

A Study on Low Student Lecturer Interaction during Lectures in Sri Lankan State Universities

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INTRODUCTION

In the Sri Lankan context, we rarely find students willing to build discussions with the lecturers during the lecture. According to Majeed (2013) 97 per cent of Sri Lankan English medium science students are not answering the questions asked by the lecturer because of fear of public speaking, language problems, fear of giving wrong answers, thinking that other students will answer etc. Also, 80 per cent of Sri Lankan English medium science students not ask questions from the lecturer to clear the doubts due to language problems, cultural effects, fear of public speaking, lack of opportunities to ask the questions etc.(Majeed, 2013). This is a normal situation for the Sri Lankans as we are used to this low student teacher interaction from childhood. As Sri Lanka is a country with high power distance from the early stages (Hofstede, 2011) people used to accept anything said by the powerful people without questioning the validity. In education, also students follow the same practice and from the surface level this can be the reason for low student lecturer interaction during the lecture.

There is an educated crowd in the universities. They should be ready to build up an effective interaction with the lecturers to clear their doubts. Education standards also recommended that two way communication is essential for an effective education system. According to Bolton and Boyer (1971) two way communication is more accurate than one way communication. The teacher should build an effective discussion with the students. In the Sri Lankan context, we do not consider the damage from low student lecturer interaction during the lecture. Still, educational standards have come up with favourable student lecturer ratios to facilitate student lecturer interaction (Tong, Standen & Sotiriou, 2018). Foreign countries have identified the importance of two way communication and changed their traditional methods of education to improve two way communication (Schaddelee & McConnell, 2017). In the Sri Lankan context, it is not easy to implement those standards with limited resources. One way communication is not highlighting the true potential of the students. Because of that, foreign countries are trying to encourage students for two way communication and give them a chance to clear their doubts (Nkhoma, Thomas,

Nkhoma, Sriratanaviriyakul, Truong & Vo, 2017). In the Sri Lankan context, most of the lecturers encourage students to develop questions and clear doubts, but students do not want that chance. Though the lecturer wanted to have an interactive session with the students, students did not want to take part, and the lecturer had to conduct the lecture as the students' preference. Also, some lecturers are reluctant to interact with the students, and they are not motivating students to build an effective discussion. Apart from these things, there is a popular belief among Sri Lankan students that they will understand the unclear areas in another session.

Though Sri Lanka is a country with high power distance (Hofstede, 2011), there should be other reasons why university students are not interacting with the lecturers because the university is a place for learning, and students are very much concerned about their grades.

The objective was to explore the reasons why there is a low level of interaction between university students and lecturers during the lectures based on a selected state University in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interaction is something that lecturer or student asking and answering questions (Mustapha, Rahman & Yunus, 2010, A). According to Fassinger (1995, as cited in Mustapha et al.2010,A, p.113) interaction is questions that students answer or raise in the classroom. That means the lecturer can ask questions from the students to make sure that students understand the lesson clearly. The student can ask questions from the lecturer to clear their doubts about the lesson. According to Navaz (2020) normally lecturers can conduct the lectures without any interaction with the students or lecturers can be interactive with the students during the lecture.

In the Sri Lankan context we rarely find students voluntarily willing to build up discussions with the lectures. In the Sri Lankan context, we cannot see this as a problem as we used to this for a long time. According to Majeed (2013) in Sri Lankan English medium science lectures, 97 per cent of the students do not answer the questions asked by the lecturers, and 80 per cent of students do not ask questions from the lecturers. Students can pass the subjects by listening to the lecturer, but active participation and interaction are essential for a good insight.

In the classroom, the normal process which is accepted by the educational standards is teacher teaches the lesson and then the students should build up an effective discussion to clear their doubts. Active classroom discussion plays a significant role in the success of the education and the personal development of the students (Tatar, (2005, as cited in Mustapha et al., 2010,A, p.114). Students can get the essence of

the lesson only if they interact with the lecturers in the classroom to discuss their doubts about the lessons. Effective learning is there only if the teacher and student actively participate in the process (Abdullah, Baker & Mahabob, 2011). Also, according to Bolton and Boyer (1971) without proper communication between teacher and student learning process is not happening correctly. Therefore good communication is considered as one of the primary needs in the learning process. According to the idea given by Nkhoma et al. (2017) education is regarded as a two way process in which students get knowledge from the lecturers passively but actively engage with pre and post classroom activities. It is clear that merely listening to the lecturer is not help to become a better graduate. For that, students should actively engage with the classroom activities.

According to the experiences in the Sri Lankan context, most of the lecturers asked the students whether they are having any questions after each session. But it is a wonder to see students who effectively use this time to build effective discussions with the lecturer. As founded by Majeed (2013) the lecturers emphasized that they have given time for students to ask questions, but they are not asking questions. Just like other Asian countries in Sri Lanka also lecturers conduct the lectures without any interaction with the students (Navaz, 2020). When students do not want to build up a discussion with the lecturer, the lecture has to maintain one way communication. One way communication does not help build up a common language between the communicator and the audience (Bolton & Boyer,1971).Common language between the students and the lecturer is important for a better understanding of the lesson.

