

Fostering positive attitudes to meet challenges in Higher Education

Conference on Higher Education
in Sri Lanka

Jointly organized by

Staff Development Centre (SDC)

University of Colombo

and



**Sri Lanka Association for Improving
Higher Education Effectiveness (SLAIHEE)**

Friday 25th May 2012

9 am to 3.30 pm

Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Colombo

8th SDC - SLAIHEE Conference
on
“Fostering Positive Attitudes to Meet Challenges in Higher Education”
Friday 25 May 2012, 9.30 to 3.30pm
at FGS Auditorium, University of Colombo, Colombo 3
(the documents / materials of this conference are available at www.slaihee.org)

WELCOME TO THE CONFERENCE

We are all aware that the progress and development of individuals, institutions and sectors, including in Higher Education (HE), depends on how well we respond to meet the needs of change. One of the most serious challenges in HE to ‘improving’ ourselves and our students lies in changing our teaching methods and learning methods of our students – and this can be facilitated or hindered by the attitude that staff and students show to embrace or reject change. The underpinning resistance to change has been due to many reasons including the lack of awareness of new teaching–learning methods, lack of related competencies, lethargy, the fear of the uncertainty associated with change. The way we teach usually is the way we have been taught and it seems that, over the years, the unchanged teaching methods may have contributed to non-development of appropriate skills in university products - impacting on graduate level employability so that many unemployable graduates have continued to become socially burdensome, and marginalized.

This eighth SDC – SLAIHEE conference is, like previous conferences, being organized jointly by the Staff Development Centre (SDC) of the University of Colombo and SLAIHEE, the Sri Lankan Association for Improving HE Effectiveness. The SDC was established in 1997, and pioneered efforts in Sri Lanka at training university staff to meet the challenges in HE. These changes that the SDC initiated in training academics resulted in the formation of SLAIHEE, a national organization committed to facilitate improvement of life skills, performance capabilities and attitudes of university students and staff.

This joint SDC-SLAIHEE conference is focused at examining what we can learn from the successes and failures that universities have recently experienced in trying to meet various challenges faced by HE and in fostering attitudes of HE staff and students. The conference is an attempt to examine, identify and disseminate how (and where) we have utilized and fostered attitude changes to meet challenges in HE.

The theme of the conference is “fostering positive attitudes to meet challenges in Higher Education”. (for previous conference themes and proceedings please visit www.slaihee.org).

Our Keynote speaker is Dr Suki Ekaratne, the founding Director of SDC at Colombo and founder of SLAIHEE. He is an internationally renowned staff developer as was evidenced in being awarded the prestigious Spirit of ICED Award in 2010 (<http://icedonline.net/spirit-of-iced-awards/>). Starting as a marine ecologist, he is widely experienced in staff development, having

worked in universities in Sri Lanka, USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and Hong Kong as a professor, staff/faculty developer and an academic administrator.

The Staff Development Centre is known for its relaxed, welcoming and positive atmosphere. This setting would be replicated in the conference, encouraging the sharing of ideas, experience and practice, with supportive, actionable feedback from the participating audience.

Intended participants – The conference is of particular interest to all those with a concern and commitment to the quality and fate of future Higher Education in Sri Lanka, including;

- lecturers, managers and administrators in Higher Education
- educational and staff developers
- policy makers

We hope you have an extremely enjoyable experience that will motivate to help meet challenges in Higher Education through fostering positive change.

From SDC and SLAIHEE – a big thank you for your participation, to the presenters and specially to Dr Suki Ekaratne for his Keynote speech, Prof Kshanika Hirimburegama Vice Chancellor University of Colombo, and all the special invitees. The reviewers (whose names are given at the end of this abstract book) are thanked for their speedy and efficient reviews. The Dean, SAR and staff of the Faculty of Graduate Studies are thanked for their ready support in allowing us to benefit from their facilities.

The Conference Organising Committee;

- Dr Enoka Corea – University of Colombo
- Prof Nelun de Silva - South Asia Institute of Technology and Medicine
- Ms Jinendra Dissanayake - University of Colombo
- Mr Mahesh Fernando – University of Sri Jayewardenepura
- Ms Anishka Hettiarachchi – University of Moratuwa
- Mr Dhanesh Liyanage – Wayamba University of Sri Lanka
- Dr Prasanna Ratnaweera – Open University of Sri Lanka
- Dr T Sivakumar – University of Moratuwa
- Ms Sajeewanie Somaratne - University of Colombo
- Ms Shrinika Weerakoon - University of Colombo

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Programme

8.30 am - Registration

Session 1

9 am - Welcome by Ms Shrinika Weerakoon
President SLAIHEE

9.10 am - Address by Prof. Kshanika Hirimburegama,
Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo.

