

## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SRI LANKAN SCHOOLS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

S.S. Dahanayake<sup>1\*</sup>, A. R. W. K. H. Abeywickrama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*Department of Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.*

### Abstract

As the trends in language education have been shifting ever since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional educational system is being replaced by innovative ways. As such, these practices have progressively made their way into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes around the world. Although the importance of using innovative methods to teach English is broadly discussed in the educational forums in Sri Lanka, to which extent ESL teachers are able to employ these methods for classroom practices has become a question. Thus, a qualitative study was undertaken with fifteen ESL practitioners in the Colombo Educational Zone to examine the effectiveness of using innovative teaching methods for teaching and learning. Findings of the study demonstrate that the implementation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century innovative methods to teach English language is a proportional approach that depends on the individual assessments of the teachers. It is significant to note that ESL teachers are increasingly attempting to cater to the needs of students by incorporating innovative teaching methods into their pedagogy.

**Keywords:** *Innovative teaching methods, ESL teachers, Education, English language, the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

---

\*Corresponding author: Tel.: +94 (77) 114 9835; Email: [senalisathsarani@gmail.com](mailto:senalisathsarani@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

Quality education is one of the seventeen sustainable development goals that promotes a shift in the obsolete cycle of the traditional classroom system and it fosters to have a multifaceted innovative environment in the classrooms in which students are forced to ameliorate their capabilities. Thus, to succeed in the new world, language teaching trends have been changing ever since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. With the advancement of technology, the students are compelled to become change-makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when receiving a proper quality education blended with technology. In the modern world, where the students are experts in technology openly welcome innovative teaching methods instead of the old methods of teaching.

The entire world recognizes English as the international language. Yet it is still difficult to teach English for non-native speakers in the present context. Therefore, the teachers need to use innovative teaching trends and help the learner in the acquisition of their second language. Sri Lankan English teachers are also promoted to move on with the trend and make use of various authentic teaching methods to motivate the students to learn the language. Yet it is highly questionable to what extent teachers use this method. According to the general statistics of the Ordinary Level Examination, 51.12% have failed the English paper in the year 2017, which is recorded as the lowest pass percentage when compared with the other subjects (Ministry of Education, 2022). The exam-oriented traditional teaching and learning methods are considered to be oppressive and no longer stand with the quality education. Thus, Teachers really need to outperform new language teaching methods instead of the non-productive traditional classroom structure.

## **Material and Methods**

A qualitative study was conducted with fifteen English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers serving in the schools of the Colombo Educational Zone. Purposive sampling method was used to make the study rich in information. Semi-structured interviews were designed to collect data from ESL practitioners. Secondary data too were collected from the previous research and scholarly articles. Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to organize, analyze and interpret data (Abeywickrama, 2021) which assisted in perceiving and assembling the themes and trends.

## **Results and Discussion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is experiencing a whirlwind technological evolution that has impacted the current educational system in most countries including Sri Lanka. Evolution of the technology has promoted classroom learning and

teaching to the next level. As Anil (2017) also claims, infusing real-world experiences with creative applications enrich the learning pedagogy in the classrooms. To this end, classroom activities need to be supported by the 21<sup>st</sup> century innovative media and technology to make the students address the current trends in the world. In order to achieve the gaps in the present growing competition in the world, English language should be mastered with new advanced skills (Participant 10). Given such a background, ESL teachers need to withdraw from the role that they normally use and adopt a role that is suitable to cater to the challenges of the 21st century (Participant 9). When using innovations “nature of the students” (Participant 8) is an inevitable factor that teachers should address in the classroom. Comparatively the present generation of students is far ahead with technology, henceforth innovation is where teachers openly welcome the interests of the students in the classroom (Participant 6).

