

**Exploration of Primary Teacher Trainees’  
Perceptions of Activity-Based Oral  
English: An Explanatory Case Study at the  
Hapitigam National College of Education**

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**Abstract**

This explanatory case study explores primary teacher trainees’ perceptions of Activity-Based Oral English (ABOE) at Hapitigam National College of Education (HNCoE), one of the several National Colleges of Education (NCoEs) in Sri Lanka that provide pre-service training to prospective primary teachers. The researcher undertakes this study because, despite trainees’ enthusiasm for ABOE during training sessions, a noticeable gap exists between their training and classroom implementation. Many trainees hesitate to integrate ABOE into their teaching practice and often omit this component,

despite having received formal instruction. The study employed an explanatory case study design under a qualitative research approach. The sample of the study selected using the purposeful sampling technique consisted of 45 primary teacher trainees. A questionnaire was utilized to collect primary data, which was analyzed in relation to secondary data gathered from previous national and international research on similar topics as well as the researcher's retrospection as a teacher educator. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of teacher trainees have a satisfactory level of awareness of ABOE and maintain positive attitudes toward its implementation despite several issues, including inadequate exposure to practical training, a lack of English-speaking proficiency, and insufficient understanding of its objectives. Thus, it is recommended that more opportunities be created to improve the English-speaking proficiency of teacher trainees. Additionally, professional development programmes should be conducted regularly to empower teacher educators, enabling them to

provide more specific training and feedback on ABOE. Addressing these challenges will help enhance the effectiveness of ABOE implementation and better prepare teacher trainees for classroom practice.

**Keywords:** Teacher trainees, Activity Based Oral English, Hapitigam National College of Education

## **Introduction**

This explanatory case study explores primary teacher trainees' perceptions of Activity-Based Oral English (ABOE). ABOE is one of the innovations introduced into the primary curriculum of government schools in Sri Lanka, following one of the recommendations: Strengthening of English capability at all levels, made by the Presidential Task Force based on the National Education Commission (NEC) proposal in 1997. According to the General Education Reforms – Executive Summary (1997), “Introduction of activity-based oral English in Grade One and Two in

all primary schools” was one of the proposals proposed by the task force (Perera, 2001a; p.17).

ABOE was first implemented in the Gampaha district in 1998 and was introduced island-wide in 1999 (NEC, 1997; p. 22). The National Education Commission (NEC) in 2003 recommended strengthening the oral English programme in Grades 1 and 2 and extending it to Grade 5 in all schools, with formal teaching of English continuing from Grades 3 to 5 (NEC, 2003; p.13).

ABOE is the beginning of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum structure (Aloysius, 2015a; p.44). As the name suggests, “it is confined to speech and listening and is not meant for reading and writing” (Aloysius, 2015b; p.44).

ABOE was introduced to provide opportunities for all children in Key Stage 1 (Grades 1 and 2) to use simple English for communication while engaging in guided play activities, especially under the subject Environmental Related Activities <sup>1</sup> (ERA). The

primary objective of ABOE is to develop students' oral English skills and prepare them for formal English learning in Grade 3. Additionally, ABOE is introduced in Key Stage 1, "in order to create an environment in the classroom for children and teachers to use a mix of the mother tongue and conversational English with appropriate vocabulary during activity learning and games" (Peiris & Nanayakkara, 2000; p.47).

According to the Resource Material for English Language for Primary Education Course published by the Department of Institutional Development of National Institute of Education (NIE), which has been prepared to assist the lecturers at the NCoEs in conducting the English component of the Primary Education Course, the main objectives of ABOE are to:

- 1.) Provide opportunities for students to familiarize themselves with simple words in English that are necessary for day-to-day activities.

- 2.) Provide an environment that is conducive to the use of simple English both in and out of the classroom.
- 3.) Diminish the reluctance of students to use English.
- 4.) Create an environment of enthusiasm to learn English (NIE, 2012; p.573).

