

A Study on Impacts of Spiritual Development on the Effectiveness of Learning English as a Second Language: A Buddhist Perspective

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Introduction

The historical and universal traditions of Buddhist education are rich with lessons for developing spirituality of human being and successful achievement of goals of education on the basis of stable equanimity of mind and resulting peaceful life and concentration on day-to-day activities. As is well evident from the Buddhist history of education, Buddhist monks had been versatile in the education of number of foreign languages in addition to their vernacular. Sri Lankan Buddhist monks have a tradition of learning classical and modern languages as a part of their secondary socialization and education as Buddhist monks after entering the Buddhist order. One important factor which has been conducive to their success in the practice of learning a number of languages is the spiritual development that facilitates systematic learning of foreign languages and the success in language education. Having considered this phenomenon of education in an environment of spiritual development, a research problem was articulated to understand the positive impacts of Buddhist spiritual development on the effective performances of students' learning English as a second language. Language education in modern society has been made more difficult by the stress and tension caused by the competitive management of time and work. Multiple involvements in activities other than language education seemed to have a negative impact on students' performances due to the stress and tension resulting from the issues of managing with the limited period of time. On the other hand, supportive involvements had the capacity of facilitating language education. In particular, students' enrolments in Buddhist activities of spirituality development are taken into account to understand any relationship between spirituality and language education.

The necessity of this study is well evident from the higher rate of students who are not successful in passing the national examinations on the

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English language. Students lower level of performances in all aspects of English proficiency compels researchers to look into the courses of such issues as well as to search for any supporting factors facilitating the proper learning of English language. It is with these observation in mind this research was selected.

Literature Review

The concept of spirituality has been defined by many researchers in diverse meanings, such as the personal, affective, experiential, thoughtful and so on. The psychological view regarding spirituality refers to emotional and spiritual intelligence (Gardner 1983).

Review of literature on the relationship between spirituality development and second language education reveals the lack of studies dedicated for explaining such a relationship with reference to the perspective of Buddhist education. General theories of Psychology and education explain different aspects of human growth and development of language capacities and various issues of learning language skills and practicing of them. The knowledge gap identified in this review refers to lack of studies on the spiritual development and its impacts on effective learning of language or any other subject. This study is designed to address this knowledge gap.

Research objectives

1. To identify different levels of performances of students learning English as a second language.
2. To ascertain Buddhist religious and other involvements of students.
3. To explore and explain relationship between students' various involvements and their performances in the English language education.
4. To find any impact of Buddhist spiritual development on higher performances in learning English.

Significance of the study

This research is of temporal, academic and practical importance. As it is concerned with the changes in teaching and learning the English language as a second language in contemporary Sri Lanka, the temporal significance remains at a higher level. The academic significance is understood with reference to the development of new knowledge with new concepts and theories useful for understanding another aspect of language education in Sri Lanka. As a practical significance the findings of this research study could be applied for the planning of second language education and implementation of such plans addressing the major issues of language education in the country.

Limitation of the Study

This study is confined to the scope of Buddhist spiritual development and the education of English as a second language in selected contexts of the first-year university students.

Methodology

Research area

The study was carried out with reference to the first-year students (academic years 2022/2023) of the selected language classes teaching English as a second language in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Research design and sources

The research was designed to gather qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources relevant to the objectives of the study. Primary sources included a sample of university students and teachers learning and teaching English as a second language respectively. The student sample was selected randomly and consisted of one hundred students and a purposive sample of ten teachers was selected.

Quantitative data of students' performance rates in examinations as well as statistics of involvement religious and other activities and time allocation for such activities were considered with the qualitative data on the interest in dedication and commitment to work hard in language education. The perception of hardship in language education, stress and tension related to language education was also compared with the quantitative data.

Techniques of data collection

Data for this study were gathered by means of questionnaire, interviews, observations as well as case studies pertaining to the students' classroom performances.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the above sources were processed and analyzed in terms of the standard statistical methods of analysis. In particular, SPSS was used to calculate the co-relations between the variables considered in this study.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis revealed some important findings pertaining to the major objectives of this research. The students' performances in the study of English as a second language remain at different levels ranging from higher performances of 10% of students to very weak performances of over 25% of students. This particular gap between higher and lower performances is related to the different levels of students' involvement in different activities in the same period of learning English. Less involvement in other activities 5% of students seem to have a positive relationship with their higher performance in learning English. On the other hand, higher involvement in activities other than Buddhist religious activities seems to have a negative impact on the performance levels of 15% of students. In particular, involvement in Buddhist religious activities has had positive impact on the higher level of performance in English language education.

Conclusion

It is concluded that there is a positive relationship between Buddhist religious involvement and the higher performance level of English language education. And this particular relationship is directly related to the spiritual development of students and the positive impacts of spiritual development on the stress management of competitive students and the maintenance of equinity of mind. Psychological stability gain through the Buddhist religious involvements has been directly facilitating the cognitive capacities of language learners. Accordingly, Buddhist way of spirituality development escapable of enhancing the performance level of students learning English as a second language.

As the implications of this research are concerned, higher performance in learning English as a second language could be ensured by means of spiritual development of students. Accordingly, language educators need to focus their attention to incorporate parallel programs of spiritual development of the students. Buddhist rites and rituals and practices including meditations are capable of preparing the mind set required for effective learning, while coping with stress and tension.

Keywords: Spirituality, Buddhist Education, English as a Second Language, Spiritual Development, Buddhist Pedagogy

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