According to the research findings, ESL teachers use multiple innovative methods in modern classrooms. Web-based learning is one of the innovative teaching methods used in ESL classrooms especially in developing countries in the world as it benefits the students predominantly. As emphasized by Participant 6, the internet encourages personalized education for students, hence, English is no longer considered another subject, but a subject of students, thanks to the modern devices that force “inquiry-based learning” (Participant 4). Social media is yet another potential and productive method that can be used in contemporary ESL classrooms. In Sri Lanka, ESL teachers had no choice but to shift for the purpose of the people, incorporating social media into language learning. Although the electronic revolution was provocative in developed countries since the start of the new millennium, Sri Lanka accelerated the use of social media dramatically to speed up the domestic learning process. Henceforth, Participant 4 claims that “social media not only construct content but also helps create an audience using the independent thoughts of the children which in a way make them open and connected”. On the other hand, the mature multimedia network is also significantly used in ESL classrooms to promote independence and autonomy among the students. Mature multimedia network learning broadens the pathways and efficiency of the English as a Second Language learners’ background (Participant 5). This perspective is strongly supported by previous studies, for instance, as Wirentake (2017) claims, the cognitive psychology of foreign language learners is addressed with sensory stimulation using multimedia network concepts such as watching, listening, tapping, touching and speaking. With the Covid-19 pandemic, yet another mode of innovative teaching technique is introduced to the ESL teaching methods, which is the hybrid method of learning. Currently, Sri Lanka is going through a post-

pandemic period with lots of challenges in the country. Thus, the teachers are encouraged to have hybrid sessions in the classroom in order to avoid the difficulties faced by the students. As a consequence, Liyanagunawardena and Adams (2014) support the idea that a shift of style in education is necessary according to the contemporary situations in the country to continue the teaching-learning process continuously.

When using innovative teaching methods teachers are also impacted by both personal and external factors. The main concern of an innovative classroom is the idea of using technology to shift from the traditional to the modern. Thus, the teachers need to outperform their technological skills to confront the latest traditions. But most of the teachers find it difficult to handle the technology due to the lack of exposure that they were given regard to automation (Participant 7). On the other hand, teachers are also influenced by the attitudes of contemporary society when implementing innovative teaching methods. Mostly, parents are very concerned about covering the syllabus (Participant 1) and the parents are in favor of the traditional teaching methods as the efforts of the students are rewarded immediately. The recorded power outages that are imposed across the whole country resulted in weak internet connections and limited resources that made the students discouraged when switching sides that they are not comfortable with. Participant 8 emphasized that innovation is only possible when background facilities are provided. Nevertheless, the use of innovative methods to teach the English language in the ESL classroom is highly proportional where the teachers have the total autonomy to decide on the modern trends that they prefer as innovation is quite a relative perspective that depends on individual assessments.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the study highlights that the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup>-century innovative methods to teach the English language is quite relative to the experiences of the teachers. While the skills of 21<sup>st</sup>-century innovative teaching may not be new to some teachers they are newly relevant to some groups of ESL teachers, which shows that there is no clear demarcation and boundaries between traditional and innovative teaching methods in Sri Lanka. Innovation is also a proportional approach that depends on the individual assessments of the particular teachers.

In order to overcome the confrontations faced by the students and the teachers when flipping the teaching methods, it is recommended to have a deeper analysis of the focal factors of an innovative classroom. It is also proposed to design teaching methods that can also match with the students who are with

limited resources. Also, it is recommended to conduct training workshops by the Ministry of Education for ESL teachers on how to employ innovative teaching methods and provide adequate facilities to implement innovations in the classroom.

## References

Abeywickrama, K. R. W. K. (2021). Professional Development and ESL Teacher Quality: An empirical study. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(2), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljssh.v1i2.37>

Anil, B. (2017). Applying Innovative Teaching Methods in a Second Language Classroom. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.18869/acadpub.ijree.2.2.1>

Liyanagunawardena, T. R., & Adams, A. A. (2014). Blended Learning in Distance Education: Sri Lankan Perspective. *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, 10(1), 55–69.

Ministry of Education. (2022). *Statistics Reports*. Retrieved from: <https://moe.gov.lk/ministry/statistics-reports/>