

**MANAGEMENT ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH MOTIVATION IN LEARNING
ENGLISH OF THE G.C.E. (A/L) CURRICULUM IN THE KURUNEGALA DISTRICT
IN SRI LANKA: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract

With the increasing ultimatum for the English language in diverse fields both locally and internationally, Sri Lanka has been trying to facilitate the field of English language teaching in the country for years. One such initiative is introducing the General English subject to the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) curriculum in government schools to improve the proficiency levels in English of the school leavers. However, despite several policy ingenuities and implementations, the results of the G.C.E. (A/L) examination ascertain that a vast majority of the students fail the General English subject every year, leading to a yet-unsolved issue in the education sector of the country.

The empirical pieces of evidence have proven that learners' motivation affects success or failure in language learning. This qualitative study focuses on the education management-related factors that affect the learner motivation for the General English subject of the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum. The primary data were collected by conducting interviews with 60 randomly selected students in the Art stream of the 30 National Schools in the Kurunegala district while the secondary data were collected from the result analysis reports of the Department of Examinations, Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, and the schools. The findings prove that some educational policies and macro-level planning, the nature of pedagogy in general, and some learner-related matters have been the main causes for the decline in the learners' motivation, leading to unsuccessful learning outcomes.

Keywords: motivation, education management, educational policies, General English subject, unsuccessful learning outcome, macro-level planning, pedagogy

1. Introduction

Free education is offered in Sri Lanka from primary classes to university education and in some technical and professional fields, irrespective of the learners' economic backgrounds, based on the Free Education Act of 1945. The school student enrolment is considerably high and the country possesses a higher literacy rate of 93.3% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2021). The government provides free student manuals, uniforms, medical inspections, dental care, and spectacles for needy children, including transport subsidies to travel to schools (Nawastheen, 2019). There are three types of government-funded schools, operated under the Ministry of Education (MOE), namely the National schools, Provincial schools, and Buddhist seminaries and some private and international schools, registered under the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka, which are not regulated, managed, or controlled by the MOE.

Teaching English as a compulsory subject to students from the primary classes to the advanced level in state schools is specified very exceptional attention in the contemporary education system in Sri Lanka because of its importance in the social and economic expansion in the globalized world. Prominence to teach English has been given in all education reforms introduced from time to time in the country and English has been incorporated as a compulsory subject from the primary classes to the advanced level in the Sri Lankan state school curriculum (Aloysius, 2015).

The students in grades one and two learn English through the Activity Based Oral English (ABOE) program. The main purpose of the ABOE is to train the students to use the language for day-to-day communication and the program focuses only on speaking and listening skills and is included as a part of the environmental studies subject. The ABOE connects with the usage of English as a means to communicate during teacher-guided play activities as a section of their subject 'Environmental Related Activity' (Widanapathirana, *et. al.*, 2016). English is formally taught from grades three to five using a textbook with emphasis paid to the development of the child's mind, skills, attitudes, and abilities through guided play, activity, and deskwork (Angela *et.al.*, 2018). Thus, English syllabi from grades three to five aim at laying the base for the continuing expansion of the student's capabilities to communicate and it contains speaking, reading, writing, and listening lessons. The secondary level (from grades six to eleven) curriculum focuses on the four main language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening to prepare the students for the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) (G.C.E. O/L) examination, the national level examination conducted at the end of the senior secondary level in grade eleven (Aloysius, 2015). The General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) (G.C.E. A/L) examination is the final level qualification of the state schools, by which the students are selected for higher educational institutes. The General English subject has been included as an additional subject in the curriculum with the objective of producing suitable human resources for the world of work. The curriculum of the subject emphasizes the capability levels that the students should reach to accomplish certain tasks using the English language (NIE, 2017).

Although several implementations such as English language teaching (ELT) curriculum/textbook changes and reforms on Advanced Level English curriculum have been made in the past to improve the English language proficiency level of the students, achieving the target objectives has still been a failure according to the records of the Department of Examinations (DOE) (2018,

2019,2020, 2021) and the empirical pieces of evidence. ELT projects carried out from time to time in Sri Lanka for more than 40 years have failed miserably (Medawattegedara, 2015) and the proficiency levels of Sri Lankan students yet remain at very low stages (Bimali & McCulloch, 2022; Abdul & Rifka, 2020; Gunawardana & Karunaratne,2017). Sri Lankan students who enter universities for their higher education do not possess an adequate level of English language proficiency to continue their studies in English medium (McCulloch et. al., 2020). Similarly, Bimali & McCulloch, (2022) found that of the core subjects, students have performed worst in English and their English proficiency level is very low. Thus, the results of the examination along with the empirical indications ascertain that despite numerous implementations to teach English in government schools, the school leavers' proficiency level residues at very low levels, leaving this to be a current issue in the education sector, leading to a huge gap between the intended learning outcomes and the actual product.

