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## **English Language Teaching in Government Schools in Sri Lanka: A Survey based on Kinniya Education Zone, Trincomalee**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study was carried out with the aim of investigating the state of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone, Trincomalee and the factors affecting ELT. This study was a survey research and quantitative method was used for primary data collection. Kinniya Education Zone was selected as the research setting and 35 English as a Second Language teachers from 35 town schools and rural schools were randomly selected as sample population. A questionnaire with close-ended questions was used as the research instrument. Based on the findings of the data analysis, most of the participants' educational qualifications were Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) and English medium degrees. Moreover, a large number of students agreed that the ESL teachers in Kinniya Education Zone encounter challenges in teaching English. Lack of interest, lack of basic knowledge in English, crowded classrooms, use of traditional teaching methods and mother tongue and lack of modern teaching/learning equipment are identified as major factors for the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone. According to participants' responses, the following suggestions can be implemented at government schools in Sri Lanka to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone. They are: use of modern teaching approaches, establishing a separate language unit with modern teaching equipment in each school, appointing competent and trained teachers at primary sections/schools, using English Language in the classrooms, reducing the number of students in the crowded classes and application of interesting language games and activities in the classroom.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Advanced Level, English as a Second Language, English Language Teaching*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

English Language is taught as a second or foreign language in most of the countries in Asia, Africa and Middle-East since colonization. Although English Language has been given prominence in the educational curriculum of the above countries, the learners do not reach the expected learning outcomes. In justifying the claim, in a relevant local study, Halik & Nusrath (2020) mention that teaching English has been a significant problem among the ESL/EFL teachers around the world. Similarly, teachers face different kinds of problems that make the process slow and rather weak (Alrawashdeh & Al-zayed, 2017). According to the above statements, it can be considered that the English Language Teaching (ELT) seems a challenging task in several countries where English is taught as a second/foreign language. In a similar study, Al-Zoubi, & Younes (2015) state that EFL students' failure in learning English has been a common problem for both teachers and policy makers. Regarding the English Language in Sri Lanka, Aloysius (2015) explains in a local study about English Language Teaching (ELT) that although Sinhala and Tamil languages are the two main languages in Sri Lanka, English has been in use since the 1800s till now. Moreover, the role of English has been very significant in various fields such as civil administration, education and industry. Accordingly, the Constitution of Sri Lanka has declared English Language the link language. English is taught as a second language at both state and non-state education institutions. Likewise, Sanmuganathan

(2017) points out that English as the link language plays an important role in social activities. He further points out that especially in the academic domains; each student has to plunge into the task of learning English to survive in the competitive world. However, most of the students fail to realize the value of English and they show their disinterest in learning English, particularly at government schools.

Wijeskera (2011/2012) asserts that English Language Teaching (ELT) in Sri Lanka has not been able to achieve its intended objectives. This failure in ELT is not a baseless assumption. It is proved by what we have experienced for the last forty or so years and evidenced by student performance at the two major examinations. According to the school curriculum of Sri Lanka, students' English Language proficiency is tested through two examinations, namely: General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) (Ordinary Level) and G.C.E (Advanced Level). Nevertheless, a large number of students in Sri Lanka do not show English language proficiency in the above examinations. G.C.E (O.L) pass rate was 62% and G.C.E (A.L) pass rate was 40%. (Department of Examination, 2019). Moreover, when the students go for their higher studies and work places, English language is highly needed. Due to lack of English language proficiency, they encounter a number of challenges *in* their higher studies and in performing their roles and responsibility at work places. Therefore, Wijesekera (2012) emphasizes in his study that it is also an undeniable truth that even after completing nearly ten years of English language learning,

students have not gained sufficient competence of it. Particularly, the pass rate of G.C.E (O.L) and G.C.E (A.L) and students' English language proficiency in Kinniya education Zone are very lower when compared with other education zones in the Eastern Province. According to 2019 G.C.E (O/L) and G.C.E (A.L) results analysis of Kinniya Education Zone, G.C.E (O.L) pass rate was 35% and G.C.E (A.L) was 22%. Considering the above problems and factors, this study was carried out to investigate the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone and the factors which affect English language teaching at government schools.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

According to the school curriculum in Sri Lanka, English language is one of the main subjects from grade 3 to 11. As far as Kinniya Education Zone is concerned, ESL teachers at both towns and rural schools face several problems and challenges in their teaching process. These problems and challenges affect their teaching, and consequently, ELT has become a failure in Kinniya Education Zone.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Research**

- To investigate why English Language Teaching has been a failure in Kinniya Education Zone, Trincomalee
- To explore the factors that affect English language teaching in government schools in Kinniya Education Zone, Trincomalee
- To suggest suitable recommendations and remedies to

overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone.

