

A Throwback to the Secondary Level English Language Teaching Programme at the *Pirivenas* in Sri Lanka: A Perspective Achieved within the Walls

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Abstract

The English language proficiency of the Buddhist clergy studying at the universities in Sri Lanka is observed to be generally low. Educational practitioners and policymakers attribute the pathetic situation experienced with their English to the lack of emphasis on and the general disdain the young Buddhist monks maintain for the study of English during their secondary-level education at the *Pirivenas*. Nevertheless, with the increasing demand for English language proficiency in the face of globalization, the *Pirivena* students who later join the universities, particularly those who seek to advance their career as Buddhist scholars or missionaries in international contexts, face a huge barrier while carrying out their studies in the English medium. Even though there is a pressing need for research on this phenomenon, studies on the low proficiency level of English among the *Pirivena* students are rare. Against that background, the present study strives to address this gap

by conducting an investigation into the perspectives of the Pirivena students on their English education experiences at the Pirivenas through the use of a questionnaire, interviews, and statistical analyses. The survey involved a cohort of 18 undergraduates and 15 graduates from two leading Buddhist universities in Sri Lanka, in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the issue at hand and suggest effective solutions based on their subjective points of view.

Keywords: English, Pirivenas, student perspective, low English language proficiency, Buddhist clergy

Introduction

The *Pirivenas*, also known as Buddhist monastic schools, have been an integral part of the Bhikku education system for centuries in Sri Lanka. This traditional Buddhist education of Sri Lanka is known by various names such as *Pirivena* education, monastic education, monastery education, Arama education, Pansala (temple) education, and Vihara education. Known to have initiated in Sri Lanka from Kalapasada in Anuradhapura (Mahavansa: 15 as quoted by Keerthirathne 2020, p. 41), the monastic education has survived as the traditional educational system of the Sangha community even during the turbulent times in the Sri Lankan history. The term, "*Pirivena*," which is translated into English as Monastic or Monastery has originated from the Pali word, "*parivena*"

meaning the dwellings of the Sangha (Mós 2014).

From the inception of the *Pirivenas*, producing educated and disciplined monks has been their primary goal and the *Pirivena Education Act* (no: 64 of 1979) states the following aims of *Pirivenas*.

- a) To foster an interest among Bhikkus in the protection and progress of the threefold Sasana namely, Pariyatti, Patipaththi, Pativedha;
- b) To foster discipline, knowledge in the Tripitaka and devotion to Dhamma among Bhikkhus in order to maintain the order of Bhikkhus descending from the lineage of Sariputtra and Moggallana Theras;
- c) To give a training in practical knowledge, necessary for the Dhammadutha activities in Sri Lanka and abroad and in other services appropriate to Bhikkhus; and
- d) To provide facilities for Bhikkhus to acquire a thorough knowledge in various subjects and languages including Buddhist Philosophy, Buddhist Culture, Buddhist History, Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit.

Accordingly, with the above purposes, 794 Monastic education centres are being functioned in Sri Lanka as the predominant educational centres for the young monks.

It is widely acknowledged that the proficiency level of English among monastic students in *Pirivena* education is generally low. As these students progress to tertiary education, they recognize the importance of English in their career development, either as professionals or missionaries. However, their low proficiency in English poses a significant obstacle to achieving these career goals. In light of this, policy makers and practitioners in the field of *Pirivena* education have taken recent steps to prioritize English education within the *Pirivena* system. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these reforms has been limited, likely due to a lack of consideration for the perspectives of the students themselves in planning the modifications. Therefore, this study aims to explore the students' perspectives on English education during their time in *Pirivena* education, using a subjective research paradigm to understand why they may “hate” or “ignore” it, as described by practitioners and policy makers.

Objectives

The current study aims to examine the thoughts and feelings of students regarding English education at *Pirivenas*, including what factors contribute to these perceptions.