The necessity then arises to investigate the issue's root causes immediately to find remedial measures to solve the problem. Importantly, an investigation into the perception of the students connected to these unsuccessful learning outcomes is vital. Among other persuading factors, scholars have emphasized the requirement of learner motivation for effective language learning. Motivation is an important factor in the learners' discrepancies in the success or failure of second language (L2) learning (Mehdi et.al, 2022; Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner, 1985). However, investigations especially focused on students' perceptions of the education management that cause their low motivation to learn English are hard to find in Sri Lanka, generating a serious gap in the related literature. Educational management denotes the administration of the system of education which combines human as well as material resources for planning, strategizing, supervising, and implementing structures to execute a system of education (Connolly *et.al.*, (2017). Further explained, educational management can simply be well-defined as controlling and managing educational resources to improve, achieve, and sustain objectives and goals of education. It is also thus understood that improper education management will lead to unproductive learning outcomes.

Thus, the present study attempted to identify the students' perspectives on education management associated with the learner motivation toward learning English of the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum in the Kurunegala district in Sri Lanka.

'The significance of a study describes its importance, who will benefit from it, and how it will contribute to further development or improvement to the areas being researched' (Azam, *et. al.*, 2021 p.69). The findings of the study will then contribute to educational policy-making and advances in practice in the field of ELT, giving the practitioners knowledge of learning motivation and a clearer view of teaching the subject. Further, this study will assist the curriculum and material designers and the teachers with a greater insight into the use and manipulation of the lessons. In addition, the findings will also help the parents understand learners' L2 motivation and the issues confronted by them to take remedial measures to get the expected learning outcomes.

2. Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions associated with educational management that cause their low motivation to learn English at the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum in the Kurunegala District in Sri Lanka?
2. What are the most contributive factors connected with the student's motivation behind each of those key management-related issues?

3. Literature Review

The review focuses on L2 motivation and the common factors that affect the field of ELT in Sri Lanka.

3.1 Motivation in L2 Learning

Scholars identify L2 motivation as a multifaceted concept (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) and a dynamic and abstract paradigm (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2014). Further, Brown (2000), Cook (2000), and Gardner (1985) emphasize that successful L2 learning depends on learners' motivation. Gardner (1985) categorizes L2 motivation as instrumental motivation (that ascends due to external and functional causes such as the learner's requisite to learn L2) and integrative motivation (learning L2 for individual developments and cultural enhancement such as the prerequisite to enter into L2 society). Added to that, Gardner (1985) explicates that individual integrative motives lead to successful L2 learning outcomes since they reflect a dynamic involvement in L2 learning. He additionally ascertains that integrative motivation will strongly inspire L2 learners and assist them to make additional efforts to learn L2 and learners, motivated instrumentally are good L2 achievers. Both instrumental and integrative motivations are required for successful L2 learning and unmotivated learners will face difficulties in learning L2 (Cook, 2000).

Dörnyei (1998) categorizes L2 motivation as extrinsic (an incentive, encouraged by external factors such as obtaining admiration and reward for the completion of a task or avoiding punishments) and intrinsic (involving in actions caused by their enjoyable nature - mental satisfaction). He stresses that L2 motivation is contingent on the learners' aims to learn L2, how hard they work on it, and how long they are passionate about sustaining the activity. Furthermore, Brown (2000) perceives a relationship between Dörnyei's and Gardner's classifications. As Brown (2000) expands, extrinsic motivation turns to instrumental motivation when an external encouragement influences an individual to learn L2. Correspondingly, extrinsic motivation will turn to integrative motivation with an outsider's necessity on the learner to know the integrative drives of learning L2. Brown (2000) further explains that learners with similar integrative motivations may exhibit differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning L2.

Thus, positive motivation is essential in L2 learning and makes the learners encouraging, progressive, self-confident, and successful in learning. Further, self-motivated L2 learners always feel the touch of success, as they understand their improvements and achievements. Motivating L2 learners frequently towards learning assists in accomplishing successful learning outcomes (Azam, *et al.*, 2019).