To support the implementation of ABOE, the Department of English of NIE has introduced syllabi for Grades 1 and 2, which integrate vocabulary, structures, and activities aligned with ERA and mathematics. Teachers are encouraged to introduce simple words, short phrases, and simple sentences when addressing students, giving instructions, praising, making requests, using polite forms, and using greetings and wishes during ‘free time’. The usage of all the words referred to in ERA and mathematics does not require any strict or rapid rule, but the teacher may be free to restrict or use new words where they are needed. Depending on the

teacher's wishes, different songs and activities may be used.

Later in 2018, the Department of Early Childhood Development and Primary Education of the Faculty of Languages, Humanities, and Social Sciences at NIE prepared a Teachers' Handbook for ABOE, which consists of objectives, vocabulary items, language structures, and activities for each theme under ERA. It was done to eliminate the drawbacks that had been revealed in an investigation done by NIE about ABOE in 2014 (Teacher's Handbook-ABOE, 2018a; pp. X–XIII). In addition, a set of 9 story books, two songbooks, two activity books, and 2 DVDs have been introduced and distributed among all schools where primary classes are conducted.

In the process of assessing the progress of children using ABOE, teachers are expected to utilize assessments in their classes solely to diagnose. Thus, informal assessments like observation, oral questioning, and listening to children are recommended to be used, followed by remedial

measures for learning difficulties, and no written question papers are expected to be used.

ABOE is expected to be carried out by the class teacher, and it is not expected to be taught by a special teacher (Teachers' Guide - Grade 1, 2016a; p.175). Further, no separate periods have been allocated for this programme (Teachers' Guide-Grade 1, 2016b; p.175). Accordingly, the primary teachers have to be equipped with a sufficient level of English to achieve the expected goals. Thus, they should be given proper training about both ABOE and the English Language.

In Sri Lanka, NCoEs provide three-year pre-service teacher training leading to the National Diploma in Teaching (NDT), which caters to the teacher requirements at the primary (1 -5) and junior secondary (6 – 11) levels of the school system. Among the 19 NCoEs, the Primary Education Course is conducted in several NCoEs, including Hapitigam NCoE.



The curriculum of NCoEs consists of an academic component,<sup>2</sup>a professional component,<sup>3</sup>and a general component <sup>4</sup> in the Primary Education Course; English is included in the academic component. The primary English syllabus attempts to raise the English proficiency level of the primary prospective teachers. The subject content of the primary English syllabus is divided into two parts: A and B. Part A mainly focuses on the language improvement of prospective teachers that will be assessed under final external examination whereas Part B focuses on the improvement of skills of primary teacher trainees in using ABOE and it is assessed through internal continuous assessment, final external examination and teaching practice. The primary English syllabus consists of 240 academic hours, and 20 hours are allocated for ABOE.

The professional component comprises 550 hours, with 100 hours allocated for educational practice. To fulfill this requirement, teacher trainees participate in block teaching at various schools during their two-

year residential training. Following this period, they complete a one-year internship, <sup>5</sup>during which they are assigned to schools for hands-on teaching experience. Throughout the training, teacher educators from the lecturing staff visit schools to observe and assess the lessons conducted by the teacher trainees. Primary teacher trainees are required to use ABOE twice a week during their ERA lessons. In their lesson plans, ABOE should be incorporated as the final step in lesson development, with a designated time allocation of 5-10 minutes.

According to the researcher's experience as a teacher educator in English, almost all the teacher trainees demonstrate enthusiasm in implementing ABOE during their training sessions, despite making numerous language errors. However, during supervision, it has been observed that a significant number of teacher trainees are reluctant to integrate ABOE into their teaching practice and often omit this component, despite having received formal training. In addition, it has been noted that ABOE is primarily

employed by teacher trainees only when they are being observed. Thus, the study was conducted in view of exploring teacher trainees' perceptions of ABOE in relation to their teaching experiences at the HNCoE.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is grounded in theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the Behaviorist Approach, both of which provide insights into the effectiveness of ABOE.

