

Professional Development of Teachers: Issues and Concerns in Improving the English Language Achievement at the Ordinary Level Examination

TB Jeganathan¹, S Fernando², H Palihakkara³, HKL Chamalika⁴, and MDMK Gunaratne⁵

¹AHEAD-SL-CELL, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

²AHEAD-SL-CELL, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

³AHEAD-SL-CELL, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

⁴AHEAD-SL-CELL, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

⁵AHEAD-SL-CELL, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

¹thomas.benjamin@saegis.ac.lk

²sandhya.f@saegis.ac.lk

³hemamali.palihakkara@saegis.ac.lk

⁴lakmini.c@saegis.ac.lk

⁵madara.gunaratne@saegis.ac.lk

Abstract

This research paper analyses the role and impact of professional development programs in improving English language standards in Sri Lankan schools. The problem investigated was the role and impact of teachers' professional qualifications on the achievement levels of the English language at the Ordinary Level Examination (G.C.E. O/Level). The relationship between teachers' professional qualifications and student achievement that affect the achievement level of English at the O/Level Examination, the degree of impact on the achievement levels of the English language, and what professional qualifications constitute teacher quality in improving the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination were the objectives. In a non-experimental research design, a research-team designed Likert scale type questionnaire was used to collect the necessary data. The data

collection instrument was pilot-tested and administered to a sample of 20 voluntary teachers of English. We ran a multiple linear regression test to calculate the students' English language achievement levels based on the teachers' academic and professional qualifications. In the classes where there were teachers with professional qualifications, the students' English language achievement level stood at $\alpha = 0.001$; however, in the classes where the teachers had only academic qualifications, no significant effect on students' English language was noted ($\alpha = 0.010$).

Keywords: Achievement, correlation, impact, professional, qualifications.

I. INTRODUCTION

The achievement levels of the English language are a concern of national interest among the educators and stakeholders. Divided opinion and criticism exist, for example.

Teachers' professional and pedagogic competencies matter in the achievement level of each student. Some teachers in Sri Lankan schools complete their first degree, and they are appointed as teachers without any professional qualifications. Some prospective teachers undergo basic training at National Colleges of Education or Training Colleges. However, many teachers fail to engage in professional development due to personal problems and lack of motivation.

Teacher quality depends on the professional development they engage in right through their careers, for example, and each student's performance has become a significant dependent factor of teacher professionalism. Thus, each teacher's *teacher quality* has become a factor that impacts student achievement—this aspect requires research.

II. BACKGROUND

After the British occupied Sri Lanka in 1796, the English language became a colonial heritage—but with the globalisation and advances in technology, the demand for English in the country increased. Over the years, the English language was established in the Sri Lankan school curriculum. The English language is considered a crucial subject in the curriculum—out of all the subjects. It has its place as a core subject. Increased awareness, significance, and usefulness of the English language have been emphasised as Sri Lanka cannot be isolated from other countries in education, trade, and tourism.

Academics agree that the 20th century marked a conceptual revolution that affected countries and individuals by reframing our understanding of change. Outdated is the formerly accepted modernist concepts such as *closed system models, stability and certainty, natural laws and order, and linear thinking*. These models have been replaced with post-modern concepts: *organic systems, unpredictability, interdependence, and constructed perspectives* (See Scott, 2003). The dissemination of new concepts has been accelerated by a simultaneous revolution in communication and increased people's global mobility.

At the G. C. E O/Level Examination, students offer English as one of the core subjects, but at the A/Level, it is General English that every student must sit and obtain a pass mark (either an A, B, C, or S). A pass mark for General English is not required for university entrance. Whether it is a requirement or not, a pass mark of the English language at the O/Level and A/Level is a prerequisite when they secure a rewarding career once they leave school.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research studies have examined the core issues related to the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination and reported insight. Elsewhere outside Sri Lanka, teaching is a profession. It is a fully-fledged profession, and teachers belong to professional bodies. However, teaching in Sri

Lanka is a vocation (we have Teacher Education Service also), or teaching is considered a semi-profession. In developed countries, teaching is fully-fledged and has autonomy and accountability. In the USA and the UK, prospective teachers enter the teaching profession after completing a professional degree, a post-graduate certificate, or a diploma in education. In France, teachers are expected to renew their teaching licenses and undergo further continuous development.

Sethunga et al. (2016), in their report, concluded that “the number of programs that provides pre-service teacher education and the annual output of professionally qualified teachers is insufficient to meet the demand for qualified teachers” (p. 13). This small number shows us a dearth of professionally qualified teachers; the training of teachers before they are deployed in Sri Lanka is far below when compared with the developed world. Elaborating further, Setunge et al. (2016) believed that “in Sri Lanka, a professional qualification is not a requirement for teacher recruitment” (ibid. 13).