3.2 Common Issues in the Field of ELT in Sri Lanka

Commonly identified issues by Nam (2023), Abdul (2021), Gunaratne, *et al.*, (2021), Samaranayake (2021), and Abdul & Rifka (2020) are insufficient teaching time allocation, application of impractical teaching techniques, scarcity of teaching materials and facilities and highly populated classrooms. In comparison with the definition of education management by Connolly *et al.*, (2017), these issues can be identified as management-related issues. Other empirical findings, identified in different contexts are summarized below.

The study conducted by Nam, (2023) in the Central Province to find out the time allocation to teaching English, loss of teaching hours, and issues related to student-centered teaching practices, found that fewer learning opportunities occur due to teachers' absenteeism, late start, and premature lesson completion, unofficial and unplanned closures of schools and the use of school days for non-academic events.

Gunaratne, *et al.*, (2021) explored the causes that affect ESL learners' proficiency in public schools in Colombo, Kandy, and Badulla education zones. They found out that education policies such as the non-compulsory requirement of a pass for English to enter universities, non-teaching of English from grade one, and inadequate professional teacher training have caused low proficiency levels and the deterioration of English in schools. The researchers further explain that due to this non-compulsory nature, the learners are not enthusiastic to learn and consider learning English useless. In addition, they found that the English periods are used to teach the core subjects since higher education requires good grades for the main subjects only. Further, they emphasize the necessity for continuous teacher training because the teacher's professionalism positively influences the learners' performances and highlight that the student population in a class should be maintained at a perfect level. A maximum of 10 - 15 students is appropriate for an L2 classroom so that every individual will be taken care of but Sri Lankan classrooms consist of over 30 students (Abdul, 2021).

A common textbook and workbook are given to all students in state schools free of charge and the teachers have common teacher's guides (Nam, 2023). This has caused serious issues for the low proficient learners and due to the difficult nature of the lessons, these students tend to neglect learning. In addition, Gunaratne *et al.*, (2021) also found unorganized lessons and a mismatch between the textbooks and the teacher's guides and further emphasized the necessity to reduce and organize the syllabus for all grades with updated input systematically to satisfy the needs of young minds. In addition, scholars have found unsatisfactory student performance evaluations. The tests evaluate reading and writing skills with unsatisfactory listening and speaking skills (Gunaratne, *et al.*, 2021).

Abdul (2021) in his study to investigate the issues related to ELT in Kinniya Education Zone, Trincomalee, identified that the deficiency of basic knowledge and learner interest, use of mother tongue to teach English, and learners' negative attitudes towards learning as major factors that affect learning English. The study, conducted by Samaranayake (2021) with 30 learners in Colombo identified the use of a common textbook for all proficiency levels, non-conducive learning environments, political interference, and parents' low economic status as the roots of deterrents to learning English. Explaining the causes further, Samaranayake (2021) states that,

- Due to the usage of a common textbook, using external sources is restricted since the teachers try to finish the prescribed syllabus within the given time without dealing with learners having different proficiency levels.
- Insufficient infrastructure demotivates teachers and students.
- Learner-centered teaching approaches are impossible in highly populated classes.
- Teachers get transfers to metropolitan schools using political favoritism, leading the schools in remote areas with qualified teacher shortages.
- The parents cannot afford educational materials and private tuition for their children due to their low economic status.

Abdul & Rifka (2020) investigated the causes of the lack of learner interest in the General English subject of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee. The results have revealed the prominence given only to the core subjects, usage of advanced textbooks, and lack of positive motivation and English background as contributing factors to the less learner interest and lower results.

The study, conducted by Seefa (2017) to investigate the English learning challenges in the Madhu education zone of the Mannar district found that lack of conducive learning environments, exposure, practice opportunities outside the classroom, and parents' support for studies due to their low education as major challenges. Other hindrances are bitter learning experiences, economic problems, learners' unsatisfactory school attendance, negative attitudes, poor grammar knowledge, differences in English and Tamil language structures, and the deficiency of qualified teachers (Seefa, 2017).

Summarizing the above empirical findings, it can be concluded that these issues lower the student motivation to learn English.

4. Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research paradigm and considering the research ethics, written permission of the education authorities to conduct the research was taken before the study, with the consent of the participants to take part in the interviews. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and voluntary participation.

4.1 The Sample of the Study

The sample consisted of 60 randomly selected students in the Art stream of the 30 National Schools in the Kurunegala district who had completed their secondary education in the academic year 2020. The National schools were selected on the premise that there is a good student representation from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds in these schools with similar learning facilities. Further, the data were collected from the students of the arts stream since the student population in this stream is comparatively larger than the other subject streams which leads to a judicious generalization of the results to a larger student population.