### **Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theories**

These theories explain how individuals learn a second language and highlight factors influencing the process. One key framework is Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Krashen argues that language is acquired by receiving "comprehensible input": language input that is just beyond the current level of competence of the learner. For explanation, it is put forward as 'i+1' in which 'i' refers to the acquirers' current level of

language competence, while ‘I’ represents the input which is supposed to be slightly higher level than the students’ faculty. Krashen states the best way to teach oral English is to offer sufficient input in large quantities. The classroom is of benefit only when “It is the major source of comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1982a, p. 22). According to Krashen, the role of the teacher is “not only to provide grammar instruction” but also to provide “The simpler teacher talk, the comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1982b; p.22). Teachers are advised to aid comprehension in two ways: linguistically, by simplifying language, and non-linguistically, by using realia and pictures. Teachers can enhance understanding by discussing familiar topics and using students’ prior knowledge. According to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, speech emerges once learners have acquired enough comprehensible input and grammatical knowledge in the target language. During the silent period, learners develop competence in the target language by processing comprehensible input before actively speaking. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis aligns with

ABOE as both emphasize providing learners with comprehensible input through engaging activities, realia, and familiar contexts, enabling them to develop oral competence naturally before actively speaking.

### **Behaviorist Approach**

This approach is primarily associated with B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory focuses on language learning through repetition, reinforcement, and habit formation. According to behaviorism, learners acquire language by imitating correct speech patterns and receiving positive reinforcement (Skinner, B., 1957). This aligns with ABOE, as it encourages structured oral activities, repetition, and teacher feedback to develop students' spoken English skills.

### **Empirical Framework**

Few studies have explored the implementation of ABOE in Sri Lanka. However, a major national-level study was conducted by the National Education

Commission in 2004 to assess how ABOE was implemented island-wide” (Rohan, 2004a; p.42).

According to the National Education Commission (2004, as cited in Rohan, 2004b), school principals in the Western and Sabaragamuwa provinces expressed satisfaction with teachers’ competency in teaching ABOE, whereas principals in the Nuwara-Eliya district were dissatisfied. The majority of the principals in other provinces emphasized the need for more competent teachers. Some districts had appointed English Language teachers to assist primary teachers as the programme suggested, while some districts, including Colombo and Hambanthota, allocated special time for English lessons, contradicting the ABOE recommendations. Teachers in Trincomalee, Matale, Gampaha, Kalutara, and Kandy reported satisfaction with their training, whereas most of the teachers in other districts were not satisfied. Department supervision of the programme was found to be inadequate except in three districts.

Furthermore, Rohan (2004c) also highlighted teachers' mixed perceptions of ABOE. Since ABOE is "a new subject area, some teachers think it to an extra burden, whereas some feel it is an interesting way of introducing the English subject to the students" (p.2). However, the majority of the teachers lacked a clear understanding of ABOE, and teachers' English appeared to affect the quality of teaching ABOE.

Nonetheless, a report by the NIE (1999) on ABOE clearly states that no English-trained teachers will be assigned to implement this programme as this has been integrated with ERA, which is conducted by primary-trained teachers irrespective of their English knowledge. Therefore, no level of English competence required by the teachers who use this program is explicitly mentioned in the report. According to the report, the implementation of ABOE is required for primary teachers, whether or not their knowledge of English is based on G.C.E. O.L. or A.L. (Aloysius, 2015c; p. 45-46).

However, the following drawbacks were revealed in an investigation done by NIE about ABOE in 2014. They are related to the inadequacy of training given to teacher trainees and how it is misinterpreted by the students (Teacher's Handbook- ABOE, 2018b).

1. The instructions given on using relevant English words and sentences appropriately when doing ERA under ABOE in 2009 and before that were not successfully followed.
2. It was obvious that a wrong attitude was inculcated in the students about their mother tongue when using English words and sentences while ERA is being introduced in their mother tongue.
3. It was revealed that the use of English words and sentences may hinder the students' interest in the subject explained in their mother tongue.
4. The mother tongue is acquired naturally through listening and spontaneous use, without forceful teaching. In contrast,



learning English as a second language starts with writing and memorization, lacking an environment for listening and speaking. As a result, despite studying English for ten years in school, students struggle with speaking.