Research Problem

The field of English education within Sri Lankan *Pirivenas* has seen limited research, and it is on the basis of a limited

number of studies that various reforms have been implemented. Despite the efforts of policy makers and practitioners, there has been little progress in improving the English proficiency of students in many *Pirivenas* across the country. To date, there has been a lack of research that approaches this issue from a subjective perspective, specifically by understanding the students' views on English education. The present study aims to fill this gap by providing an insider's perspective on the issue at hand.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, there has been a limited amount of research conducted on English education in *Pirivenas* in Sri Lanka. However, the studies that have been conducted have undoubtedly contributed to the development and implementation of recent educational reforms related to the English education in the *Pirivenas* in the country.

a) Evolution of English as a main subject in the *Pirivenas*

At the inception of *Pirivena* education, only a selected number of subjects such as the Tripitaka, commentaries, *tīka*, and *prakarana* were taught. During the reign of King Walagamba, a significant shift occurred in *Pirivena* education with the introduction of Mahayana texts. Along with Pali, Sanskrit was also added to the curriculum, and subjects such

as Vaitulyawāda, Indian philosophies, various crafts and other secular subjects also became part of the *Pirivena* education system. English was made a compulsory subject under the 1979 *Piriven* Act, ironically not giving priority among other classical languages such as Pali, Sinhala and Sanskrit which were made compulsory for Primary *Pirivena* Examination. The initiative to include English as one of the six compulsory subjects to be taught in a *Pirivena* was taken by Mr. Nissanka P. Wijerathne, a senior Administrative Officer who later became the Education Minister in 1977 (Vijithananda, 2003, p. 289). However, the *Pirivena* State Ministry of the Ministry of Education has made commendable efforts in promoting the English subject, including the introduction of a *Pirivena* textbook for English, conducting workshops for English teachers as an initiative to establish bilingual *Pirivenas*, training English teachers who were working in bilingual monastic schools, and establishing a separate branch for bilingual *Pirivena* education within the *Pirivena* education branch of the Ministry of Education. These steps demonstrate the Ministry's commitment to improving English education in *Pirivenas*. The evolution of the English subject in the *Pirivena* education system is as follows:

Evolution of English Subject at *Pirivenas*

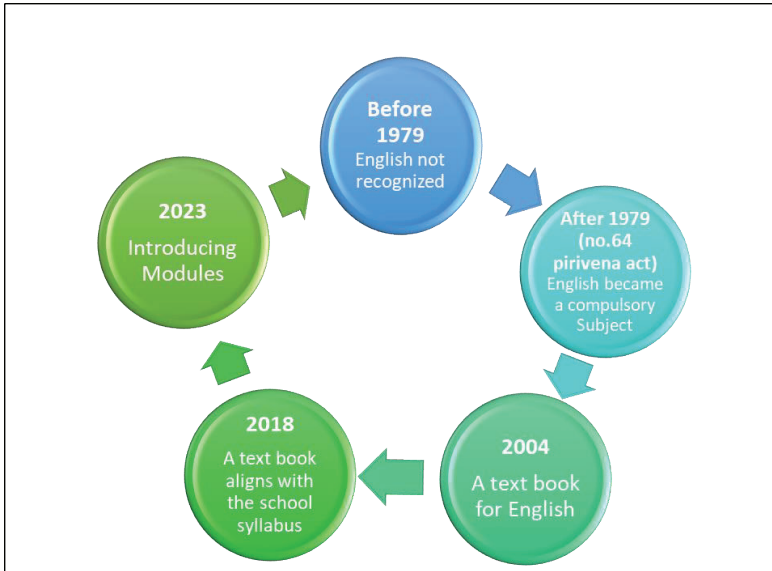


Figure 1: Evolution of English at Pirivenas

(Extracted from handout: 21වන සියවස සඳහා පිරිවෙන් අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රතිසංස්කරණ කෙසේ සකස් විය යුතුද? 2022)

b) Pedagogical Methods and Tools

Even if English is taught in all the *Pirivenas* in the country at present, there seem to be lack of update of English teaching techniques among the *Pirivena* English teachers. According to the authors of '*Sri Lankawe Parivenika Adyapanaya Pilibada Paryeshana Warthawa*' (2016, p. 19), the majority of Pirivena teachers utilize traditional teaching methods and their use of

modern technology to educate students is extremely limited. Supporting the above finding, Ven. Vijithananda (2003, p. 337) states that the main mode of teaching *Pirivena* subjects are reading aloud and giving meaning for them.