4.2 Survey Instruments

Data were collected through telephone interviews mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Interviewing is an ideal way of collecting data for a study where the researcher can comprehend the relevant data with the help of interviewee responses (Azam *et al.*, 2021). The researcher designed the interview questions reviewing the literature and receiving the external expert validation for the interview guide and it was pilot-tested on five students followed by the adjustments and modifications in the interview questions. Data credibility was assured using the member-check technique.

4.3 Technique of Data Analysis

Document analysis of the responses was completed following the thematic content analysis technique (systematic coding) using the inductive method. “Document analysis involves the encoding and content into the same theme in the process of identifying focus groups, and also the analysis of the transcript of the interview” (Azam *et. al.*, 2021 p.270). This method discovers patterns and trends in respondents’ perspectives and reveals recurring themes that might go unnoticed in the analysis, finally providing a richer and in-depth understanding of the non-numerical data. The summaries of the responses were first analyzed and coded based on the grounded theory. When coding and analyzing the data, the researcher should familiarize himself with the collected data, create initial codes, search for appropriate and specific themes, review them, define and name those themes followed by writing the report (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Categories can be developed based on the theory, that emerges from the collected data (Azam *et. al.*, 2021). The researcher used the bottom-up phase as the coding approach, by carefully reading the responses and identifying the important and relevant sections of the text. The identified segments with more or less similar ideas were then categorized under abstract sub-categories (codes), followed by collating and grouping them into three main broader themes, which signify more general ideas that are implicit in the sub-categories. The themes were refined and reviewed again by examining all extracts that are connected to each code to verify whether they signify, overlap, or contradict the theme. In addition, several rounds of discussions with three independent researchers were conducted to validate the accuracy of the coding system and theme design as well. Three emerging themes namely policy and macro-level planning-related matters, delivery of teaching-related matters, and student-related matters were designed. The findings are communicated in graphs and charts.

5. Analysis of the Results

The following section displays the results followed by the discussion.

5.1 Theme 01- Policy and Macro-Level Planning-related Matters

The bar graph shows the policy and macro-level planning-related matters.

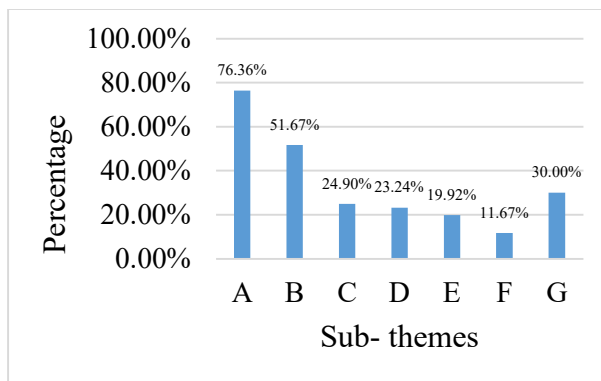


Figure 01 - Policy and macro-level planning-related matters

Sub-themes

A: Lack of learning resources

B: Heavy workload of the main subjects

C: Use of a common textbook

D: Over-populated classes

E: Lack of motivation to learn due to the non-compulsory requirement of English to pass the A/L examination and university admissions

F: Insufficient time allocation in the timetable

G: Difficult, uninteresting, and irrelevant lessons in the textbook

As depicted in Figure 01, a vast majority of the respondents (76.36%) have accentuated the deficiency of learning resources with 51.67% complaining of the heavy workload of the main subjects. The use of a common textbook for all proficiency levels has been commented on by 24.9% of the total responses. 23.24 % have claimed about the over-populated classes and a considerable number of participants (19.92%) have highlighted their lack of motivation to learn English due to its non-compulsory requirement to enter the universities and to pass the examination. 11.67% of the total respondents emphasize the insufficient timetable allocation for English and a significant number of respondents (30%) have stressed that the lessons in the textbook are difficult, uninteresting, and irrelevant.

5.2 Theme 02 - Delivery of Teaching-Related Matters

The bar graph shows the delivery of teaching-related matters.