9.20 am - Keynote Address by Dr Suki Ekaratne
Founding Director SDC, University of Colombo
Founder SLAIHEE

10.00 am - Vote of Thanks by Ms Malkanthi Abeyratne,
Acting Director, SDC, University of Colombo

10.10 am - Tea

Session 2

10.30 am - Presentation of scientific papers - Parallel Sessions I A, I B

12.30 pm - for non-members: Lunch- College House Boardroom I and II

12.30pm - for members: Annual General Meeting of SLAIHEE followed
by lunch

Session 3

1.45 pm - Presentation of scientific papers - Parallel Sessions II A, II B

3.30 pm - Conference closure and Tea

8th SDC – SLAIHEE Conference 2012 – Session Timetable

Venue	Hall A	Hall B	Abstract page #
Session #	Session 2		
Chairpersons	<i>Prof. Nelun de Silva Mr Chinthaka Ranasinha</i>	<i>Dr Enoka Corea Ms Sajeewanie Somaratne</i>	
Time	Abstract #, Title and Author(s)	Abstract #, Title and Author(s)	
10.30 - 10.45 am	I A 1 Introduction of Poster Presentation as a Student Centered Teaching and Learning Method in a Conventional Teacher Centered Teaching Environment <i>Rev. Wimalarathana Aluthgama*</i>	I B 1 Assessing the Impact of a Student Honor Code <i>Shahani Markus Weerawarana and Malaka Walpola*</i>	IA6 on p. 6 IB1 on p. 12
10.50 – 11.05 am	I A 2 Psychometric Analysis of Paediatric OSCEs Conducted at Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University <i>Y.G.S.W. Jayarathne, W.A.J.C. Chandrakumara*, M. Marystella, and P.H.G. Janaka Pushpakumara</i>	I B 2 Mining Learning Management System Data to Track Students' Learning Attitudes for Producing Self-regulated Graduates <i>W. M. N. Fernando*</i>	IA2 on p.6 IB2 on p.13
11.10 – 11.25 am	I A 3 Student-Centered Learning Experiences for Skill Development Through a Project-oriented Course Unit at Wayamba University of Sri Lanka <i>B.P.A. Jayaweera* and D.N. Liyanage*</i>	I B 3 Impact of ‘Student Self Help Groups’ on Learning in the Classroom <i>A.T.P. Wickramasinghe*</i>	IA3 on p.7 IB3 on p.14
11.25–11.35	BREAK		
11.35 – 11.50am	I A 4 Group Work for Stress-Free Environment for Effective Language Learning and Acquisition – An Experimental Study <i>Subajana Jayaseelan*</i>	I B 4 The use of Critical Incidents to Develop Lecturers’ Skills to Address Emerging Challenges in Higher Education <i>Shrinika Weerakoon*</i>	IA4 on p.8 IB4 on p.14
1.50 – 12.05pm	I A 5 “Student Voice” in Student Feedback: Presence, Power, and Agency <i>Hasitha Pathirana*</i>	I B 5 Aligning Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods with Expected Graduate Profile <i>A.Anton Arulrajah*</i>	IA5 on p.9 IB5 on p.15

12.10 – 12.25pm	I A 6 A Study on English Writing Difficulties of the Undergraduates with Low Proficiency Level of English <i>P.L.M.S.Cooray*</i>	I B 6 In-class Activity Based Structured Lecturing Method for Teaching Theoretical Subjects – A Methodology for Improving Students’ Positive Attitudes for Industry Demand <i>K.A.S.H. Kulathilake</i>	IA6 on p.9 IB6 on p.16
12.30 – 1.45pm	SLAIHEE AGM and LUNCH		
Session #	Session 3		
<u>Chairpersons</u>	<i>Dr Prasanna Ratnaweera</i> <i>Ms Anishka Hettiarachchi</i>	<i>Dr T. Sivakumar</i> <i>Ms Jinendra Dissanayake</i>	
Time	Title and Author(s)	Title and Author(s)	
1.45 – 2.00 pm	II A 7 Contribution of Course Units in Materializing the Expected Graduate Profile of a Study Program: an Investigation <i>A.Anton Arulrajah*</i>	II B 7 Pictures; an Indispensable Tool in an Adult English as a Second Language Classroom <i>M.N.S Mahagamasekera*</i>	IIA7 on p.10 IIB7 on p.17
2.05 – 2.20 pm	II A 9 A Comparison of the Students’ Perception About the Effectiveness of Teacher Guided Student Seminar and Lectures as Teaching Methods <i>K.K.E.I.U. Kumari, N.S.B.M Atapattu*,K.K.A Pushpakumara, and A.L. Sandika</i>	II B 8 Improving Academic Writing in Undergraduates: A Process Oriented Approach <i>N T S Abeyratne*</i>	IIA9 on p.11 IIB8 on p.17
2.25 – 2.40 pm	II A 10 An Empirical Study on Opinion on Public and Private Universities in Sri Lanka <i>P P Nanayakkarawasam*</i>	II B 9 Lack of Commitment in Learning English Among the Undergraduates – Can a New Teaching Approach Change It <i>Savitri Dias*</i>	IIA10 on p.16 IIB9 on p.18
3.00 pm	TEA		