In the Sri Lankan context, we rarely find students enthusiastic about actively interacting with the lecturers. There can be various reasons for this. Sometimes students' behaviour can be a reason for this, and lecturers' behaviour can also be a reason. According to Fawzia (2002, as cited in Mustapha, Rahman and Yusuf, 2010,B, p.1083) factors such as course, topic, lecturer, and teaching style could affect the student interaction with the lecturer.

For Sri Lankan students, language can be a barrier to interact with the lecturers during the lecture. Because from the preschool to advanced level, most of the Sri Lankan students study in Sinhala medium and in the university most of the degrees are conducted in English medium. Therefore most of the students find it challenging to interact with the lecturers during the lecture. According to Majeed (2013) 63 per cent of students among Sri Lankan English medium science lectures are not answering questions, and 47 per cent of them are not asking questions because of language problems. Therefore, language is a huge barrier for the Sri Lankan students to interact with the lecturers during the lecture. Except for Humanities and Fine Arts, English is the medium of instruction for most of the degree courses (Majeed,2016). According to World Bank reports (2009, as cited in Majeed, 2016, p.159) English is a compulsory subject in the Sri Lankan syllabus from Grade 3 to Advanced level. Because of various

reasons like inadequate resources, every student will not get an opportunity to have solid English knowledge. According to University Grant Commission (2015, as cited in Majeed, 2016, p.159) students are not motivated to learn English as it is not a criteria for university entrance. Because of these reasons, Sri Lankan students are facing difficulties when interacting with the lecturers. Also, according to Majeed (2016) students with limited language proficiency in school struggle to understand the lectures in English medium in the university.

A large number of students in the classroom are also a reason why there is a low student lecturer interaction during the lecture. Students have different personalities, and students afraid to raise their voices in front of a large audience will not raise their voices in large classrooms. According to Tong et al. (2018) large number of students in the classroom affects the students' interaction with the lecturers. The lecturer also will not be able to monitor students' interactions. Also, this is supported by the idea that small groups are suitable for active learning (Lake,2001). As founded by Majeed (2013) 43 per cent of Sri Lankan students in English medium science lectures are not asking questions from the lecturer because of the fear of public speaking.

There can be students with different personalities and different perspectives. Therefore their interaction is also different. According to Majeed (2016) some students are with sufficient English knowledge and raise their voice in language classes, but in the common lectures, they are not willing to talk. Sometimes they might have a fear of raising their voice in front of a large audience. According to Bolton and Boyer (1971) when there is a powerful person, people are reluctant to express their ideas and views. In the Sri Lankan context, students consider this power distance as one of the major barriers to interact with the lecturers.

The influence from other students also sometimes can be a reason for not interacting with the lecturers. According to Mustapha et al. (2010,B) students ranked negative classmate traits as the first reason why they are not interacting with the lecturers. Some students do not want to be interactive with the lecturers. They do not want others to be interactive with the lecturers during the lectures as well. Also, according to Mustapha et al. (2010, B)negative student traits ranked as the third reason for students are not interacting with the lecturers. When students have personal problems or feel tired or sleepy, they cannot interact with the lecturers properly.

Other than these reasons ragging in the Sri Lankan University system can be a reason why students are not interacting with the lecturers in the lecturer. As founded by Majeed (2013) most of the English Medium Science students in his research are not interacting with the lecturers due to the existing ragging system in the faculty.

In contrast to this, there is a category of students who think it is a pleasure for joining the class discussions because they can learn more and as well as they can share their knowledge (Wade (1994, as cited in Mustapha et al., 2010,A, p.114)). Some students have identified the importance of being interactive and actively participating in the lecture. Therefore they are trying to engage with the lecturer during the lecture actively.

Sometimes the lecturer can be the reason why students are not interacting in the lecture. According to Shaari, Yusoff, Ghazali, Osman and Dzahir (2014) teacher is defined as someone who motivates and facilitates students to be interactive in the class. But as founded by Mustapha et al. (2010,B) students ranked negative lecturer traits as the second reason for not being interactive. As argued by Grash and Hicks (2000, as cited in Shaari et al.,2014, p.11) to provide an effective learning process, one has to focus on the teaching style. It is clear that if the lecturer's teaching style is not attractive, the students do not want to interact with the lecturer. As discussed in Bolton and Boyer (1971) some teachers avoid this two way communication because of the fear of losing control. They also think that students are not ready for a discussion just after the end of the lesson. Most of the lecturers believe that giving students a chance to build up a discussion is a waste of time. According to Mustapha et al. (2010,B) some lecturers even do not wait to listen to the students' explanations and answers. Also, according to the findings of Boton and Boyer (1971) some lecturers do not like students ask questions because they have problems with their knowledge regarding the subject. If the lecturer is not good with that part, some lecturers are ready to say that they also have problems with that area. They will find it and clarify, but some lecturers are unwilling to do that because they have to maintain their status in front of the students. Also, the lecturer's teaching style affects the students' interaction. According to Carpenter et al. (2013, as cited in Zweekhorst and Mass, 2014, p.16) students do not learn more from lecturers who stand at the podium and read the notes without looking at the students. When the students identify the type of their lecturer, they decide whether they should be interactive with this lecturer or not.