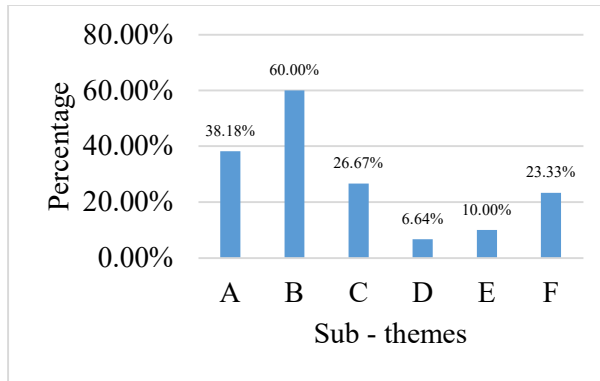


Figure 02 - Delivery of teaching-related matters

Sub-themes

- A:** Lack of extra-curricular activities
- B:** Lack of different teaching methodologies
- C:** Lack of continuous flow of the lessons
- D:** Uninterested, monotonous teaching
- E:** Teachers’ frequent absenteeism and use of English period for core subjects
- F:** Less individual attention by the teacher

Figure 02 shows the issues related to the delivery of teaching. Lack of extra-curricular activities and different teaching methodologies have been emphasized by 38.18% and 60.00% of the total respondents respectively. 26.67% of the respondents have complained about the non-continuous flow of the lessons while 6.64% view teaching as monotonous and uninteresting. A few participants (10.00%) have complained about the teacher’s frequent absenteeism and using the English period to teach core subjects. Teachers’ less individual attention to the learners is another issue highlighted by 23.33% of the participants.

5.3 Theme 03 - Student related matters

The following chart shows student-related matters.

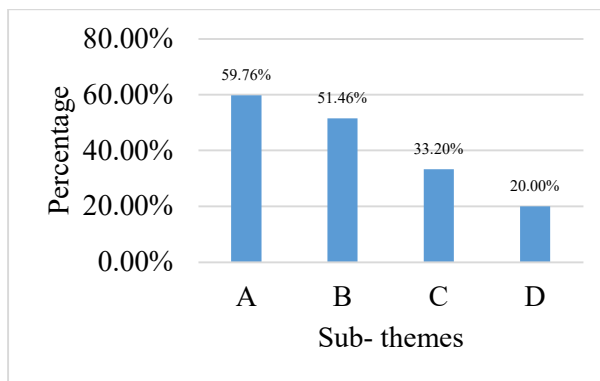


Figure 03 - Student related matters

Sub-themes

- A:** Difficulty in allocating time for learning English, due to the focus on the main subjects
- B:** Insufficient vocabulary and difficulties in pronunciation
- C:** Lack of basic grammar knowledge
- D:** Lack of motivation

More than half of the respondents (59.76 %) have emphasized their difficulty in finding time to learn English, as much time is needed for the core subjects. Lack of vocabulary and pronunciation problems and basic grammar knowledge have been highlighted by 51.46% and 33.20% of the overall responses respectively. A considerable number of the participants (20.00%) have highlighted their lack of motivation to learn English.

6. Discussion

6.1 Policy and Macro-Level Planning Related Matters

The following section discusses the policy and macro-level planning-related matters.

6.1.1 Lack of Learning Resources

The majority of the respondents have emphasized that they had only the teacher and the textbook to learn English, and the use of only the lessons in the book. Sanmuganathan (2017) also found that teachers frequently teach textbook lessons and expect the learners to participate only within that frame. Further, the respondents expressed that they like technology-based learning but were unable to use the computer lab due to time constraints and lack of access. The schools do not have language laboratories and language learning software because it is very difficult to supply modern facilities to every school due to financial constraints. The lack of learning facilities in Sri Lankan state schools has been highlighted by Gunaratne, *et al.* (2021), Abdul (2021), and Polagolla & Wicramasinghe (2019). The non-availability of computers in every school, the higher cost of the devices, poor network facilities, and computer literacy among teachers and students have been the barriers to the use of modern technology in the classroom (Polagolla & Wicramasinghe, 2019).

6.1.2 Heavy Workload of the Core Subjects

Respondents complained about the large syllabus, higher amount of assignments, homework, and tests in the core subjects. Further, the students claimed that they could not allocate time to English due to these heavy workloads and neglected English because of its non-compulsory nature. Core subjects are given prominence in the A/L classes (Abdul & Rifka, 2020).

6.1.3 Use of a Common Textbook with Advanced, Uninteresting, and Irrelevant Lessons

Many students complained that they neglected to learn English due to the unfair use of a common textbook for all proficiency levels. Abdul (2021), Gunaratne *et al.* (2021), Samaranayake (2021), and Abdul & Rifka, (2020) emphasize that one main problem with low-proficient students is the nonexistence of choice to use differentiated textbooks, appropriate to their proficiency

levels. This status quo may discourage the teachers who struggle to deal with less proficient students using high-content textbooks. Samaranyake (2021) explains that this situation restricts using external sources due to teachers' attempts to finish the prescribed syllabus within the given time and the teachers cannot deal with learners with different proficiency levels using a common textbook.