Teacher recruitment and deployment in Sri Lanka are in stark contrast to the methods of recruitment and deployment in some of the other countries. In their report, Setunge et al. (2016) concluded that “in Sri Lanka, a consistent policy had not been implemented in the teacher recruitment process. Graduates and candidates without a basic degree have been recruited without professional qualification in teaching” (p. 35).

Research conducted elsewhere has reported findings that correlate with our postulate. In one study, MacKinnon & Shields (2020) concluded that “with the broadening workplace in mind, it is incumbent on teacher educators to better prepare teacher interns with an extended range of skills necessary for an international career” (p. 1). Also, they argued that “in many institutions worldwide, the content and processes advanced by teacher education programs, are constantly being revisited to ensure that graduated teachers have the appropriate skill set to address the realities of public-school teaching” (ibid. p. 2).

This revision of teacher education brings us to the argument that unarguably, teachers' level of education and professional know-how has a causal effect on the achievement level of students, as this study has found. A teacher training model for illustrative purposes may be presented as in:

Teacher training is a crucial aspect of the recruitment and selection process. However, graduates with a degree in the English language are also appointed as teachers of English—they lack a teaching practicum such as the one built into a post-graduate diploma in teaching English as a second language or the internship by the National Colleges of Education. As discussed in Setunge et al. (2016), three phases in teacher training exist. They reiterated the significance of teacher professional competencies and the need for teacher training programs before prospective teachers are deployed into schools spread across Sri Lanka.

An untrained teacher, for example, is unaware of child psychology, child development, learning difficulties and styles, maturation, and learning. Furthermore, an untrained teacher may not recognise the developmental stages of children and may not customise and personalise the lessons.

Teachers' professional qualifications impact the achievement levels of students as their increased technical expertise may help them deliver lessons and help students learn well. In teaching a language like the English language, mere educational qualifications are unlikely to help teachers; combined with them are required professional qualifications recognised as relevant and essential.

A. *Teacher Quality*

Teacher quality, for example, is an evasive term though various researchers have attempted to define what teacher quality is. Goe (2017) defined it as “teacher quality is a complex for which there are no general as well as absolute agreement exists concerning an appropriate and comprehensive definition. One of the first issues is to resolve is the difference between teacher quality and teaching quality” (p. 8).

Teacher quality has also been researched because, as learner variables, teacher quality is a teacher variable that impacts the achievement levels of students. The professional behaviour of teachers is a variable. It is also a contributory factor as well. Although teachers' quality may be measured using inputs

and processes, the achievement measurement used in this research synthesis is student achievement on standardised tests (Ibid. p. 2). The impact of teacher quality is visible when the results of the O/Level are evaluated; the drastic and underperformance of students indicate the effects of teacher quality.

The genesis of the information age and the establishment of a knowledge society (see Drucker, 1993) transformed the world. Such a society requires people to have “a good formal education and an ability to acquire and apply theoretical as well as analytical knowledge... Above all, they require a habit of continuous learning” (ibid. p. 62). Drucker outlined a new role for education in a knowledge society—learning and schools would not exist for children but would extend through adults' lives, permeate society, and include knowledge generation and problem-solving.

Learning, as Drucker predicted, would be based on performance and results rather than on rules and regulations; besides, he predicted that lateral thinking coupled with formal education would help us with upward social mobility (ibid. pp. 62 - 63).

A direct correlation is hard to find between teachers' professional qualifications and student achievement. This difficulty is experienced in other parts of the world as well. Squire-Kelly (2021) concluded that “Although researchers reported a positive correlation between student achievement and teacher empowerment, other researchers could not

determine a direct correlation” (p. 18). Other teacher variables such as motivation and teacher quality have been researched; out of the two, motivation has received in-depth analysis and investigation. Kim and Kim (2015) confirmed that “in educational sciences, particularly in teaching languages, motivation is one of the key factors in sustaining success and it was researched from various perspectives” (p. 78).

IV. RESEARCH PROBLEM

A perennial yet contemporary issue that has received attention over the years is the low achievement levels in the English language at the O/Level and A/Level Examinations. Many students fail to get a pass mark in English. Public funds have been allocated to improve the English language standards and the achievement levels of English, yet we have failed to gain a return on investment, however much we have tried in recent years. We have not been able to increase the pass rate of the English language at a higher level at the public examinations.