In some instances, the gender of the lecturer also can affect the student's interaction with the lecturer. According to Fassinger (1995) having female professors positively affects female students. They are more interested in the subject and more interactive when the professor is a female. There can be female students who studied from the girls' schools, and they are more comfortable with females. They are trying to interact more, when the lecturer is a female. If the lecturer is a male, these kinds of students are not ready to interact. Therefore the gender of the lecturer also affects the student lecturer interaction in the classroom.

If students do not interact with the lecturers, the lecturer can take steps to make them interactive. According to Bolton and Boyer (1971), Swanson et al. (2005, as cited in Voss,2009, p.163) and Jones

(2008, as cited in Nkhoma et al., 2017, p.320) teachers can display a warm friendly attitude, showing regard for the opinions, helpful, empathetic etc. If the lecturers show these kinds of qualities, students will be motivated to interact with the lecturers. Also, to encourage students, lectures should always motivate students who are trying to interact with the lecturer. It will motivate other students and add value to those who interact with the lecturer (Carpenter & Tait, 2001). In contrast to this in Fassinger (1995) the professor's interpersonal style is not directly related to the student interaction in the classroom. Sometimes lecturers' style is not the problem, and there can be other reasons why students are not interactive. But most of the instances, students consider the lecturer before they are trying to be interactive.

Other than the students' behaviour and lecturers' behaviour there can be other reasons which affect the student lecturer interaction. According to Miller (1988, as cited in Sills-Briegel, 1996, p.21) the distance between the lecturer and the student is also a critical factor in this interactive process. Some lecture hall arrangements do not facilitate the lecturer to communicate with the students while teaching using the presentations and the whiteboards. So this is a factor that should be a concern when designing the layout of the classroom. This is supported by the idea of Carpenter and Tait (2001) saying that the furniture arrangement of the classroom is also as crucial as the lecturer. Also, according to Mustapha et al. (2010,B) students ranked uninteresting and complicated subjects as the fifth reason for not being interactive with the lecturer during the lecture. But the fact that students should understand is they should more actively interact with the lecturers in difficult subjects. If they try to neglect those subjects thinking that they cannot understand them or are difficult, they will not grab the required knowledge.

Though we cannot see any impact of not being interactive with the lecturers from the surface level, it can affect the academic performances of the students adversely as well as their personal development. According to Lake (2001) active learning is vital for a better education. According to Abdullah et al. (2011) also it says that student interaction in the classroom is considered as one of the key indicators of academic performance. It says that students who engaged more with the lecturers during the lesson perform better in the examinations. But in contrast, Lake (2001) states that there is no difference between students who engaged in active learning and passive learning in examinations. This can be true because though these students do not try to clarify the doubts by interacting with the lecturer, they will try to clarify it by themselves or ask a colleague who has a better understanding of the lesson.

METHODOLOGY

According to this research, the problem arose from my observations about the student interaction with the lecturers in the classroom. I observed that students rarely wanted to interact with the lecturer in the lecture and actively participate in the lecture. Therefore this research is intended to find the reasons why students are not interacting with the lecturers in the lecture, and it is a study to examine the behaviour, attitudes, perceptions about students, and the research was conducted using a qualitative approach. According to Sekaran (2003) inductive reasoning is where we observe a certain phenomenon and make conclusions based on that. This research is based on an observation about students are not interacting with the lecturers in the lecture. Here the problem was analysed based on a known phenomenon. This phenomenon was analysed based on collected data. After analysing those collected data, a conclusion had drawn. Therefore it is clear that it is a research that followed the inductive approach.

Population relates to all the groups of people, events, incidents that come under the researcher's preference area (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to this research, all the students in the University System of Sri Lanka are considered as the population. It is not easy to collect data from all the university students in the Sri Lankan University system. Therefore the study is narrowed down to one of the leading Business Administration Department in a State University. Seven participants were selected based on purposive sampling for the data generation. Purposive sampling was used because qualitative samples are relatively small due to practical difficulties of collecting and analysing data, and therefore, the selected small sample should have the ability to build up an effective analysis (Mason, 2002). Semi structured interviews were used for the data generation because, according to Mason (2002) most of the qualitative researchers consider knowledge as situational, and they consider interviews also as a social situation, and because of that, qualitative researchers are selecting interviews over social surveys. Therefore, semi structured interviews were used to find the students' attitudes, behaviour, and perception about lack of student interaction with the lecturers in the classroom. The interview guide was developed based on the literature. Interviews were conducted in Sinhala medium as it is their mother tongue, and it was easy to generate their ideas. In most of the interviews, participants did not identify this low student lecturer interaction during the lecture as a problem. They perceived it as a normal phenomenon in the lecture because for years they used to that. Therefore it was difficult for most of them to identify the reasons in the beginning. Then I had to ask some follow up questions, and then they identified they also had those problems. They started to narrate their experiences in the lecture hall. After the generation of data through semi structured interviews, the data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Participants for the semi structured interviews were shown in Table 1.

