived experience, which gives it the potential to counter misinformation and stigma surrounding epilepsy in Sri Lanka. The short film also emphasises that people with epilepsy, by engaging in the act of sharing their epilepsy stories with each other, can inspire one another the same way Bawantha's experiences inspire the young boy in the short film. *Fit Thamai* also highlights different reactions to epilepsy in Sri Lanka as well as different treatment approaches to the condition. Therefore, the epilepsy representation in the short film is uniquely Sri Lankan, which is significant in that autobiographical Sri Lankan epilepsy narrations are rare. Furthermore, the short film lends the word 'fit' a uniquely Sri Lankan meaning, in addition to the range of other meanings associated with this term in relation to epilepsy.

However, Bawantha unwittingly posits himself as an anomaly and epilepsy as a personal tragedy in this short film. Also, it not only positions people with epilepsy as 'ill' or 'sick' people, or patients, but also seems to consider epilepsy solely a medical condition. In turn, the short film ignores the socio-cultural factors that contribute to misinformation and stigma surrounding epilepsy, possibly equating social injustice to life challenges that should be bravely overcome. Furthermore, it also inadvertently generalises Bawantha's epilepsy symptoms and experience with epilepsy medication to the larger population of Sri Lankans living with epilepsy, although epilepsy has a diverse range of causes, symptoms and treatments. This paper argues that *Fit Thamai* positions epilepsy as solely a health condition that is medically controllable, as in the medical model of disability, thereby failing to acknowledge the larger framework in which epilepsy is experienced and (mis)understood. This highlights the need for a well-rounded representation of epilepsy to challenge epilepsy misconceptions, stereotypes, misinformation and stigma.

Acknowledgement

This paper is based on a PhD study being funded through a Curtin Higher Degree by Research (HDR) scholarship.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/HRZA3181>

A Comparative Study on Narrative Techniques in the Novel *Deutschstunde* and its 2019 Film Adaptation

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Abstract

The adaptation of literary works into films presents unique challenges and opportunities in translating narrative techniques across media. This study provides a comparative analysis of narrative techniques employed in Siegfried Lenz's novel *Deutschstunde* and its 2019 film adaptation directed by Christian Schwochow. It explores the complexities of transforming a thematically dense literary narrative into the visual and auditory medium of film. The primary research problem addressed is the extent to which narrative strategies in Lenz's novel *Deutschstunde* differ from its 2019 adaptation. The methodology consists of a qualitative comparative approach incorporating close reading of the novel and detailed formal analysis of the film. Central narrative aspects focused on are focalisation, temporal structure, character representation, and the presentation of symbolic motifs. Results indicate that while the film effectively utilises cinematic techniques to depict the oppressive setting and Siggie Jepsen's inner turmoil, it alters the pervasive frame narrative and extensive interior monologue utilised in the novel, subtly shifting the portrayal of the protagonist's inner journey and the engagement of the audience with memory. This comparative analysis elucidates the adaptive processes, the impact of different media on narrative delivery, and the continuing relevance of *Deutschstunde* to adaptation studies.

Keywords: Narrative technique; Adaptation studies; *Deutschstunde*; Siegfried Lenz; Christian Schwochow; German literature

Introduction

Siegfried Lenz's 1968 novel, *Deutschstunde* (The German Lesson), is a master work of post-war German literature, presenting a searching examination of personal conscience, the weight of obligation (Pflicht) and the interweaving of guilt and memory in the context of National Socialism and post-war trauma. Famous for its complicated narrative structure, conveyed largely through the retrospective memories of its young protagonist Siggie Jepsen, the novel constitutes a daunting task for the cinematic adaptation. The transposition of its tight prose, dense inner monologue, and multi-tiered temporality into the visual and discursive vocabulary of the moving image provides a compelling study in narrative transfer. This study endeavours to fill this gap by pursuing the following objectives:

- To identify and critically analyse the primary narrative techniques employed in Siegfried Lenz's novel *Deutschstunde*, with particular attention to its frame narrative, focalisation, and representation of interiority.
- To identify and critically analyse the primary narrative techniques employed in Christian Schwochow's 2019 film adaptation of *Deutschstunde*, focusing on cinematic equivalents and departures from the strategies of the novel.
- To comparatively evaluate the similarities, differences, and transformations in these narrative techniques and discuss their impact on character portrayal, thematic development, and the overall narrative experience afforded by each medium.

Accordingly, this research article demonstrates a comparative study of the narrative strategies used in the original novel by Lenz and the 2019 German film adaptation by Christian Schwochow, to clarify how each medium uniquely constructs the delivery and resonance of the narrative.

Recent scholarship on narrative techniques in literature and film adaptations provides a foundation for this study. For instance, Hegab (2021) examines structural elements like repetition, sequential narration, and character voices in two novels. Ibrahim and Khalaf (2024) compare *The Kite Runner* novel and film, concluding that the novel surpasses the film in narrative depth (Khalaf, 2024). Zipes (1977) discusses the political dimensions of Böll's novel and Schlöndorff's film adaptation of *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, emphasizing the importance of social context in understanding narrative techniques (Zipes, 1977). Hurst (1996) proposes a model for comparing narrative structures in literature and film adaptations, drawing on Stanzel's theory of typical narrative situations and applying it to works by Mann, Kästner, Frisch, and Döblin, alongside films by Visconti, Schlöndorff, and others (Hurst, 1996). Building on these approaches, this study focuses on Siegfried Lenz's *Deutschstunde* and its 2019 film adaptation by Christian Schwochow to explore intermedial narrative transformations.

Materials and Methods

This study utilises a qualitative comparative methodology, drawing on literary narratology and film analysis principles to examine the interplay between narrative form and content. The primary texts are Siegfried Lenz's novel *Deutschstunde* (Lenz, 1984) and Christian Schwochow's 2019 film adaptation, *The German Lesson* (*Deutschstunde*).

The analytical framework, informed by theorists such as Gérard Genette (1980) for literature and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2017) for films, focuses on key narrative components:

- **Focalisation and Point of View:** This examines how perspective is constructed in the novel (Siggi Jepsen's first-person, internal focalisation) versus the film (camera placement, editing, performance and voice-over).
- **Temporal Structure:** Analysis includes event ordering (e.g., frame narrative, flashbacks), duration, and frequency, comparing the novel's layered temporality with the temporal strategies of the film.
- **Character Representation:** The study investigates the development of Siggi Jepsen, Jens Ole Jepsen, and Max Ludwig Nansen, comparing the use of internal monologue and description of the novel with the dialogue, performance, and visual presentation of the film.
- **Presentation of Symbolic Motifs:** Key symbols (e.g., Nansen's paintings, "Pflicht," art/writing) are traced to analyse their presentation and significance across both media.

Data collection involved meticulous close readings of the novel and repeated analytical viewings of the film, with detailed notetaking and scene-by-scene breakdowns. The comparative analysis highlights how Schwochow's film diverges from, condenses, or reinterprets the novel's narrative strategies and their effects.

Results

The comparative analysis of Siegfried Lenz's *Deutschstunde* and Christian Schwochow's 2019 film adaptation reveals significant transformations in narrative techniques, primarily driven by the inherent affordances and constraints of the literary and cinematic media, respectively. These transformations impact the presentation of the temporal structure of the story, the portrayal of the subjectivity of the protagonist, character dynamics, and the conveyance of thematic concerns.

Transformation of the Frame Narrative and Temporal Structure

Lenz's novel uses an intricate frame narrative: Siggi Jepsen, in a post-war juvenile facility, writes an essay on "Die Freuden der Pflicht" (The Joys of Duty). His inability to write a concise essay leads him to fill numerous notebooks with the extensive story of his childhood, his father's fanatical adherence to duty, and his relationship with the persecuted painter Max Ludwig Nansen. This frame is not merely a container but an active narrative device, constantly reminding the reader of Siggi's present isolation, the act of remembering as a painful, reconstructive process, and the therapeutic, perhaps obsessive, nature of his writing. For instance, Siggi frequently interrupts his recollections with reflections on his current situation or the difficulty of his task:

"...weil ich, gehorsam nach den Freuden der Pflicht suchend, plötzlich zuviel zu erzählen hatte, oder doch so viel, daß mir kein Anfang gelang, so sehr ich mich auch anstrengte" (Lenz, 1984, p. 9).

Translation: "...because, obediently searching for the joys of duty, I suddenly had too much to tell, or at least so much that I couldn't find a beginning, no matter how hard I tried."

This layered temporality creates a reflective, melancholic tone and underscores the theme of grappling with a traumatic past. In contrast, Christian Schwochow's 2019 film adaptation modifies this frame. While Siggi (Tom Gronau) is shown in the institution with his essay task, the frame is less pervasive. The film quickly shifts to a largely linear flashback of young Siggi's (Levi Eisenblätter) childhood. Voice-overs from the older Siggi are sporadic, setting scenes rather than offering continuous narration. This diminishes the emphasis of the novel on memory as an arduous, ongoing reconstruction, prioritizing direct engagement with past events for immediate accessibility.

Focalisation and the Representation of Subjective Experience

The novel is filtered through Siggi Jepsen's internal focalisation, giving readers direct access to his thoughts, emotions, and moral dilemmas. Lenz masterfully uses this perspective to show Siggi's internal conflict between filial obedience and his empathy for Nansen.

The film conveys Siggi's subjectivity differently due to cinema's external nature. While the camera often stays close to young Siggi, using close-ups to show his reactions, this is an external view of his internal state. Point-of-view shots align the viewer's visual perspective with his, but the depth of internal monologue from the novel is curtailed. The film translates Siggi's internal struggles through his observable actions, interactions, and the performance of the actor, for example, his silent acts of hiding Nansen's paintings or his pained expressions during the tirade of his father. This offers more inferred, rather than directly experienced, access to his psyche.

Narrative Techniques in Character Portrayal

The differing narrative techniques significantly impact the portrayal of key characters. For example, the novel presents Jens Ole Jepsen largely through Siggi's fearful and critical lens, portraying him as an oppressive figure shaped by duty and Nazi obedience. Max Ludwig Nansen, conversely, is often idealized through Siggi's admiring gaze, his art and defiance representing a beacon of humanity.

In Schwochow's film, these characters are brought to life through the performances of Ulrich Noethen (Jens) and Tobias Moretti (Nansen). While Siggis perspective remains important, the film uses action, dialogue, and visual elements to present the characters with greater immediacy. Jens's authoritarian nature is reinforced through Noethen's stern presence, while scenes beyond Siggis viewpoint offer a fuller picture. Nansen's artistic spirit is vividly expressed through Moretti's performance and the direct depiction of his forbidden paintings, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Selected Narrative Techniques in the Novel and the 2019 Film Adaptation

Narrative Technique	Deutschstunde (Novel)	Deutschstunde (2019 Film Adaptation)
Primary Focaliser	Siggi Jepsen (consistent internal, retrospective first-person)	Primarily Siggi Jepsen (often external observation, with subjective cues like POV shots, selective voice-over)
Frame Narrative	Explicit, structurally central and pervasive (essay writing in an institution)	Present but significantly modified and less pervasive; serves primarily as an entry point for flashbacks
Representation of Art	Detailed textual descriptions of Nansen's paintings, their colours, emotional impact on Siggi	Visual depiction of paintings; focus on the act of painting; symbolic use of colour palette in film
Pacing	Often reflective, digressive, and slow, driven by memory and internal thought	Generally, more linear within flashbacks, with a comparatively faster pace; use of montage for temporal compression
Access to Interiority	Direct and extensive access to Siggi's thoughts, feelings, and internal conflicts	Primarily inferred through performance, visual cues, and limited voice-over; more externalized

Lenz's novel uses rich, sensory language to evoke Schleswig-Holstein's bleakness and the oppressive atmosphere of the era, where the land's "grey monotony" often reflects the psychological states of the characters. Schwochow's film translates this via Frank Lamm's cinematography, using a desaturated palette, stark lighting, and wide shots to create a palpable sense of isolation. The motif of "Pflicht" (duty), central to the novel through Jens Jepsen's pronouncements and Siggis internal conflict, is conveyed in the film through Jens's stern dialogue, rigid posture, and the visual symbolism of his uniform. Nansen's art, described as vibrant and defiant in the novel, is visually realised in the film through stylised "degenerate art," contrasting sharply with the surrounding drabness and offering an immediacy distinct from the novel's interpreted descriptions.

Discussion

This analysis highlights how *Deutschstunde's* 2019 film adaptation reconfigures key narrative elements to suit the cinematic medium. While the film remains faithful to the novel's core themes, it transforms Siggis introspective narration into more externalised portrayals, using voice-over and visuals rather than internal monologue. This shift reflects the broader challenge of adapting introspective literature into the "showing" mode of film (Stam, 2005), aligning with Hutcheon's (2006) view of adaptations as dialogic, second-order creations.

The frame narrative of the novel, which is centred on Siggis act of writing as a form of processing trauma, is streamlined in the film, which presents memory more as flashback than active reconstruction. This change enhances dramatic pacing but reduces the novel's exploration of memory as unstable and burdensome.

Similarly, Nansen's art, described subjectively in the novel, is concretised on screen. While visually powerful, this reduces the interpretive openness offered by the literary version, reflecting a fundamental difference between textual suggestion and visual representation (Chatman, 1980).

These changes are not shortcomings but adaptations to cinematic possibilities. The film employs stark visuals and strong performances to capture the moral weight of the era, making the narrative accessible to modern audiences. However, the focus of the study on narrative structure limits its analysis of other cinematic techniques. Future research might examine viewer reception or compare other adaptations, such as Beauvais's 1971 version, to broaden understanding of the cinematic legacy of the novel.

Conclusion

This comparative study of narrative techniques in Siegfried Lenz's *Deutschstunde* and Christian Schwochow's 2019 film adaptation illuminates the intricate processes of intermedial translation. The profound exploration of guilt, duty, and memory in the novel, conveyed through its first-person narration and intricate frame structure, grants access to the inner world of Siggi Jepsen. Schwochow's film, while honouring the thematic core of the novel, adapts these strategies to the demands of the cinema, resulting in a more externalised yet emotionally resonant portrayal.

Key transformations include a modified frame narrative, a shift from internal focalisation to an observational perspective with subjective cinematic cues, and the direct visual representation of elements like Nansen's art. These changes alter audience engagement, particularly with memory and the psyche of the protagonist. Nevertheless, the 2019 film uses its distinct narrative tools including powerful cinematography, compelling performances, and focused drive to convey the oppressive atmosphere and moral questions of the story. Ultimately, the comparison shows adaptation as creative reinterpretation, not replication, offering a new lens on a classic. Both novel and film, through their unique artistry, affirm the power of *Deutschstunde* to provoke reflection on individual responsibility in times of collective moral failing.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/UHJC1106>

Letters from the Id: A Psychoanalysis on *Wicked Little Letters*

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Abstract

This study presents a psychoanalytic examination of the film *Wicked Little Letters*, analysing the underlying psychological dynamics and suppressed desires that drive the narrative of the protagonist, Edith Swan. Set in a 1920s conservative English town, the film juxtaposes the outward respectability of Edith with the eruption of anonymous, obscene letters that expose hidden tensions, desires, and social hypocrisies. Drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theory, this study examines the protagonist's internal conflicts, the symbolic function of language and letters, and the manifestation of suppression and projection. Special focus is given to the character dynamics between Edith Swan and Rose Gooding, analysing how moral panic and female sexuality are negotiated within patriarchal structures. The film employs humor and scandal to critique social repression, revealing the unconscious drives that undermine the illusion of civility. Ultimately, *Wicked Little Letters* becomes a cinematic expression of how the unconscious erupts into the public, exposing the fragile boundaries between propriety and human desire.

Keywords: Female Sexuality; Psychoanalysis; Repression; Suppression; *Wicked Little Letters*

Introduction

Wicked Little Letters (2023) is a British dark comedy mystery directed by Thea Sharrock, featuring Olivia Colman as Edith Swan and Jessie Buckley as Rose Gooding in the leading roles. Set in the 1920s English seaside town of Littlehampton, the film is inspired by the real-life "Littlehampton libels," a scandal involving anonymous, obscene letters sent to residents.

The narrative revolves around Edith Swan, a devout Christian and conservative woman who begins receiving profane letters. The immediate culprit is her neighbour, Rose Gooding, a free-spirited Irish immigrant in the town, known for her use of inappropriate language.

As the town's authorities pursue Rose, a group of women, led by police officer Gladys Moss (Anjana Vasan), question the prevailing assumptions and seek the truth behind the letters, only to find that Edith has written those 'Poisonous Letters' to herself and to the others in the community.

This study delves into the psychological underplay of Edith Swan, whose outward social conformity starkly contrasts with her clandestine act of sending obscene letters to herself. Employing the psychoanalytic frameworks of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the research aims to unravel the unconscious motivations and internal conflicts that drive such paradoxical behavior.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, suppression is a conscious effort to avoid distressing thoughts or feelings, while repression operates without conscious intent (Freud, 1999). If the repressed/suppressed material returns in disguised forms, it can result in neurotic symptoms such as slips of the tongue. Both concepts are central to understanding how individuals manage inner conflict, especially regarding sexuality, aggression, or trauma, and they form the foundation for exploring the unconscious motivations that influence behaviour (Freud, 1999).

Lacan (2018), reinterprets Freudian psychoanalysis by positing that the unconscious is structured like a language, meaning that unconscious processes adhere to the rules of language, such as metaphor and metonymy, rather than operating solely through biological or instinctual mechanisms. This view shifts the focus from drives to signifiers, suggesting that the subject is formed through linguistic structures and that unconscious desire emerges through the play of language. Central to Lacan's framework are the three orders, namely: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The Imaginary is the realm of images and illusions, where the ego is formed through identification, notably in the mirror stage. The Symbolic encompasses language, law, and social structures, shaping our sense of self and relationships through systems of meaning. The Real represents what lies beyond language and symbolization, which cannot be fully articulated or integrated into our understanding. Lacan also emphasizes that the desire of the Other always shapes desire, and that the subject is fragmented and formed through language and the unconscious. These concepts have made Lacan's theory especially influential in film, literature, and cultural studies.

Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis are pivotal in analyzing diverse film genres and cinematic tropes. Notably, Alfred Hitchcock's work serves as a central point for psychoanalytic critique. His film *Vertigo* (1958) has been read through Lacan's mirror stage and theories of desire, with critics arguing that Scottie's obsession with recreating Madeleine reflects a search for a lost object of desire (Poole, 2023). Hitchcock's manipulation of point-of-view shots and subjective camera work contributes to the illusion of identification central to Lacanian film theory.

