

A Study of the Second Language needs of the Undergraduates in the Humanities and Social Science streams in relation to the transition of Medium of Instruction

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Faculty of Education  
University of Colombo  
Sri Lanka

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m 28



Shiranthi Niranjala Rajendram

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## Abstract

The reintroduction of English medium education in schools and university has created a renewed interest in the learning/teaching of the English language in Sri Lanka. English is learned as a foreign language in Sri Lanka. In the 1950's, the medium of instruction in schools and universities changed from English medium to mother tongue medium of instruction. This resulted in generations of Sri Lankans being educated in their mother tongue (Sinhala or Tamil). With the recent reintroduction of the English medium education, the transition from mother tongue medium to English medium is proving to be difficult. This study focuses on the Bachelor of Arts (B.Ed) undergraduates of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo who have thus far studied in the mother tongue medium (Sinhala/Tamil).

This study was conducted to investigate the English language needs of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) undergraduates of the Faculty of Education. This study analyses the problems and difficulties faced by the B.Ed students following their degree programme in the English medium. Data was gathered from the B.Ed students who followed the English Language course offered by the Department of Humanities Education, Faculty of Education with the objective of suggesting an English Language course that would minimize the difficulties faced by students in the event of a transition from mother tongue medium of instruction to English medium instruction.

The sample of the study comprised sixty nine students following the Bachelor of Education (Third Year) programme and twelve students of the Bachelor of Education (First Year) English medium programme. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) English medium programme commenced in 2006 and the sample of twelve students comprised the first batch.

The methodology used in the study was to conduct a needs assessment of the English language requirements of the B.Ed students following the English Language Course offered by the Department of Humanities Education. The data collected was used to recommend and suggest a new English Language course that would cater to the

specific English language needs of the B.Ed students. The data was collected using questionnaires and interviews.

The findings of the study reveal that the B.Ed students are instrumentally motivated to learn English. The primary objective of the students in learning English is for employment purposes where English language proficiency could create a demand in the employment market. Therefore, the needs analysis reveals that there is a need to improve oral language proficiency. However, in transiting from mother tongue medium to English medium education, the primary requirement of the students should be developing academic reading, writing and academic listening skills.

The study recommends an English Language Course designed to cater to the specific language needs of the students. An Adjunct Instruction model is recommended where the content area lecturer and the language teacher will work with each other to develop the language course. The main purpose of introducing adjunct instruction in language teaching is to provide assistance to the content area lecturer by resolving difficulties in language the students could encounter. However, the recommendations have to be pre tested and needs analysis conducted repeatedly over a period of time.