Table 14: List of Participants

Participant	Academic Year	Gender
Udara	4 th year	Male
Sayani	4 th year	Female
Nethmi	4 th year	Female
Sandun	4 th year	Male
Kavindi	4 th year	Female
Rasith	4 th year	Male
Dineth	4 th year	Male

Source: Author compiled

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis. It is the normal method used to analyse the data in qualitative researches. As per Braun and Clerk (2006) there are six phases in thematic analysis, and those six phases were followed for the analysis. Data analysis was undertaken using the themes identified using these six phases.

The data generated through semi structured interviews were interpreted using past findings of scholars. There is no specific theory about why students are not interacting with the lecturers in the lecture. Therefore I have used the literature relevant to the aspects that emerged to justify the findings. Using literature according to the theme, I interpreted the generated data according to the identified themes, assigning meaning through interpretivist approach.

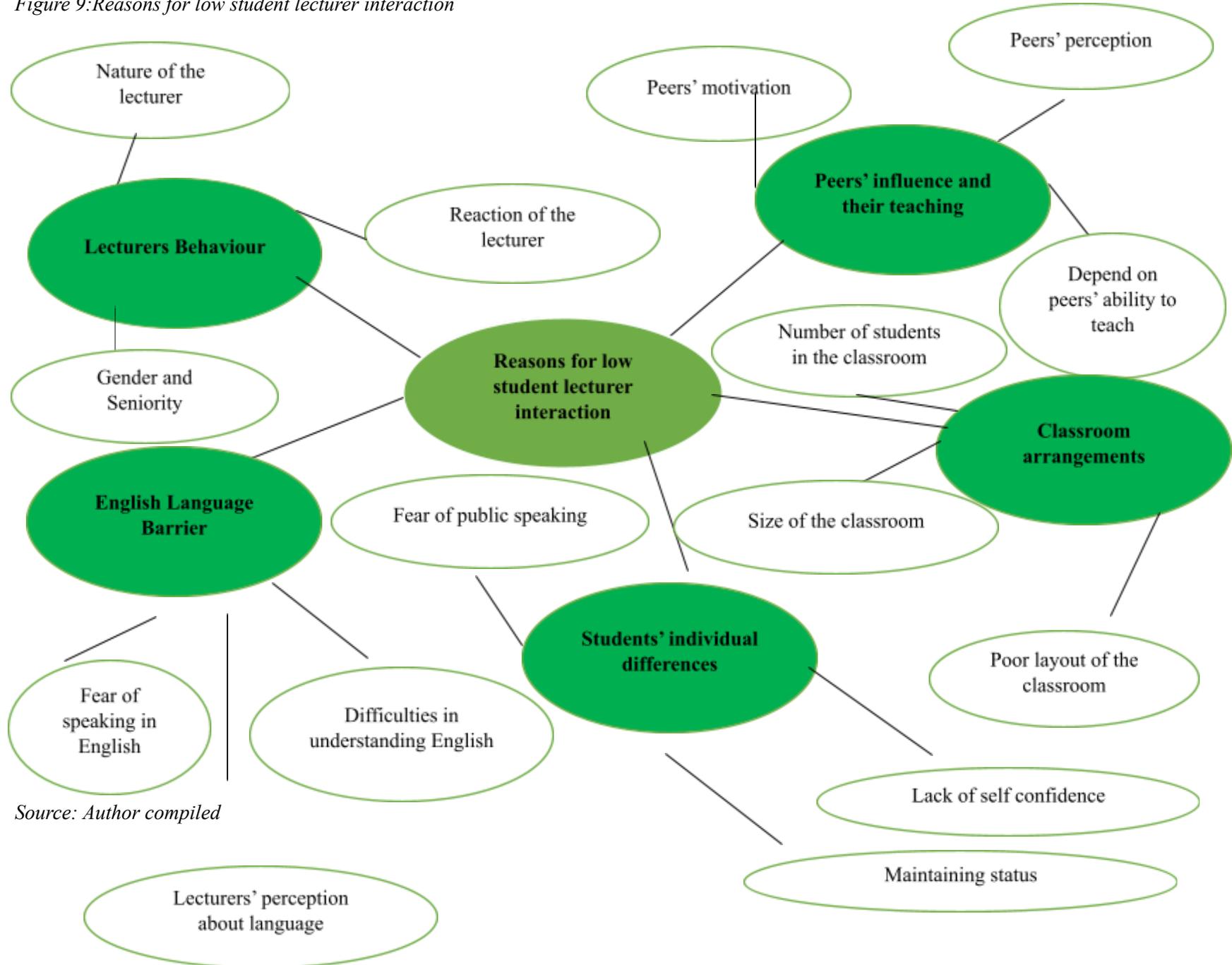
Reasons for low students lecturer interaction was categories under five themes as shown in Table 2.