### **1.3 Hypotheses of the Research**

- English Language teaching seems a failure at schools in the Kinniya Education Zone due to students' lack of interest and negative attitude towards learning English.
- Over-crowded classrooms and use of traditional teaching approaches are key factors which contribute to the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone.
- Textbooks do not address the students' needs since the students do not have basic English knowledge to follow and understand the textbooks.

### **1.4 Limitations of the Research**

English language teaching seems to be a failure particularly in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. However, to limit the research setting, Kinniya Education Zone in the Trincomalee District was selected. In Kinniya Education Zone, there are 66 schools and 168 ESL teachers. Out of them, 35 ESL teachers from 35 rural and town schools in the Kinniya Education Zone were taken as sample population of the study.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The following section focuses on the research methods. It includes research design, sample and population, research instruments and data collection.

## **2.1 Research Design**

This study was a survey research and quantitative method was used for data collection. With regard to collecting primary data, the instruments were selected based on the problem and hypotheses of this study.

## **2.2 Research Sample**

The total number of ESL teachers in the Kinniya Education Zone is 168. Therefore, the total population of this study was 168 ESL teachers. Out of the total population, 35 ESL teachers in rural and town schools were randomly selected as sample population to collect primary data.

## **2.3 Research Instruments**

In this study, a questionnaire was taken as research instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was designed focusing on close-ended questions, and it consisted of two parts and they focus on the factors contributing to the failure of ELT at government schools in Kinniya Education Zone and the suggestions to overcome this problem.

## **2.4 Data Collection**

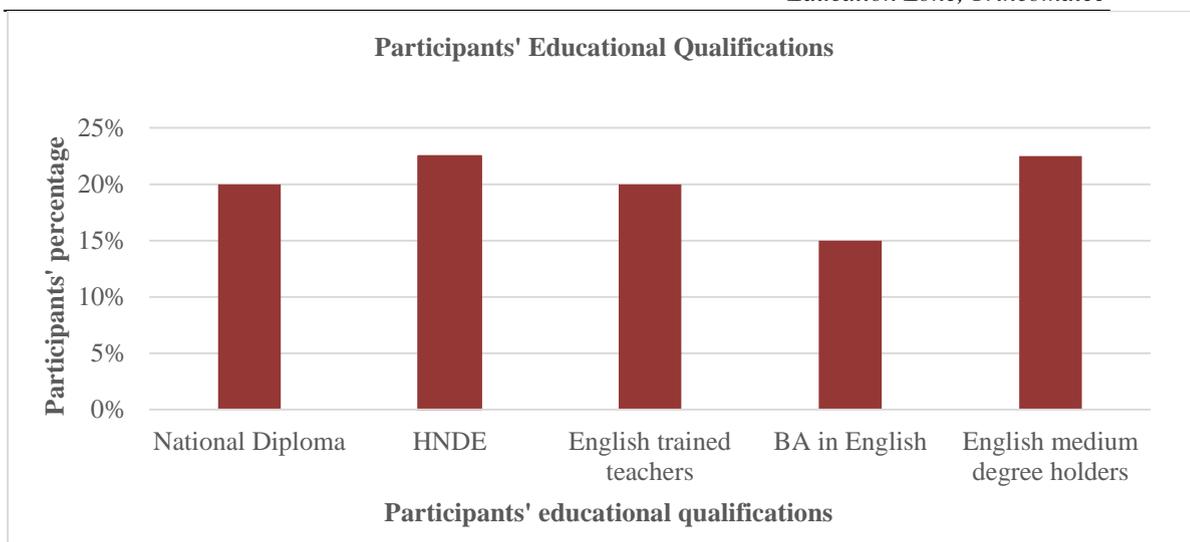
The primary data were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the limited WhatsApp contacts, and the participants completed the questionnaire. Later, they sent back the questionnaire to the researcher. Moreover, the secondary data were collected from journal research articles, books, web pages, 2019 GCE (O/L) and GCE (A/L) results analysis of the Kinniya Education Zone and report on GCE (A/L) students' speaking proficiency in the Kinniya Education Zone issued by British Council, 2019.

## **3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire, findings of this study can be presented as follows.

### **3.1 Educational qualifications of the participants**

According to the response given by the participants regarding their academic qualifications, they possess various qualifications to fulfill the mandatory requirement for obtaining English teaching in Sri Lanka. The following graph shows the educational qualifications of the participants.