Slavoj Žižek (1992) is renowned for blending Lacanian psychoanalysis with Marxist ideology. He treats cinema as a privileged site for ideological fantasy, where unconscious desires are staged and structured. Žižek argues that film does not merely reflect reality but stages the gaps and inconsistencies in ideological structures, functioning much like dreams in the Freudian sense. In 'The Pervert's Guide to Cinema and Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture,' Žižek explores how the Real disrupts the Symbolic order in films, often through moments of trauma or uncanny repetition.

David Lynch's surrealist cinema, particularly *Mulholland Drive* (2001), has attracted Lacanian readings that emphasize the fragmentation of identity and the eruption of the Real. Žižek (2001) uses *Mulholland Drive* to illustrate the uncanny appearance of the Real, which disrupts the Symbolic order, particularly in scenes where fantasy and nightmare blur. The film's disjointed narrative and dreamlike sequences embody Freud's theory of dream work and latent content.

In contemporary media studies, the psychoanalytic approach has been extended to digital and post-cinematic contexts. Todd McGowan (2007) argues that even in postmodern film, Lacanian theory remains relevant for understanding how ideology functions through the interplay of enjoyment and disavowal. Yet others argue that the shifting dynamics of digital spectatorship, such as interactivity and

fragmentation, challenge the foundational assumptions of psychoanalytic theory, which relies heavily on the cinematic apparatus as theorized in the 1970s.

While psychoanalytic film theory has long been applied to canonical cinema, especially in the works of Hitchcock, Lynch, and Bergman, there remains a lack of psychoanalytic scholarship on *Wicked Little Letters* that examines the intersection of repression, class, gender, sexuality and religious morality through Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, especially as they manifest in the psychology of the character. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap in literature by applying a psychoanalytic lens to *Wicked Little Letters*, focusing on how unconscious desires, defense mechanisms, and the symbolic order shape the characters' behaviours and relationships. By analyzing the film through Freudian and Lacanian notions, this study explores how social norms, gender dynamics, and religious dogma contribute to the psychological turmoil and moral conflicts experienced by the protagonists. Thereby, it extends psychoanalytic film theory to an under-studied contemporary work, revealing the enduring relevance of psychoanalytic critique in understanding the socio-cultural undercurrents that inform cinematic narratives.

Materials and Methods

The study employs textual analysis through close reading of the film, focusing on dialogue, character dynamics, and symbolic imagery. The study is grounded in psychoanalytic theory, drawing on Sigmund Freud's concepts of suppression and projection, which are useful in analysing the return of suppressed impulses through symptoms such as the anonymous letters. Lacan's framework provides insight into how language and social structures shape Edith's fragmented subjectivity through the notions of the three registers: imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Additionally, his theory on the subject of desire plays a central role. These theories help illuminate the underlying psychic structures in the selected film. To supplement this framework, the contemporary Lacanian thinker Slavoj Žižek is referenced to support a more modern and nuanced application of psychoanalysis to film analysis. The film '*Wicked Little Letters*' was selected for the study as it offers a fresh and underexplored site for investigating how unconscious drives erupt into public scandal through language and performance.

The analysis meets two key research objectives: first, to explore how Freudian concepts of repression and projection are manifested in Edith Swan's psychological behaviour; and second, to examine the conflict between Edith and Rose through the lens of Lacan's theory of desire and the Symbolic order. In doing so, the research seeks to answer two questions: How are Freudian ideas of repression and projection evident in Edith Swan's behaviour? And how can Lacan's theory of desire and the Symbolic order be used to interpret the complex dynamics between Edith and Rose?

The study was conducted with certain limitations. Psychoanalytic theory is inherently interpretive and subjective; thus, the analysis may risk overlooking certain socio-political interpretations that fall outside a psychological framework. Furthermore, given the film's recent release, there is limited academic literature available, which necessitates a heavier reliance on primary textual analysis and theoretical frameworks rather than established critical discourse.

Results

Suppression and the Return of the Suppressed

Edith Swan is initially portrayed as a paragon of moral virtue, a devout Christian, a devoted daughter, and an idol of middle-class respectability. Her utterance, "We worship a messiah who suffered, so by my suffering do I not move closer to heaven?" (2.54), reflects a religious valorization of suffering. This belief reinforces her moral masochism, the idea that enduring suffering, including emotional suppression and unfulfilled desire, brings her closer to spiritual purity or divine favour. However, Edith's strict adherence to social decorum conceals a tumultuous unconscious. The content of the letters

she writes is marked by sexual innuendo and violent fantasies, which are depicted by terms such as “foxyass old whore” and “tricksy old fucker”, stand in stark contrast to Edith’s public demeanor. She writes, “Miss Swan sucks ten cocks a week,” evoking her sexual fantasy and state of despair. It is also evident from the derogatory terminology she uses to describe herself, such a “sad old stinky bitch”, that she is hyper-aware of her age and her status as a spinster.

The act of writing letters constitutes a transgression not just of language but of the Symbolic order itself, the patriarchal, religious, and moral frameworks that regulate what can be said, felt, and desired in Edith’s world. Her obscenities violate the expectations placed on her as a Christian woman and obedient daughter, thus breaching the codes of propriety, feminine virtue, and class decorum. From a Freudian perspective, the letters function as neurotic symptoms, indirect expressions of suppressed sexual desires, while from a Lacanian standpoint, they serve as signifiers of a fractured subject caught between the demands of the Symbolic (social norms and religion) and the return of the Real (unmediated desires). Hence, the letters are psychic eruptions and transgressive acts that momentarily release the pressure of Edith’s suppressed desires.

Projection and the Desire of the Other

Freud (1999) discusses projection as a defense mechanism whereby individuals attribute their unacceptable thoughts to another. Edith’s accusations against Rose can be understood as a typical case of projection. She ascribes to Rose the very desires that she cannot admit to herself. Lacan’s concept of the “desire of the Other” deepens this analysis. Edith’s identity is structured around the gaze and judgment of the symbolic Other, embodied by her father, her community, and the moral code of her religion. Lacan’s mirror stage can also be invoked here, as Edith’s constructed identity as a “pretty young Christian woman,” as praised by the judge and the local newspapers, is her ego ideal. Her suppression is not merely personal but ideological as she internalizes the prohibitions of the Symbolic order, aligning her ego with the expectations of propriety (Freud, 1999).

However, Rose disrupts this structure by embodying a form of jouissance that Edith both envies and fears. Rose’s unapologetic enjoyment exposes the repressive limits of Edith’s identity, structured by the symbolic order and its moral prohibitions. The obscene letters become a vehicle through which Edith can momentarily inhabit this forbidden jouissance without publicly compromising her social identity. Hence, it is seen that the letters serve a dual psychological purpose: relieving her internal pressure and punishing others for what she cannot allow herself to experience. Her rage is not mere moral outrage, but the return of the suppressed. Henceforth, Edith’s accusations against Rose reveal a complex interplay of psychological and ideological forces.

Edith’s actions reflect not just personal suppression but the ideological contradictions at the heart of the moral order she seeks to uphold. Lacan’s framework further exposes how Edith’s identity is governed by the Symbolic order, making her susceptible to internal conflict when confronted with Rose’s unapologetic enjoyment. Rose’s presence threatens the fragile coherence of Edith’s subjectivity, exposing the cracks in her ideological conformity. Žižek’s (1986) insight into the obscene supplement of ideology sheds light on how Edith’s momentary indulgence, through the anonymous letters, serves as a paradoxical escape and reinforcement of the very norms she outwardly upholds. Ultimately, the tension between Edith and Rose encapsulates the fraught dynamics of desire, suppression, and the ideological structures that shape the subject.

Father Figure and Patriarchal Control

The father’s dominance, particularly evident during the police interview (6.30), exemplifies the classic Freudian construct of the paternal superego, the internalized figure of authority that enforces order through intimidation, guilt, and suppression. In this scene, his unyielding control over the room exposes the power he exerts not only in public domains but also within the private sphere of the family. Edith’s

silence during these moments is not mere compliance; it suggests castration anxiety, the internalized fear of punishment and invalidation by the father, which results in submission.

Edith's entire sense of identity is shaped under the shadow of this paternal authority. Her emotional fragility becomes especially visible in the fleeting moments when she lights up under external approval, such as the brief affirmation she receives from the judge, highlighting a desperate hunger for validation denied to her at home. In stark contrast, Edith's domestic environment is saturated with emotional neglect and open humiliation, as symbolized by the brutal moment when the food she cooks for the father is thrown away in disgust (59.59), making her efforts invalid even within the supposed acceptance of the home.

The father's refusal to allow her to marry her lover, Sydney, is another assertion of his control, enforcing the patriarchal logic that her autonomy, particularly her romantic agency, must be subordinate to his consent. Rose disrupts Edith's symbolic identity as the dutiful daughter. Edith's collapse begins when she admits, "I liked both of them, Sydney and Rose" (1.19), a Lacanian moment of the Real, a revelation that destabilizes her constructed self. Her father's retort, "You don't know what you like," tries to restore symbolic control. This prohibition reinforces Edith's infantilization. Her loyalty and sense of duty are deeply intertwined with the very force that suppresses her free will. Her identity is shaped through a love-hate dynamic with her father, where duty masks suppression.

Her final outburst, when she screams at her father and laughs horrendously in relief, marks a moment of catharsis. Edith finds the symbolic space to voice "I'm not coming back home to you ever!" followed by filth. It is a breaking of the superego's hold, a regression into chaos that paradoxically liberates her. In psychoanalytic terms, this is a reclamation of agency through abjection. By vocalizing her pain and anger in that visceral moment, Edith challenges the authority that has defined and confined her, signaling the possibility of psychic emancipation.

Social Transgression vs. Moral Conservatism

Rose and Edith function as symbolic binaries within a Lacanian framework, embodying opposing realms of psychic experience. Rose represents the Real and the Imaginary. She is instinctive, chaotic, and emotionally unfiltered, epitomizing social transgression. Her behavior resists logic and embraces the libidinal, aligning her with the Imaginary's fluid self-images and the Real's disruptive, inassimilable truths. In contrast, Edith embodies the Symbolic Order. She is structured, dutiful, and constrained by law, language, and Christian morality, epitomizing decorum. She adheres to the codes of the father, both literally and symbolically, striving for moral clarity and social approval. Their binary opposition dramatizes the internal psychic conflict between desire and repression, freedom and duty, chaos and control.

This binary also reflects Lacanian topology as Edith's moral rigidity and suppressed emotions can be read as attempts to maintain her position within the Symbolic order, while her projections onto Rose may reflect unconscious disavowals of her desires and shame. Rose, in contrast, may represent the disruptive force of the Real, impossible to contain within the narrow confines of social respectability.

Conclusion

From a Freudian standpoint, Edith Swan's actions can be interpreted as manifestations of suppressed desires surfacing through neurotic symptoms. The act of writing and receiving obscene letters may serve as a mechanism for Swan to navigate internal conflicts between her id-driven desires and the superego's moral constraints, resulting in a compromise formation that allows partial expression of suppressed content.

Lacanian theory further enriches this analysis by emphasizing the role of language and the symbolic order in shaping subjectivity. Lacan's assertion that "the unconscious is structured like a language" suggests that Swan's letters function as signifiers within a linguistic framework that both reveals and conceals her desires. The letters can be seen as 'sinthomes', a unique, personal symptom that provides a form of enjoyment by linking the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic in a way that stabilizes the subject's identity.

In summary, *Wicked Little Letters* is more than a dark comedy. It is a psychoanalytic case study of suppression, desire, and the fragility of constructed identities. Edith Swan's respectable exterior conceals a tumultuous unconscious, governed by the logic of Freudian repression and Lacanian lack. Through her, the film stages the eruption of the Real into a Symbolic order steeped in patriarchal and religious dogma.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/QAYQ9748>

Weekly Paragraph Writing in Enhancing ESL Writing Confidence: A Classroom-based Action Research Focused on Engineering Students

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Abstract

Effective written communication is vital in engineering education, particularly for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners who face additional challenges in articulating the technical content in their assignments. This study investigates the pedagogical impact of weekly paragraph writing on ESL engineering students' writing confidence and performance. Addressing the lack of sustained, low-stakes writing opportunities within technical curricula, the study was conducted as a five-week classroom-based action research intervention at a government technical institute in Sri Lanka. The research aimed to (1) assess whether short-form writing tasks could improve the students' academic writing confidence and (2) evaluate the feasibility of integrating writing into large, discipline-diverse ESL classrooms. The participants included 25–30 second-year students from eight engineering disciplines. The data were collected through weekly student paragraphs, instructor field notes, feedback logs, and pre- and post-intervention surveys. A thematic content analysis revealed steady improvements in their paragraphs in terms of structure, coherence, and grammar. The mean scores increased from 3.43 to 3.79 over five weeks, with further gains observed in the revised drafts. While the students showed modest gains in self-reported confidence, many valued the opportunity to practice writing in a technical context. The findings support the integration of short, structured writing tasks into technical education as a low-cost, scalable strategy for language development. The study highlights the importance of scaffolding, formative feedback, and peer review in fostering learner autonomy and writing fluency. It contributes a practical, replicable model for embedding language instruction into engineering curricula, especially in multilingual and resource-constrained environments.

Keywords: ESL learners; Engineering education; Paragraph writing; Writing confidence; Action research

Introduction

Effective communication, particularly in writing, has become a vital competency for engineering graduates preparing to enter the global workforce. While technical expertise remains the cornerstone of engineering education, the ability to communicate ideas through structured writing is increasingly

acknowledged as essential for academic success and career development (Paretti, 2008; Wolfe, 2010). Writing not only serves the purpose of documentation but also supports conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and reflective learning. Despite this recognition, writing instruction often remains marginal in undergraduate engineering curricula, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Institutional constraints—including limited teaching time, inadequate training for instructors, and low student motivation—continue to hinder the systematic integration of writing into technical disciplines (Coppola & Daniels, 1996; Paretti, 2018). As a result, writing tends to be isolated within stand-alone language courses or concentrated on final-year projects, with little reinforcement throughout the academic journey.

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) framework has been proposed to embed writing across disciplinary boundaries, supporting both content mastery and linguistic competence (Russell, 2002). However, implementing WAC in large, multidisciplinary classrooms typical of engineering institutes remains challenging. Large cohorts, minimal instructional support, and a persistent belief that engineering and language learning are unrelated domains limit its effectiveness. In response, this study introduces a more focused and practical approach: integrating short, structured paragraph-writing exercises into weekly English lessons for engineering undergraduates at a government technical institute in Sri Lanka. By moving away from high-stakes assignments such as technical reports or capstone projects, the intervention emphasizes routine, low-pressure writing intended to build fluency and confidence.

Unlike much of the existing literature, which frames writing primarily as a tool for technical knowledge acquisition, this study highlights its role in shaping students' confidence as communicators. Situated within the frameworks of Writing-to-Learn (WTL) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the intervention contributes to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and applied linguistics while offering a cost-effective, scalable model for resource-limited ESL environments. Covering eight engineering disciplines—Civil, Electrical, Electronic, IT, Mechanical, Chemical, Polymer, and Textile & Clothing—the research emphasizes writing confidence as a measurable outcome, addressing an often-overlooked dimension of pedagogy.

Overall, the study aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- To examine whether consistent short paragraph writing can improve ESL engineering students' confidence in academic writing.
- To assess the feasibility and effectiveness of a low-resource intervention across multiple engineering fields.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative, classroom-based action research design to examine the impact of weekly paragraph writing on ESL engineering students' writing confidence and performance. Action research was selected for its suitability in real-time pedagogical interventions within classroom contexts. The researcher also served as the instructor, enabling consistent implementation, observation, and reflection throughout the study.

Participants comprised 25–30 second-year ESL students from each of eight engineering disciplines: Civil, Electrical, Electronic, Information Technology, Mechanical, Chemical, Polymer, and Textile & Clothing. Students, aged 22–25 years, were enrolled in a government-run technical institute in Sri Lanka. A stratified convenience sampling method ensured proportional representation across disciplines while minimizing disruption to the existing class structure.

The intervention spanned five consecutive weeks within the students' regular three-hour weekly English sessions. An initial workshop introduced paragraph-writing components: the topic sentence,

supporting details, explanations/examples, and a concluding sentence. Each week, students received a five-minute oral briefing on a selected prompt, followed by a 30-minute writing task (120–150 words). Prompts were designed to balance technical relevance with linguistic accessibility and were categorized into descriptive, opinion-based, explanatory, and revision-based types to ensure varied cognitive and linguistic engagement.

A multi-method approach was used to capture both quantitative and qualitative data:

- Weekly Paragraphs – the primary evidence of writing progress.
- Instructor Field Notes – documented engagement patterns and recurring challenges.
- Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys – 4-point Likert scale questionnaires measuring writing confidence and perceptions.
- Feedback Logs – instructor comments on student submissions highlighting linguistic and structural issues.

Data analysis combined thematic content analysis with quantitative scoring. A holistic rubric with five criteria—clarity of topic sentence, relevance of supporting details, coherence, grammar, and effectiveness of concluding sentence—was used to rate each paragraph on a 1 (Needs Improvement) to 5 (Excellent) scale. Weekly mean scores were calculated to track progression. Revised drafts were analyzed to evaluate the impact of feedback. Survey responses were statistically summarized to assess confidence shifts, while field notes enriched the analysis with qualitative insights into classroom dynamics.

The study was informed by four key models:

- Writing-to-Learn (WTL): Writing as a cognitive tool for reinforcing knowledge and critical thinking.
- Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Writing tasks as scaffolded support enabling performance beyond current ability.
- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Writing framed as meaningful communication central to language acquisition.
- Incidental Writing in STEM (Hanson & Williams, 2008): Short, low-stakes writing integrated into technical disciplines to encourage reflection and fluency.

Results

Over the five-week intervention, students demonstrated steady gains in writing proficiency. The average holistic rubric score rose from 3.43 in Week 1 to 3.79 in Week 5, reflecting improvements in organization, content development, and grammatical control. Revised drafts consistently outperformed originals by 0.2–0.6 points, highlighting the positive effect of feedback and revision.

Early challenges included weak cohesion, inconsistent verb tenses, and fragmented ideas. However, with sustained practice and rubric-based guidance, students began producing more coherent, logically sequenced paragraphs. Engagement levels varied with prompt type: descriptive and opinion-based prompts elicited higher interest, while explanatory prompts proved more linguistically demanding. To validate these improvements observed, inferential analyses were conducted. A paired-samples t-test comparing Week 1 ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.41$) and Week 5 ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.38$) rubric scores indicated a statistically significant improvement, $t(54) = 4.27$, $p < .001$. Likewise, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test on self-reported confidence scores revealed a modest yet significant increase ($Z = -2.11$, $p = .035$). Together, these findings provide robust evidence of the intervention’s pedagogical effectiveness.