The respondents further emphasized the lack of speaking and listening lessons in the curriculum and further stressed their need to improve their speaking skills. The textbooks focus mainly on reading and writing with less emphasis on speaking and listening (Bimali & McCulloch, 2022). In addition, these skills are not evaluated in the major examinations, and consequently, teachers pay less attention to improving these skills. The emphasis on preparing learners for national examinations mitigates increasing speaking and listening skills, as these skills are not tested in the O/L and A/L examinations (Bimali & McCulloch, 2022). Some participants commented that the textbook lessons are difficult, not interesting and relevant, and do not match their needs. Further, they suggest presenting the lessons in an interesting way to grab their attention more. Gunaratne *et al.*, (2021) emphasize the necessity of innovative and methodical revision of the present textbooks for all classes with updated input for satisfying the learners' needs.

6.1.4 Highly Populated Classes

This situation is mostly observed in popular schools, creating problems for both teachers and learners. The teachers have to work with diverse populations, including learners with different aims, proficiency levels, learning styles, and backgrounds, which increases teacher stress. Due to the lack of space in the class, paying individual attention and employing a variety of strategies such as group work, task-based learning, speaking activities, access to technology and fair use of available learning facilities are rather difficult. Moreover, conducting a variety of performance evaluation tests, giving individual feedback, and organizing extra-curricular activities are impossible. Overpopulated classrooms create learners' negative attitudes towards learning and lower results in A/L examination (Abdul, 2021; Abdul & Rifka, 2020)) and teacher-centered learning (Nam, 2023; Gunaratne, *et al.*, 2021; Samaranyake, 2021). Abdul (2021) emphasizes the necessity of a fair number of students in classes to attend to learners' individual needs.

6.1.5 Lack of Motivation to Learn due to the Non-compulsory Requirement of English to Pass the A/L Examination and to Enter the Universities

Respondents seem demotivated to learn English due to the non-requirement of passing grades at the A/L examination and university entrance. Core subjects are paid more attention due to this flexibility and higher competition at the examination and they seem to consider studying English a waste of time. These negative attitudes and lack of interest finally result in unsuccessful learning outcomes. Learners' lack of positive motivation to learn English is identified as a major issue in A/L classes (Abdul & Rifka, 2020). Further, Cook (2000), Brown (2000), and Gardner (1985) highlight the requirement of learners' motivation for successful L2 learning. The learners should be motivated continuously to achieve successful learning outcomes (Azam, *et al.*, 2019).

6.1.6 Insufficient Time Allocation for English

The school timetable allocates 210 minutes from grade five onwards a week to teach the English subject (Angela, *et al.*, 2018). Learning a language is completely different from learning other subjects where a lot of practicing time is required. The students emphasized that they need more time to practice in school due to the lack of outside opportunities and the heavy workload in the main subjects.

Due to insufficient teaching hours, teachers also face problems in providing adequate feedback and practice, organizing extra-curricular activities, and employing learner-centered teaching practices. Nam (2023), Abdul (2021), Gunaratne, *et al.*, (2021), and Angela, *et al.*, (2018,) identified that fewer learning opportunities occur due to insufficient timetable allocation in Sri Lankan schools. Nam (2023) further explains that teaching opportunities are lost due to unofficial, unplanned closures of schools and the use of school time for non-academic activities.

6.2 Delivery of Teaching-Related Matters

6.2.1 Use of Ineffective Teaching Methodologies

More than half of the respondents complained of the use of traditional teaching methods where most of the classes seem teacher-centered. They emphasized the necessity of activity-based, learner-centered teaching practices inclusion of modern technology. This is common in most L2 learning contexts due to a lack of facilities, professional teacher training, and over-populated classrooms. This can be compared with the findings of Abdul (2021), Abdul & Rifka (2020), and Angela, *et al.*, (2018). Teachers cannot apply learner-centered teaching approaches in a very limited space in non-conducive classrooms and highly populated classes (Samaranayake, 2021).

6.2.2 Lack of Extra-Curricular Activities

A considerable number of respondents emphasized their desire to participate in English clubs, camps, concerts, competitions, projects, and workshops. They consider that such activities will improve their language skills, make learning enjoyable, interesting, and practical to them, and break the monotony of learning. This will increase their language exposure and in a way, such participation will improve individuals' inherent capabilities (creativity, organizing and leadership, and decision-making abilities) and enrich their L2 learning experience. Extracurricular activities help learners to be exposed to a real-world language setting (Chakraborty & Roy, 2021) and help learners develop discipline, time management, self-confidence, and academic achievements (Albayrak & Şener, 2021). However, teachers may not organize extra-curricular activities due to lack of funds, time, and student interest especially in A/L classes, and may consider it an extra burden to them.