**Figure 1:** Educational qualifications of the participants

As shown in the graph, 7 of the participants (20%) possess National Diploma in English (NDE), 8 of the participants (22.5%) possess Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE), 7 of the participants (20%) possess G.C.E Advanced Level (A/L) with 2 years of teacher-training, 5 of the participants (15%) possess Bachelor of Arts in English, and 8 of the participants (22.5%) are English medium degree holders. However, a number of National Diploma holders in ELT are produced every year by National Colleges of education. They possess one-year teacher-training qualification and basic knowledge of action research.

As far as the findings of the participants' educational qualifications are concerned, only 15% of the participants possess BA in English and none of the participants had done any postgraduate programmes related to their field to improve their knowledge and teaching skill. In particular, English medium degree

holders are appointed as teachers of English. However, they do not have English knowledge or teaching skills since they are not taught English language and teaching skills as a main subject in their course of study. Likewise, most of the diploma holders, HNDE holders and trained teachers possess limited knowledge in the English language since they are not taught English language and English language teaching as main subjects in the course of study. According to the report of Assistant Director of Education (ADE) – English, most of the ESL teachers in the Kinniya Education Zone are not sufficiently competent in English.

Further, teachers have the responsibility to design a curriculum based on students' level. Therefore, in a local study, Wijeskera (2011/2012) states that teachers are the most important stakeholders in relation to the final outcomes expected in the curriculum. However, if the teachers possess limited knowledge and experience

regarding education and teaching, teachers will have to face difficulties in teaching. As a result, ELT seems a failure in Kinniya Education Zone.

### 3.2 Reasons for failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone

As far as the findings regarding the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone and the factors affecting the failure of ELT are concerned, the data shows the reasons for failure of ELT. The following table shows participants' response to the questionnaire.

**Table 1:** Participants' response to the questionnaire

No	Statements of the Questionnaire	Total number of participants who responded	
		Agree	Disagree
1	Most of the ESL teachers encounter challenges in teaching English since students do not have a basic knowledge in English.	31	4
2	A large number of students do not have any interest in learning English at schools.	27	8
3	Students do not give prominence to learn English as they give prominence to other subjects.	28	7
4	Teaching English at rural schools is challengeable for most of the teachers.	26	11
5	Students at primary section/school fail to grasp basic English language skills such as like reading, writing, basic vocabularies etc.	30	5
6	English textbooks of grade 6 - 13 are a failure since most of the students do not have basic English proficiency.	24	11
7	A large number of students do not reach the expected learning outcomes of the English textbook.	23	12
8	Crowded classroom is the key factor for the failure of ELT in the Kinniya Education Zone.	31	4
9	Use of traditional teaching approaches and mother tongue lead to failure of ELT at both town and rural schools in the Kinniya Education Zone.	28	7
10	Lack of modern teaching equipment at both town and rural schools in the Kinniya Education Zone is another significant factor for failure of ELT.	26	9

When the above table is analyzed, 88.5% of the participants agreed that most of the ESL teachers encounter challenges in teaching English since students do not have a basic knowledge in English. Lack of basic knowledge in English, lack of interest in learning English and negative attitude towards learning are common factors which contribute to the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone. Similarly, the findings of a related study carried out by Halik & Nusrath (2020) show that out of 15 participants, 9 students were not supportive and attentive in their teaching process in the classroom. Further, the findings show that 77% of the participants agreed that a large number of students do not have any interest in learning English at schools and 80% of the participants agreed that most of the students do not give prominence to learn English when compared to the importance given to other subjects. This is one of the crucial reasons why teaching English at rural settings has been challengeable for ESL teachers. Accordingly, 74% of the participants agreed that teaching English at rural schools is challengeable for most of the teachers. In a local study which was carried out investigating the challenges faced by ESL teachers in teaching English at rural schools in Kinniya Education Zone, Halik & Nusrath (2020) find that all the participants agree that teaching English at rural schools is challengeable.

Another significant factor which has to be discussed is that 85.5% of the participants agreed that students at primary section/school fail to grasp basic English knowledge like reading, writing and basic vocabularies. Therefore, when they are

promoted to secondary education, they do not possess basic English knowledge to follow the textbook. As a result, teachers face problems in teaching English effectively. Due to lack of sufficient knowledge, teaching the textbook seems difficult at schools. According to the findings, 68.5% of the participants agreed that textbooks at government schools are a failure. When the textbooks are taught to the students who do not have a sufficient competence in reading, writing and vocabulary, they are unable to understand the textbook. However, the respective Assistant Director of Education (ADE), In-Service Advisors (ISA) and principals insist the teachers to complete the syllabus. As a result, most of the students do not reach the expected outcome. This problem can be seen from primary stage onwards. In primary stage, if the teachers give basic knowledge in English, students will not struggle to understand the textbooks. In this sense, the findings show that 65.5% of the participants agreed that a large number of students do not reach the expected learning outcomes in the textbook.