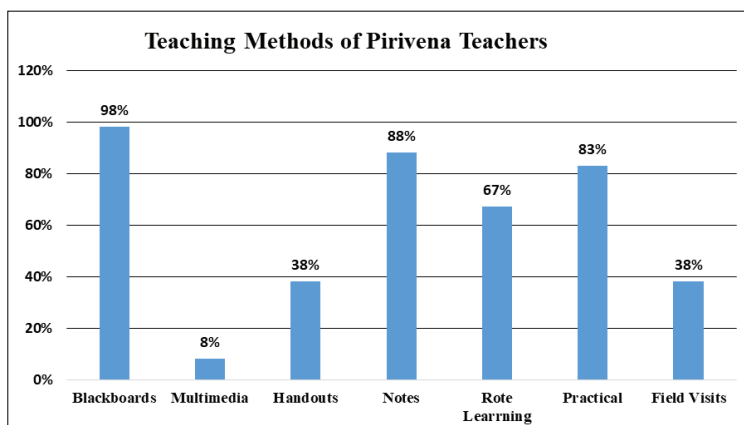


Figure 2: Teaching Methods of Pirivena Teachers (Adopted from '*Sri Lankawe Parivenika Adyapanaya Pilibada Paryeshana Warthawa*,' 2016, p. 19)

Even if the teaching and learning techniques used in the *Pirivenas* do not favorably facilitate learning a language, research has shown English to be their most favourite subject (18%).

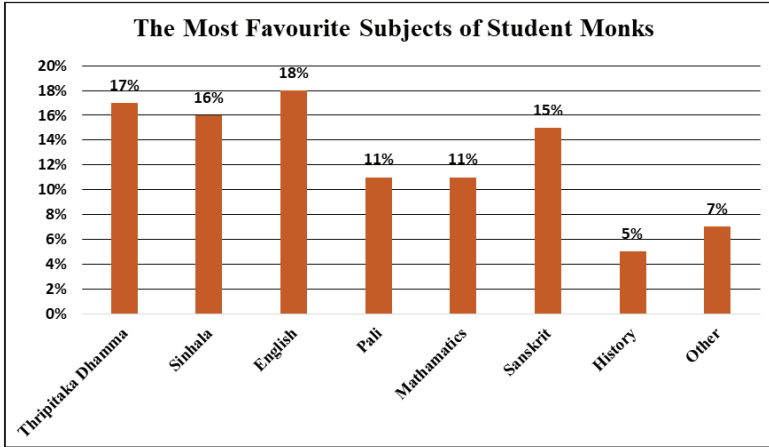


Figure 3: The Most Favourite Subjects of Student Monks
(Adopted from 'Sri Lankawe Parivenika Adyapanaya Pilibada Paryeshana Warthawa,' 2016, p. 20)

c) Low Proficiency of English of *Pirivena* Students

On the contrary to the above fact that the students' favourite subject is English, State Ministry of *Pirivena* Education summarizes the English results of students who faced the *Piriven* Final Examination in 2018 as follows.

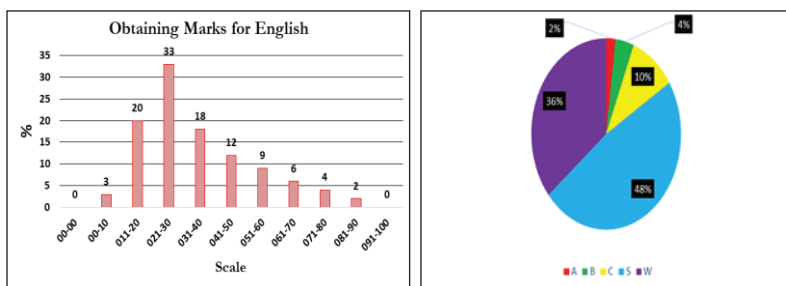


Figure 4: *Obtaining Marks for English at the Piriven Final Examination, 2018* (Extracted from handout: 21වන සියවස සඳහා පිරිවෙන් අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රතිසංස්කරණ කෙසේ සකස්විය යුතුද? 2022)