V. METHODS AND MATERIALS

A non-experimental cross-sectional research design was used in conducting this study. After pilot-testing the instrument, it was administered to 20 volunteer participants (teachers of English) serving government schools in the western province. A research-team designed Likert scale type questionnaire was administered. Data were collected from the sample, and they were subjected to multiple linear regression analysis.

B. Significance

As this study examined the relationship between the achievement levels and professional qualifications of teachers of English, this study is significant—the findings of this study may be considered seminal leading to empirical research studies in the future.

C. Aims and Objectives

This study addresses these objectives to report the causal effects and examine the correlation of the underachievement of the English language.

1. To determine the relationship between teachers’ professional qualifications and student achievement that affect the achievement level of English at the O/Level Examination
2. To explore the degree of impact on the achievement levels of the English language
3. To analyse what professional qualifications constitute teacher quality in improving the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination

D. Aims

Several practical and implementable recommendations, together with practical suggestions to increase the pass rate of the English language, form part of the aims and objectives of this study. Hence, this research investigation aims to propose implementable recommendations to the policymakers, stakeholders in education, and regulatory bodies in the hope that they may consider the impact of teachers’ professional qualifications on the achievement levels of the English

language at the O/Level and consider policy decisions in teacher deployment.

E. Research Questions

The problem of the current study stems from the following research questions.

1. How do teachers' professional qualifications affect the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination?
2. What causal effect do teachers' professional qualifications have on the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination?
3. What teacher qualifications improve the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination?

VI. HYPOTHESIS

Teachers' academic and professional qualifications (in English) have a causal effect on the achievement levels of the English language at the O/Level Examination

VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The study included English language teachers from 6 schools in the Borella Division of Colombo Education Zone. These schools fall under the categories of high, mid, and low. Two schools from each school category were included. The sample consisted of 20 teachers of English from high category schools ($n = 9$), middle category schools ($n = 8$), and low category schools ($n = 3$).

The study hypothesised that teachers' academic and professional qualifications have a causal effect on students' English language achievement levels. We conducted multiple

linear regression analysis and several other statistical measures on the collected data to evaluate the statistical significance of the above predictors and outcomes.

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.729 ^a	.531	.476	10.924

a. Predictors: (Constant), Qualifications, Professional Qualification Development

Table 2 - ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2297.065	2	1148.533	9.624	.002 ^b
Residual	2028.685	17	119.334		
Total	4325.750	19			

a. Dependent Variable: Student's Examination Results

b. Predictors: (Constant), Qualifications, Professional Qualification Development

VIII. DISCUSSION

Multiple linear regression was conducted to calculate and predict the achievement levels of the English language proficiency of the students based on teachers' academic qualifications and professional qualifications.

A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 17) = 9.624, p < 0.002$), with an R^2 of 0.531. The predicted student's English language achievement levels is equal to $48.383 + 3.578$ (teacher academic qualifications) + 11.140 (professional qualifications), where academic qualifications are coded as 1 = GCE O/L English language, 2 = GCE A/L General

English, 3 = GCE A/L English as a subject, 4 = Trained Teachers' Certificate, 5 = Colleges of Education, 6 = Bachelor's Degree (TESL, English, English Literature), 7 = BEd., 8 = PGD in Education (TESL), 9 = PGD in Education (English Medium), 10 = MA (TESL, English, Linguistics, English Literature), 11 = M.Ed., 12 = M.Phil., 13 = PhD and professional qualification development is measured in how frequent the participants engaged in activities that developed their professional qualifications.

Students' English language achievement levels increased by 11.140 for each professional qualification development and 3.578 increments of students' English language achievement levels for higher academic qualifications among teachers. In the classes where there were teachers with professional qualifications, the students' English language achievement level stood at $\alpha = 0.001$. However, no significant effect on students' English language was noted ($\alpha = 0.010$) in the classes where the teachers had only academic qualifications.

IX. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study included 20 English language teachers from 6 schools within the Borella Division in the Colombo Education Zone. There are additional considerations when we interpret the results of previous research studies and plan for further studies of this nature. A lack of control groups and a small sample have contributed to low statistical power and limited generalizability of the results. Hence, we suggest conducting further

research with large samples of students and control groups to generalise results.

DISCLOSURE

We declare that we do not have conflicts of interest whatsoever concerning the authorship and publication of this research paper.

1) Authors' Contribution:

HP designed and developed the questionnaires and monitored data collection. MASPM reviewed previous literature. TBJ edited the manuscript, MDMKG wrote the introduction, background and research problem, HKLC analysed the data set and wrote the section on the data analysis, and TM researched published data for references.

2) Availability of Data and Materials:

The data and materials in this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

3) Acknowledgement:

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