Illustrative Writing Excerpts

Week 1: *“Engineering is very important for develop a country. It help people but sometime it is difficult to study. I try to write but I do not know the correct grammar.”*

Week 5: *“Engineering plays a vital role in national development because it provides innovative solutions to social and industrial needs. Although studying engineering is challenging, consistent practice in writing has improved my ability to explain ideas clearly and confidently.”*

These examples illustrate the shift from fragmented, error-prone sentences to more grammatically accurate, cohesive, and logically connected writing.

Table 1. Weekly Mean Rubric Scores for Student Paragraphs

Week	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1	3.43	0.41
2	3.55	0.39
3	3.61	0.36
4	3.70	0.34
5	3.79	0.38

As shown in Table 1, weekly mean scores increased gradually, demonstrating consistent improvement across the intervention period. Survey results indicated a modest improvement in students’ self-reported writing confidence, increasing from an average of 3.00 pre-intervention to 3.10 post-intervention on a 4-point Likert scale. Students’ recognition of the importance of writing in engineering remained strong throughout (mean 3.40–3.50). Though the intervention did not significantly alter overall attitudes, many students valued the integration of writing into their technical curriculum.

Students appreciated the opportunity to revise their work, reflected in a mean satisfaction score of 3.52. However, many expressed difficulty interpreting rubric-based feedback and requested more concrete examples. Interestingly, more than 80% did not actively seek help from instructors, peers, or academic support services. This highlights the need for structured guidance and awareness of support systems. Instructor observations confirmed incremental gains in both engagement and writing quality. Notable strategies included in-class reading of student samples, peer reviews, and short lectures on paragraph unity (drawing on Strunk & White). Developing effective prompts and managing time within a multi-topic syllabus were identified as implementation challenges. Nevertheless, the intervention was seen as sustainable, effective, and pedagogically valuable.

Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of weekly paragraph writing exercises integrated into an English course for ESL engineering undergraduates in a Sri Lankan technical institute. As outlined in the Introduction and Literature Review, a clear gap exists in technical curricula: the lack of sustained, low-stakes writing opportunities for ESL learners. The intervention addressed this gap through a theoretically grounded and resource-feasible design, drawing on Writing-to-Learn (WTL) and incidental writing theory in STEM contexts. Results confirmed notable gains in grammar, cohesion, and organization, supporting earlier findings that structured, short writing tasks can enhance both linguistic and cognitive development (e.g., Bean, 2011; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). While overall mean scores improved steadily across the five weeks, the pace of individual progress varied—some students responded quickly to feedback, while others advanced more gradually. This variation reflects authentic classroom learning dynamics and strengthens the credibility of the findings. The outcomes can be interpreted through the lens of WTL and Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as scaffolded tasks and repeated practice allowed learners to extend their competence beyond initial levels.

Likewise, the results affirm principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), since the writing activities provided meaningful communicative practice rather than isolated grammar drills. Overall, the intervention demonstrates that embedding short, structured writing tasks can significantly improve both student performance and confidence, contributing to more integrated language support within engineering education.

The structured prompts served a dual purpose: fostering language development while reinforcing disciplinary engagement. By making tasks linguistically accessible yet contextually relevant to engineering, the activities connected with students' technical identities and increased motivation. Learning gains were particularly evident in topic sentence clarity and logical idea linking, outcomes that aligned closely with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through scaffolded support, students extended their writing abilities beyond initial competence. This success demonstrates how targeted paragraph writing can bridge the long-standing divide between language instruction and technical content delivery.

The intervention proved both manageable and sustainable. Conducted within the standard three-hour English session, it required only a brief five-minute briefing followed by 30 minutes of writing each week. While initial preparation—such as developing prompts and designing the rubric—demanded effort, these resources became reusable across cohorts, reducing long-term workload. The holistic rubric also streamlined assessment by balancing attention to content and language. This low-cost, high-impact model shows that meaningful writing instruction can be embedded into technical curricula without major disruption.

Assessment posed challenges despite overall success. Many students misinterpret rubric-based feedback, focusing mainly on surface-level grammar while neglecting coherence and organization. This mirrors well-documented difficulties in ESL contexts (Felder & Brent, 2004). To address this, model paragraphs and explicit coding strategies were introduced mid-intervention, which improved alignment between expectations and student revisions. However, more than 80% of students did not actively seek additional support, revealing limited feedback literacy and help-seeking behaviors. Embedding peer review sessions, guided by simplified rubrics, may help alleviate instructor workload while promoting collaborative learning. Such adaptations align with broader calls for sustainable feedback practices in large and diverse ESL classrooms.

Although peer review was not formally included in this study, the findings suggest strong potential for its integration. Given students' reluctance to seek feedback independently, structured peer-review sessions could provide accessible, low-stakes opportunities for critique. Supported by rubrics and sample models, peer review would encourage collaboration, critical reflection, and shared responsibility. Careful design, however, is essential to ensure equitable participation across varying proficiency levels.

Survey results showed a modest increase in writing confidence (from 3.00 to 3.10 on a 4-point scale). Qualitative reflections suggested that revision opportunities and regular feedback enhanced motivation and helped students see writing as relevant to their engineering studies. While the numerical gains were limited, the intervention achieved its broader aim of strengthening perceptions of writing as valuable and attainable. Nonetheless, the gap between perceived confidence and actual performance highlights the need for more explicit writing instruction and clearer assessment alignment. Incorporating reflective activities, such as self-assessment checklists or guided journals, could further bridge this gap and support both confidence and competence in future implementations.

Conclusion

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the integration of language instruction within engineering education. By piloting a low-resource, classroom-based intervention in a Sri Lankan technical institute, it addressed a key gap in ESL higher education: the absence of sustained, low-stakes writing practice. The intervention enhanced students' writing competence and confidence through regular, structured paragraph tasks embedded in existing lessons, supported by revision and feedback. Its strength lay in its pragmatic, replicable design, which improved linguistic outcomes without disrupting the technical syllabus. The findings validate *Writing-to-Learn* and *Communicative Language Teaching* principles in technical contexts, offering a scalable model for multilingual and resource-limited classrooms. While the intervention was effective, limitations were noted in feedback clarity and rubric interpretation. Future adaptations should include coded rubrics, collective feedback sessions, and structured peer review cycles to strengthen sustainability. Additionally, targeted instructor training in formative assessment and paragraph-based pedagogy would further enhance impact. In sum, embedding short, structured writing tasks into engineering curricula can significantly support ESL learners by improving communication skills, fostering autonomy, and building confidence. As interdisciplinary communication becomes increasingly vital in global workplaces, equipping engineering undergraduates with writing fluency is not just advantageous but essential for their academic and professional success.

Acknowledgment

The researcher thanks the students, faculty, and administrative staff of the participating institute for their support and feedback. This study received no external funding.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/OJWC4228>

Assessment of an ESL Course Module Design Based on Its Representation of the Target Learner Needs: An Experiential Study Conducted at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University

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Abstract

ESL course modules developed with discipline-specific technical language contents are considered a compulsory component in all the undergraduate degree programmes in the state universities of Sri Lanka. These modules scaffold the English-medium instruction, enabling the undergraduates to improve their English language skills, which are necessary in following their selected degree programs. The reasons for considering it necessary to maintain an advanced competency level in English in university education are mainly the disparities in the education system in the country, which cause the students' demotivation and a lack of interest in studying English. Consequently, the perceived effectiveness of the ESL course modules offered to the undergraduates has also been much debated on their capability of presenting the language according to their specific English language needs. The study, therefore, explores the issue, utilizing a qualitative re-evaluation methodology, in which 30 volunteer participants have provided in-depth analyses of their learning experiences. Prior to the main study, a comprehensive Needs Analysis was conducted to identify the specific language requirements of the participants, and the data collection included their writings on specific language needs, interviews as well as structured questionnaire surveys conducted for 15 weeks. The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, and it was understood that the offered course module is generally effective in addressing their basic language needs only. However, the study emphasised the need for more and more engaging and integrated language support, under which the students are grouped according to their language proficiency levels.

Keywords- ESL; language needs; EMI; undergraduates; perceived effectiveness

Introduction

In many higher education institutes in Sri Lanka, the majority of undergraduates strive to be competent in the English language to pursue their higher education. However, many find it either impossible or challenging due to various reasons. Though the effectiveness of English language course modules

offered to the undergraduates has been discussed by many scholars and in academia itself, the crux of English language competency remains unchanged and unanswered.

However, the role of the English language in the country cannot be merely ignored, as Mahroof claims, “with globalization English continues to play a distinctive role not only to cross borders but also for survival in Sri Lanka” (nd, Pg 15) emphasizing the importance of the English language as the “link language”. Referring to the same context, Ranasinha (2011/2012), comments that the importance of the English language as a medium of instruction was increased when the country was exposed to globalization. Subsequently, necessary changes regarding the medium of language were followed both in schools and in higher education institutions accordingly. (Pg 205) As she further discusses, a quite slow process of adapting to the changes in the university system resulted in a lack of communication skills among the undergraduates and the graduates when they are in the job market. (World Bank, 2009) This fact was further proven in a study conducted by the Open University of Sri Lanka on the language skills of the students- reading, listening, writing, and speaking in which the study results revealed "Skills wise, all institutions performed best in reading. The next best performance, skills wise, was in speech and listening. Writing proved to be the weakest skill" (Raheem & Wijetunga, 2009). Therefore, as identified, English language competency has become very challenging in the higher education sector since the students in the Higher Education Institutes are adult learners who have much more expectations and different perspectives in learning. Moreover, undergraduates, being adult learners may have other priorities than learning a second language, especially since they have a specific workload related to their degree that eventually makes the need of learning English belittled. This however encapsulates the crux, inadequate English language competency of undergraduates, as Perera (2013) comments, although the universities have taken several steps to improve the language proficiency of the students, many have not been fruitful. Reasons for the identified lack vary from the lack of interest of the students in language learning, issues in pedagogy, to the lack of facilities and opportunities to learn the language. Consequently, as Rahuman (2017) writes, “the final accusation comes to the faculty and the English Language Teaching Unit when the students record a high failure rate in English and lack the required language skills once they step into the job market,” explaining the consequences of the inadequate English Language competency of undergraduates and its impact on the responsibilities of academia. This furthermore affects the overall academic performance of the undergraduates, especially in the degree courses conducted in the English medium. This emphasizes the request to analyse the students’ needs and the interest in learning English as a second language to inspire the academia to revise the set objectives and the aims of ESL course modules opt for the changing requirements of the students as claimed by Nunan, (2004) as cited in De Silva and Devendra (nd), “an analysis of students needs and interests may be useful in identifying or revising the goals and objectives of a course module, deciding on methodology, and determining means of assessment and evaluation.” (Pg 09).

Subsequently, the designed study aimed to explore the essential English language requirements of the first-year undergraduates in the Faculty of Computing at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, focusing on the effectiveness of the first ESL course module offered by the university.

Materials and Methods

A convenience sampling method was used in the study, in which the research cohort consisted of 30 voluntary participants, first-year IT undergraduates of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Southern Campus, from different language proficiency levels and different ethnic backgrounds.

The first academic year in a university is foundational for undergraduates, especially in demanding degree programs like Information Technology and Information Systems. Therefore, the effectiveness of the ESL course modules in the first academic year is crucial for setting the foundation for future academic performances of the students since the lectures and assessments are conducted only in

English. Additionally, it further facilitates the advanced English language course modules they have to follow in the university, along with the other course modules they learn.

The study was designed as a case study including a two - fold study in the form of a Needs Analysis and an ESL course evaluation which is limited to learner perspectives. The Needs Analysis, conducted at the very beginning of the study provided a profound background, especially in the purposes of identifying the English language needs of the participants and was foundational throughout the study. Similarly, a designed course evaluation, which was strictly limited to the learner perspectives supported the analysis of the perceived effectiveness of the offered course module in addressing the identified language needs of the learners.

The study was designed to be conducted during the first 15 weeks of the first academic year of first-year undergraduates, by collecting data both at the beginning and at the end of the study. Focus group interviews, structured questionnaires were used as the research tools to identify and discuss the English language needs of the undergraduates, their perspectives and the effectiveness of the ESL course modules in addressing the specific language requirements stated by them.

The Needs Analysis was conducted in the first phase of the study through collecting data by requesting the participants to write a short composition of what they expected to learn by following an ESL course module at the university. They were furthermore allowed to use their preferred language to write the compositions. Similarly, a series of focus group interviews was also conducted before the study, as it provided the researcher with a deep insight into the specific language needs that were highlighted in the compositions of the participants.

At the end of the 15 academic weeks, the same group of participants were again interviewed and given a structured questionnaire, which was prepared based on their responses to the needs analysis, to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the ESL course module in addressing their language needs. Moreover, structured interviews were also employed to address the perspectives of the learners on the ESL course module they were offered to address their required language needs.

Results

The Needs Analysis conducted at the initial stage of the study revealed that the participants of the research were from non-English backgrounds since the first language of all the participants were Sinhala. This highlighted the diversity of the English language needs of the participants, indicating their diverse English language proficiency levels.

According to the responses of the participants to the Needs Analysis, participants indicated four main language needs, including academic needs, emphasizing their needs of excelling in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Communication needs of the undergraduates were identified as another highlighted language need that they want to achieve by following an ESL course module, implying their urgent need to improve both oral and written competency in English. According to the respondents, they needed English language competency, both oral and written, as they wanted to communicate with the academia for their educational purposes during the lectures and in the mentoring programs conducted by the faculty. Moreover, the study revealed the participants' awareness on the necessity of the English language in society.

Especially, their interpretations of English language competency as a “class marker” were evident during the interviews and conversations held with the students. Moreover, participants revealed their understanding of the need for English language competency for their future professional pursuits (occupational needs) since most of the participants believed that English language competency was an

extra qualification for securing their place in the professional world, especially for their future career development.

As identified in the conducted Needs Analysis, the participants highlighted the necessity of addressing their academic needs with an effective ESL course module. The interviews held with the participants at the end of the study revealed that the ESL course module offered to them could scaffold them, providing a thorough understanding of grammar, improving vocabulary and engaging them in writing practice. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of having tutorial sessions in the module, hours allotted for them to do relevant language activities, followed by a discussion with the lecturer. The participants considered this a positive remark that helped them improve their English language skills. Furthermore, the participants considered the difficulties in note-taking as a challenge and insisted on the practical sessions that would make them skilled in note-taking methods. Subsequently, the participants highlighted the need to improve their speaking skills, which was often less concerned due to the strict timeline and the content of the course modules. Similarly, many students in an ESL classroom were identified as another challenge that limits the speaking activities during the sessions. A participant remarked, "It is good if we can do speaking activities during the lecture, because we find it difficult to talk in English" emphasizing the urgent need for speaking skills. The need to improve their listening skills was also discussed, referring to the "speed" of the lecture delivery of some lecturers and the difficulties of the participants in understanding the lectures due to their less improved vocabulary and less knowledge of grammatical structures.

As stated by the participants, communication need was another significant aspect of language that they wanted to perceive by following an ESL course module offered to them at the university. Both speaking and written communication skills in English were required by them, for the purpose of official and personal communication purposes. Consequently, the results of the study revealed that most of the participants were satisfied with the provided knowledge on grammar during the lectures, allowing them to improve their written communication skills in English, while the ESL course module did not emphasize very much on improving the oral communication skills of the undergraduates.

As per the language learning experience of the participants, they were ambitious of an improvement in their English language competency with the help of the ESL course modules offered to them at the university. Social needs highlighted in the Needs Analysis have been acquired by the participants through the ESL course module offered to them, especially by making students confident in their language and motivating them to use the target language in public. However, since the participants have not yet experienced the role of the English language in a work environment, their lack of experience was a gap in the study, which invites future research pursuits.

Discussion

Despite how successful and effective the ESL course module is in addressing the English language needs of the undergraduates in the university, still few causes would hinder the success. As identified by analysing the responses of the participants during the study, such few significant factors were identified, including the lack of a proper grading system according to the language proficiency level of the students, large language classrooms and less student engagement.

As many participants of the study stated, the lack of a proper grading system for the students according to their language proficiency level was a significant drawback that hindered the effectiveness of the course module offered to the students. This fact places the learners in a more challenging position, as a class would consist of students from basic to advanced language proficiency levels. This would obviously result in negative learning experiences for many learners, as often they are given activities that are not relevant to their language proficiency level. Similarly, the lecturer also experienced this situation as more challenging as they were placed with a more challenging task of preparing lesson

materials and lectures for a class with learners from different language proficiency levels. Consequently, this fact has been identified by the participants as one of the main drawbacks to be addressed in the language classroom. This fact further led to less student engagement in the language learning process, which was identified as another hindrance to the effectiveness of a language classroom in addressing the specific language needs of the participants.

As suggested by the participants, the effectiveness of the ESL course module offered to the undergraduate could be much enhanced by having a grading the students on their language proficiency level, adopting an active pedagogy, giving continuous feedback to the learners and adopting of technology in the language learning process.

Significantly, what was highlighted throughout the research was the effort for a successful involvement of the ESL course module in addressing the language needs of the fresh undergraduates, amidst many challenges, indicating the opportunities for a positive change that would overcome the drawbacks for a successful course module delivery.

Conclusion

In an academic context in which the English language proficiency was essential for a learner, the study highlights the effectiveness of the ESL course module offered to a group of first-year undergraduates in their first semester, for assisting their specific English language needs. The study identified the contexts of academic, communication, social and professional contexts, insisting on the basic language requirements of the participants in the conducted Needs Analysis. By conducting focused group interviews and through structured questionnaires, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the ESL course module in addressing the specific language needs was conducted, applying qualitative content analysis. The results indicated positive feedback from the learners on the effectiveness of the ESL course module they followed in supporting their specific language needs. The conducted study furthermore invited further research pursuits for a longitudinal study on the same context and comparative studies on the impact of demographic factors on the effectiveness of the language learning process.

Acknowledgment

I express my sincere gratitude to the Head of the Department, Department of IT and IS, Southern Campus, KDU and all the undergraduates who willingly participated in my study.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/OVBN5619>

Depiction of the American Myth in Contemporary and Postmodern Literary Narratives: A Comparative Study of Charles Bukowski's 'Ham on Rye' and Chimamanda Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck.'