Rev. Minuwangoda Gnanawasa in his article, “A Study of *Pirivena* Students' Low Achievements in Communicative Competency in English Language in Sri Lanka” (2020), highlights a key drawback of the *Pirivena* education system in producing students proficient in English. He points to the contradiction between statement (c) and (d) of the *Pirivena* Establishment Act, which expects student monks to engage in Dhammadutha activities both within Sri Lanka and abroad, yet does not give priority to English, the language of communication most needed in the world. Within the monastic system, the languages listed in the act, namely Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit, are given priority over English, making it a subordinate subject and leading to a lack of enthusiasm and weakness in English among monastic students. This

observation is also echoed by Ruwanpathirna et al. (2021) in their study on the challenges of *Pirivena* education, which raises questions about the “contemporary relevance of the existing syllabus, absorbing English knowledge and computer literacy” (p. 26) in relation to the goals specified in the *Pirivena* Education Act. The study quotes a response from a member of the sample as follows:

“Lack of diversification of subjects is a limitation in *Pirivena* education. Even at the graduate level, we learn subjects such as Buddhism, Pali, Philosophy, and History. Had we learned diverse subjects in *Pirivena*, it would have been very advantageous to us in the post-*Pirivena* education.” (p. 27)

Commenting on the above, Ruwanpathirna et. al. comment on the importance of Buddhist monks receiving a ‘comparatively low level of experience in the English language and computer literacy to gain global knowledge’ (p. 27).

Rev. Gnanawasa further highlights the lack of emphasis placed on English education in monastic schools in contrast to its high importance in the national school curriculum. He summarizes the reason for the failure of English education in the monastic system by stating that “the educational setting of the *Pirivenas* does not support the creation of an educational space for English as a subject or as a language in facilitating

the students on those *Pirivenas*" (p. 2). The article identifies the following factors as contributors to the lack of success in English education in *Pirivenas*:

- a) The inability of English teachers to “grip the language adequately"
- b) Unfavorable economic, social, and educational background of *Pirivena* students that do not motivate them to learn English
- c) Low achievement level and pre-educational background
- d) Lack of positive attitudes and inner motivation towards learning
- e) Teachers using Sinhalese as the mode of instruction in the teaching-learning process
- f) Teachers recruited with minimal qualifications, resulting in a lack of pedagogical knowledge and teaching experience
- g) A large gap between teachers and students maintained during the *Pirivena* education system
- h) Lack of teaching resources and a lack of use of modern teaching aids such as computers, OHP, multimedia, etc.
- i) A teacher-centered or exam-centered approach to language instruction
- j) Insufficient time allocated for teaching subjects (from 1p.m. to 5.30 p.m./6 p.m.)
- k) Limited opportunities for students to use authentic language in their surroundings.

d) Qualifications of the *Pirivena* English Teachers

The statistics pertaining to the academic qualifications of English teachers within *Pirivenas* reveal that a significant majority (366 out of 702) of them hold a grade 3 (ii) qualification, and 126 out of 702 hold a grade 3 (i) qualification which are the minimum requirements for employment in *Pirivenas* (Handout, 21වන සියවස සඳහා පිරිවෙන් අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රතිසංස්කරණ කෙසේ සකස්විය යුතුද? 2022).

Accordingly, existing research on English education in Sri Lankan *Pirivenas* predominantly focuses on identifying obstacles that hinder progress in English education from an objective standpoint. While these findings have certainly been instrumental in shaping the reforms implemented thus far, this study aims to adopt a subjective approach to explore the challenges associated with advancing English education.