Table 15: Reasons for low student lecturer interaction

Themes (main reasons)	Codes (elements of reasons)
1. Lecturers Behaviour	Nature of the lecturer
	Reaction of the lecturer for students' questions
	Gender and Seniority
2. Peers' behaviour and their teaching	Motivation from peers
	Peers' perception
	Depend on peers' ability to teach
3. English Language Barrier	Fear of speaking in English
	Difficulties in understanding English
	Lecturers' perception about the language
4. Students' individual differences	Fear of public speaking
	Lack of self confidence
	Maintaining status
5. Classroom arrangements	Number of students in the classroom
	Size of the classroom
	Poor layout of the classroom

Source: Author compiled

Figure 9: Reasons for low student lecturer interaction



Source: Author compiled

Lecturers' behaviour

Lecturer plays a major role in student lecturer interaction. The lecturer is one of the crucial points that affect this student lecturer interaction. Students tend to see who the lecturer is before they raise a question or ask for further explanation. Students' judgements about the lecturers can be based on different factors.

The nature of the lecturer affects student lecturer interaction during the lecture. Here the way the lecturers behave in the classroom affects students' interaction with them. Students were highly concerned about the nature of their lecturer before they started a conversation with the lecturers. Some lecturers' teaching style makes them not ask questions from that lecturer. Also, some lecturers are in a hurry to leave the classroom, and students do not want to interact with them. Students are not trying to ask questions from those lecturers because the students know those lecturers are not ready to wait for the students (Mustapha et al., 2010,B). Some lecturers teach just for the sake of doing that. The lectures of those lecturers are boring, and students are not trying to interact with those lecturers. Before asking the question, students carefully studied how the lecturer behaved in the lecture and their teaching style. From that, they identified the lecturers who can be interacted with. In a university classroom, most of the time, students are paying attention to their status. If they ask a question and the lecturer blames them by chance, it can affect their status adversely. Therefore this might be a reason for students to understand the nature of the lecturer before they ask a question. To be safe, most of the students are trying to understand the nature of the lecturer by themselves other than listening to their colleagues. There are some lecturers who motivate students to be interactive. These lecturers appreciate the students who are being interactive and try to encourage others to be interactive. Generally, in the Sri Lankan context, students need some motivation to ask a question. Therefore this will be a good approach. In some lectures, the inspiration comes from colleagues. When colleagues ask questions, others also want to ask questions. In some lectures, no one asks questions, and the lecturer has to motivate students to ask questions. As stated by Bolton and Boyer (1971), Swanson et al. (2005, as cited in Voss, 2009, p.163) and Jones (2008, as cited in Nkhoma et al., 2017, p.320) teachers can display a warm, friendly attitude, showing regard for the opinions, helpful, empathetic etc. If the lecturers show these kinds of qualities, students will be motivated to ask questions. Participants explained that if the lecturers are friendly and they can discuss their doubts, they are motivated to be interactive during the lecture, but if they find the lecturer is rude, they are not motivated. *“ Normally in our department, there is a situation where we can interact with most of the lecturers. But some lecturers' teaching style is even boring. So I think if I ask a question from this person, I will disturb them. If so, I will not be going to ask questions. If I feel that the lecturer is not teaching carefully and like they want to leave the classroom early, I will not be going to ask questions.”* (Nethmi)

According to participants' experiences, some lecturers do not have a proper understanding of the lesson. These kinds of lecturers are trying to avoid students' questions and do not allow students' questions. As Bolton and Boyer (1971) stated, the lecturers do not like students to ask questions if they have problems with that lesson. But as the participants mentioned, if the students ask a question that even the lecturer is not clear, some lecturers honestly say they also do not have a clear understanding about that, and they will find it and explain. Students are motivated to interact with these kinds of lecturers as they know that these lecturers are willing to help students clear their doubts. As described by the participants, it is difficult to interact with lecturers who stand only in one place in the front or near the podium. According to Carpenter et al. (2013, as cited in Zweekhorst and Mass, 2014, p.16) students do not learn more from the lecturers who stand behind the podium, reading the lesson from the note and not maintaining the eye contact. If the lecturer has these kinds of practices, students' attention also decreases after some time. It is not easy to keep the attention if the students cannot hear the lecture. When students even cannot hear the lecture, they will not try to be interactive because they know the lecturer is neglecting the back rows, and it is useless to make an effort to listen or ask a question. Suppose the lecturer is paying attention to the whole classroom irrespective of where the students sit. In that case, students should have to participate in the lesson actively.