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Abstract

The American myth promotes the idea that everybody has access to all opportunities in the US if they are willing to work hard for it. The immigrants in the US passionately hold on to that belief. Based on Charles Bukowski's 'Ham on Rye' and Chimamanda Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck', which both capture the contemporary situation with immigrants entrapped in the American dream from a postmodernist point of view, this paper attempts to investigate the reality behind the American myth as exposed by these two authors. The characters in both narratives arrive in the US under a grand deception about the American myth. They are first fascinated by the beauty of America. The methodology uses a qualitative research design where the two narratives are subjected to a 'textual analysis' from the dimensions of unemployment, poverty, and disillusionment, in a setting where the immigrants are bluntly marginalized and alienated. The findings reveal how Charles Bukowski provides an insight into the influence of the American myth on an immigrant family during the Great Depression and how Chimamanda Adichie depicted its impact on an immigrant working woman from a developing country who flies to the US in order to pursue her dreams. They reveal the patterns followed by the American myth during its journey under the contemporary postmodernist influence.

Keywords: American myth; Contemporary; Immigrants; Narratives; Postmodern

Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary mentions that the American dream is "the ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative." On the contrary, the aforementioned American dream has become merely a concept that limits the individual in America. Churchwell (2021) has also mentioned that the American dream opens a chasm between fact and fancy, and the whole fine dream is detached from the living zone of the present. This dream of endless progress was indistinguishable, Lippmann wrote, "from those who dream of a glorious past." Both dreams were equally illusory. The history of American myth returned to the postmodernism period, where the 'Great Depression' was the worst economic crisis in the modern history of the commencement of World War II in the year 1939. The fall of the stock market in New York City happened because every American and immigrant had invested their savings

in stocks. Consequently, there was a rapid expansion in the U.S stock market, and it reached its peak in August 1929. The main idea of the American myth empowers the idea that everybody has access to equal opportunities in America as long as they are willing to work hard for it. The aforementioned idea is deeply rooted in the American democracy. The Americans and the immigrants focused more on materialistic goals rather than moral values. Because of such a disillusioned concept, the working-class people aspired to enter into Upper-class society. As Hugh (2005) mentioned, Charles Bukowski was a German who immigrated to America and presented his real-life experiences as an immigrant who flew to America in order to realize his American dream. (p.67). In his debut semi – autobiographical novel, 'Ham on Rye,' he depicted the young gentleman called, the life of Henry Chinaski. The novel, 'Ham on Rye' was a postmodern novel which was written in 1982. As Bogdanowicz (2014) mentions 'American myth' is simply the sum of views, visions, images, values, beliefs and the opinions which are presented United States as a positive country, but the reality is depicted by intervention of the term, 'American myth' which embodied the opposite of the positive connotations of the term, American myth (p.15). As Onunkwo & Chigbu (2024) state, a myth is a story that shapes their view of truth and false (p.45). On the other hand, Roseqvist (2023) mentioned that 'The Thing Around your neck', which is written by Chimamanda Adichie problematizes the idealization of the American Dream while contrasting it with migrant's experiences (p.42). Simultaneously, the characters seem to be unable to fully disconnect their lives from their Nigerian origins and always feel somehow displaced both from Nigeria and the United States. The short story 'The Thing Around Your Neck' is a contemporary short story that was published in the year 2009.

Adichie depicted the character 'Akunna', who was struggling with poverty in Nigeria and moved to the United States while following the American myth. Both writers have narrated the story of American myth in two different time periods and the ways in which the lives of those characters have become unfortunate because of following American myth. The purpose of the present research study is to investigate the performance of American myth in both the Postmodern and the Contemporary contexts. The objective of the present research study is to investigate the performance of American myth in both postmodern and contemporary contexts through referring to the story of 'Ham on Rye' by Charles Bukowski and the story of 'The Thing Around Your Neck' by Chimamanda Adichie. Thus, the study examines how the concept of American myth is depicted in the postmodern story, 'Ham on Rye' and the contemporary story, 'The Thing Around Your Neck'.

Materials and Methods

The present study uses a qualitative research design where the stories of the 'Ham on Rye' and 'The Thing Around Your Neck' are analyzed through 'Textual Analysis.' The two stories are analyzed using a specific theoretical framework of American myth. The theoretical framework of American myth is created through referring to scholarly research articles.

Results

According to Priyanshu (2022) the poor Americans were continuously affected by unemployment and poverty because of the consequences of the Great Depression. The Immigrants were disillusioned because of the American myth, and the poverty was widespread like the sea without a shore. People were helpless without a job. Bukowski (1982) has portrayed the fate of all the fathers of Chinaski's neighbourhood as follows,

All the fathers in my immediate neighbourhood had lost their jobs. My father had lost his job. Gene's father sat on his front porch all day. My mother went to her low-paying job each morning, and my father, who did not have a job, left each morning too. Although most of the neighbours were unemployed, he did not want them to think he was jobless. So, he got into his car each morning at the same time and drove off as if he were going to work. Then in the evening, he would return at exactly the same time. (Ham on Rye, 1982)

Unemployment also caused widespread poverty. The condition of the immigrants was worse than that of the Americans because they were deeply marginalized, unlike the Americans. In the novel, *Ham on Rye*, the young Chinaski has been provided with harsh treatment for scars on his body at the L.A. Country General Hospital. It seems that the treatments were at the experimental level while using young Chinaski. Bukowski (1982) has portrayed the level of harsh and unfair treatment of boils at the hospital as follows,

My sessions with the drill were endless. Thirty-two, thirty-six, thirty-eight times. There was no fear of the drill anymore. There had never been. Only an anger. But the anger was gone. There wasn't even resignation on my part, only disgust, a disgust that this had happened to me, and a disgust with the doctors who couldn't do anything about it. They were helpless and I was helpless, the only difference being that I was the victim. They could go home to their lives and forget while I was stuck with the same face. (Ham on Rye, 1982)

On the other hand, Franklin (2013) mentioned that immigrants who highly worshipped the American myth believed that high performance would bring economic success. The aforementioned fact has itself become a myth because the Great Depression had already ruined the ways of Economic success. Kheirandish (2024) mentioned that if one wants to achieve success in America, they should keep struggling without asking questions. As Patrizi (2022) states American dream has created the disillusionment of the ideal America, which is available in the imagination of immigrants who immigrated to America with the hope of economic success, which is beyond their hope in the current moment. As Daniel (2024) indicates that the character is not able to locate themselves in a particular society because they are alienated from the available society. The character was going through the inevitable struggle to maintain their African culture and principles while trying to assimilate into American culture. According to Ryan (2007), the postmodernist text is the opposite of a classical text. The postmodernist texts do not welcome self-reflexiveness because postmodernists believe that while self-reflexiveness is a technique which facilitates the chance of avoiding the problem of worn-out plots. On the other hand, postmodernist fiction writers refuse to accept the hegemony of representational truth and instead accept the uncertainty of the status of reality in their texts. Simultaneously, Barthes (2008) mentioned that the myth contains the system of natural language, or object-language, possessed by the myth in order to build its own, and it contains the myth itself, or metalanguage, which is a secondary language used for describing the primary one.

The aforementioned discussion of the scholars paved the way for the following three dimensions. Each dimension will be analysed in relation to both postmodern narrative and the contemporary narrative.

- The unemployment, poverty and the disillusionment
- Immigrants were bluntly marginalized
- Alienation

Discussion

In the postmodern narrative, the Chinaski family was a German immigrant family who settled in America to achieve economic success. The family was disillusioned from the beginning. Since every character is disillusioned, the characters were not guided to get out of disillusionment. Everyone lost their job and stayed at home. Some of the characters tended to commit suicide. Henry's father followed the disillusioned idea without question. Due to the fall of the stock market, everyone lost their jobs. Young Chinaski's father had pretended that he was going to work. Bukowski (1982) portrayed the disillusioned life as a result of the American myth as follows,

My mother lost her job. My father kept leaving in his car every morning as if he was going to work. "I'm an engineer," he told people. He had always wanted to be an engineer. (Ham on Rye, 1982)

The adult Henry aspired to be a writer whose career dream had been shattered due to his poverty. On the other hand, the life story of Akunna is depicted in the contemporary narrative 'The Thing around your Neck' by Chimamanda Adichie. Akunna was a poor Nigerian woman who came to America with the belief that she would be supported by her uncle. Unfortunately, Akunna was raped by her uncle. Akunna remained silent because she was poor, and she was not ready to believe the unfortunate reality of the American dream. For both of the characters, young Chinaski and Akunna, survival was not easy. Adichie (2009) started her work by introducing the American myth, which seems to be familiar to Sri Lankans as well. In that way, this concept of the American dream is not only limited to a certain part of the world, but it is a universal concept.

You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don't buy a gun like those Americans. They trooped into the room in Lagos where you lived with your father, mother and three siblings, leaning against the unpainted walls because there weren't enough chairs to go round, to say goodbye in loud voices and tell you with lowered voices what they wanted you to send them. (The Thing Around your Neck, 2009)

In the postmodern narrative, the Chinskai family has immigrated to America from Germany. Henry was diagnosed with a skin acne where he gets boils. He visited the hospital intending to receive medicines for his boils. Consequently, Henry was provided a strict treatment with severe pain. The young Chinskai has learnt that the aforementioned treatment had been performed on Henry as an experiment. Bukowski (1982) portrayed the unfortunate situation of young Chinskai because of being a victim of the American myth. Being poor, he was not able to get the privileges that were received by the rich. He was discriminated being the experiment of the treatments for the rich.

What I minded was that they didn't know how to deal with me. I sensed this in their discussions and in their manner. They were hesitant, uneasy, yet also somehow disinterested and bored. Finally, it didn't matter what they did. They just had to do something -- anything -- because to do nothing would be unprofessional. They experimented on the poor, and if that worked, they used the treatment on the rich. And if it didn't work, there would still be more poor left over to experiment upon. (Ham on Rye, 1982)

Henry missed the success of his first job application, and the same was offered to an American. In the contemporary narrative, Akunna has been raped by her uncle. Her voice is silenced because she is an immigrant to the United States, and she is not familiar with the cultural context of that particular country. Besides, Akunna falls in love with an American. On the contrary, Akunna feels that she has marginalized within the relationship because of being a Nigerian in America. Adichie (2009) mentioned Akunna does not want her boyfriend to visit Nigeria or sympathize over her helplessness.

You did not know how you could ever afford a ticket and your rent. He said he really wanted to see Nigeria, and he could pay for you both to go. You did not want him to pay for you to visit home. You did not want him to go to Nigeria, to add it to the list of countries where he went to gawk at the lives of poor people who could never gawk back at his life (The Thing Around Your Neck, 2009)

Many Americans were curious about Nigeria and asked Akunna many questions. In such a context, Akunna was touched by the warm welcome of her boyfriend's parents. She looked at them and felt grateful because they did not examine Akunna as an exotic trophy and an ivory tusk (p.23, The Thing Around Your Neck). Akunna feels that even her boyfriend loves her because he has appreciated the cultural values of her country. At the beginning of their relationship, Akunna is followed by an American senior of a state university (later her boyfriend). Adichie (2009) mentioned that the American has taken his first move to get along with the Nigerian girl as follows,

After your shift that night, he was waiting outside, earphones stuck in his ears, asking you to go out with him because your name rhymed with hakuna matata and The Lion King was the only maudlin movie he'd ever liked. You didn't know what The Lion King was. (The Thing Around Your Neck, 2009)

In the post-modern narrative, the Chinskai family is alienated towards the cultural aspects of that country. Henry's father encouraged Henry to be well-educated and be the best in the class. Unfortunately, being the best has been owned by the Americans. The story depicts the growth of the young Henry. The readers can be exposed to the life of the young Henry, including how Henry has been exposed to the knowledge of puberty. Henry's father does not allow him to play with his friends in the backyard because his father believes that Henry should play with rich American children. On the contrary, Bukowski (1982) has mentioned that the particular behaviour of his father has led him to be secluded in society. In that way, one can understand the fact that the father is alienated from the available social context because he is a blind follower of the American myth. Simultaneously, Henry has become a socially secluded individual. Even at the end of the novel, the adult Henry leads such a socially secluded life without his family and friends.

I still wasn't allowed to play with the children in the neighbourhood. but sitting in the bedroom often got dull. I would go out and walk around in the backyard, looking at things, bugs mostly. Or I would sit on the grass and imagine things. One thing I imagined was that I was a great baseball player, so great that I could get a hit every time at bat, or a home run anytime I wanted to. But I would deliberately make outs just to trick the other team (Ham on Rye, 1982)

In the contemporary narrative, Akunna is a young immigrant who has immigrated to America with the hope of achieving economic success. Unfortunately, she feels that she does not belong to the American culture, and she yearns to be with her community in Nigeria. The aforementioned fact has been reflected through a specific phrase which is used in the narrative. When she goes to bed at night, 'The thing wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go.' She always thought of going back to her roots, but she tries to survive in the American culture. Adichie (1982) has mentioned that most of the time, Akunna is emotionally depleted. Akunna is with her boyfriend in his apartment. He mentioned that he discarded his parents' offer to visit the summer cottage in the Quebec countryside.

You dropped a glass, and it shattered on the hardwood of his apartment floor, and he asked what was wrong, and you said nothing, although you thought a lot was wrong. Later, in the shower, you started to cry. You watched the water dilute your tears, and you didn't know why you were crying. (The Thing Around Your Neck, 2009)

Finally, when her father dies, she is not able to stay in America any longer, and she returns to her roots in Nigeria. Akunna feels guilty and conscious of being unaware of her father's death. She has tried to remember and locate where she was when she lost her father. Adichie (2009) has hinted to her readers that Akunna is not supposed to return to the place where her soul has been unfairly depleted. It seems that Akunna would stay in her home country. She would select being in her comfort zone back in her home rather than being with an American in an unknown country.

He said you knew what he meant, Would you come back, come back? You turned away and said nothing, and when he drove you to the airport, you hugged him tight for a long, long moment, and then you let go (The Thing Around Your Neck, 2009)

Conclusion

The present research study provides insights into the evolution of American myth from the time period of Postmodern period to the Contemporary period. During the post-modern period, the influence of American myth is weightier than in the contemporary period. Charles Bukowski has depicted a dark

image of American society. It further relates the beginning of the American myth as a consequence of the Great Depression. On the other hand, Chimamanda Adichie has depicted the impact of American myth towards an immigrant from a developing country who flew to America in order to pursue her dreams and the dreams of her family. In addition, Charles Bukowski's writing has depicted the harsh and cynical visual imagery of American myth. On the other hand, Chimamanda Adichie's writing style makes the reader empathetic towards the main character of the story, Akunna. Both contexts lead towards the life which has been survived at the deception of American myth.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful towards my parents and my professors.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/XWXU2930>

The Use of Feedback Strategies Implemented by Teacher and Peer Involvement in Developing Writing Proficiency among ESL Learners: An Action Research

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Abstract

This study endeavours to explore the effectiveness of teacher-monitored peer feedback in enhancing proficiency in writing paragraphs among secondary-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Sri Lanka. Over a period of two months, focusing on paragraph writing activities carried out with 20 ESL students from a semi-government school, the study experimented with a set of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, preplanned classroom observations, and reflective teacher references. There, peer feedback was guided by a rubric, while the teacher's verbal feedback was aligned with the routine instructional practices. The thematic analysis revealed that both feedback strategies enhanced students' engagement, confidence, and motivation in carrying out paragraph writing exercises. It was noticed that peer feedback helped encourage collaboration and critical thinking among the subjects, while teacher feedback provided them with clarity and direction. The reflective teacher references ensured improvement in student participation and independence. Challenges such as discomfort with peer evaluation and concerns about peer accuracy could be mitigated through structured guidance provided as and when required. The study thus concluded that integrating peer and teacher feedback helps foster a supportive, interactive environment for ESL writing development by establishing learner autonomy in ESL classrooms.

Keywords: Peer feedback; Verbal feedback; ESL writing; Paragraph writing proficiency

Introduction

Feedback is essential in ESL education for promoting self-assessment, reflection, and improvement, with various types supporting learner autonomy and motivation. The exam-oriented education system in Sri Lanka shapes feedback practices to remain teacher-centred and exam-focused, requiring a shift toward formative, student-centered feedback to improve writing proficiency (Jayawardena, 2021). While the NIE (National Institute of Education) (2017) guide emphasizes general feedback aligned with ongoing assessments, this approach limits developmental feedback, with Perera (2010) noting that exam pressure prioritizes corrective over formative feedback. Peer feedback is seen as effective but varies based on students' ability to give and receive constructive input (Topping, 1998), while verbal feedback

effectiveness can also be inconsistent due to factors like clarity and learning styles (Kang, 2010; Wijesuriya & Dissanayake, 2021). In this context, the present study investigates the effectiveness of peer feedback and teacher verbal feedback in improving ESL students' paragraph writing skills.

Several previous studies have examined feedback in ESL writing. Ferries (2003) synthesized research on feedback types, highlighting that a combination of corrective and formative feedback enhances writing accuracy over time. Bitchener & Knoch (2008) found that explicit corrective feedback significantly improves grammatical accuracy in ESL writing. Regarding peer feedback, Trang & Anh (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study showing that students using structured peer feedback performed better in writing tasks. Liu & Carless (2006) found that peer feedback fosters critical thinking, though its quality varies depending on students' confidence and experience. Cui et al. (2022) demonstrated that trained peer reviewers provided more meaningful content-based feedback than untrained peers, improving writing structure and clarity. For verbal feedback, Ellis (2009) found that it enhances sentence structure and cohesion. Hyland & Hyland (2006) highlighted that students perceive verbal feedback as interactive and constructive, allowing immediate clarification. Yang et al. (2006) compared peer and teacher feedback, finding that while teacher feedback provided structured guidance, peer feedback promoted autonomy and self-regulation. Accordingly, existing research underscores the importance of feedback in ESL writing.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed an action research design to examine the impact of peer and verbal feedback on Grade 9 ESL learners' paragraph writing skills, as the cyclical and reflective nature of this approach would assist in identifying problems, implementing interventions, and refining teaching practices in real-time within the classroom (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lewin, 1946). While experimental research could test cause- and - effect relationships, action research was more suitable as it allowed the teacher-researcher to reflect on practice, assess impact, and adjust methods, enabling practical improvements and bridging theory and practice (Burns, 2010). This approach aligns with the emphasis on critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and personal values in professional development within educational settings (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

Methods and Instruments

This research was based on qualitative data and involved 20 female Grade 9 ESL students from a semi-government school in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka. The students, all under 15, were selected through convenience sampling as they were part of the researcher's assigned class. Their writing skills were below standard as per their mid-term exam results for English, particularly in paragraph writing, prompting the need for a feedback-based intervention. All students participated regardless of proficiency level. Ethical clearance was obtained from students, parents, and school authorities, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. This group represented was representative of typical secondary- level ESL learners in Sri Lanka, making the findings relevant to similar contexts.