Materials and Methods

The present mixed-method research adopts a subjective research paradigm, as it examines the insider perspective on English education in monastic schools in Sri Lanka. The focus group study was conducted from May to October 2022. An initial attempt was made to gather data from students currently studying in *Pirivenas*, but this approach was unsuccessful due to a lack of willingness among students to share authentic views, hence that will generate unreliable data. Therefore,

the study sample consisted of 33 participants, including 18 undergraduates (16 monks and 2 lay male students) and 15 recent graduates (14 monks and 1 lay male student) from two leading Buddhist universities in Sri Lanka. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in *Pirivena* education. The sample was initially selected using purposive sampling and then snowball sampling was used to gather data from a wider audience. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and voice recordings received via WhatsApp. A Google form questionnaire was prepared and sent to the sample via Google forms, and 10 students (3 undergraduates and 7 graduates selected from the purposive sampling method) were telephone interviewed and voice recordings were received from 5 students (2 undergraduates and 3 graduates, all of whom were added to the sample through snowball sampling). The sample represented students from *Pirivenas* in 15 districts including Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Galle, Matara, Nuwara Eliya, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala, Ratnapura, and Kegalle. Data were analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis framework suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included familiarization of data, initial coding, generating themes, validity and reliability of themes, defining and naming themes, and interpretation and reporting.

This research study used a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources included

questionnaires, interviews and voice records of the students as mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the informal interviews with two Assistant Directors at the *Pirivena* State Ministry to gather information related to the steps taken by the Ministry of Education to improve the English education in the *Pirivenas*. The secondary data sources included books, survey reports, and presentation slides used at workshops to reform the Piriven English education.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first limitation is that there was an unequal number of lay and Bikkhu respondents. Second, an equal number of respondents could not be found from the two universities. Third, the study only received data from first, third, and fourth year students and no second-year students participated in the study. Lastly, most of the respondents were English medium students, meaning they were students who had a comparatively stronger interest in learning English from an early age, which may have biased the results.

Results and Discussion

a) Data gathered through questionnaires

The results of the study were surprising as they revealed that only a small percentage of respondents from both Sample 1

and Sample 2 reported to 'hate' English while they were at *Pirivena*. This was in contrast to the perception of practitioners and policy makers who believed that a larger percentage of *Pirivena* students had a negative attitude towards English. The exact percentage of the students who hated the language is 16.7% from Sample 1 and 6.7% from Sample 2.

- a) How do you describe your experience of learning English at your *Pirivena*?

Sample	I liked it a lot.	I had an average interest.	I had no special interest.	I hated it.
Sample 1	27.8%	22.2%	33.3%	16.7 %
Sample 2	13.3%	66.7 %	13.3%	6.7 %

1.1 Experience of learning at Pirivenas

The study found that many of the students had a positive perspective towards the importance of English. 50% of Sample 1 and 26.7% of Sample 2 stated that they knew the importance of English and were motivated to learn it. However, some students had a different attitude, as 16.7% of Sample 1 and 26.7% of Sample 2 mentioned that they were not interested in learning English, even though they knew its importance. Additionally, 27.8% of Sample 1 and 46.7% of Sample 2 reported that they had been delaying learning English until they graduated from their *Pirivenas*. These responses show that most students were interested in learning English, and

many of them understood its importance. Furthermore, the data indicated that English was the favorite subject of many students. These findings suggest that the poor proficiency in English among Pirivena students is not due to a lack of interest in the language, but rather internal variables within the classroom that are affecting their learning.

