

Challenges Faced by Sri Lankan Teachers of English within their Academic Institution: A Case Study of KDU

The wonder of teaching can only truly be savored when an individual enters the profession of teaching and delves into the mired grounds of technicalities and complexities of teaching. The challenges faced and efforts to overcome them certainly make the teacher a stronger individual. With this article, I wish to enlighten you on the challenges faced by English language teachers of the establishment, so that undergraduates and forward thinking establishments alike can benefit from the revelations through successfully formulated plans and measures.

KDU, being a defence university and the only one of its kind in the South Asian region, dedicates a considerable time and energy in promoting extracurricular activities of its students and employees, thereby encouraging them to have a balanced lifestyle. The undergraduates are a far cry from being bookworms and actively take part in sports meets, club activities, balls and other gatherings. The lecturers are encouraged equally well to take part in these events and they also contribute to the additional functional programmes and tasks assigned to them by the university. With this arises the first challenge for the English language lecturers. The extra work assigned to lecturers is an effective use of available resources to achieve set goals. At the same time the challenge it presents to the lecturers is to find a balance between the extra work and their traditional tasks of lesson planning, material preparation and delivering lectures without allowing the reduction of hours essential for proper lesson planning and material preparation adversely affect their academic duties. Working in a busy environment that is different from the calm and quiet required for lesson planning should also be considered and handled by the lecturers.

Furthermore, we live in an academic era where the motivation factor of students to study has become the GPA (Grade Point Average). In local national universities, undergraduates select course units that they think would earn them a high GPA contributing towards a good Class, and in the case of the University of Kelaniya, they even drop out of certain subjects after their first year and opt for a "combination" general degree due to a certain subject giving them a low GPA.

In this context, it is not surprising to witness that students lose interest and motivation in studying a subject that does not count towards the GPA. Although the subject of English is not counted for GPA, the fact that undergraduates of KDU still turn up for English language lectures is commendable.

English, being the medium of instruction of this academic institution and studied by undergraduates of all streams of both 1st and 2nd years, is allotted two hours per week in the academic curriculum. Within the two hours the students learn a language of a different language origin (Sanskrit vs Germanic) with a grammatical structure different from the first language of the students. Furthermore, at least one teaching sequence such as presentation, practice and production of the particular language component needs to be carried out if the lesson is to be delivered systematically. What's more, Malcolm Gladwell in his book "Outliers" cited by Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton, comments on a study by Ericsson et al published in the Harvard Business Review which forwards the research findings that true expertise in language learning "is achieved after an individual has invested 10,000 hours in learning or practicing" the skill. Therefore, the students would benefit greatly if the number of hours spent at learning English can be increased in consideration of the value of English to our undergraduates.

Another factor that needs to be much-admired is the facilities that KDU offers its students. I can safely say that some of these facilities, such as e-learning platforms for online learning, use of interactive boards in conducting lectures and the availability of language labs for language learning are not found among some local national universities. Some of the lecture halls are also of a far superior standard than those found in other degree offering universities. Therefore, it can be expected that KDU as a flourishing university in its bloom, will in the near future be able to accommodate the rapidly growing number of students with the required number of well facilitated lecture halls, since when it comes to subjects such as English, the whole of the Intake or at least half of them would have to be accommodated within one lecture hall at a given time. The current size and condition of some of the lecture halls are inadequate to accommodate the growing number of students for each stream of academic study, especially with the opening of the university doors to day scholars, and the lecturers are compelled to make do with whatever rooms are available to conduct their language lessons.



However, due to the high demand of the use of equipment such as multimedia projectors and laptops among the lecturers, a situation which in itself reflects their enthusiasm and commitment to teach, there is sometimes a shuffle to obtain the limited equipment from the related administrative bodies. At the same time, accessibility to existing facilities such as computers, printers and scanners can be improved in consideration of the lecturers and instructors of English so that they can make use of the facilities provided by the university in delivering lectures in line with the global attempt to incorporate technology in language teaching for an effective and productive language learning experience.

As can be thus seen, the university while having many positive aspects when it comes to language teaching, presents its own challenges probably presented to any expanding university's to academic staff. These concerns should not be viewed as undermining the positive attributes that the institution possesses. But a look into the above mentioned concerns can be used to optimize the learning output of the students. This, I am certain, will produce undergraduates who are worthy of their university and who would carry the good name of their mother university to the outside world and make KDU proud.

Reference

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Erandi Kithulgoda
Department of Languages
Faculty of Management, Social sciences & Humanities