The rubric for peer and verbal feedback was both aligned with IELTS (International English Language Testing System) (2021) standards to ensure consistency in evaluation and support student understanding. IELTS is a globally recognized test assessing English proficiency in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Using its validated rubric ensures consistent, objective feedback aligned with international standards, strengthening the reliability of the study's evaluation and helping students clearly understand their performance.

The action plan began with a lesson on paragraph writing for the participants. To provide students with an understanding of peer evaluation, the same lesson was taught to another Grade 9 class, and their written paragraph samples were distributed anonymously among the study participants. of the study,

and the participants were instructed to give feedback in pairs using the provided rubric. Accordingly, the students received training on how to assess peer work effectively prior to the evaluation process. Thirdly, students were instructed to write another paragraph and received peer feedback based on the same rubric. Each student evaluated a peer's work. Next, the teacher provided individual verbal feedback, addressing organization, cohesion, grammar, and clarity. These steps were repeated in three writing tasks to help students identify and correct mistakes. To gain comprehensive insights into the teaching and learning processes, classroom observations were conducted carried out throughout the intervention to gain comprehensive insights into the teaching and learning processes. At the end of the process, the researcher conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with all 20 participating students in the classroom setting to understand their experiences with the feedback strategies, challenges encountered, and overall perceptions of their usefulness. Teacher reflections were also collected to examine the instructional strategies used and their perceived impact on student learning. The interviews mainly included open-ended questions, along with a few close-ended questions to clarify specific aspects. All qualitative data from the interviews, teacher reflections, and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes related to feedback effectiveness, student engagement, and educational practices. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework was used for the thematic analysis as it provides a clear, flexible guide for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The steps of this framework include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview questions used during the study are as follows.

Table 1: Interview Questions

Peer feedback	Verbal feedback	Overall feedback strategies
How did you feel about giving feedback to your peers? Was it easy or difficult?	How did you feel about receiving verbal feedback from your teacher?	Did you use the feedback you received (peer or verbal) to improve your writing? If so, how?
How did you feel about receiving feedback from your peers?	Do you think verbal feedback from your teacher helped you improve your writing?	How would you describe your overall experience with the two feedback strategies used in the classroom?
Did you find peer feedback useful? Why or why not?	What specific areas of writing were you able to improve with verbal feedback from your teacher?	Do you have any suggestions for improving the way feedback is provided in the classroom?
Do you think giving feedback to your peers helped you improve your own paragraph writing? How? What specific areas of your writing do you feel have improved because of peer feedback?	Do you think verbal feedback is more or less effective than peer feedback? Why?	
Is there any other type of feedback you think would have helped you more than peer feedback?	How did you feel about receiving verbal feedback from your teacher?	

Results

The responses obtained from the interview process were transcribed and categorized into significant and recurring themes. Through a detailed review of the qualitative data, a total of nine themes emerged: six positive and three negative. The positive themes reflect the benefits and strengths of the intervention, while the negative themes highlight the challenges and limitations. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis. After coding and grouping similar codes, themes were identified, refined, and categorized as positive or negative based on their content.

Table 2: Themes Identified by Thematic Analysis

Positive themes	Negative themes
1) Improved quality of writing (improved paragraph writing skills ex, organization, topic sentence, supporting details, conclusions etc.).	1) Perceived judgment from peer feedback (worrying that they will be judged through their writings)
2) Improved confidence and motivation to write paragraphs.	2) Lack of trust in peer abilities (Doubting peers' confidence, some students feel that their peers are not qualified or skilled enough to provide meaningful feedback)
3) Opportunity to correct their common mistakes (Capitalization, punctuation, use of transitional words)	3) Lack of confidence to provide feedback (because of their different levels of understanding and trust in their own abilities, they tend to seek the help of the teacher to provide peer feedback)
4) Effective combined feedback (A Combination of the two feedback strategies is helpful)	
5) Supportive teacher feedback (Teacher feedback is more supportive)	
6) Development of self-editing skills	

Student interviews revealed that the peer and verbal feedback significantly improved writing skills, enhancing students' confidence and motivation. For example, Student 1 shared that verbal feedback felt "personal and constructive," boosting confidence, while Student 5 noted that peer feedback reduced her fear of making mistakes and motivated her to improve. Additionally, students valued opportunities to correct technical errors, such as capitalization and punctuation, with Student 15 highlighting how peer feedback helped with capitalization, and Student 5 noting learning new transitional words through peer review. The combination of peer and verbal feedback was also highly effective, with students appreciating the multiple perspectives. Student 18 emphasized how peer feedback helped catch small mistakes missed by the teacher, while verbal feedback clarified broader writing issues like paragraph structure and organization. This combined feedback allowed students to address both macro (structure) and micro (grammar, word choice) elements of writing, fostering a more comprehensive learning experience. Students also developed self-editing skills, as many began recognizing and correcting repeated errors independently. Student 13 shared how peer feedback helped her identify grammar mistakes, leading her to review her work more critically. Moreover, improved quality of writing was evident, with students better able to organize their ideas, provide supporting details, and write effective conclusions. Student 10, for example, highlighted how teacher feedback helped her improve the structure of the paragraphs by providing better supporting details.

Finally, supportive teacher feedback emerged as a crucial factor. While students appreciated peer feedback, many preferred the detailed and constructive nature of verbal feedback from their teacher. Students felt that teacher feedback provided more explicit guidance and emotional support, which helped them feel more confident in making changes to their writing. Student 7 stated, "With my teacher's feedback, I felt more confident making changes," highlighting the importance of expert, emotionally supportive feedback in fostering students' growth as writers.

These themes collectively suggest that peer and teacher feedback significantly enhanced students' writing proficiency, confidence, and self-editing skills.

The negative themes from the interviews reveal several challenges students faced with peer feedback. One common issue was the perceived judgment from peer feedback. Some students expressed anxiety about being judged by their peers, which affected their comfort and participation. Student 12 shared, "If I share my work, I was worried that my classmates would think I'm not good at writing." This concern led to a lack of focus during the feedback process, highlighting the need for a more supportive, non-critical atmosphere to encourage full participation in peer feedback.

Another significant issue was the lack of trust in peer abilities. Some students were sceptical about the quality of feedback provided by their peers, as they felt that their classmates might not be able to catch all the errors. Student 7 mentioned, "I felt like I didn't get useful feedback from my peers since there were some unnoticed errors." Additionally, some students admitted to giving vague feedback to avoid hurting others' feelings, with Student 4 saying, "I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, so I just gave general feedback." This suggests that students may need more training in constructive feedback while maintaining trust.

The lack of confidence to provide peer feedback was also a recurring theme. Many students doubted their ability to give effective feedback, often relying on the teacher for confirmation. Student 18 remarked, "I was not sure about my advice, and that's why I asked the teacher." This dependency on the teacher's support limited students' engagement in the feedback process, making them hesitant to contribute their opinions.

To address these issues, teachers could train students to give effective feedback. Providing workshops on feedback principles and using structured tools like checklists or rubrics can help build students' confidence. Encouraging a collaborative classroom culture that values development over judgment can alleviate students' fears and promote more active participation. Pairing students with varying skill levels for feedback activities could also enhance peer learning, allowing stronger students to model effective feedback strategies. Regular teacher check-ins would provide reassurance, ensuring students feel supported in the feedback process.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that peer feedback fostered collaborative learning, improving students' sentence structure and paragraph organization. In contrast, the teacher's verbal feedback encouraged self-reflection and helped address grammatical errors, resulting in overall progress in writing proficiency. Learners showed significant improvement in paragraph organization, using clearer topic sentences and supporting details, while developing self-editing skills to correct errors like capitalization and punctuation. The combined use of peer and verbal feedback enhanced confidence and motivation, with teacher feedback providing essential guidance that complemented peer feedback to strengthen technical and attitudinal aspects of ESL writing proficiency.

However, challenges were noted, including students' fear of judgment, lack of trust in peers' abilities, and low confidence in evaluating others' work, leading to inconsistent feedback quality and reliance on teacher intervention. These challenges highlight the need for structured training to improve confidence and competence in peer feedback. Future studies could expand sample sizes, conduct longitudinal research, and explore digital tools in feedback facilitation, with further research into teacher and student perspectives to enhance trust and effectiveness in peer and verbal feedback processes. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that peer and verbal feedback strategies significantly enhance the writing proficiency of secondary-level ESL learners in Sri Lanka. The findings contribute valuable insights into

ESL education, offering a foundation for future research and practical improvements in writing instruction.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/TSYT5856>

Motivation Factors Influencing English Language Learning Among the Agriculture Students at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Proficiency in English is integral to higher education in Sri Lanka, facilitating academic success and global engagement. Despite extensive instruction, the students' English language proficiency varies considerably, predominantly under motivational factors. Although prior research underscores the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in second language acquisition, a notable gap exists regarding their specific impact on university students within the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, this study attempts to address this gap by exploring the motivational determinants that affect English language learning among the undergraduates at the Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Using a quantitative approach, the data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising 27 Likert-scale items, administered to a stratified sample of 250 randomly selected students. The research instrument formulated in this way helped to measure the elements of intrinsic motivation— such as curiosity and perceived relevance— and extrinsic motivators, including academic performance and future career aspirations. The data analysis involved descriptive statistics, reliability testing, ANOVA, and independent samples t-tests. The results reveal that intrinsic motivation significantly influences the students' engagement and proficiency in English, along with enthusiasm for the mastery of the target language and personal development. External factors, such as classroom environment and peer influence, also affect motivation to a lesser degree. Gender differences emerged, with females demonstrating higher motivation and perceived benefits. Challenges such as language anxiety and waning enthusiasm hinder participation; nonetheless, students recognize English's role in effective communication and personal growth. The findings thus highlight the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and supportive learning environments to enhance language acquisition among the Sri Lankan university students through pedagogical strategies aimed at sustainable language proficiency development.

Keywords: English Language Learning; Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation; Motivation Factors; Sri Lankan University Students

Introduction

English is a compulsory subject at all educational levels in Sri Lanka, covering reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Its importance has grown as a global communication tool and a measure of proficiency beyond exams. Students learn English for academic, professional, personal, and travel reasons, with motivation playing a key role in learning success. Since the 1990s, motivation has been recognized as vital in second language acquisition and achieving personal goals. At Sri Lankan State Universities, English education varies by program; some offer it only in the first year, while others continue throughout the degree. Some programs include intensive English courses at the start. For example, at Rajarata University's Faculty of Agriculture, students undergo a two-month intensive English program, followed by courses like General English I & II, English for Higher Education, and Professional English across their studies, providing ample opportunity to develop skills. Despite similar instruction, students show different proficiency levels, largely influenced by motivation factors like career goals and peer influence. According to Oletić and Ilić (2014), motivation in language learning comprises two primary forms: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from internal factors, such as personal interest and the inherent enjoyment of learning. External rewards, such as grades, praise, or future benefits, drive extrinsic motivation. Simbolon, Nina, and Ramadhani (2019) emphasized that both types of influence behavior and student development, with extrinsic motivation fostering competitiveness and intrinsic motivation encouraging genuine engagement. This study aims to identify the motivational factors affecting English learning among Agriculture students at Rajarata University, offering insights to improve language acquisition strategies in higher education.

In Sri Lanka, university students need strong motivation to actively learn English, as a lack of interest can reduce engagement and hinder progress. Both internal factors (like interest and self-efficacy) and external factors (such as peer support and teacher encouragement) influence motivation. This study examines how these factors affect agriculture undergraduates at Rajarata University's English learning, focusing on their engagement and interest. Accordingly, the research questions of the study are:

- What motivational factors influence English language learning among agriculture students at Rajarata University?
- What learning processes and classroom factors can be implemented to enhance motivation and improve English language proficiency among these students?

Materials and Methods

Population and Sample Size

This study used a survey to analyse motivation among 250 agriculture undergraduates at Rajarata University. The 27-item Likert scale questionnaire covered motivation, learning, and benefits. Conducted during lectures, the study aims to improve motivation strategies and language skills by examining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors.

Research Instrument

Rajarata University's diverse student body provided a representative sample of foreign language learners. Using simple random sampling, 250 agriculture undergraduates from all years completed a 15-minute Likert scale questionnaire.

The questionnaire, which was based on a 27-point Likert scale, had three items focusing on motivational factors, the learning process, and benefits, which also included items for personal information. The Likert scale options were as follows:

1= Strongly disagree (SD)

2= Disagree (D)

3= Neutral (N)

4= Agree (A)

5= Strongly agree (SA)

The participants completed the questionnaires individually during class, with the researcher distributing them with the instructors' permission. Each participant took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Collection

The data were collected from the survey questionnaire and used to explore the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on learning English as a foreign language.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to present the frequencies and percentages of questionnaire items.

Results

The following results are interpreted through mean rank interpretation.

Table 1: Reliability of the Questionnaire

Categories	Number of items	Alpha
Motivation Factors in Learning English (MFLE)	13	.622
Learning Process in Learning English (LPLE)	6	.647
Benefits of Learning English (BLE)	8	.626

Table 2: Mean Rank Interpretation

4.01-5.00	A high degree of satisfaction with English Learning
3.01-4.00	A fairly moderate degree of satisfaction with English Learning
2.01-3.00	A moderate degree of satisfaction with English Learning
1.00-2.00	Low degree of satisfaction with English learning

Table 3: Respondents' Demographic Profile

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	176	70.4
	Male	74	9.6
Age	Below 20-22	154	61.6
	23-25	85	34.0
Year of Study	First Year	67	26.8
	Second Year	45	18.0
	Third Year	92	36.8
	Fourth Year	46	18.4

Table 4: Motivational Factors in Learning English

Items	Statements	Level of Agreement %					M	SD
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
MFLE1	I'm excited to continue my English learning journey in the future.	0.4	1.6	7.2	45.2	45.6	4.34	.717
MFLE2	I enjoy actively participating in English lessons by sharing my thoughts.	1.2	4.0	30.4	48.4	16.0	3.74	.817
MFLE3	Learning English is a priority for me.	0	5.2	29.2	46.4	19.2	3.8	.808
MFLE4	My curiosity fuels my success in learning English.	0.8	1.6	12.0	55.2	30.4	4.13	.739
MFLE5	Honestly, my motivation for studying English is solely to pass exams.	7.2	28.8	34.4	24.4	5.2	2.92	1.01

MFLE6	I may have a preference for studying in my native language.	7.2	21.2	35.2	24.0	12.4	3.13	1.10
MFLE7	Honestly, I have very little enthusiasm for my English lectures.	24.0	42.8	23.2	6.8	3.2	2.22	.99
MFLE8	I feel tense whenever I need to speak during my English lectures.	12.4	26.0	41.6	17.2	2.8	2.72	.98
MFLE9	English helps me express myself more confidently.	0.4	2.0	17.6	59.6	20.4	3.98	.70
MFLE10	I feel comfortable participating in English lecture discussions by answering questions.	0.8	5.6	28.8	51.2	13.6	3.71	.80
MFLE11	I aspire to speak English fluently.	1.2	1.2	6.4	34.0	57.2	4.45	.77
MFLE12	I experience embarrassment when speaking English in front of my peers.	3.2	10.4	25.6	37.6	23.2	3.67	1.04
MFLE13	However, learning English allows me to connect new information with my existing knowledge, fostering a deeper understanding.	1.2	1.6	14.0	54.0	29.2	4.08	.77

Table 4 indicates that a significant proportion of students expressed enthusiasm for continuing their English studies (MFLE11: 45.6%) and attributed their success to curiosity (MFLE4: 55.2%). Additionally, 57.2% aspire to speak English fluently (MFLE11), demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation. While extrinsic factors, such as studying solely to pass exams (MFLE5: 28.8%) and prioritizing English (MFLE3: 46.4%), are also evident, intrinsic motivation remains more prominent. Challenges identified include tension (MFLE8: 41.6%), lack of enthusiasm (MFLE7: 24.0%), and embarrassment in peer settings (MFLE12: 23.2%). Nonetheless, many students reported that learning English helped them relate new knowledge to their existing understanding (MFLE13: 54.0%). High levels of engagement were reflected in their enjoyment of sharing thoughts (MFLE2: 48.4%) and actively participating in discussions (MFLE10: 51.2%).

Table 5: The Learning Process in Learning English

Items	Statements	Level of Agreement %					M	SD
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
LPLE14	I struggle to independently summarize the key points in English subject material.	1.2	4.4	31.2	52.4	10.8	3.67	.774
LPLE15	English lecture covers a lot of ground.	0.4	2.0	8.0	56.8	32.8	4.20	.698
LPLE16	I find English a challenging language to learn.	2.0	14.0	32.8	44.0	7.2	3.40	.888
LPLE17	I experience embarrassment when speaking English in front of my peers.	0.4	1.6	12.4	54.0	31.6	4.15	.721
LPLE18	However, learning English allows me to connect new information with my existing knowledge, fostering a deeper understanding.	0.4	1.6	8.4	47.6	42.0	4.29	.722
LPLE19	I experience embarrassment when speaking English with my peers.	0.4	5.6	23.2	52.4	18.4	3.83	.806

Table 5 shows that 56.8% of students agreed that learning English enhanced their understanding by linking new information to prior knowledge (LPLE18). A considerable number of students found English classes challenging (LPLE16: 32.8%) and experienced embarrassment when speaking English in front of peers (LPLE17: 12.4%) and with peers (LPLE19: 23.2%).