* presenter

5 minutes gap between presentations is to facilitate the presenters to get ready and the conference attendees to change halls, if needed

Introduction of Poster Presentation as a Student Centered Teaching and Learning Method in a Conventional Teacher Centered Teaching Environment

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The challenge faced by the researcher, as a junior lecturer, in promoting active, deep learning among students and developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes was immense due to the conventional teacher-centred environment at the Buddhist and Pali University. To face this challenge and make learning student-centred, the researcher introduced poster presentation as a teaching-learning method which was unprecedented in that university. Resistance at different levels, including that of from students, was addressed.

This study was conducted to identify the impact of this teaching-learning method, through peer and student feedback. The presentation at the conference will also show the carefully-planned process adopted in bringing this change which was a novel concept to the researcher also.

The students (n=36) were formed into groups and conducted the poster session. The student engagement was observed by the researcher. The two other lecturers evaluated the effectiveness of the session, and provide peer evaluation. Anonymous written feedback was collected from the students.

The poster presentations were assessed under six different criteria and three of four

groups were able to reach “good” or “very good” in all those criteria. According to feedback 95% of students were able to gain “more knowledge” and 70% “develop skills” because of the poster presentation. Almost all the students interested in participating in poster presentations in the future.

Observations and feedback confirmed the success of the poster presentation as a teaching-learning method. The students claimed poster presentations could motivate more student participation. The peers identified the higher level of student engagement in the learning process. As a result, poster was identified as a deep and active learning method to be included in the new syllabus. Further, the need to improve students’ presentation skills was identified and appropriate measures were planned for undertaking. The university identified poster presentation as an effective teaching-learning method.

Psychometric Analysis of Paediatric OSCEs Conducted at Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University

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It is clear that assessment had played and continues to play a central role in medical education. A rigorous assessment system is

an essential requirement in enhancing quality and accountability of medical education.

An OSCE is conducted at the end of first paediatric clinical appointment. Four separate OSCEs, each comprising of twenty stations were conducted for a batch. For this study all the OSCEs conducted for 2006/2007 batch were considered. Difficulty index (DI) and the discrimination index (DP) were calculated for each question of all four OSCEs. One way ANOVA test was used to analyze the difference between four OSCEs.

There were a minimal number of questions with an ideal DI (21.25% n=17) and excellent DP (25%, n=20) however, the average DI (0.55-0.63) and DP (0.21-0.28) were in satisfactory and acceptable ranges respectively. The DI and DP were significantly varied between the four OSCEs.

Less than 25% of individual OSCE questions are having ideally DI, which are suitable to be taken to the question bank. There may be several reasons for that including the opportunistic teaching pattern conducted during the clinical appointments, students collecting previous OSCE questions and superficially studying the answers. Since the DI and DP were significantly varied between four OSCEs these OSCEs were not fair in terms of their validity. Thus OSCEs needs to be reviewed and modified in a way it is valid and fair for all the students.

Student-centered Learning Experiences for Skill Development Through a Project-Oriented Course Unit at Wayamba University of Sri Lanka

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Pro-active measures were taken during the curriculum revisions of the Faculty of Livestock, Fisheries and Nutrition to develop well rounded graduates demanded by future employees. As students perform 'well' when their work is relevant, when engaged, challenged, and supported; necessary project activities were arranged to transfer non-technical skills to work in a multicultural environment.

Course consisted guest lectures, workshops and a project completed by students. Relevant lectures were conducted by sociologists. The major part of the course was a student driven project that was implemented in small groups (n~8). Ethnic and gender diversity was maintained in groups, while having leadership opportunities even for the socially backward students to realize their potential. Student proposed activities with a wider impact towards society was approved and the project supervisor was assigned to provide necessary support and guidance. Necessary skills identified to complete a task were given as workshops (photography, videography etc) to all students. To complete the project, students needed to do a presentation and launch the necessary outcome to the faculty.