6.2.3 Lack of Continuous Flow of the Lessons

The participants complained of the unorganized (especially the grammar lessons) and ineffective nature of the lessons and emphasized the necessity of arranging them from the easiest to the most difficult. This situation may demotivate the slow learners and they may feel that they are neglected

in the class. Gunaratne *et al.*, (2021) also, found disorganized lessons and disparities between the teacher's guides and textbooks and suggest to upgrade the input methodically and innovatively to ascertain the learner's needs. They further suggest that the textbook and study guide writers communicate with each other to reduce and organize the syllabus systematically.

6.2.4 Frequent Teacher Absenteeism and Use of English Period for the Core Subjects

Participants expressed that the core subject teachers use English period for their lessons. This situation occurs due to less consideration and treatment given to English, the importance specified to the core subjects, and lack of communication between the teachers. Students also tend to neglect learning English due to their focus on the main subjects. English periods are used to teach the core subjects in the A/L classes due to the requirement of good grades for those subjects in higher education (Gunaratne, *et al.*, 2021). Nam (2023) and Angela, *et al.*, (2018) found teachers' absenteeism, late start and premature completion of the lessons, closures of schools for informal and unplanned activities, and the use of school days for non-academic activities. They identified the causes such as attending teacher training, extra school duties or official work at the education office, and medical or casual leaves for teachers' absenteeism. This happens due to a lack of proper administrative systems in the education sector. The dearth of a proper monitoring mechanism is identified as a major issue (Polagolla & Wicramasinghe, 2019; Ilmudeen, 2015).

6.2.5 Less Individual Attention to the Learners

The teacher's individual attention with necessary backing and feedback is vital and it will enhance learners' enthusiasm, interest, and motivation toward learning (Munna & Kalam, 2021; Sanmuganathan, 2017). A considerable number of respondents highlighted the teachers' less individual attention to them. This happens due to the lack of space, excessive student numbers in classes, and teachers' heavy workload (Sanmuganathan, 2017). In addition, the teachers may pay less attention to the students with lower proficiencies. Munna & Kalam (2021) emphasize the necessity of detecting these learning barriers and the teaching approaches should be adjusted to achieve all learners' learning objectives and not certain individuals.

6.3 Student-Related Matters

Three student-related matters are discussed in the following section.

6.3.1 Less Time Allocation for Learning English

The majority of the respondents highlighted their inability to allocate time to study English due to their focus on the core subjects and that they spend only the class time for learning English. The main reason for this again is the underestimation given to English due to the non-requirement of at least a simple pass for university admission and to pass the A/L examination. In addition, due to higher competition in the A/L examination and the importance given to core subjects, the students tend to pay less attention and ignore English. It was observed that many students have

not felt the need for English because they are living in monolingual areas. A/L students give their prominence only to the core subjects, leading to low English proficiencies (Abdul & Rifka, 2020).

6.3.2 Insufficient Vocabulary and Basic Grammar Knowledge, and Pronunciation Difficulties

Insufficient vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of basic grammar knowledge are other identified issues. This is common with individuals, learning a new language where they face difficulties especially when speaking and writing. Consequently, the learners may be reluctant, fearful, and shy to speak in English. This can be compared with the findings of Abdul, (2021) and Seefa (2017). They further explain that the students are having a misconception that learning English is learning grammar and a majority of them view learning grammar as difficult, which finally leads to an unwillingness to learn English.

6.3.3 Lack of Motivation

Motivation is important in the individual discrepancies in the success or failure of L2 learning (Mehdi *et al.*, 2022; Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner 1985). Some students do not feel the necessity to learn English because they learn in their mother tongue and live in monolingual areas. These learners do not usually get opportunities to use English in these environments and the teachers should provide more opportunities to use English in the classroom (Sanmuganathan, 2017). Further, they seem unaware of the role of English in and out of the country due to their lack of experience with the outside world. In addition, owing to inefficient teaching methods, lesson difficulties, and the English language in general, they are not instrumentally or integratively motivated and neglect learning. The learners' lack of motivation and positive attitudes impede successful learning (Gunaratne, *et al.*, 2021; Abdul & Rifka 2020).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Successful education depends on correct education policies, curriculum development and implementation, teachers' and students' motivation, effective use of teaching approaches, and learning facilities. This study explored the key management-related issues that affect student motivation in learning English of the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum in the Kurunegala district in Sri Lanka to recommend practical solutions to overcome the issues.