Students are highly concerned about how the lecturers react to them when they raise a question. Most of the time, students are not asking questions because of their fear of this reaction. When another student asks a question, and if the response is good, other students also feel confident about asking questions. According to Parson, Nuland, and Parson (2014) teachers can maintain an interactive classroom by making students feel that they care about the students and maintain a good interpersonal environment.

Some students find it is easy to interact with lecturers of the same gender. They are reluctant to interact with lecturers of the opposite gender. Most of the time, female students who had their Grade 1 to 13 education from girls' schools face this problem. They feel comfortable when a female lecturer is doing the lecture. They are confident that they can interact with the female lecturers in the classroom and clarify their doubts. It can be there with male students also, but according to my perspective, this problem is high with the female students. Fassinger (1995) explained that female students are more confident and have a good interest in the subject matters and try to participate actively in classroom activities when their lecturer is a female.

Other than that, students find the seniority of the lecturer also as a problem to be interactive with the lecturer during the lecture. As Bolton and Boyer (1971) explained, titles and status of lecturers badly affect some students. They think that those lecturers are well educated knowledgeable people and have a fear of talking with them. Students find that it is easy to interact with the young lecturers than the senior

lecturers. Students think that those senior lecturers think that they are stupid if they ask a question from them. Also, some students believe that young lecturers can identify the students' doubts clearly and can give a better explanation. Still, some students think that senior lecturers are more knowledgeable and experienced. They can identify the students' problem and can provide a solution. This seniority issue might be due to the power relations in Sri Lankan culture. According to Sri Lankan culture, we are maintaining high power distance (Hofstede,2011). Usually, People are not trying to question the people who are more powerful than them. It can be the reason why students are reluctant to interact with the senior lecturers. *“Normally, I can talk well with female lecturers. I can talk with male lecturers also, but I feel a little uncomfortable as I studied in a girls’ school and used to interact with girls and ladies. Always in lectures, I expect a female lecturer. Also, it is easy for us to interact with young lectures. Because they are making jokes and talking normally with us, sometimes it is difficult to interact with the senior lecturers. So there is a doubt about whether senior or junior and I concern about whether the lecturer is a male or a female.”* (Kavindi)

Peers influence and their teaching

Peers are also an important factor related to student lecturer interaction. According to Mustapha et al. (2010,B) negative classmate traits have been identified as the first reason for low student lecturer interaction in the classroom. According to the participants’ ideas, peers can affect student lecturer interaction positively and negatively. Some peers motivate students to be interactive with the lecturers, but some demotivate students. This will change according to the type of peers each student gets. The motivation from the peers is important because sometimes though the student badly wanted to ask the question, they are not self-motivated.

In contrast, if the peers demotivate the students, they will not ask questions even if they have a doubt. Therefore sometimes, students ask a question is dependent on the motivation given to them by their peers. This is good if the peers motivate students to ask questions, but it is not good if they demotivate the students. Sometimes the peers demotivate the students because if the peer has a better understanding, they will have the fear that if their friend asks it from the lecturer and clarifies and will obtain a higher grade.

Also, some students think that they can learn everything at the end of the semester from a friend. They believe it is easy to ask from a peer because they can ask the same thing from a friend until they understand it clearly. Students are reluctant to ask the same thing several times from the lecturers because they think lectures will blame them if they ask several times. But most of the lecturers are willing to explain until the students get the right idea. Students believe that their friend is better than the lecturers. Among students, some students can explain the things taught by the lecturer in a manner that the students

can understand. Students have in build mindset that those students can teach better than the lecturers. It can be true that their peers can teach better than the lecturers, but they should understand that lecturers have more knowledge and experience than their peers. According to Majeed (2013) 57 per cent of students in Sri Lankan English Medium Science lectures are not asking questions from the lecturer, thinking they can clear those doubts by discussing with a colleague. But there is a clear difference between asking from a colleague and asking from the lecturer. The lecturers know how to explain the solution using different theories, but the peer knows only the factors lecturer taught to explain the solution. Students should understand that their peers cannot give a better insight than the lecturers, but their teaching style can be better than the lecturer because they are at the same level. From my point of view, it is better to clear our doubts by discussing with the lecturer all the time if possible. In a situation where it is difficult, it is better to go for a peer without continuing with the doubts. *“I think I can ask all the lessons from one of my friends at the end of the semester because I have friends whom I can ask all the lessons. So with that in mind, I think no need to ask for a clarification from the lecturer.”* (Udara)