The Teacher's Handbook for ABOE (2018c) mandates the class teacher to use ABOE even if the English teacher is assigned to teach English in grades 1 and 2 (p.12). However, when using ABOE, it has been suggested that the primary teacher may receive guidance from the English teachers of the school and the in-service advisor of English (Teachers' Guide - Grade 2, 2017; p. 188).

ERA serves as a coordinating subject, reinforcing the other three subjects in the primary curriculum: mother tongue, mathematics, and religion. From ERA, students are introduced to the natural elements of the surroundings and the different people who live around them. So, the teacher is expected to introduce some simple words orally at the appropriate

instances when teaching different themes in environment-related activities. This is more natural and meaningful and relates to the task and hand” (Atugoda, 2005a)

Similarly, “Children learn willingly and responsively when they are offered meaningful experiences in a natural setting, making abundant use of the environment familiar to them. Consequently, the compartmentalized subject curriculum at the primary level should give way to a set of integrated activities, which children may pursue freely according to their interests and inclinations” (Peiris, 1973; p.163).

Internationally, ABOE is not limited to specific subjects or grades, unlike its implementation in Sri Lanka. Greater emphasis is placed on using activity-based methods for teaching both native and non-native speakers in primary classes. However, limited research has focused on the challenges faced by trained non-native English-speaking teachers when teaching English to non-native primary students.

Butler (2002a) found that a key challenge in teaching English to primary students is the teacher's ability and knowledge about effective second language teaching methods. "Not only the teacher's knowledge about the students and methods of teaching, but also the teacher's language proficiency is a major concern. In Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, where English education has been started recently research shows that teacher's proficiency level of productive skills is lower than that of their receptive skills" (p.211). Butler further mentions that there is a gap between the actual proficiency of the teachers and the level they expect to have. "Examining the teacher's perception of their English proficiency alongside the level of proficiency that they feel is needed to teach English reveals a gap between the two" (Butler, 2002b; p.212). As a result of this lack of proficiency, especially in productive skills, teachers tend to pay more attention to what they can do from books. Consequently, they teach more and more grammar, making the language more complex to the students. "In many Asian EFL contexts,

language instruction focused so intently on grammar and translation that students often acquired insufficient communication skills” (Butler, 2002c).

There is limited research on primary teacher trainees’ perceptions of ABOE at NCoEs in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the effectiveness of current training programmes at NCoEs in equipping teacher trainees with the necessary pedagogical and linguistic skills to implement ABOE effectively remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps through an explanatory case study at Hapitigam NCoE.

### **Materials and Methodology**

The researcher selected an explanatory case study as the research design under the qualitative approach. The population of this study is the teacher trainees who follow the primary education course, conducted in the NCoEs. The sample consisted of forty-five teacher trainees enrolled in the Primary Education course at HNCoe. The researcher employs a purposeful sampling technique to select a

homogeneous group of individuals, ensuring that all participants share specific characteristics. The homogeneous group consists of teacher trainees enrolled in the primary education course at HNCoE, as they have all received training in Activity-Based Oral English (ABOE). HNCoE was selected as the research site, due to the researcher's access to it, as she has been working there as a teacher educator of English and as it offers the primary education course for teacher trainees.

A questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions followed by open-ended questions, was the primary data collection method. It was administered via Google Forms in Sinhala to facilitate data collection. The teacher trainees' perception of ABOE was explored under 6 themes: Significance of ABOE, Opinion on giving responsibility of ABOE to the class teachers, Integrating ABOE to ERA, Is ABOE enjoyable? Opportunity to use English and Opportunity to teach English.