Table 6: Benefits of Learning English

Items	Statements	Level of Agreement %					M	SD
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
BLE20	I believe individuals who speak multiple languages possess significant knowledge.	2.0	3.2	22.8	42.8	29.2	3.94	.910
BLE21	Learning English aids me in effectively communicating in the language.	0.8	1.6	15.6	54.0	28.0	4.07	.755
BLE22	I can think critically and analyze content in English.	0.4	6.4	34.4	47.2	11.6	3.63	.787
BLE23	I desire to have numerous friends who speak English.	0.8	3.6	26.8	47.2	21.6	3.85	.825
BLE24	I have a genuine interest in learning English.	0.8	1.6	12.4	56.0	29.2	4.11	.736
BLE25	I sometimes procrastinate on my English homework.	4.0	16.8	32.8	36.0	10.4	3.32	1.003
BLE26	When I miss lectures, I refrain from asking my friends or lecturers for homework assignments.	14.4	32.8	22.4	20.8	9.6	2.78	1.206
BLE27	I believe English contributes to my overall personal development.	0.4	2.4	8.4	51.2	37.6	4.23	.735

Table 6 shows mean (M) values from 2.78 to 4.23, indicating varying agreement levels on English learning benefits. The highest is for “English contributes to my personal development” (BLE27) at 4.23, showing strong agreement. “I have a genuine interest in learning English” (BLE24) has a mean of 4.11, reflecting its importance. “Learning English helps me communicate effectively” (BLE21) has a mean of 4.07. The statement “When I miss lectures, I refrain from asking for homework” has a mean of 2.78, indicating moderate agreement and highlighting students’ recognition of English’s role in their learning and their efforts to benefit from it.

Table 7: One-way ANOVA among First Year, Second Year, Third Year and Fourth Year students

The Motivational Factors	Between Groups	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
		.27	1	.27	1.99	.15
	Within Groups	34.30	248	.13		
	Total	34.58	249			
The Learning Process	Between Groups	.28	1	.28	1.31	.25
	Within Groups	53.22	248	.21		
	Total	53.50	249			
The Benefits	Between Groups	.63	1	.63	.28	.59
	Within Groups	53.62	248	.21		
	Total	53.68	249			

Table 7 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA test used to compare the means of the motivational factors, the learning process, and the benefits among First Year, Second Year, Third Year and Fourth Year students. For motivational factors, there was no statistically significant difference in motivation across the various levels of students ($f(1,248) = 1.995$ & $p = .159$). Similar to the previous one, there is no particular significance among other different class levels for the Learning Process ($f(1,248) = 1.310$ & $p = .254$). In terms of benefits, there was no statistically significant difference among the various levels ($f(1,248) = .289$ & $p = .591$).

Table 8: Independent Sample t-test between Genders

Variables	Gender	Mean	SD	T	Sig
The Motivational Factors (MF)	Male	3.59	.302	-1.412	.007
	Female	3.66	.501	-1.164	
The Learning Process (LP)	Male	3.95	.377	1.144	.001
	Female	3.87	.623	0.944	
The Benefits (B)	Male	3.73	.393	-0.538	.005
	Female	3.77	.603	-0.455	

Table 8 shows gender differences in motivation, learning, and perceived benefits. Significant differences were found: females scored higher in motivation ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .501$) than males ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .302$; $t(248) = -1.412$, $p = .007$); males scored higher in learning ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .377$) than females ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .623$; $t(248) = 1.144$, $p = .001$); and females again scored slightly higher in perceived benefits ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .603$) than males ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .393$; $t(248) = -0.538$, $p = .005$). Intrinsic motivation, like curiosity and the value of English, motivated 54% of students, while extrinsic motivation was less influential (28.8%). Barriers included classroom tension (41.6%) and embarrassment (23.2%). Many students enjoyed discussions (51.2%) and saw English as a link to prior knowledge (56.8%). The study recommends creating supportive, interactive environments to reduce anxiety and increase motivation, noting the need for further research on age and gender differences.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify key challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of English language learning among university students, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Analyzing data from 250 students using quantitative methods and statistical techniques showed that intrinsic motivation plays a more significant role in influencing English learning. The study also highlighted variations in learning styles and satisfaction across the four main English skills, with students' intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes fostering their commitment to language development. Despite diverse learning approaches, students shared common goals and recognized personal benefits from English courses, emphasizing the importance of motivation for academic success. The researchers carefully addressed various aspects of the research process, overcoming challenges during data collection and analysis. The Faculty of Agriculture at Rajarata University was selected as the primary site for its relevance, although the study acknowledges that not all factors influencing motivation were explored. The researchers recommend further investigations to deepen understanding in this area, emphasizing the need for ongoing research to enhance English proficiency, which is vital for global business and international communication.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/NUOW8753>

Investigating the Effectiveness of Shadowing as a Listening Technique in Enhancing Listening Comprehension of Undergraduate English as a Second Language Learners

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Abstract

Shadowing is an advanced language learning technique that learners can use independently to improve their intonation and pronunciation. Through this technique, the learners are allowed to listen to a model (i.e., a video or audio of someone speaking) and repeat what is said in real-time. Unlike in the listen-pause-repeat method of yesteryear, here one precisely repeats every utterance, sound by sound, word by word, immediately after they are heard. Based on an experiment involving shadowing, this study examines the impact of shadowing on enhancing listening comprehension among a group of undergraduate English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Kelaniya. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data through pre- and post-tests and structured interviews to evaluate the efficacy of shadowing in enhancing learners' listening comprehension skills, while also documenting their perceptions of shadowing as a listening technique. The quantitative findings from the independent sample t-tests indicated a substantial enhancement of the listening comprehension scores during the post-test, with mean scores of 8.10 for the experimental group and 5.50 for the control group. The statistical study validated the importance of these techniques ($p = 0.000$). The qualitative results gathered from interviews highlighted the students' initial scepticism and curiosity, increased focus and active engagement in listening, improvement in listening speed and word recognition, enhancement of their pronunciation and intonation, and the positive impact shadowing had on their listening comprehension test performance as the emerging themes. These results underscore the pedagogical value of shadowing as a listening technique under an interactive and cognitively engaging approach to ESL listening instruction. Hence, this study adds to the existing literature on listening instruction and provides practical implications for ESL instructors seeking to integrate the shadowing technique into their teaching practices.

Keywords: ESL learners; Listening comprehension; Shadowing listening technique; Mixed methods approach

Introduction

The acquisition of a second or foreign language is widely acknowledged as one of the most cognitively challenging endeavors an individual may experience, involving the mastery of listening, speaking,

reading, and writing (VanPatten, 2004). In the Sri Lankan context, despite years of formal English instruction, many adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, especially at the university level, struggle with listening comprehension, an essential skill for real-time communication in English (Karunaratne, 2009). This persistent difficulty can be attributed to traditional teaching techniques that often emphasize grammar, vocabulary, and passive listening exercises, rather than engaging learners in active listening tasks (Field, 2008). Consequently, researchers have suggested incorporating innovative techniques such as the shadowing listening technique, which requires learners to repeat spoken language immediately after hearing it to enhance real-time language processing and comprehension (Hamada, 2015).

Research on the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of using the shadowing listening technique has been extended to studies in both ESL and EFL contexts. Many studies have examined using the shadowing listening technique among EFL university undergraduates (Hamada, 2012; Lestari, 2020; Zuhriyah, 2016), high school students (Hamada, 2011; Villavicencio & Serrano, 2023), and elementary school kids (Zaidan, 2021) in enhancing listening skills. Similarly, studies have been conducted in ESL/EFL contexts on the effects of using the shadowing listening technique for enhancing bottom-up skills (Hamada, 2015) as well as L2 pronunciation (Foote & McDonough, 2017). Clearly, research on utilizing the shadowing listening technique for language development has been attempted from various pedagogical and theoretical angles. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the existing literature regarding effective strategies to enhance listening skills in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap by investigating the potential impact of incorporating the shadowing listening technique into language teaching to enhance the listening comprehension of ESL undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya. By incorporating the shadowing listening technique into language teaching, this study aims to offer a novel approach to improve listening proficiency among ESL undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study addresses the following research questions:

- How effective is the use of shadowing as a listening technique in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of undergraduate ESL learners?
- What are the perceptions of undergraduate ESL learners regarding the use of the shadowing listening technique to enhance their listening comprehension skills?

Materials and Methods

Study Design

In this study, a mixed-methods research framework is used to investigate the effectiveness of the shadowing listening technique in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of undergraduate ESL learners. The research design follows an experimental study, incorporating both a control and an experimental group.

Population and Sample

The purposive sample in this study comprises 40 ESL undergraduates (20 students from one class), a mix of males and females aged 19 years or older, at the Faculty of Humanities, who are enrolled in the English for Humanities course. This sample depicts the population of ESL undergraduates in Sri Lanka. This will be an ideal sample for this study because undergraduates in the Faculty of Humanities are more likely to engage with language-related studies, requiring advanced language proficiency in terms of all four skills to succeed in their career fields.

Data Collection Tools

The research instruments include a pre-test, a post-test, and structured interviews with a focus group of six participants from the experimental group. This focus group was randomly selected based on the students with the highest average post-test score. Each paper consisted of five multiple-choice items and five gap-filling items, while the allotted time to complete the paper was 20 minutes. The interview

questionnaire comprised eight open-ended questions designed based on Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) Framework. Quantitative data gathered from the pre-test and post-test results measure the effectiveness of the shadowing listening technique, while qualitative data from structured interviews provide insights into learners' perceptions of the technique. The treatment was conducted over a period of five weeks.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis involves evaluating the listening comprehension of each student during both pre- and post-tests. Then, the scores obtained in the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using independent and paired-sample t-tests to scrutinize the significant difference in their performance.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews underwent Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive approach of Thematic Analysis (TA) to explore patterns in learners' perceptions.

Results

Quantitative Results

The study aimed to evaluate the effect of the shadowing listening technique on the listening comprehension of ESL learners. Pre-test and post-test scores were utilised to assess listening comprehension enhancement via t-test analysis.

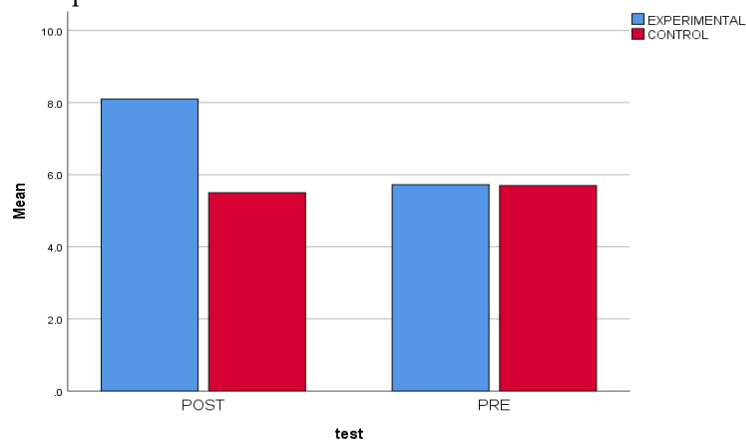
Table 1: Independent sample statistics of the pre-test

PRE-TEST	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-value
	Experimental	20	5.725	1.3521	0.952
	Control	20	5.700	1.2503	

Table 2: Independent sample statistics of the post-test

POST-TEST	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-value
	Experimental	20	8.10	1.210	0.000
	Control	20	5.50	1.357	

Figure 1: Pre-test and post-test mean score differences



According to Table 1, the mean pre-test score was 5.72 in the experimental group, whereas 5.70 in the control group. This negligible difference (0.025) suggests that both groups started with similar baseline

listening comprehension skills before the treatment. The experimental group's mean, however, increased significantly to 8.10 following the intervention, indicating notable improvement (Figure 1). Conversely, there was no improvement in the control group's mean score, which remained nearly the same at 5.50. Hence, the experimental group's mean escalated by approximately 2.38 points from the pre-test to the post-test, whereas the control group's mean decreased slightly by 0.20 points. The standard deviation for the experimental group (1.3521) and control group (1.2503) indicates that the initial listening scores of both groups were similarly variable.

However, after the intervention, the experimental group depicted a decreased score of 1.210, suggesting that scores became more consistent. This means the participants performed more uniformly in their post-test. Conversely, the control group's standard deviation increased to 1.357, indicating slightly more variation in performance after the post-test, despite the lack of significant improvement. Additionally, the p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) for the post-test is 0.000, which is well below the standard significance threshold of 0.05. This further confirms that the experimental and control groups' post-test results varied statistically significantly, implying that there is a difference between the scores obtained by the learners in the control and experimental groups.

In addition to the statistical significance, the effect size was also calculated to determine the practical significance of the difference between the post-test of the experimental and control groups. The Cohen's d score for this study was 1.62, which represents a very large effect size using Cohen's (1988) criteria (0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large, > 1.00 = very large). This suggests that the shadowing technique did not merely produce a statistically significant improvement but also had a substantial impact on learners' listening comprehension. The large effect size confirms that the improvement in the experimental group's performance is not only reliable but also educationally meaningful. Therefore, the findings provide strong evidence that shadowing is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing listening comprehension among adult ESL learners.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis in this study is based on the responses obtained through structured interviews. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) identified five principal themes that summarise students' experiences with the shadowing listening technique: Initial scepticism and curiosity, increased focus and active engagement in listening, improvement in listening speed and word recognition, enhancement of pronunciation and intonation, and positive impact on listening comprehension test performance. These topics illustrate the beneficial effects and the difficulties faced by students throughout the execution of the shadowing listening technique (Appendix A).

A common theme among participants was an initial sense of scepticism or nervousness about the shadowing listening technique. This was a notable theme throughout the analysis, indicating that while learners are open to new methods, they also have initial apprehensions regarding the feasibility of the approaches. Unlike passive listening exercises, such as listening to audiobooks, the shadowing listening technique required active engagement (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), which led to noticeable improvements in comprehension. Therefore, the second theme reflects that the shadowing listening technique facilitated increased concentration and active participation during the listening process, which is necessary for effective listening comprehension development. Moreover, the responses scrutinize the fact that the shadowing listening approach facilitates the development of micro-listening skills, including quick word recognition and faster processing of spoken language, which enables learners to comprehend spoken English more efficiently. Additionally, the respondents indicate that the shadowing listening technique facilitated the enhancement of listening comprehension skills as well as exposed the learners to natural language use, contributing to their speaking and listening accuracy. Ultimately, the learners believe that shadowing helped them in answering comprehension questions

more effectively, suggesting a direct correlation between the technique and improved performance on listening assessments.

Discussion

This study's quantitative findings indicate that the shadowing listening technique significantly enhances listening comprehension in ESL learners. The significant enhancement in post-test scores, especially the difference between the mean test scores of the experimental (8.10) and control groups (5.50), underscores the efficacy of the shadowing listening strategy.

These results corroborate Sumarsih's study (2017), which found that the shadowing listening technique enhances learners' capacity to decode spoken input more efficiently, resulting in quantifiable improvements in listening comprehension. In his study, a sample of EFL undergraduates from Indonesia was used following an experimental research design. The experimental and control groups' mean scores varied greatly, according to the outcomes ($F = 8.98$, $p = 0.004 < 0.05$). This is consistent with the results of the present investigation, which support the idea that shadowing is a useful method for improving the listening comprehension skills of undergraduate learners. Moreover, the findings of this study align with the study conducted by Arbain et al. (2023). Correspondingly, the researchers have used an experimental study with a sample of EFL undergraduates. According to them, the EFL undergraduates in the experimental group who had instruction using the shadowing listening technique performed better than the control group who learned through traditional methods. The t-test analysis of that study depicts the post-test mean score of the experimental group as 15.70, while the control group has a mean score of 11.33. Hence, it is obvious that the results of the study of Arbin et al. (2023) support the results obtained in the present study.

On the other hand, the qualitative findings reveal valuable insights regarding the perceptions of the undergraduate ESL learners towards the shadowing listening technique suggesting that it is an effective strategy to enhance listening comprehension of ESL learners.

The findings of this study align with the previous study conducted by Binarkaheni & Dewangga (2024). According to that study (Binarkaheni & Dewangga, 2024), the researcher has noticed that "the participants were shocked and confused" when introduced to shadowing during cycle one (p. 63). Additionally, they observed that the "participants were frustrated" because the tasks demanded listening and speaking simultaneously (p. 63). However, by the end of cycle two, the participants were enthusiastically engaging with the technique while showing improvement in listening comprehension (Binarkaheni & Dewangga, 2024). Additionally, Arthurson's study (2019) investigated the learners' perceptions regarding the shadowing listening technique through surveys. Accordingly, "seventeen out of nineteen students either agreed or strongly agreed" that shadowing was productive in upgrading their listening skills (Arthurson, 2019, p. 213). Another experimental study by Hamada (2011) used surveys to examine students' insights relevant to the shadowing approach. In that study, "Fourteen students reported that they can listen to sounds more clearly," and "Four students responded that the speed of speech felt slower than before" after exposure to the technique (Hamada, 2011, p. 156). Moreover, Villavicencio & Serranos' study (2023) utilized an experimental design with a survey to investigate perceptions regarding the efficiency of the shadowing method. According to the findings of that study, 85% agreed that their listening skills had improved through the new technique. Hence, it is clear that the shadowing listening technique is a cognitively engaging and pedagogically valuable technique for improving listening comprehension skills among undergraduate ESL learners.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of the shadowing listening technique as a strategy to enhance listening comprehension in ESL undergraduate learners. The results demonstrate that this tactic markedly improves listening comprehension by promoting better retention, pronunciation, and comprehension skills, supporting the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition. Furthermore, qualitative responses from the structured interview highlighted students' positive attitudes towards shadowing, emphasizing its effectiveness in developing listening fluency and confidence.

The study holds significant contributions for the field of ESL teaching and learning in the Sri Lankan context and beyond. Firstly, addressing the persistent challenge of low English listening proficiency among ESL learners in Sri Lanka is crucial for their academic and professional success. By investigating the impact of incorporating the shadowing listening technique in language teaching, this study will provide insights into innovative strategies that can effectively enhance listening skills among undergraduate ESL learners. The results of this study will have implications for future research, theory development, counseling, and policy formulation in ESL education. By demonstrating the effectiveness of innovative teaching strategies such as the shadowing listening technique, the study will guide educators and policymakers in improving language teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and instructional practices based on learners' perceptions. As the findings depict positive attitudes towards the shadowing listening strategy, the educators can formulate policies focusing on listening skills by incorporating active strategies into the curriculum. In this way, the teaching and learning curriculum may lead to a whole different path with active learning tasks instead of boring repetitive strategies.

