

Despondency of English Language Teaching Departments: Factors Impinging upon the Struggle to Enhance English Language Skills of Undergraduates

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In a context where the increasingly competitive labour market demands individuals to captivate significant skills in the English Language, the role played by the ELTDs in Universities is challenged. A university is a cross-section of a larger society that consists of undergraduates from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, English language skills possessed by this diverse group vary at the entry and exit. Even though the responsibility of propagating the English Language proficiency of undergraduates lies in the hands of ELTDs, relevant literature suggests that ELTDs of the Sri Lankan government universities are lagging behind in achieving the set goals. Besides, this study meticulously explored the factors behind this failure in order to recommend remedial measures to be taken. The sample consisted of 112 third-year students out of 226 of the Faculty of Science, University of Ruhuna. A convenient sampling method was used to determine the sample and a questionnaire comprising open-ended questions was administered to accumulate data. Moreover, to derive a better understanding of the phenomena, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 lecturers of the DELT. It was particularly evident that low proficiency of English at the entry, absenteeism, passive involvement in learning, ragging, and subculture, preconceived notions of students towards English, priority given to core-course units, lack of intrinsic motivation, compartmentalization, the mismatch between the lesson materials and students' desires, make teaching English a struggle at university. Thus, it is argued that the role of ELTDs should be re-conceptualized to equip the undergraduates with the required English language proficiency by introducing innovative teaching methods and incorporating technology, which will in return help to create a conducive English language learning environment.

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