The questions related to the grades received for English at the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level Examinations reveal that a significant proportion of students received lower grades for English. In the Ordinary Level Examination, the highest number of students received S passes (38.9% for Sample 1 and 40% for Sample 2), and a relatively small proportion received A grades (16.7% for Sample 1 and 13.3% for Sample 2). A significant proportion of students also failed the examination (16.8% for Sample 1 and 20% for Sample 2). The results of the Advanced Level Examinations showed a similar pattern, with the highest number of students receiving S passes (33.3% for Sample 1 and 33.3% for Sample 2) and a higher proportion receiving Weak passes (39% for Sample 1 and 60.1% for Sample 2) compared to the Ordinary Level Examination. Additionally, 11.2% of Sample 1 and 13.4% of Sample 2 had not sat the Advanced Level Examination in English. These data suggest that there is a significant difference in the grades received by students for the English papers at the Ordinary and Advanced Level Examinations. Furthermore, the fact that some students did not participate in the Advanced Level

General English paper shows a lack of interest for that paper and the results indicate that the students' proficiency level of English has further declined at the A/L level. And some students in Sample 1 has left this question unanswered, too.

The majority of students from both Sample 1 (83.3%) and Sample 2 (73.3%) attributed their current level of English proficiency to the university. A relatively small number of students (11.1% for Sample 1 and 6.7% for Sample 2) cited their *Pirivenas* as the source of their English knowledge. Only a small number of students from both samples reported that tuition or other higher education institutes had contributed to their English proficiency. These results indicate that the majority of students attribute their current level of English proficiency to their university education, while a relatively small number of students credit their earlier education at *Pirivenas* or other educational institutes.

The following data were gathered regarding the attitude of the participants towards their English teachers at the Pirivena.

Sample	English teacher was interesting	English teacher was not interesting	English teacher was somewhat interesting
Sample 1	27.9%	33.3%	38.8%
Sample 2	13.4%	40 %	46.6%

1.2 Assessing the English teachers

Unfortunately, a majority of responses from both samples indicate that the students' experience with their English teacher was not an interesting one.

The data seems to be contradictory, as a high percentage of students from both Sample 1 (88.8%) and Sample 2 (80%) reported that their English teacher made the subject uninteresting. However, an even higher percentage of students from both samples (83.3% from Sample 1 and 80% from Sample 2) also expressed regret for not being more committed to learning English well during their time at the *Pirivena*. This suggests that despite the negative perception of the teacher, students still recognize the importance of learning English and wish they had taken it more seriously.

Interestingly, a larger percentage of students from both samples (83.3% and 46.6%) did not cut their English classes and remained in the class most often. Since there is a contradiction between their attitudes towards the English teacher and remaining in the class often for English period, this was addressed in the interviews which will be discussed in the following section.

b) Data gathered through interviews and voice recordings

The interviewees and those who sent voice recordings discussed various internal factors that contributed to their lack of success in learning English in Pirivenas.

- They highlighted that English education is not given much importance within the monastic school setting, where classical languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, and Sinhala are prioritized. The fact that these subjects are compulsory in the *Piriven* Final Examination means that the *Pirivenas* focus much on teaching them, leaving little time and attention for other subjects such as English. Additionally, students are motivated to spend more time working on these subjects and those who excel in them are rewarded and acknowledged, which further discourages students from dedicating time to learning English.
- The sample commonly cited the weaknesses of English teachers in terms of their pedagogical approaches and behaviours as a major factor in their lack of success in learning the language. The English teachers were often described as being angry, unresponsive to students' questions, favoring students who were more proficient in English over weaker students, frequently deviating from the lesson and talking off topic, talking too much,

and not being strict with students like other teachers³. This behavior made students feel discriminated against, unimportant and lack self-confidence when it comes to learning the language. However, the students were compelled to stay for the English periods in the class despite their unwillingness to stay there because *Pirivenas* are not very large and students had no other place to go during that time.

- When discussing the pedagogical approaches of the English teachers, the cohort noted that they did not use any extra activities in teaching English beyond just following the textbook. Most members commented that they had never participated in group activities in their *Pirivena* classes. Comparing their current experience of learning English at university, they mentioned that many activities that could have been used to teach them English at the *Pirivenas* were not utilized by their *Pirivena* teachers.