English language barrier

In the Sri Lankan context, most of the lectures are conducted in English, being competitive with international standards. As founded by Majeed (2016) most of the degrees in Sri Lanka are conducted in English medium except the degrees in Humanities and Social Sciences. English is not the mother tongue of Sri Lankans. Therefore, this affects the student lecturer interaction in the classroom. Some students are reluctant to ask questions in Sinhala because the teaching language is English. So the students who are not good with English are not trying to ask questions or interact with the lecturer even if they have doubts. Some students feel ashamed to raise a question in Sinhala in English medium lectures. They think it will badly affect their status. Also, students think that lecturers will blame them if they raise questions in Sinhala in English medium lectures. This is the situation of most of the Sri Lankan University students. Other than that, a group of students is afraid to speak English in front of an audience. According to Majeed (2016) students are not asking questions because they fear that other students will make fun of their poor language ability. These students do not understand that there is no one to laugh at them in classrooms if they make mistakes. Though these students have a question, they do not try to raise it and live with that problem. If that question comes to the examination, they will start to suffer, thinking that they should have clarified this doubt on that day by asking the lecturer. Until that, they will not understand the impact of not clarifying the doubts.

But in contrast, a group of students thinks language is not a barrier for the student lecturer interaction. According to their perspective, English is not our mother tongue, and we are not fluent as foreigners. Almost all the lecturers have this understanding, and they do not blame if the student raises the questions

in Sinhala. The student should raise the question in a language where they can understand the explanation clearly. If not no point in raising that question. Most of the students take this language issue as an excuse for not being interactive. *“I do not consider English as a barrier because we are not foreigners. Therefore making mistakes in English is not a reason to be ashamed of. If I can understand it better in Sinhala, I am asking in Sinhala. If I ask it in English and cannot understand what the lecturer explains, it will not be effective. Any lecturer did not tell that ask questions in English, if you ask in Sinhala I will kick you out.”* (Dineth)

But this language problem arises not because students are not good in English but because they think that they are not capable of speaking in English. Though they like it or not, all the students have to learn in English medium from the first year of the University. With that when the time passes, usually anyone will get the ability to speak in English to some extent because all the students have to do presentations and viva whether they like or not. Therefore, this language difficulty seems like something students developed from their minds and not a problem they actually have for most students. Rarely there can be students who are struggling with language. Most of the students perceive that they can write well in English but cannot speak in English. Keeping that in mind, the students always say they are not interacting with lecturers because they are not good with English. But actually, it is a problem which is in their mind. Other than this, there can be another category of students who cannot understand the lecture because they cannot understand English (Majeed, 2016). Therefore these kinds of students do not try to ask questions because they cannot understand the whole lecture. Irrespective of whether this problem is something students have actually or something that students have in their mind, for most of the students, it seems like a serious issue when it comes to student lecturer interaction in the classroom.

Students' individual differences

Students are not similar, and there are individual differences in everyone related to their different perspectives, different personalities. Due to these individual differences students, interacting level with the lecturers can be different. Most of the times, students are concern about what others think about them if they stand up and ask a question, and because of that fear, they do not want to ask questions. Students have fear that comes from their personality to speak in front of an audience because they are thinking about what others think. If I ask these questions and if I made a mistake, they would start to laugh at me. Keeping those kinds of things in their minds, they will not ask questions in a large audience. They are always thinking about others' view about their question. If the students can avoid thinking about others' perspectives, they will raise questions in front of an audience. Most of the students in the university are not thinking about developing their interpersonal skills, and only want to get high marks. There are plenty of opportunities in the University to develop social interaction, public

speaking skills, avoid stage fear etc. But students are not getting benefits from those opportunities. The students who join with those opportunities and take benefits are the ones who are interacting with the lecturers effectively in the classroom already. Though they join those clubs or not, they know how to interact with the lecturers in the classroom. The ones who are not interacting do not want to develop themselves by joining with these opportunities. Finally, the result is that because of fewer social interactions students are not willing to interact with the lecturer in the classroom. Also, some students are having a fear of losing their status by raising a wrong question. They do not understand that being confident to ask a question in front of the whole class is the thing that matters for the status and there is no one to laugh if they made a mistake in front of the classroom. Keeping these kinds of perceptions in mind, students are losing the opportunities to clarify their doubts by the lecturers. *“ I think if I ask a wrong question, it will adversely affect my status. Keeping that in mind, I will not ask questions sometimes.”* (Udara).

Sometimes it is difficult to change these perceptions because some students hardly believe in those things, and they think that even though they cannot obtain good results for the examination maintaining the status in the present is the main thing. But if somebody is trying to ask questions without considering the status, that person will be able to build a better status in the future. Because he or she has effectively utilized the opportunity to ask questions and get a good knowledge and will be able to obtain a good result for the examination. According to my point of view, in the classroom, it is acceptable to make mistakes, but when a student makes mistakes after leaving the university because of not getting the knowledge correctly in the classroom, it is the situation that will adversely affect the status. Though the individual differences are highlighted as a reason for the low student lecturer interaction by the participants, there is minimum literature related to this area.