Eleven projects were conducted with the participation of 78 students included short movie, book release, exploration of archiological sites, workshops to university etc; where there were wider participation from the university community. Among the participants 93%, 81%, 77% and 90% respectively agree/strongly agree that the course module designed in a way to challenge the students to improve, provide support to complete the task, relevent with the expectations and, to actively involve the students in the activities. Further, survey among the students revealed that a number of their life skills were improved by completing the course unit.

Conducting non-technical course units with a student centred context can be efficiently used to develop the life skills of students.

**Group Work for Stress-Free
Environment for Effective Language
Learning and Acquisition -An
Experimental Study**

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Group work is a general teaching-learning strategy where students work together in face-to-face interaction and teacher as a facilitator to achieve a common goal. Language competency occurs successfully in the stress-free, friendly and low anxiety environment. Through fruitful discussions, students are able to personalise this knowledge and intensify thinking processes and also they can mold their language ability.

This study examined whether group work enhances students' English language dexterity in a stress-free environment. The problem associated with this study is to find why students show inability and hesitance to compete in the language skills, especially, students feeling insecure when they communicate in English though they have been learning the language for more than a decade; besides, they scarcely show interest in learning the language .

This study was conducted selecting sixty undergraduates from the Faculty of Business Studies, Vavuniya Campus. Students were put into twelve groups consisting five in each. They were given series of individual and group work activities throughout the semester and their performances were measured by pre-test, post-test scores, continuous observations and open-ended questionnaires were administered to elicit opinions from the respondents. The collected data were analysed by using statistical analysis such as descriptive analysis. After conducting the statistical analysis on the test scores, significant improvement was observed among the students after the implemetation of systematic group acitivities rather than individual or whole class activites. The findings showed a higher mean value of 40.31 for group learning performance than the individual learning (29.6)

The findings recommend for the implementation of collaborative learning; practicing the traditional way of language teaching and following the conventional class room set up should be avoided to achive the competency in the language learning.

“Student Voice” in Student Feedback: Presence, Power, and Agency

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Student voice is giving the student the opportunity to speak one’s mind, be heard and counted by others, and, perhaps, to have an influence on outcomes. It is commonly believed that student feedback is a way of communicating with students and getting their opinions and perspectives devoid of bias as the feedback forms are anonymous.

It is important to identify to what extent “student voice” is imbued in student feedback as most of the time students grumble when feedback forms are given, as they feel that is a burden to fill them up. Also, while mid-semester feedback is answered with much enthusiasm, end of semester forms are handed over unanswered.

In this research a definition is given to ‘student voice’ and then see to what extent student voice is apparent in feedback forms. Also what power student feedback has in influencing decisions and practices is questioned.

The research was largely qualitative in nature and the sample group comprised 20 of the 1st year and 2nd year students who take ELTU courses at the University of Kelaniya. The purposive sampling method was used and structured interviews were conducted focusing on their opinion on student feedback and “student voice”. The student feedback forms were compared against the responses of the interviewees.

It was concluded that “student voice” can have multiple meanings, most clearly the idea of “rights” and “respect” were included. The majority of the interviewees expressed that they did not believe in the power of student feedback have in influencing decisions and practices. More detailed answers were given at interviews compared to the feedback in the forms. It was apparent that most students had not completed the feedback forms properly but had completed the suggestions section with care, and feedback forms should be modified to include and stimulate student voice.

A Study on English Writing Difficulties of the Undergraduates with Low Proficiency Level of English

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It has been observed that the number of Level 1 (L1) students has been increasing over the past few years especially in the Faculties of Arts and Management.

This research was conducted with a special focus on the first year L1 students in the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo.

In this paper, the researcher shares her findings in relation to the English writing difficulties of L 1 students, the reasons behind them and the assistance that can be provided by the English Language teachers and the subject experts in empowering the undergraduates, with the language skills required for survival in English medium instruction.

A placement test was given for the first year batch (2011/2012) to identify the L 1 students. Sample was selected through disproportionate stratified random sampling.

Their difficulties were identified through their answer scripts. Incorporating their difficulties, a remedial English course was designed and conducted. At the end of the course a post test was given. In addition to that, questionnaires were administered to students, English teachers and subject experts.