³ Within the *Pirivena* education system, classical languages are typically taught by Bhikkus, who maintain a significant authority gap between themselves and their students. These teachers are often characterized as stringent and exacting, and have been known to administer punishment for errors made in language acquisition. Conversely, English instruction is almost exclusively conducted by lay teachers, who typically exhibit less severity in their approach than their Bhikku counterparts. This discrepancy in teaching styles is partly attributed to the deeply respectful relationship maintained between Bhikkus and the lay community, whereby English teachers are less likely to reprimand students for errors in language use. However, this leniency may contribute to a lack of motivation among students to learn English.

- Age difference among students in a classroom was another factor cited in the interviews. In the *Pirivena* system, students are ordained at different ages, leading to a diverse age range in a single classroom. Due to this, students have different levels of proficiency in English based on their prior education. Learning with students of different ages and proficiency levels was reported as a challenging issue that made some students uncomfortable in class. This caused feelings of boredom or repetition with certain lessons.
- Another issue that the respondents brought up was that learning English is seen as unchallenging within the monastic school setting. As students are trained from a young age to be proficient in Pali, Sanskrit, and Sinhala, most national level competitions and language days are held for these subjects and not for English. This lack of opportunities to use and showcase their English proficiency leads to students feeling bored and unmotivated to learn the language.
- The cohort also brought up that the text books for English are not interesting. Additionally, the exercises in the text books are often neglected, or the answers are provided by the teacher for the students to copy down in their books. They also mentioned that some teachers do this in order to get credit from

the classroom supervisors who visit the *Pirivenas* and check the students' books. When asked about teaching literature-related lessons (such as poems) from the books, the majority of interviewees said that these were not taught in class. Instead, the teacher would give a note on one of the poems in the book for students to memorize and they would be asked to write it in response to a question on 'any' poem given in the *Piriven* final examination paper.

- They also commented that English teachers tend to favor students who are better in English, giving them more opportunities to read lessons aloud and answer questions. They also mentioned that weak students are often ignored and not motivated in class.
- The respondents also mentioned some practical issues in the *Pirivenas* that affected their ability to learn English. They stated that since classes are conducted in the afternoon hours (from 1 pm to 5.30 pm/6 pm), they felt bored with learning English after having lunch (*dāna*).
- The interviewees and those who sent voice messages also discussed the reactions they developed to the problems mentioned earlier. They mentioned that their attention was often diverted from learning English, and they were inattentive, bored, and chose to engage in

other activities to pass time during class. They reported that some teachers did not notice or purposely ignored these students, while others scolded them, but these attempts failed to regain the students' attention after a few classes. Some students also mentioned that they did not respond to any questions asked by the English teacher, particularly if the teacher easily gets angry or they chose to keep aloof without actively participating in the learning process. Some students also habitually made the teacher talk off the subject, asking question after question about something that the teacher was interested in talking. Often, these talks were boasting done by the teacher and these talks were in Sinhala, which further decreased the students' interest in the class.

Based on the data gathered, it appears that the reasons for the lack of English proficiency among *Pirivena* students are primarily situated within the classroom environment. The interviewees did not mention their socio-economic status or social class as influencing factors in their English learning, instead focused on the various variables within the classroom environment such as the teaching methods, behavior of the English teacher, and practical issues in the *Pirivenas*.

Suggestions

- *The poor recognition given to the importance of English within the Pirivenas*

Even though the Pirivena State Ministry has taken steps to improve the English learning environment in *Pirivenas*, the fact that English is not a compulsory subject in the *Pirivena* Final Examination has led to it being given second priority within the *Pirivena* setting, with a focus on Pali, Sinhala and Sanskrit which are compulsory for the examination. To improve the quality of English teaching, it would be beneficial to make English a compulsory subject in the *Pirivena* Final Examination, which would give it more recognition and importance within the *Pirivenas*.

- *Pedagogical Skills of the English teachers*

Cotton (1999, p. 409) argues that a supportive classroom environment is preferable for students to learn successfully and research shows that teachers' behavior can sometimes be demotivating to students without the teachers knowing or intending to do so. This finding is confirmed by the current research, as some students reported being demotivated to learn English due to unprofessional behavior of the English teachers. Providing proper teacher training for the English teachers could be a solution to this issue identified through the research. The following suggestions are made based on the analysis of the data

gathered in the study related to the improvement of the quality of English teachers and teaching.