Layout of the Classroom

According to Tong et al. (2018) a large number of students in the class room affect the students' interaction with the lecturers. Moreover, lecturers found it is challenging to monitor the interaction of the students. When there is a large number of students in the classroom, students who are having a fear of raising their voice in front of a large audience will not try to be interactive with the lecturer. Even though there are students who do not fear a large audience, they also find it difficult to interact with the lecturer when there are a large number of students in the classroom. Students feel comfortable when the classroom is small. Some students are willing to be interactive only when there are few students. Lecturers also face difficulties in these types of classrooms and does not able to notice the interaction of all the students. When the lecturer is not able to monitor the whole classroom, students have the opportunity to do unnecessary things during the lecture, and they will anyway not going to interact with the lecturers. When

there are only a few students, even though they do not want to interact with the lecturer, at least they have to answer the lecturer's questions because the lecturer can easily point out the students. Therefore the concept of fewer students is very effective in education. Also, if all the students in a large classroom start to raise questions from the lecturer, the two or three hours in the lecture will not be enough to cover the lesson. There are practical difficulties in doing this. As founded by Tong et al. (2018) education standards use teacher-pupil ratio as an indicator of an effective learning process. According to the educational standards also it is accepted that there should be less number of students in the classroom to facilitate effective teaching and learning process. But in Sri Lankan universities, there are more than 100 students in every classroom. In the Sri Lankan university system, with limited resources, it is impossible to maintain these teacher-pupil standards. Actually, classroom is a place where it gives the opportunity for students to gain knowledge and it should be given all the students a comfortable environment to develop their knowledge. Leadership, public speaking, and social interaction should be developed as a byproduct of this. Other than the number of students in the class room, the arrangement also affects the student lecturer interaction. According to Carpenter and Tait (2001) the classroom arrangement affects the student lecturer interaction. In some classrooms, there is a large gap between the students and the lecturer. With the classroom arrangement, lecturer has to stay in the front of the classroom to use the computer and the whiteboard. Most of the lecturers try to minimize the distance between them and the students, but it increases the unnecessary motion, and is a waste of time. In this kind of situation, even though the lecturer wants to be interactive with the students, the lecturer will not be able to move. With a huge gap between students and the lecturer, students are also reluctant to be interactive as they have to speak loudly. *“ When there is a huge gap between us and the lecturer, we cannot shout saying ‘teacher’ loudly. Most of the lecturers try to minimize the gap between them and the students. Some lecturers are blaming for the layout of the classroom saying I have to change the slides from there and I have to interact with the students also. It is not an issue most of the time because most lecturers are trying to reduce that distance.”* (Sandun). If the lecturer walks around the classroom, students find it easy to be interactive. As mentioned above the classroom should be arranged in a way that can facilitate effective interaction between the lecturer and the students.

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to explore the reasons for low interaction between students and lecturers during the lecture in a Sri Lankan state university. The findings revealed that lecturers' behaviour in the classroom, influence of peers and their teaching, individual differences among the students, English language barrier and classroom layout affect the low student lecturer interaction during the lecture. It was

found that the lecturers' teaching style, lecturers' behaviour, lecturers' reaction when a student raises a question, gender, and seniority affect the student lecturer interaction during the lecture. Under the influence of peers and their teaching, it is identified that some students are motivated and some are demotivated because of their peers and some students are trying to depend on peers when asking questions and also some students try to clarify what they do not know from a peer because they are afraid of asking from lecturers. Also, there are a group of students who believe that their peers can teach better than the lecturers. Peers' teaching style can be better than the lecturers, but the peers do not have many experience as the lecturers. According to the individual differences of students, it is revealed that students are different from one to another, and because of that, there can be students who are willing to be interactive and who are reluctant to interact with the lecturer during the lecture. In the university, teaching language has changed to English and most of the students in Sri Lankan University system are not used to this, and they found this language as a barrier to interact with the lecturers during the lecture. Though the students consider it as a problem, lecturers are willing to answer students' questions irrespective of the language. Finally, under the classroom layout, it was found that the number of students in the classroom and the distance between the student and the lecturer affects the low student lecturer interaction in the classroom.

The findings of the study will help students change their behaviour patterns to interact with the lecturers. It will also help them understand how the interaction with the lecturers affects their academic performances. The findings will help lecturers identify the changes they need in their behaviour and teaching style to be interactive with the students in the lecture. In the Sri Lankan context, there are only few researches related to this area. Most of them discuss only the students' language problems. Therefore, this will help identify a problem that needs to be addressed because if this two way communication is not successful, the education will not be effective. Time was the main limitation for the research, and because of that, it was only able to analyse data from one department. If the time permits to gather data from more than one department, the findings could be different from this.

Even though new global educational standards motivate two way communication and prescribing effective lecturer student ratios, with the limited resources in the Sri Lankan University system, it is impossible to align with them. But if both the students and lecturers make an effort for a behavioural and attitude change, it will be possible to improve two way communication during the lecture.

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