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Appendix A – Thematic Analysis Table

Participant responses	Generated codes	Themes
Participant 1: "I wasn't sure if I could keep up with the speaker at first..."	Initial uncertainty	Initial skepticism & curiosity
Participant 3: "I was excited to try something new, but at the same time, I was unsure if I could keep up with a native like speaker..."	Curiosity & hesitation	
Participant 4: "It trained my brain to listen more actively..."	Active listening	Increased focus and active engagement
Participant 1: "Shadowing really helped me focus more on spoken English..."	Improved focus on speech	
Participant 2: "Yes, my listening speed improved significantly, and I also became more accurate in recognizing words, even in fast conversations..."	Improved accuracy in word recognition	Improvement in listening speed and word recognition
Participant 4: "It definitely helped me improve my listening speed and accuracy..."	Faster comprehension	
Participant 5: "I could mimic the rise and fall of sentences better".	Improved intonation awareness	Enhancement of pronunciation and intonation
Participant 6: "Shadowing helped me pronounce words like native speakers..."	Improved pronunciation	
Participant 1: "Definitely! I was able to answer comprehension questions faster and understood the speaker's words more clearly compared to the pre-test..."	Improved test performance	Positive impact on listening comprehension test performance
Participant 2: "Yes, I believe shadowing helped me perform better on the post-test".	Faster comprehension processing	

<https://doi.org/10.54389/HYNR1098>

Implementing a Multiple Intelligence - Differentiated Instruction Model for Teaching Reading to Pre-Primary Students in the English as a Second Language Classroom in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This research addresses the growing interest in catering to diverse learning needs, focusing on integrating Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory and differentiated instruction (DI) in pre-primary bilingual ESL classrooms. The study aims to explore how the MI-DI model can enhance the development of reading skills among pre-primary ESL learners, offering insights into its benefits and limitations. The research problem is rooted in the lack of empirical studies on the combined MI-DI model's application and impact, particularly in pre-primary ESL reading development. The study's significance lies in its potential to create more inclusive and effective learning environments by catering to individual learning styles and intelligence. This research's methodology involves several phases: initial assessment, model development, and application, with data collected through quantitative and qualitative measures. The study includes thirty pre-primary ESL students at a nursery in the Galle district known for its English-focused nursery education. Quantitative data were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to capture the nuances of teachers' ideologies through transcriptions of teacher interviews by adhering to ethical considerations, ensuring comprehensive understanding of the MI-DI model's effectiveness in improving reading skills. The findings can be used to contribute to enhancing language education practices in bilingual settings, empowering both teachers and learners in the process. Furthermore, the study guides teachers by providing a universal strategy applicable to any ESL classroom. This strategy supports the diverse needs of learners by identifying different intelligences and framing them as assets rather than hindrances, thereby fostering more inclusive and effective learning environments.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction; Multiple Intelligence Theory; Reading Skills; Strategy; Teacher

Introduction

In today's increasingly diverse classrooms, teachers are challenged to face the challenge of catering to students' varying learning styles, backgrounds, and abilities, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Traditional teacher-centered methods, often reliant on uniform instruction, have been criticized for neglecting learner diversity and limiting student engagement (Dryden & Vos,

2005; Rodriguez, 2012). To address this, Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory (1975) and Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction (DI) framework (2001, 2006) have been widely applied to create more inclusive and responsive pedagogy. These approaches acknowledge that learners possess distinct strengths and require varied instructional strategies. However, research has typically examined MI and DI separately, with a strong focus on teachers' perspectives (Hettiarachchi & Das, 2012; Hettiarachchi & Ranaweera, 2013), leaving a gap in understanding how the integration of MI and DI can enhance specific skills, particularly reading, among young ESL learners.

The academic importance of this study lies in addressing this gap by combining MI and DI into a unified pedagogical model (MI-DI) for teaching reading. While studies highlight the effectiveness of scaffolded and differentiated strategies in ESL reading instruction (McBride, 2004; Tomlinson, 2006), there has been limited empirical focus on pre-primary learners' experiences in bilingual contexts such as Sri Lanka. Practically, this research holds promise for improving inclusivity, engagement, and learning outcomes in early language classrooms, where reading serves as a foundation for long-term educational success.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) identify and assess students' dominant intelligences; (2) apply a differentiated instruction approach focused on their dominant intelligences through the MI-DI model, which combines the Multiple Intelligences theory with the differentiated instruction approach for reading instruction; and (3) evaluate the model's impact on learners' reading skills and overall classroom engagement. To achieve these aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the dominant intelligence among pre-primary ESL learners?
- How does the MI-DI model enhance the reading skills of pre-primary ESL learners?
- What are the benefits and challenges of applying the MI-DI model in a real classroom context?

Materials and Methods

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods action research design to explore how the MI-DI model can enhance the reading skills of pre-primary ESL learners. The approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to implement and evaluate instructional strategies in the natural classroom setting while collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component measured learners' reading progress through diagnostic assessments, while the qualitative component captured insights from teachers and parents regarding classroom practices and learners' engagement.

The study involved 30 pre-primary learners (ages 4-5) from a private preschool in Galle, Sri Lanka. The participants represented mixed language backgrounds, with English as a second language, and were at an early stage of literacy development. In addition, two pre-primary teachers participated in the study as adult interviewees. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and approval for conducting the study during school hours was granted by the school administration, ensuring compliance with ethical standards.

Data were collected using multiple instruments to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions:

Diagnostic Reading Assessments

These were designed specifically for this study and aligned with pre-primary literacy benchmarks. They measured learners' initial reading abilities and progress post-intervention. The assessments included letter-sound recognition, word identification, and picture-word matching to evaluate early decoding and comprehension skills.

MI Profiling Activities

A two-step process was used to identify learners' dominant intelligences. In Phase 1, the two pre-primary teachers were provided with an Intelligence Ranking-Point System Chart containing the names of all 30 students. They evaluated each student's multiple intelligence areas by allocating points based on observed behaviors and skills. In Phase 2, the TIMI Multiple Intelligence Inventory (Teele, 1995), a standardized MI tool adapted for this context, was applied. The teachers' evaluations and the TIMI Inventory were compared to determine each child's dominant intelligence area and to ensure consistency between the two measures.

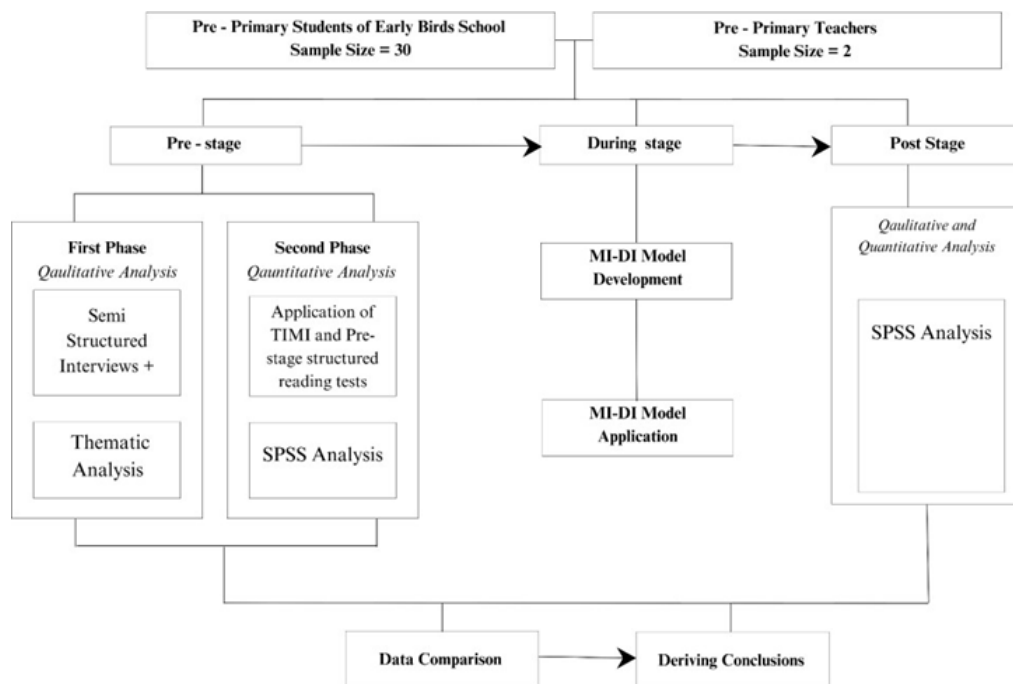
Classroom Observations & Field Notes

These documented learners' engagement, behaviors, and responses to MI-DI-based instruction during the intervention phase.

Semi-structured Interviews with Teachers

To complement the quantitative data and classroom observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two pre-primary ESL teachers who participated in the study. These interviews were designed to explore the teachers' perspectives on implementing the MI-DI model, including their experiences of tailoring instruction, perceived benefits and challenges, and their views on how multiple intelligences could be addressed in early reading instruction. Open-ended questions allowed teachers to elaborate on issues such as the feasibility of differentiating tasks, classroom conditions, and the potential of the MI-DI framework to support reading development. Interview transcripts were later coded and thematically analysed alongside other qualitative data.

Figure 1: Exploratory sequential mixed method design in the present study: Author's Construct



Procedure

The intervention was conducted over six weeks and involved three stages:

- Pre-assessment - Learners' reading skills and dominant intelligence were assessed using the diagnostic reading assessments, the Intelligence Ranking-Point System Chart completed by the two pre-primary teachers, and the TIMI Multiple Intelligence Inventory. This established the baseline

for measuring growth.

- Intervention - Differentiated reading activities were designed and delivered according to learners' MI profiles. For example, musical learners practiced phonics through songs, while visual learners engaged with picture-based storytelling. Classroom observations were recorded throughout the interventions, and the two teachers and parents provided supplementary insights via interviews.
- Post-assessment - Reading progress was evaluated using the same diagnostic tools applied in the pre-assessment, and results were compared to measure the impact of the MI-DI model on reading development and classroom engagement.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from diagnostic reading assessments were analyzed descriptively using mean scores and comparisons between pre- and post-intervention performance. Qualitative data from classroom observations, field notes, and teacher interviews were thematically coded to identify patterns of improvement, engagement, and challenges in implementing the MI-DI model. Integration of both data types provided a comprehensive understanding of the model's effectiveness in enhancing reading skills.

Results

Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers

The interviews with two pre-primary ESL teachers revealed consistent themes regarding using the MI-DI model. Both teachers emphasized the importance of supportive, engaging learning environments and tailoring instruction to students' needs. Teachers reported awareness of multiple intelligences but cited time constraints and workload as barriers to fully differentiating activities. They highlighted that even partial integration of MI elements boosted student engagement and confidence. Key challenges included difficulty catering to all intelligences simultaneously and limited time for planning and implementing differentiated tasks.

Overall, both teachers believed that the MI-DI framework had the potential to understand individual learner needs and cater to their needs, creating a more efficient and approachable learning environment.

Identification of Dominant Intelligences

Teachers completed an intelligence ranking-point chart, which was compared against each child's TIMI Multiple Intelligence Inventory (N=30). Results showed overlap between teacher evaluations and TIMI findings for several students, though not consistently.

Table 1. Example of teacher vs. TIMI assessment of dominant intelligences (excerpt).

Child	Teacher Dominant Intelligence	TIMI Dominant Intelligence	Match
A	Verbal/Linguistic	Verbal/Linguistic	✓
B	Interpersonal	Visual/Spatial	✗
D	Kinesthetic/Bodily	Kinesthetic/Bodily	✓

Overall, results indicated that while both methods provided valuable insights, complete agreement was limited. As Danaci (2022) notes, intelligence is shaped by hereditary, experiential, and environmental factors, complicating singular conclusions about each child's dominant intelligence.

Table 2. Distribution of dominant intelligence across the sample (N=30).

		V/S	V/L	K/B	M/R	I/S	L/M	P/I	Dominant Area	Percentage of Dominant Area.	Overall Dominant Area
Child A	Teacher	3	6	2	4	4	4	3	V/L	21.4	V/L
	TIMI	4	6	1	5	2	3	2	V/L	21.4	
Child B	Teacher	4	3	4	2	3	1	5	P/I	17.8	V/S
	TIMI	6	2	3	4	3	3	4	V/S	21.4	
Child C	Teacher	3	3	5	6	2	4	4	M/R	21.4	M/R
	TIMI	3	5	2	3	3	4	2	V/L	17.8	
Child D	Teacher	4	2	5	3	2	2	4	K/B	17.8	K/B
	TIMI	4	3	5	2	4	1	2	K/B	17.8	
Child E	Teacher	6	3	1	2	5	3	5	V/L	17.8	I/S
	TIMI	3	2	3	4	7	5	4	I/S	25	
Child F	Teacher	6	2	4	3	4	3	3	V/S	21.4	P/I
	TIMI	4	5	2	2	4	2	7	P/I	25	
Child G	Teacher	4	2	1	3	4	2	2	V/S - I/S	14.2	L/M
	TIMI	3	3	2	2	2	7	4	L/M	25	
Child H	Teacher	5	3	4	2	3	2	4	V/S	17.8	V/S
	TIMI	6	4	4	1	2	4	3	V/S	21.4	
Child I	Teacher	5	2	6	2	3	3	2	K/B	17.8	K/B
	TIMI	5	1	7	3	2	4	3	K/B	17.8	
Child J	Teacher	4	3	5	3	2	2	4	K/B	17.8	V/L
	TIMI	4	6	4	2	1	1	2	V/L	21.4	
Child K	Teacher	3	2	3	3	7	4	5	I/S	17.8	I/S
	TIMI	6	4	4	4	5	3	4	V/S	21.4	
Child L	Teacher	4	6	3	5	2	3	3	V/L	21.4	M/R
	TIMI	3	4	5	7	4	5	3	M/R	25	
Child M	Teacher	7	3	3	6	3	4	4	M/R	25	M/R
	TIMI	4	5	4	6	4	2	4	M/R	21.4	
Child N	Teacher	5	3	4	6	5	5	3	M/R	21.4	V/S
	TIMI	7	6	5	3	3	4	4	V/S	25	
Child O	Teacher	5	3	3	4	6	5	3	I/S	21.4	I/S
	TIMI	2	4	4	2	6	3	5	I/S	21.4	

Child P	Teacher	6	4	7	4	3	5	3	K/B	25	K/B
	TIMI	2	4	7	04	2	4	4	K/B	25	
Child Q	Teacher	6	5	3	2	1	3	5	V/S	21.4	P/I
	TIMI	5	4	2	2	3	2	7	P/I	25	
Child R	Teacher	4	3	4	6	5	3	3	M-R	21.4	M/R - I/S
	TIMI	3	5	5	5	6	4	4	I/S	21.4	
Child S	Teacher	4	6	2	3	4	4	5	V/L	21.4	V/L
	TIMI	4	5	3	4	3	4	4	V/L	17.8	
Child T	Teacher	5	4	3	4	3	4	2	V/S	17.8	L/M
	TIMI	6	5	3	5	2	7	4	L/M	21.4	

Child U	Teacher	3	3	3	2	4	6	3	L/M	21.4	L/M
	TIMI	2	2	5	1	1	4	2	K/B	17.8	
Child V	Teacher	3	3	5	4	3	4		K/B	17.8	V/S
	TIMI	6	5	3	2	3	3		V/S	21.4	
Child	Teacher	5	6	5	3	4	4		V/L	21.4	K/B

W	TIMI	4	3	7	3	3	2		K/B	25	
Child X	Teacher	5	6	5	4	3	2	2	V/L	21.4	V/L
	TIMI	5	4	5	3	2	4	3	V/S-K/B	17.8	
Child Y	Teacher	4	2	3	3	4	2	6	P/I	21.4	P/I
	TIMI	4	5	4	2	2	3	4	V/L	17.8	
Child Z	Teacher	5	3	3	6	3	2	3	M/R	21.4	M/R
	TIMI	3	2	4	5	4	3	2	M/R	17.8	
Child A2	Teacher	6	5	2	2	3	4	4	V/S	21.4	V/L
	TIMI	4	7	4	5	5	2	2	V/L	25	
Child B2	Teacher	4	4	3	2	5	6	2	L/M	21.4	L/M
	TIMI	5	4	4	3	4	6	3	L/M	21.4	
Child C2	Teacher	4	5	4	3	3	4	5	V/L-P/I	17.8	K/B
	TIMI	5	3	7	2	2	3	4	K/B	25	
Child D2	Teacher	4	3	2	4	5	3	4	I/S	17.8	V/S
	TIMI	6	4	3	2	3	4	5	V/S	21.4	

Pre-Test Reading Performance

A diagnostic reading test was administered before the MI-DI intervention. The average score was 56.37 (SD = 20.99). Most learners fell within Grade C, indicating below-average reading proficiency before the intervention

Post-Test Reading Performance

Following six weeks of MI-DI intervention, a post-test was administered. The average score rose to 61.93, indicating an overall improvement. The score distribution shifted slightly left (negatively

skewed), showing that more students achieved higher scores compared to the pre-test.

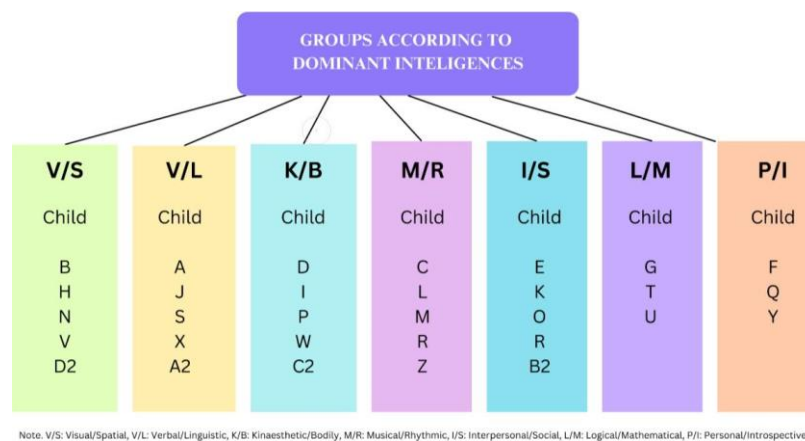
Group-Wise Analysis by Intelligence Type

Performance gains were further analyzed by MI group.

- Visual/Spatial: Mean increased from 42.40 → 50.20.
- Verbal/Linguistic: Mean increased from 58.80 → 66.20.
- Kinesthetic/Bodily: Mean increased from 67.00 → 72.40.
- Musical/Rhythmic: Mean increased from 50.00 → 53.00.
- Interpersonal: Mean increased from 67.00 → 71.25.
- Logical/Mathematical: Slight decrease from 62.00 → 61.67.
- Intrapersonal: Significant increase from 48.67 → 59.67.

Overall, six out of seven MI groups showed improvement, suggesting that the MI-DI model had a generally positive effect on reading development.