Another key issue faced by the ESL teachers in Sri Lanka is crowded classrooms. As far as language learning is concerned, maximum 10 – 15 students are appropriate. Each and every student will be taken care of and they can improve their language skills. However, according to school system in Sri Lanka, there are over 30 students in a class. As a result, ESL teachers encounter challenges in taking care of all the students. Thus, based on the findings of the data analysis, 88.5% of the participants agreed that

crowded classroom is a key factor for failure of ELT in Kinniya education zone.

Likewise, use of traditional teaching methods and mother tongue in ESL classes is another factor for failure of ELT. The ESL teachers at schools in the Kinniya Education Zone still use Grammar Translation Method (GTM) because they focus only on grammar, reading, writing and direct translation of the text. As a result, a large number of students are unable to speak English with proper pronunciation. To justify the above statement, a three-day workshop on evaluating the speaking proficiency of the GCE (A/L) students in the selected 1AB schools in the Kinniya Education Zone was conducted by the British Council in 2019. By the end of the workshop, the evaluation report indicated that most of the students face a huge number of difficulties in speaking English. Therefore, the findings show that 80% of the participants agreed that the use of traditional teaching approaches and mother tongue lead to failure of ELT at

government schools. Moreover, In Kinniya Education Zone, most of the schools do not have modern teaching/learning equipment like projectors, computers, audio tape recorder and speakers. According to the findings, 74% of the participants agreed that lack of modern teaching equipment at schools is another significant factor for failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone.

### **3.3 Participants’ suggestions to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone**

The participants suggested various useful measures to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone. The following table shows the ranking of the participants regarding the suggestions to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone. In the following table, 1 shows ‘very important’, 2 shows ‘important’ and 3 shows ‘not important’. They ranked the suggestions according to their point of view.

**Table 2:** Participants’ suggestions to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone

No	Suggestions to overcome the failure of ELT at government schools	Total numbers according to the response		
		1	2	3
1	Use of modern teaching approaches	21	14	-
2	Establishing a separate language unit with modern teaching equipment in each school	30	5	-
3	Appointing competent and trained teachers at primary sections/schools	24	11	-
4	Using English language in the classrooms	16	12	7

5	Reducing the number of students in the crowded classes	15	11	9
6	Application of interesting language games and activities in the classroom	23	12	-

According to the above table, a large number of participants responded that the above suggestions are very important to overcome the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone in Sri Lanka.

#### **4 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Kinniya Education Zone is one of the 98 education zones in Sri Lanka. Regarding the performance of Kinniya Education Zone in English language, it has been producing lower results in English in both GCE (O/L) and GCE (A/L) examinations. According to the 2019 results analysis of the Kinniya Education Zone, the GCE (O/L) results pass percentage was 33 and GCE (A/L) results pass percentage was 36. Hence, it is apparent that the ELT in the Kinniya Education Zone has not been satisfactory for a long time. According to the findings of the primary and secondary data, the results show that there are a less number of efficient and qualified ESL teachers in the Kinniya Education Zone. Moreover, several teachers agreed that the ESL teachers in Kinniya Education Zone encounter various challenges in teaching English. As a result, the status of ELT in the Kinniya Education Zone has not been to the expected level for a long time. Regarding students' interest in learning English, the participants agreed that most of the students do not have any interest in learning English, and they do not give importance to English language. Particularly, most of the participants

agreed that teaching English at rural schools is very challengeable for teachers. Further regarding the use of textbook, most of the students do not possess basic knowledge in English. As a result, they are unable to follow the textbook. Thus, students do not reach the expected outcome and English language proficiency. According to the findings, crowded classrooms, use of traditional teaching approaches and use of the mother tongue in the classroom and lack of modern teaching/learning equipment are significant factors for the failure of ELT in Kinniya Education Zone in Sri Lanka.

To overcome the failure of ELT in the Kinniya Education Zone, based on the results of the participants' opinions given in the questionnaire, the following suggestions can be implemented at government schools in the Kinniya Education Zone. They are as follow:

- Use of modern teaching approaches in ESL classrooms.
- Establishing a separate language unit with modern teaching equipment in each school.
- Appointing competent and trained teachers at primary sections/schools.
- using English language in the classrooms.
- Reducing the number of students in the crowded classes.

- Application of interesting language games and activities in the classroom.

The above suggestions were proposed by the participants of the study to overcome the failure of ELT in the Kinniya Education Zone.

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