

Editorial

The Impact of Internal and External Factors on Student's Learning Process

Fulfilling a long-felt need, the National Education Research and Evaluation Center (NEREC) of the Faculty of Education published its first-ever peer-reviewed journal, Sri Lanka Journal of Education (SLJE) in March 2022. In the current issue of Volume 1 of the SLJE, diverse issues in several ways, yet interconnected in many other ways pertaining to the field of education are presented. The spectrum of topics ranges from content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) in bilingual education through differences in the lexico-grammatical features of legal letters of demand to soft skill development in undergraduate degree programs.

Adding CLIL content into lessons can improve teachers' subject knowledge and they can become broader and more balanced educators. Having CLIL lessons can also help teachers develop their language-teaching skills by adjusting their approaches to meet the needs of teaching various subject contents. Both situations can lead to the professional development of teachers. Expert opinions on using CLIL highlight the fact that while it is very useful for students, it is also quite advantageous for teachers particularly because it can make teaching more enjoyable.

Kularatne Suriya Arachchi explores the status of content and process standards of bilingual education at the junior secondary level of the Sri Lankan national curriculum. His special emphasis is on the English language curriculum in grades 6-11 in facilitating CLIL in bilingual education. His findings show that the content standards and process standards of teaching English as a second language are not rich in facilitating the second language skills of the monolingual and bilingual learners. One of the key reasons for this situation is identified as the absence of partnerships among key stakeholders. Suriya Arachchi suggests that such partnerships are vital to get over this situation.

While CLIL has a noticeable impact on the learning process of students, there are other important factors that affect their learning process. Wijesundara et al. in their study delve into this arduous yet obligatory task of determining internal and external factors influencing students' learning process (SLP). They point out that the attributes under the learning style such as, 'asking questions verbally', 'use of chat box for answers', 'use of video/audio clips', 'checking with individual students if they understand', and 'sharing computer screen' have a positive and significant impact on SLP. 'Asking questions verbally' is, according to them, the most effective attribute of SLP. These are

presented as internal factors affecting SLP in a given tertiary education setting related to the teaching-learning situation. While the ‘use of laptops’ as a connectivity device significantly and positively impacts SLP, ‘background noise’ is shown to have a noticeably negative impact on SLP under external factors.

Chamila Kothalawala, in her article, examines yet another pertinent issue in legal education, namely, the writing styles of legal letters of demand of the law students. Her results conclude that the letters of the lawyers and students differed in lexicogrammatical features such as genre-specific formulaic expressions, direct utterances, polite forms, and legal terms. Such differences, according to Kothalawala, decreased the effectiveness in important areas such as choice of formulaic expressions, legal terms, polite forms, and direct expressions as observed by the lawyers interviewed by her. Incorporation of activities that encourage students to compare typical students’ informal expressions and formulaic expressions of lawyers into the teaching materials is suggested as remedial action that will enable law students to notice the expert-novice distinction in the use of the lexicogrammatical features. It is highly likely that such remedial measures will strengthen the learning process of law students.

Anxiety plays a deciding effect in learning foreign languages. Language anxiety “encompasses the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue.” Such negative feelings strongly affect SLP particularly when they are adults. Susil Manchanayaka, in his case study, examines why a particular student had been silent for a considerable period and the causes of his silence. The findings of this case study indicate that the reason for the silence of the adult student has been tripartite as he was having language, trait, and test anxieties. To enhance the learning process of such students, Manchanayaka suggests that a stress-free class environment, developing an easy, supportive, and friendly demeanor towards correcting errors should be created.

While Manchanayaka’s findings are more aligned with the ‘soft skills’ of the teachers when facilitating the foreign language learner, ‘soft skills’ is the key theme of the final paper in this issue. The term soft skills originated in the US in the mid-20th century. Hard skills, which traditionally were viewed as more valued, mainly refer to practical skills, while soft skills denote more human-centered abilities, such as communication, ethnic tolerance, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, professional outlook, work ethics, and higher order thinking. Toward the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, the list got longer. Thus, Lakshi Karunarathne, and Ranthilaka Ariyawansa, in their article, attempt to identify important soft skills for undergraduates and

barriers to teaching and developing soft skills with a focus on the potential of public universities (in Sri Lanka) in developing such skills in undergraduates. Their results indicate that communication, teamwork, work ethics, and professionalism as the most important soft skills for undergraduates from the industry as well as academic perspectives. The study suggests that the universities and the industry should work together to increase students' awareness of the importance of soft skills and guide them in developing these skills. They argue that the university curricula should create scope for implementing and evaluating soft skill development in undergraduates during their study periods.

Therefore, the contributors to the current issue of the SLJE address some key areas which are thought provoking and pertaining to the SLP both at school and tertiary level contexts.

Lakshman Wedikkarage

September 2022