Figure 2: Categorization according to the Child’s activity preferences according to the teacher and TIMI scores, Source: Author’s Construct



Discussion

Dominant Intelligences in Pre-Primary ESL Students

The analysis of dominant intelligence among pre-primary ESL learners highlighted the diverse learning profiles in the classroom. Consistent with Gardner’s (1975) theory, students exhibited varying strengths across visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/social, logical/mathematical, and personal/introspective domains. Understanding these dominant intelligences allowed educators to tailor instruction to students’ strengths, enhancing engagement and motivation. Identifying and developing dominant intelligence areas early is crucial, as it influences academic performance and overall learning outcomes (Batdi, 2017; Goodnough, 2001). In this study, leveraging teachers’ intuitive knowledge and point-system assessments proved effective for recognizing these diverse profiles.

Impact of the MI-DI Model on Reading Skills

The MI-DI model’s personalized approach led to measurable improvements in students’ reading abilities. Post-test results demonstrated that most students scored higher after lessons structured around their dominant intelligence, reflecting deeper comprehension and retention. By alternating whole-class instruction with intelligence-specific group activities, the model accommodated individual learning preferences without isolating students from the broader lesson. These findings align with Mehta (2002), who emphasized that understanding and supporting individual strengths enhances

learning outcomes, particularly for younger ESL learners with diverse needs

Benefits of the MI-DI Model

The study confirms several advantages of the MI-DI model for pre-primary ESL classrooms. By addressing multiple learning styles, it fosters a more inclusive and engaging environment (Gardner, 1999; Armstrong, 2012). Students showed increased motivation, deeper conceptual understanding, and a positive attitude toward learning, supporting the notion that intelligence-focused instruction can promote long-term academic growth. Additionally, the model encouraged creativity in teaching, as educators designed activities to align with varying intelligence, enhancing both student engagement and instructional effectiveness.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite its benefits, implementing the MI-DI model posed practical challenges. Time constraints, resource demands, and the need for ongoing professional development were notable barriers (Tomlinson, 2001). Some students accustomed to traditional methods required additional support to adapt to the differentiated approach. Moreover, identifying dominant intelligence with complete precision remains challenging due to the complex interplay of heredity, experience, and environment (Danaci, 2022). These limitations highlight the need for careful planning and support when applying the model in real classrooms.

Implications for Practice

The findings underscore the value of integrating MI-DI strategies into pre-primary ESL instruction. By recognizing diverse intelligence and aligning teaching methods accordingly, educators can enhance reading outcomes, engagement, and student confidence. While challenges exist, the model offers a practical framework for differentiated instruction that is adaptable to diverse classroom contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the tailored Multiple Intelligence Differentiated Instruction (MI-DI) model effectively develops pre-primary ESL learners' reading skills. By identifying students' dominant intelligence and aligning instruction accordingly, the model fostered a more engaging, inclusive, and productive bilingual learning environment. Despite limitations such as the small sample size and context-specific scope, the findings provide valuable insights for ESL pedagogy, emphasizing the potential of intelligence-focused, student-centered approaches to enhance early literacy. The study contributes to improving language education practices and offers a foundation for further research across diverse age groups and educational settings.

Acknowledgement

Gratitude is extended to the Department of English Language Teaching at the University of Kelaniya for their guidance and support throughout the study. Appreciation is also extended to the lecturers and professors who contributed to the academic development of the researcher, as well as to the participants and academic staff at Early Birds School, Galle, for their cooperation and assistance.

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<https://doi.org/10.54389/YUXU4627>

Enhancing English Proficiency through Level-Based Flipped Learning: Insights from a First-Time Implementation in a Computing Faculty

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Abstract

This study reports on the first implementation of a flipped English module at the Faculty of Computing, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT), designed to improve students' speaking proficiency through a custom mobile application integrated with AI-driven tasks. The flipped approach encouraged learners to engage with video lessons, quizzes, and practice activities before class, while classroom sessions were reserved for interactive assessments and communicative practice. Data were collected from 266 first-year undergraduates using a structured online survey consisting of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative responses were thematically coded to capture student perspectives in depth. The findings demonstrate high levels of engagement, particularly with quizzes and instructional videos, which students described as helpful in consolidating knowledge and preparing for class. Many participants reported improvements in pronunciation, confidence, and overall communication skills, indicating that the flipped model effectively supported oral language development. In-class sessions were also viewed positively, with students valuing the opportunities for practice and feedback, and recognizing the strong alignment between app-based tasks and classroom activities. Nonetheless, several challenges were identified, including technical glitches, loss of progress due to the lack of an autosave function, heavy workloads, and the need for more interactive speaking opportunities. These results highlight both the strengths and limitations of flipped CALL approaches in STEM-based higher education. Overall, the study suggests that integrating flipped learning with AI-driven tools can significantly enhance English proficiency, provided that issues of workload, app design, and feedback practices are carefully addressed.

Keywords: *Flipped approach, Speaking skills, ESL, Custom app*

Introduction

The globalization of higher education has made English proficiency crucial, especially in countries where it is not the dominant language but serves as the medium of instruction in STEM disciplines. In Sri Lanka, English proficiency strongly influences academic success and employability (Wijesinghe &

Gunawardena, 2021). Yet, large student cohorts, limited instructional time, and varied proficiency levels often reduce the effectiveness of traditional teaching. Flipped learning offers a promising alternative by shifting content delivery outside class and reserving classroom time for active, higher-order learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). In English language education, flipped models have proven effective for building communicative competence, as they allow more time for interaction and practice in class (Vygotsky, 1978; Teng, 2021). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) further enhances this model, particularly through AI-based speaking tasks that provide immediate feedback and extended oral practice opportunities (Zou et al., 2023).

Although flipped learning has been increasingly applied in higher education, little is known about its effectiveness when tailored to proficiency levels in English language modules within computing faculties in Sri Lanka. Existing studies largely focus on general EAP contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how a level-based flipped model may support undergraduates in technical disciplines where English is often a secondary concern.

The methodological design of the flipped classroom was underpinned by constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, which emphasize scaffolding, interaction, and learner autonomy (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1970). Drawing on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), pre-class activities targeted lower-order cognitive skills, while in-class sessions were designed to promote higher-order application and analysis. In terms of second language acquisition, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) informed the provision of comprehensible input through pre-class materials, while Swain's Output Hypothesis (1995) shaped the design of in-class speaking and writing activities. This theoretical grounding provided the rationale for adopting a level-based flipped model, ensuring that both weaker and stronger learners benefited from differentiated input and interactive practice.

This study reports on the first implementation of a flipped English module at the Faculty of Computing, SLIIT, designed to strengthen first-year students' speaking proficiency. The objective of this study was to examine how a level-based flipped English module could enhance student engagement, participation, and perceptions of learning in a computing faculty. Specifically, the study aimed to evaluate the integration of app-based lessons and AI-driven tasks as tools to support speaking proficiency. Using a custom mobile app for pre-class lessons and AI-driven tasks, the course maximized class time for interactive assessments and communication. The study addresses three research questions:

- (a) How did students engage with the app-based course?
- (b) How did they participate in in-class sessions?
- (c) What were their perceptions of the flipped model?

Methodology

This study used a survey-based descriptive design to examine student engagement and perceptions of a flipped, app-supported English course. The aim was not to test hypotheses but to document students' experiences during its first implementation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Participants included 266 first-year computing undergraduates out of a total enrolment of about 1,200, representing roughly 22% of the cohort. Although not exhaustive, this response rate was sufficient to capture key patterns and insights (Fowler, 2014). Data was collected through a structured online questionnaire containing Likert-scale items on engagement, usefulness, and challenges, as well as open-ended questions that allowed students to provide qualitative reflections beyond numerical trends.

Quantitative survey items were examined using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and averages) to identify participation patterns and general attitudes. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically, with comments coded under recurring themes such as benefits, challenges, and

suggestions. This mixed approach provided both broad trends and deeper insights, consistent with Patton’s (2015) view that numbers alone cannot capture the complexity of human experience.

The study followed standard ethical practices in the collection and handling of data. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and students were informed of the purpose of the study prior to completing the questionnaire. No email addresses or personally identifying information were collected, ensuring the anonymity of all responses. The survey was circulated online, and students were free to withdraw by simply choosing not to respond. The data was used solely for research purposes and reported in aggregate form, thereby safeguarding confidentiality and protecting participants’ privacy.

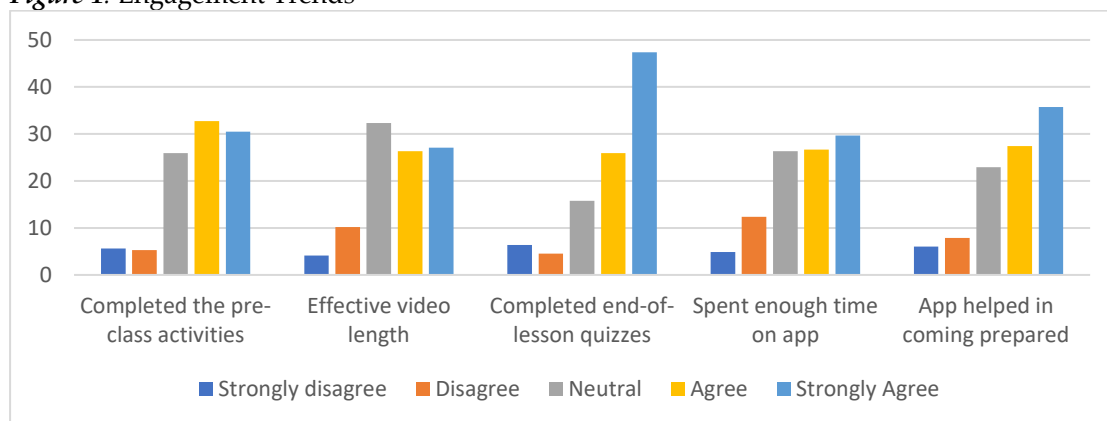
Results

This section reports findings from the student survey on the flipped English module. Quantitative results from Likert-scale items (Sections A–E) are presented using descriptive statistics and charts to show patterns in engagement, speaking improvement, in-class practices, and app usability. Qualitative responses (Section F) are analyzed thematically to capture students’ views on strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

The survey included 266 first-year undergraduates: 59 from Group A (high proficiency), 75 from Group B, 59 from Group C, and 73 from Group D (low proficiency). Almost all participants (265/266) used the app, indicating strong engagement potential for the flipped learning model. The balanced representation across proficiency levels allows analysis of how different learners interacted with app-based preparation and in-class activities.

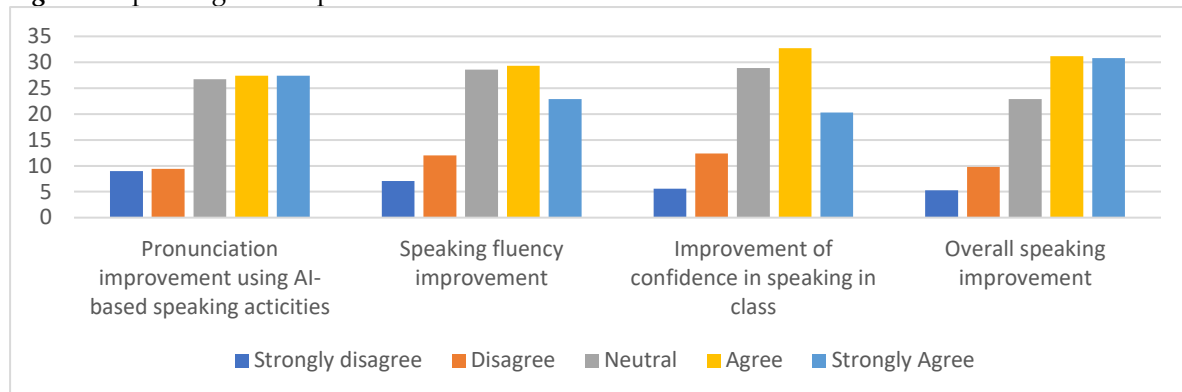
Most students reported regular pre-class lesson completion, with 168 agreeing or strongly agreeing. Video length was generally acceptable, and end-of-lesson quizzes had the highest engagement, with 126 strongly agreeing that they completed them. Students indicated spending sufficient time on the app and felt it helped them come prepared. Neutral and disagree responses suggest variability in engagement, emphasizing the importance of guidance and motivation strategies to ensure consistent participation.

Figure 1: Engagement Trends



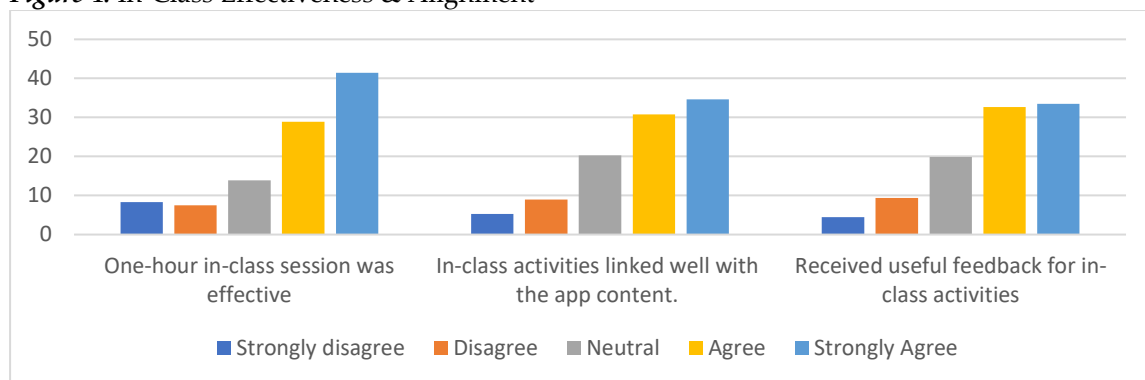
Responses indicate moderate to strong perceived gains in pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. While 73 students strongly agreed that AI-based activities improved pronunciation, neutral responses were substantial, highlighting that some learners may need additional scaffolding or personalized feedback. Overall, 165–170 students agreed or strongly agreed that speaking skills improved during the module, demonstrating that the app contributed to measurable development in oral proficiency.

Figure 3: Speaking Development Outcomes



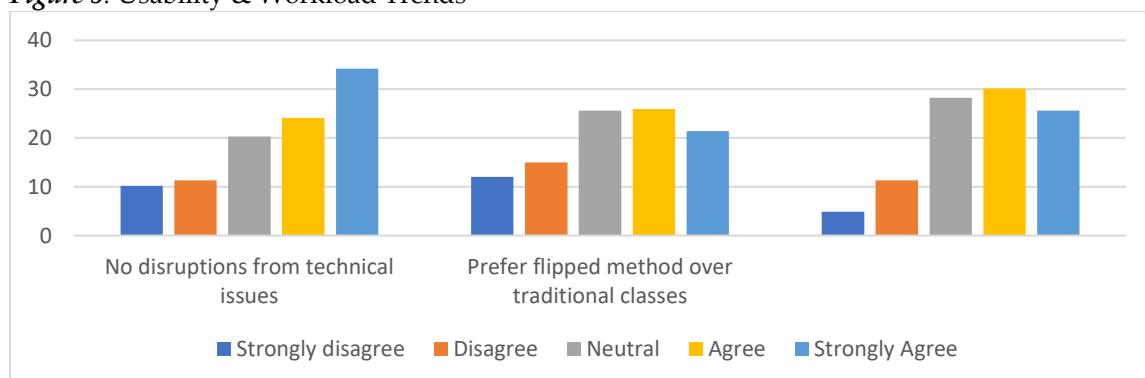
Students generally viewed the one-hour face-to-face sessions as effective, with 70% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Classroom activities were largely aligned with app content (65% agreement), and feedback was valued by 66% of students. Neutral and disagree responses highlight variability in engagement or clarity of activity alignment. The findings suggest that while the flipped approach effectively translated to classroom practice for most learners, refinement may enhance consistency and maximize learning for all proficiency levels.

Figure 4: In-Class Effectiveness & Alignment



The app was largely perceived as user-friendly (58% agreement), though 21% reported difficulties, indicating room for improved interface design and technical support. Technical issues moderately affected learning for nearly one-third of students, emphasizing the need for reliable infrastructure. More than half of the cohort preferred the flipped model over traditional classes, yet a notable neutral group suggests adjustment challenges. Overall, usability was a strength, but technical and workload considerations remain critical to sustained engagement.

Figure 5: Usability & Workload Trends



Students highlighted quizzes, video lessons, and AI-based speaking activities as the most helpful features of the flipped model. One student noted, *“The quizzes were very useful; they helped me understand*

what to focus on in class,” while another commented, “Talking with the AI assistant improved my pronunciation and boosted my confidence.” Ease of access and structured progression were also appreciated. Technical issues, such as progress resetting (“Sometimes the app resets my progress, which is frustrating”), and workload concerns were common suggestions for improvement. Overall, students valued interactive learning but recommended smoother functionality and lighter tasks.

Discussion

The results indicate that the level-based flipped learning approach was largely effective in enhancing English proficiency among first-year computing students. High engagement with pre-class lessons, quizzes, and video content suggests that students valued structured, interactive learning outside the classroom. AI-mediated speaking activities contributed to improved pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, although some learners remained neutral, highlighting differences in individual readiness and experience.

In-class sessions were generally well-received, with most students noting effective use of time, alignment with app-based preparation, and useful feedback. Yet, a minority reported inconsistent experiences, suggesting that more personalized guidance and active participation strategies could further enhance outcomes. While the app was mostly user-friendly, technical glitches and navigation issues were noted, affecting a subset of learners. Despite this, a majority preferred the flipped model over traditional classes, appreciating its flexibility and active learning focus.

Open-ended feedback reinforced these findings, with students emphasizing the value of quizzes, structured content, and AI speaking practice, while recommending improvements in technical reliability, workload, and expanded speaking opportunities. Overall, the study confirms that well-integrated pre-class preparation and interactive classroom components support language development, though attention to technical and pedagogical support is essential for consistent learner benefit.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that level-based flipped learning can effectively enhance English proficiency among first-year computing students. High engagement with app-based lessons, quizzes, and AI speaking activities, coupled with structured in-class practice and feedback, contributed to improvements in speaking skills, confidence, and overall classroom readiness. While most students favoured the flipped model, technical issues, navigation challenges, and workload concerns highlight areas for refinement. Overall, the findings suggest that a well-integrated flipped approach—combining interactive pre-class preparation with active, feedback-rich classroom sessions—supports both autonomous learning and practical language development.

Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Nuwan Kodagoda, Dr. Namalie Walagampaya, and Dr. Sanvitha Kasthuriarachchi for their immense support in initiating this module. Their guidance, encouragement, and invaluable insights have been instrumental in shaping the direction and depth of this work. We are equally grateful to the participants for their active involvement and to our institution for the support and resources extended throughout this process.

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