Secondary data was gathered from relevant literature on second language acquisition theories, the

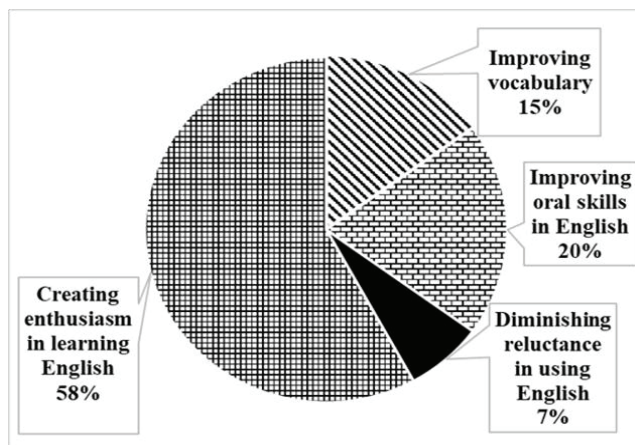
behaviouristic approach and prior national and international research on similar topics. The data gathered from all sources were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns and themes in teacher trainees' responses.

## **Findings**

This section presents an analysis of the data collected from teacher trainees regarding their perceptions of ABOE. The findings provide insights into how trainees view the implementation of ABOE, the challenges they face, and the potential benefits of this approach in developing students' oral English proficiency. The discussion integrates relevant theoretical perspectives, comparing the findings with existing research on ABOE.

### **1. Significance of ABOE**

The researcher aimed to determine why it is considered important that ABOE be included in the primary curriculum of Sri Lanka's education system,



based on views expressed by teacher trainees. It also sought to ascertain whether teacher trainees were aware of the ABOE objectives and if they considered any additional importance in implementing ABOE.

Figure 1: Significance of ABOE

Almost all the teacher trainees firmly declared that ABOE is an important component, although the reasons given for its introduction differ from one another. The majority of the teacher trainees (58%) stated that ABOE made them enthusiastic about learning English, while the lowest proportion (7%) claimed it helped to make them less reluctant to use

English. At the same time, 15 % of respondents said that students could learn vocabulary related to subject matter at an earlier stage and they regarded it as a simple way to memorize English words. However, only 20% came out with the main objective of ABOE: improving the oral English of primary students. Remarkably, all of the teacher trainees in this study seemed to be aware of at least one of the objectives of implementing ABOE.

## **2. Opinion on giving the responsibility of ABOE to the class teachers**

When the perceptions of the teacher trainees on giving responsibility of ABOE to the class teachers were concerned, 96% of the teacher trainees agreed, claiming that it is appropriate, while only 4% of the teacher trainees disagreed



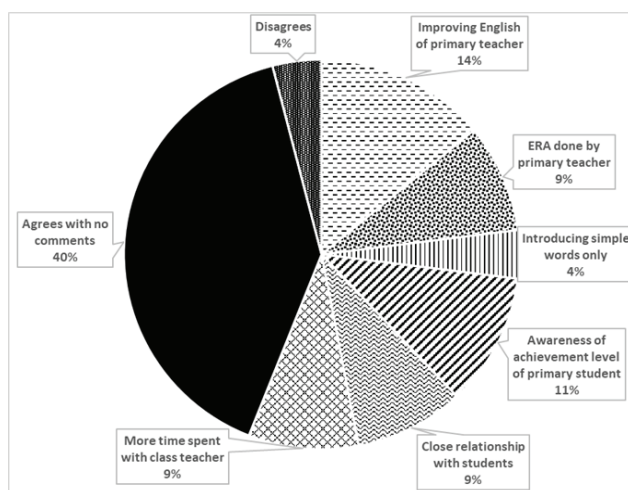


Figure 2: Opinion on giving the responsibility of ABOE to the class teachers

The majority of the teacher trainees, accounting for 56%, have different opinions regarding their agreement on the matter, while 40% do not provide any concrete reason for their stance. Among those who agreed, the most common response, given by 14% of the teacher trainees, was that “It is a good opportunity for the primary teacher to improve her English knowledge.” Additionally, 11% of the teacher trainees believed that “No one else knows the