Taking down notes, writing assignments, essays and essay type answers are identified as the most strenuous writing tasks for 70% of the students. 86% of the students' argue that the writing tasks are strenuous for them due to their limited vocabulary, poor spellings, lack of grammatical competency and poor organizing skills. Poor foundation in English, lack of reading and lack of practice in English writing are provided as the main reasons pertaining to the writing difficulties. Further students have requested the English teachers and subject experts to provide them additional support as their proficiency level of English is at an unsatisfactory level.

Undergraduates with low proficiency level of English should be constantly supported and guided in order to empower them with English.

Contribution of Course Units in Materializing the Expected Graduate Profile of a Study Program: An Investigation

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Mapping individual course units with the expected graduate profile of a study program is an important requirement to understand the potentiality of a course unit in materializing the expected graduate profile. If there is no such a mapping it is very difficult to achieve the outcomes of the expected graduate profile. In order to explore the contribution of the course units, this study was conducted with two objectives. The first objective was to identify the contribution of course units of the study program in materializing the expected graduate profile and the second was to develop the possible strategies to materialize the expected graduate profile.

Methods

In this study process, data were collected from the staff of the study program by using group discussions and questionnaire and an individual course unit (43) of the study program was considered as unit of analysis. The expected graduate profile of the study program consists of 7 skills and 10 attributes.

Results

In overall, most of the course units of the study program are highly contributing (91% -95%) to the improvement in communication skill while less contribution (16% - 28%) is observed regarding language skill improvement under the skills component. At the same time majority of

the course units contributes to the achievement orientation (84% - 86%) while less contribution is observed in leadership development (44% - 47%) under the attributes component. Regarding second objective respondents have suggested several strategies to materialize the expected graduate profile of the study program.

Discussion and conclusion

Findings of this study provide a significant insight regarding the contribution of course units of the study program in materializing the graduate profile. Further, suggested strategies and practices would facilitate achievement of the graduate profile of the study program in the future.

A Comparison of the Students' Perception About the Effectiveness of Teacher Guided Student Seminar and Lectures as Teaching Methods

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Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is widely used as a valuable pedagogical tool in which students encounter mutual educational benefits as both teachers and learners. Student seminars improve a range of soft skills as well. The objective of this study was to compare the students' perception about the effectiveness of lectures and student seminar as teaching methods.

Data were collected from 54 students of University of Ruhuna, who followed two

courses of the BSc Agriculture degree programme where they had lectures and teacher guided student seminars. A questionnaire containing both structured and open ended questions was used to gather data. Data acquired from the questionnaire related to the two teaching methods were analyzed by t-test using Microsoft Excel 2007 program.

Students in general satisfied with the availability of internet facilities, text books and research journals required for the preparation of seminars. Data showed that lecturing as a significantly better ($p < 0.05$) method of improving knowledge compared to student seminar. Further, rating scores for lectures in the aspects of subject coverage, student satisfaction, depth of knowledge, preparation for teaching were higher compared to student seminar, but statistical data showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$). In the aspects of actively participation of students, improvement of presentation skills, team working ability scores were higher in student seminar compared to lecturing but showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$).

Students' ratings for lectures were higher compared to student seminars for many aspects showing the student preference towards teacher centered learning. This may be due to various reasons such as higher workload in student centered learning, time limitations etc. This preference shows the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards effective learning teaching methods.

An Empirical Study on Opinion on Public and Private Universities in Sri Lanka

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Many countries permit private universities (PU) to function within the tertiary education system. Though the Sri Lankan government's policy is to establish PU to optimize the higher education opportunities for all, many trade unions oppose it. This has created a challenge to the higher education system to overcome. This study focused on finding the opinion of Sri Lankan's on this issue.

Mixed Method Approach was adopted in this study. The sample (adults, permanently living in twenty-five districts) was selected by snowball method. A bilingual (Sinhala/English) telephone interviews were conducted with questionnaire included three open three closed-ended questions each. The interviewer summarized and recorded the answers to open ended questions.

The participants (n=129) included 62.79% males and 37.21% females whose mean age was 37.57 years. Majority, 72.87% of participants preferred government universities (GU) due to free education and whereas 22.48% favoured PU. However, negative words strike in minds of 51.94% participants when thinking of GU and the most common words were "strike" and "ragging", where as "money" was associated with PU. Majority, 73.64% said that the GU would not be closed in the future due to PU. The participants were equally divided in on the question whether PU were fair or unfair for poor students.

Though the negative words were associated with the GU, the participants favoured

government funded tertiary education since it was free, but at the same time they were not completely against the PU. Participants did not accept the establishment of PU as a threat to the GU though almost half of them believed that it was unfair for the poor students. Though the sample size was small the findings merit consideration when optimizing higher education opportunities and making policy decisions to meet challenges in higher education.