To improve the quality of English teaching, the teacher should,

- continuously update and expand their knowledge of the English language and literature by reading books, articles, and attending workshops and conferences on second language teaching. This will help them stay current in the field and improve their teaching methods.
- develop their lesson planning skills to create well-structured, engaging, and effective lesson plans that align with the students' needs and learning objectives. They should be trained to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to keep the students engaged and focused in learning. This will help to make the class more interesting and interactive.
- use whatever the technology accessible and available to him (such as smartphones, laptops, multimedia tools, and online resources) in the classroom. This will help to make the class more interactive and engaging for the students.
- encourage active student participation through group discussions, debates, and presentations which will also

help to improve the quality of English teaching. This will provide opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills, and to practice using the language in a real-life setting.

- provide constructive feedback for students, giving them regular and specific feedback on their progress, and provide guidance and support on areas they need to improve. This will help the students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to improve their skills.
- create a positive and inclusive classroom environment where all students feel comfortable to participate and express themselves.
- be adaptable and open to trying new teaching methods, and willing to adjust their approach if they find that something is not working.
- continuously evaluate and reflect on their teaching, seeking feedback from students and colleagues, and making adjustments as necessary will improve the teaching skills.
- create a balance between classroom instruction and real-world application by providing opportunities for students to apply their language skills in real-world contexts.

- balance teacher talk, teaching and activities to keep students engaged with content throughout the class time.

■ *Age difference of students in a classroom*

Addressing the issue of age difference among students in a classroom, the English teacher should understand the level of proficiency of the students in the class. They can alter lessons and activities to cater to the level of all students in the class. This will help to make the class more inclusive and engaging for all students. Some suggestions for the teacher are:

- Assessing the students' current level of proficiency and understanding their individual needs.
- Using a variety of teaching methods and activities that cater to different learning styles and abilities.
- Differentiating instruction by providing various levels of challenge to students based on their proficiency level.
- Incorporating a mix of whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- Providing individualized support and feedback to help weaker students catch up to their peers.
- Creating an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel comfortable to participate and express themselves.

- Continuously monitoring students' progress, adjusting instruction as necessary and providing feedback and support to help students achieve their learning objectives.
- *English learning to be unchallenging*
To address the issue of English learning being unchallenging, the Pirivena State Ministry may organize inter-Piriven English competitions, debates, etc., to motivate the students towards learning English. This will provide opportunities for students to practice and improve their language skills in a fun and engaging way. Additionally, within classes, teachers can organize mini-competitions to keep students motivated and engaged in learning English.

Conclusion

The knowledge of English is crucial for Bhikku students as it allows them to communicate with a wider audience, study and understand Buddhist texts, participate in international Buddhist communities, collaborate with other organizations, better understand Western culture, and engage with the modern world. However, it is widely acknowledged that the proficiency level of English among Bhikku students is generally lower compared to lay students who have had formal school education.

The present research, conducted using a subjective research paradigm, aimed to find out the perspectives of students who could better comment on their experience of learning English during their *Pirivena* days. The research highlights that while students have a desire to learn English, there are internal variables within the *Pirivena* system that have led to a general weakness in their proficiency. These issues include the lack of attention given to English within the monastic school setting, the weaknesses of English teachers in terms of their pedagogical approaches and behaviors, and the lack of opportunities for students to apply their language skills in real-world contexts.

The study recommends that more research should be conducted on the English education of *Piriven* schools, and that the perspectives of students should be taken into account when reforming the English education in the *Pirivena* system. The study also emphasizes the need for immediate measures to be taken to improve the English education in *Pirivenas*, addressing the issues pointed out by the students. While appreciating the measures taken by the *Pirivena* State Ministry and the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka to enhance the quality of English education in *Pirivenas*, it is important to note that such measures should be implemented gradually yet immediately.

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