performance level of the primary child better than the primary teacher.” A further 9% of the teacher trainees shared similar perspectives, emphasizing different aspects of the primary teacher’s role. They said that since the primary teacher is responsible for teaching ERA and ABOE is a related component, the responsibility of using ABOE should also fall on the primary teacher. Some highlighted the close relationship between the primary teacher and students, as the teacher spends the entire school day with them, making them the best person to motivate students to learn English. Others pointed out that, given the frequent interactions between primary teachers and students, the use of ABOE could lead to better results. Four percent of the teacher trainees held the opinion that using ABOE should not be a challenge for primary teachers since only simple English words are taught, making it easy for them to implement.

However, bringing forth a different perspective, one teacher trainee complained that expecting the

primary teacher to carry out ABOE would be an additional burden, as they already teach multiple subjects such as mathematics, mother tongue, environmental studies, Buddhism and Tamil. Another teacher trainee raised the issue of language proficiency, claiming that the primary teacher might become a poor language model for primary students due to their limited expertise in English. She suggested that “It is better to give it to somebody else who knows her English well.” These varied responses highlight the diverse perspectives among teacher trainees regarding the role of the primary teacher in implementing ABOE.

### 3. Integrating ABOE to ERA

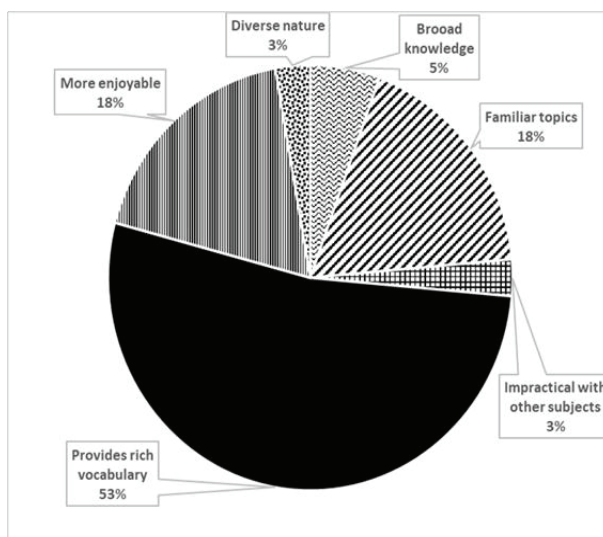


Figure 3: Integrating ABOE to ERA

Teacher trainees unanimously supported the integration of ABOE into ERA. According to 38% of the trainees, ERA provides a rich vocabulary due to its diverse themes, enabling them to improve the vocabulary of the students. Additionally, 13% of the trainees noted that since ERA covers themes related to daily life and the environment, students can easily learn about familiar topics in English. Another 13% highlighted that learning English through ERA is

more enjoyable. Furthermore, 4% of the trainees pointed out that ERA's broad knowledge base allows for extensive discussions in English when linked with ABOE. In contrast, 2% believed that it is impractical to integrate ABOE with subjects like Sinhala, Buddhism, and Mathematics, while another 2% stated that ERA's diverse nature makes it the best subject for ABOE integration. Moreover, agreeing with the fact that integrating ABOE with ERA is quite appropriate, one teacher trainee is hopeful that it would be better if it could be integrated with other subjects. Furthermore, 28% of the trainees agreed without giving any reasons. However, it seems that teacher trainees are not aware of the fact that ABOE has already been introduced into mathematics. Thus, the available evidence indicates that ABOE can be best integrated with ERA and all the teacher trainees agreed with it.

**4. Is ABOE enjoyable?**

It is much encouraging to notice that almost all the teacher trainees were in favour of ABOE and expressed their interest and enthusiasm in learning ABOE. They presented a variety of reasons why they enjoy learning ABOE.