Assessing the Impact of a Student Honor Code

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In this action research, a 'Student Honor Code' was introduced to the new batch of students (n=100) entering the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Moratuwa. The objectives were, to create a trusting learning environment and to facilitate academic integrity. The intended outcome was to enable quality learning via a 'Theory Y' learning environment, which is focused on creating a trusting and supportive learning climate (Biggs & Tang 2007).

The motivation to introduce an Honor Code to the new students was based on the perceived success of a course-specific Honor Code in a semester-long course for 100 students (Weerawaranana 2011).

Special emphasis was placed on the content of the Honor Code and the manner in which it was introduced to the students, staff and faculty members, since these aspects are

considered to be significant in ensuring success (Sledge & Pringle 2010).

At the end of the semester, student opinions on the Honor Code and its impact on their individual learning experiences were solicited using a questionnaire where anonymity was guaranteed. Opinions of faculty members were solicited via unstructured interviews.

Of the 42 students, who responded, the majority (64%) asserted the Honor Code had a positive impact on how they learned. However, across courses, the students' adherence to the Honor Code appears to have varied widely.

The reasons for non-adherence to the Honor Code provide insight into contributing factors behind student academic integrity violations. The analysis also highlights ways in which the methodology of operationalizing the Honor Code could be improved.

In conclusion, this research has yielded positive results in addressing the challenge of maintaining academic integrity in higher education by heightening awareness of this issue with an Honor Code.

Mining Learning Management System Data to Track Students' Learning Attitudes for Producing Self-Regulated Graduates

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Student attitudes and preconceptions related to learning can lead to various actions and

products in the learning process. This paper aims to show the extent to which students used peers as an offline resource for accessing learning materials despite the same resources being provided on a freely-available online learning management system (LMS). These students (n = 762) followed Management Information Systems as a third-year core course.

Pre-processed data gathered from LMS logs, students attendance sheets, and examination results were analyzed and the results of data mining applied to interpret student behaviours. According to LMS participation logs, 48% voluntarily enrolled onto the course through the LMS. Of the enrolled students 41%, 38% and 60% browsed the LMS for course, fora and resources, respectively. Only 28.5% had downloaded at least one handout from the LMS while same handouts were not available in any other source and class room lectures were conducted based on handouts.

The scatter diagram visualization of cross variables showed that a majority of students who attended lectures had high marks but had downloaded a smaller number of handouts. In contrast, students who did not attend lectures had less marks, showed high interest in handout downloading. Data showed that students who do not attend lectures were not participating in discussion fora while others showed less interest. The lecture attendance was not compulsory for students, thus usually around half of the registered students attended lectures.

Students displayed a willingness towards a dependent learning attitude than independent information-search strategies. Most of students share hard or soft copies of handouts rather than downloading a own copy. Most students struggling to balance

their training and education in this latter part of the degree thus tried to depend on others than taking their own responsibility, showing a need to reorient the role of Higher Education in Sri Lanka to produce self-regulated graduates.

Impact of ‘Student Self Help Groups’ on Learning in the Classroom

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This intervention was carried out to enhance students learning and motivate them to perform better. The research focused on four of the final year students (of Fashion Design and Product Development, University of Moratuwa) who had failed and were to repeat the course unit in the first term but would not engage in individual tutorials in the second term effectively.

Discussions with them individually revealed they need more attention from tutors than other students and also need continuous feedback for them to develop their learning. However, tutors were not able to give comments daily due to their other work commitments. Therefore introduced ‘Peer Mentoring Programme’(PMP) through ‘Student Self Help Groups’ (SSHG). The intention of this intervention was to maximize the student engagement through tutorial sessions and facilitate them to achieve higher marks in the assessment. Students (those four repeat students and those who achieved highest marks for peer evaluation in the tutorials) were formed into pairs according to their marks of the last term. Then introduced ‘PMP’ and discussed with them individually

and informed how they should mentor each other.

The study analysed the impact of the SSHG on learning, quantitatively using marks they obtained and qualitatively through tutors’ feedback.

After the intervention the feedback from the tutors were positive and in the final submission of the second term those students who had fail achieved higher marks. The range of marks they obtained the second and third terms increased (6-29% and 10-25% respectively) compared to that of first term. Further their commitment, courage and dedication became higher level compared to previous term. Students who work negatively need extra attention, self motivation and guidance to develop themselves. ‘Self Help Groups’ always can help students to develop their learning spontaneously.