In conclusion, lack of learning resources, heavy workload of the core subjects, use of a common textbook with advanced, uninteresting, and irrelevant lessons, overpopulated classes, lack of motivation to learn due to non-compulsory requirement of English, insufficient teaching time were identified as the major policy and macro-level planning-related issues. The identified delivery of teaching-related issues are lack of extra-curricular activities, effective teaching methodologies, continuous flow of the lessons, individual attention on the learners, and in addition, teachers' frequent absenteeism and the loss of teaching time. Less time allocation for learning English due to the focus on the core subjects, lack of motivation, sufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and pronunciation difficulties were identified as student-related matters. Following

recommendations for the key issues that received 50% and above of the total responses, are suggested to assist learners overcome these issues in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

7.1 Lack of Learning Resources

The school authorities can optimize resources and plan to get maximum benefits by allocating separate time slots to use the computer labs based on the highest needs and grade levels. Organizing fund-raising programs to buy computers, learning software, and other devices will be a good solution. Further, the teachers can prepare supplementary teaching materials rather than depending only on the textbook. In addition, the students can be encouraged to use online learning tools, like virtual classroom platforms and YouTube videos in their free time. Zonal-level language laboratories may be established for the students to use after school.

7.2 Heavy Workload of the Main Subjects

Increasing the number of admissions to higher education institutes gradually and reducing the syllabus content of the main subjects will decrease the competition of the A/L examination and pressure on the learners. Core subject teachers may minimize the amount of homework, assignments, and tests and the schools can design a suitable implementation plan for the entire A/L section to lower the burdensome tasks. Stress management courses may be included in the syllabi of the teacher training schools to give special training on handling student pressures.

7.3 Use of Ineffective Teaching Methodologies

Incorporation of learner-centered lessons into the textbook, supply of additional facilities (computers and free internet) to every school, and conducting repetitive zonal level professional in-service teacher training will solve the issue. Financial support and leave approvals are important requirements for the teachers to participate in these trainings. The in-service advisors and experienced teachers can continuously supervise teaching sessions and provide necessary feedback to the teachers. The learners' feedback will assist the teachers in selecting the most effective technologies to be used. Teachers may join online language teacher communities and zonal-level teacher circles can be established to enable the teachers to discuss their issues and share experience. It is also suggested that teachers experiment continuously with novel teaching techniques and peer evaluations will help in finding the effectiveness of these techniques.

7.4 Less Time Allocation for Learning English, due to Focus on the Core Subjects

Allocating a proportion of the marks (at least 35-40%) from the General English subject for university admission, and a compulsory passing requirement to pass the A/L examination will motivate students and make additional efforts to learn English. School authorities, teachers, and parents can educate the students continuously about the benefits of learning English and the events in the school (morning assemblies, sports meet, daily announcements, etc.) can be conducted in English to make the students feel the necessity and motivate them to learn English.

7.5 Insufficient Vocabulary and Basic Grammar Knowledge, and Pronunciation Difficulties

Learners can be instructed to download language-learning apps and dictionaries to their mobile phones and use them in their free time to learn grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Teachers can encourage students to listen to English songs and speeches and watch English films, TV shows, and YouTube videos. This will assist students to improve both their word power and correct pronunciation. Due to the difficulties in correcting all individual pronunciations in large classes, teachers can make notes on the most frequently mispronounced words and give the correct feedback immediately after the learning task. Constant practice with some words every day at the end of each lesson will be a good practice. Learners can be engaged in conversations with native speakers through internet sources where they can listen to correct pronunciations. The vocabulary can be improved by cultivating reading habits in the learners. Teachers can give students some new words daily and ask them to write a few sentences using these words and they can be asked to maintain a small vocabulary notebook.

8. Limitations of the study

As the study was restricted only to a selected area, the following limitations are identified and they may provide some directions for future studies on the issue. The first limitation lies with the sample selection. Data were collected from 60 students in the Art stream out of five subject streams of the National schools in the district. The sample is relatively small with low statistical power and it may not represent all students in advanced-level classes, leading to difficulties in generalizing the results. For a fair representation, more participants from other subject streams and other schools are needed to be included in a future study.

In addition, due to accessing difficulties, the views of the education policymakers, curriculum designers, principals and teachers of English, and the parents were not taken into consideration. A future research may include them also since they may have different views to express in this regard. Further, the interviews were conducted over the telephone due to the inability to conduct face-to-face interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's economic crises. This may have caused in identification of the participants' true feelings and body language during the interviews. In addition, since Sri Lankan students are not usually familiar with this type of research study, the presence of the researcher as an outsider may influence participants' true and free opinions because of their fear that their opinions may affect them personally.

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