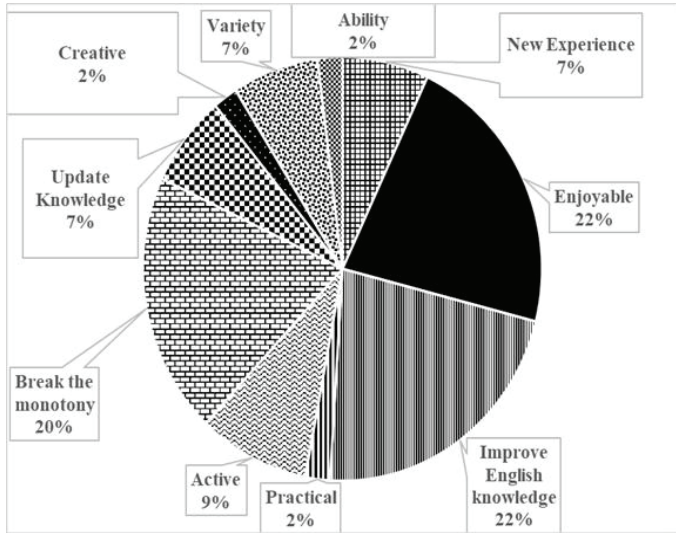


Figure 4: Is ABOE enjoyable?

Twenty-two percent of the teacher trainees claimed that integrating ABOE into ERA is very enjoyable. An equal percentage (22%) stated that it helps

improve their English knowledge by providing opportunities to use the language spontaneously. The second highest percentage, 20%, highlighted that ABOE integration breaks the monotony of the course, as all other subjects are taught in Sinhala. Additionally, 9% of the teacher trainees appreciated that the approach allows for active participation. Meanwhile, 7% of the teacher trainees pointed out that it offers a new experience, adds variety and helps them update their knowledge. Other reasons given for supporting ABOE integration included its practicality, creativity and ability to guide students effectively.

## **5. Opportunity to Use English**

The primary teacher is expected to use Sinhala as the medium of instruction to teach the core subjects to the primary students. ABOE gives them the opportunity to use English as the medium of instruction in their primary classroom.

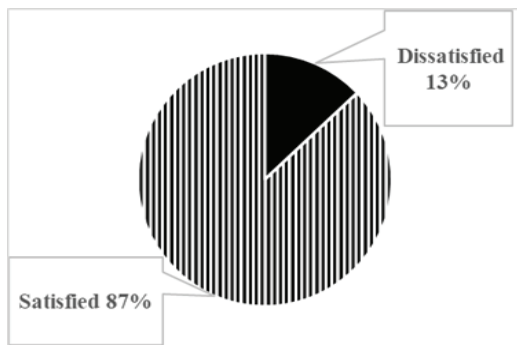


Figure 5: Opportunity to use English

The majority of teacher trainees, accounting for 87%, were satisfied with the opportunity to engage in ABOE for several reasons. Eleven percent believed it helps improve their English knowledge, while 9% found it useful for updating their knowledge. Additionally, 7% appreciated that it improves their vocabulary and allows them to learn new songs and another 7% valued the opportunity to develop their oral skills in English. For 2% of the teacher trainees, it is a new experience, as they never expected to use English as primary teachers and had no opportunities to practise the language after their school years. However, 13% of the teacher trainees were



dissatisfied with the opportunity. Their concerns included insufficient time to achieve meaningful learning outcomes (9%) and a lack of adequate English proficiency to effectively use ABOE (4%).

## **6. Opportunity to teach English**

When the teacher trainees' attitudes toward having the opportunity of improving oral English skills of the primary students are concerned, the majority of the primary students are concerned, the majority of the teacher trainees which is 91% were satisfied whereas 9% of the teacher trainees were dissatisfied.