The Use of Critical Incidents to Develop Lecturers’ Skills to Address Emerging Challenges in Higher Education

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The varied challenges in Higher Education (HE) are numerous and increasing (e.g. Henry 1976; Down, 2006; Tham & Kam, 2008). One very important stakeholder category having to face and address such challenges is HE lecturers who therefore need continuous upgrading of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes for effectively addressing emerging challenges.

This study identified how a teacher-training course conducted at the University of

Colombo supported university lecturers to address such emerging challenges by the use of Critical Incidents (CIs; *sensu* Flanagan, 1954) that fostered positive attitude development. CIs are incidents meriting sufficiently strong self-attention to change the behaviour of a person (Flanagan, 1954), such as through changing ways-of-thinking to render attitudes to become positive. If relevant CIs can be identified, such CIs can be remodelled in teacher-training courses to reorient ways of thinking and action, so that trainee-teachers can be upskilled to address newly emerging challenges of HE.

A mixed-method approach was adopted for collecting and analysing data, using semi-structured interviews (n=20) and document analyses. Both individual and focus group interviews were carried out with lecturers who had completed the training course within the last three years. They represented different universities across a range of subject-disciplines.

The results revealed that course participants (100%) were first supported by course learning-teaching activities to reflectively identify a range of CIs. The course activities then helped participants to form positive attitudes with respect to taking action to resolve those self-selected challenges in classroom and other self-improvement situations. This developmental process helped trainees to become self-supported self-regulated action-oriented lecturers who became confident and upskilled to address emerging HE challenges.

The study showed the importance of CIs in developing positive attitudes and skills of trainee-lecturers. The CIs that lecturers identified to help influence behavioural changes and the challenges they addressed

during the course will be presented and discussed.

Aligning Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods with Expected Graduate Profile

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In the outcome based learning context, aligning teaching, learning and assessment methods with expected graduate profile is an important phenomenon in the university education system everywhere. Graduate profile is a description of the personal qualities, skills and attributes a student is expected to obtain by the end of an undergraduate degree program at the university. Nowadays in producing globally employable graduates, developing a very good graduate profile and aligning teaching, learning and assessment methods towards that is one of the key aspects and emerging issues in the university education system in Sri Lanka. Thus, this paper focused on this emerging issue (to what extent teaching, learning and assessment methods align with expected graduate profile of a study program). The objective of this paper is to explore the extent to which teaching, learning and assessments methods are aligned with the expected graduate profile of the study program.

In order to achieve the study objective primary data were collected from 20 lecturers of a study program by using questionnaire method. Survey research design was employed primarily in this study.

Results revealed that, there is a gap in achieving expected graduate profile (7 skills and 10 attributes) through the existing teaching, learning and assessment methods of the study program. Relatively more gaps exist in terms of entrepreneurial skills (mean value: 2.90), work life balanced (mean value 2.95) and ethical aspects (mean value 3.05) of the graduate profile.

This study highlights the significance of aligning teaching, learning and assessment methods with the graduate profile in order to materialize the expected graduate profile of the study program. Therefore, innovative teaching practices are needed to fill the gaps in the expected profile of the study program. Future research are possible in the same directions to further explore these practices.

**In-class Activity Based Structured
Lecturing Method for Teaching
Theoretical Subjects – A Methodology for
Improving Students’ Positive Attitudes
for Industry Demand**

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Eventhough various procedures are in operation within the National Higher Education Institutes to improve students’ intellectual strength according to required professional levels, the majority of undergraduates are not aligned with the current industry demands due to various reasons. As a result of this, it increases the possibility of the loss of career opportunities on competitive demands in industry. This

paper has introduced a sustainable teaching method for improving students’ positive attitudes towards industry demands.

As a methodology I have introduced structured lectures including activities. Structured lecture contains four main parts namely (i) Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO), (ii) Body of the lecture organized as sections which covers ILO, (iii) Activities at the end of each section and (iv) reflection activity. As the reflection activity I gave a project for student teams to develop and I have checked the progress of the application development continuously.

The proposed teaching method was evaluated based on two surveys based on the second year students who have followed System Analysis and Design course which is highly required in industry applications. Following results represent the percentage of improvement of selected factors in year 2012 than in year 2011; students positive feedback for teaching materials - 5.55%, practical activities are increased - 10.22%, project work and group activities - 4.23%, teaching methods - 6.17% and assessment method - 3.98%. Further, the proposed method proved that the industry oriented students’ positive attitudes have been gradually improved as a result of the reflection activity.

As a conclusion it is clear that this teaching method has improved the traditional teaching practices and it leads to produce highly qualified professionals. An automated quantitative method to determine the usability of this method is suggested as a future work.

Pictures; an Indispensable Tool in an Adult English as a Second Language Classroom

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Pictures are considered a universal stimuli that aid learning. "a great help in stimulating the learning of a foreign language (Bowen, 1982). However, they are not aptly explored in our programmes for the students. The study examines the contribution the pictures can make in an adult (English as a Second Language) ESL classroom. It focuses on the effectiveness of using picture based activities in practice phases of ESL lessons as an extension to the textbook activities to help learners absorb the language structures targeted in the curriculum of level 2 programme of English Language Proficiency Course in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Colombo. The claims of the theory of Multiple Intelligences and learning styles also prompted the use of this approach to help students acquire language in an interesting and engaging way.

Evaluation of the approach was done through classroom observation and analysis of questionnaires administered among 04 teachers and 82 students who used a module prepared with picture based activities.

Great enthusiasm and motivation on the part of the students when engaging in the tasks had been observed in all the classes in which the module was used. The study revealed 100% positive feedback in favour of the approach with students claiming that the practice phases helped them to better absorb the targeted language structures. Three out of four teachers pointed to the

need of introducing vocabulary prior to the commencement of the activity. Imposition of ground rules too was suggested by 50% of teachers as useful in minimizing the use of the mother tongue.

The study found that the pictures helped adult learners to absorb the language structures that had already been introduced to them. This indicated the possibility of using them in a wide range of language learning situations. The study thus reveals several possible areas for future research in the context of language learning and teaching.

Improving Academic Writing in Undergraduates: A Process Oriented Approach

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Writing skills are essential to academic success and it is used as either evidence of successful learning or as a means of learning. The lessons of ESL (English as a Second Language) courses that attempt to instruct students on how to set about doing a particular task generally create a 'gap between knowing and doing' (Jordan, 1997). Further, grammar, which is usually an integral part of an ESL course, does not tend to have a significant impact on the quality of writing. Planning, writing drafts and revising are basic features of the process-oriented approach to writing. Study skills needed for a number of academic writing activities also include: planning, writing drafts and revising. This study attempts to test the effectiveness of the process-oriented approach to improve academic writing.

A case study was conducted with eight volunteer participants who were second year Arts undergraduates. The participants followed a short academic writing program. They received guidelines on academic writing style and teacher and peer feedback on their drafts. They revised and rewrote the texts four times. The first and the fourth drafts were analysed for their linguistic errors and compared; a subject lecturer from the relevant field and two ESL lecturers rated the texts. The participants completed a questionnaire.

The findings revealed that there was a considerable improvement between the first and the fourth drafts in the areas of language and organisation of the texts. There was not much improvement in the content. The participants positively commented on this experience.

The study revealed that this approach could be successfully used for small group writing instruction and academic writing could be considerably improved. In the next stage of the writing programme, guidance in using academic reading texts could be recommended in order to improve content of the text.

Lack of Commitment in Learning English among the Undergraduates – Can a New Teaching Approach Change It

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It has been observed that the attendance of the undergraduates following the English classes in all faculties have been very low. Although this group of adult learners are

aware of the importance of English, their lack of commitment displayed through absenteeism has been a constant problem for the authorities concerned. The student behaviour that was different to the above was observed in a class which adopted Neuro Linguistic Approach to teaching (Dilts and Epstein, 1995)

This study aimed at identifying whether the change in teaching contributed to enhanced learning. A placement test was conducted and a group of staff of the University of Colombo were placed in the Basic II class.

Quantitative data was obtained through Placement test marks, Portfolio, Oral presentation marks, Post test marks and Attendance. Qualitative Data was through Questionnaires on students' learning styles, Student feedback (open ended questionnaires) and Personal observation of the researcher-teacher. Out of all students (n=18) 75% had recorded >80% attendance. All students obtained 100% for maintaining a portfolio. The lowest mark for oral presentation was 65%. According to the post test marks 66% could be placed in the Advanced class, 28% in the Intermediate class and one student obtained 31 marks which was 03 marks more than his placement test mark.

Student feedback highlighted their enjoyment, the knowledge obtained and the teaching approach. The observation of the researcher was of the enthusiasm and the commitment of the students.

Difference in behaviour observed when comparing these students with the undergraduates who had the same need for learning English could be attributed to the new approach adopted in teaching. More accurate data could have been obtained if the same paper was used for the pre and post test.

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