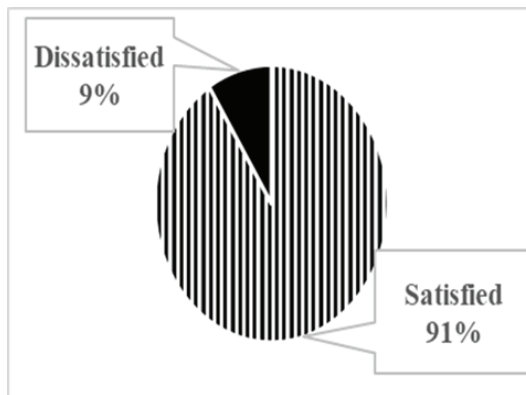


Figure 6: Opportunity to teach English

Among the teacher trainees who were satisfied with ABOE, the majority (26%) believed it helps create interest in students to learn English through enjoyable activities. Additionally, 32% stated that ABOE motivates students, as it provides a new experience and breaks the monotony of learning. Other justifications include the ability to provide basic English knowledge (20%), contribute to improving students' oral skills (15%) and help familiarize them with the language (10%). One teacher trainee, expressing great enthusiasm, suggested that more time should be allocated for ABOE, while another viewed it as a valuable opportunity to become a well-rounded teacher. On the other hand, some teacher trainees expressed dissatisfaction for various reasons. One teacher trainee complained about not having the opportunity to practise ABOE since she was not assigned to teach ERA. Another teacher trainee suggested the need for more awareness programmes on ABOE. Additionally, one teacher trainee found it impractical to allocate 15 minutes from the ERA period for

ABOE, as covering the extensive ERA syllabus was already challenging.

## **Discussion**

Teacher trainees at HNCoE enroll in the Primary Education Course to teach subjects like Mathematics, Sinhala, ERA, and Buddhism, all delivered in Sinhala. Since English oral skills were not traditionally their responsibility, many did not anticipate teaching it. However, with the integration of ABOE, they now play an important role in developing students' English-speaking abilities, leading to both enthusiasm and challenges in its implementation.

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of teacher trainees hold positive perceptions of ABOE, recognizing its significance in the primary curriculum. However, their awareness of its objectives varies, with only a small percentage explicitly identifying the primary objective of ABOE. This suggests a need for further emphasis on

the objectives of ABOE during teacher training programmes.

The study also highlights strong support for assigning ABOE responsibilities to primary teachers, with 96% of teacher trainees agreeing that this is appropriate. Many believe that primary teachers, due to their close relationship with students and their role in teaching ERA, are best suited to implement ABOE. This aligns with Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, which highlights the importance of providing meaningful learning experiences during early childhood. According to Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, during the Intuitive Thought Substage, which continues from 5 years to 7 years, children want knowledge of knowing everything (Wikipedia - The Free Encyclopedia, 2002). It is during this period that students in Sri Lanka study in Key Stage 1 (grades 1 and 2) and learn ABOE. ABOE has been designed with a large vocabulary included in its content, taking into consideration the cognitive development

level of the Intuitive Period (Rohan, 2004d; p.20). However, some trainees expressed concerns regarding the additional workload and the language proficiency of primary teachers, aligning with the views of Rohan (2004) and Atugoda (2005). Rohan (2004e) stated that the limited vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation of primary grade teachers, who are not qualified English teachers, can have negative consequences on students learning ABOE in Grades 1 and 2 (p.104). His views were supported by the views of Sunil Atugoda, a former Director of NIE. According to him, the drawback that has been there up to now was that all these Grade 1 & 2 teachers have not undergone adequate training to learn methodologies to be used in introducing English at these grades. So, if a child learns anything faulty, it would become a massive task to correct it by the English teachers later (Atugoda, 2005b). In addition, B.F. Skinner, in his theory of Behaviorism, has suggested that “learning was assumed to take place through imitation” (cited in Perera, 2001b; p.54). The Behaviorist perspective reinforces the

importance of proper language modeling, emphasizing that poorly trained teachers may inadvertently reinforce incorrect language use among students (Perera, 2001c). Thus, “the language input that the students were exposed to was considered important as it provided the model” (Perera, 2001c; p.54). “A teacher’s role was to provide the correct model and to eliminate errors while the students imitated the teacher and learned the structures through drilling and reinforcement. Therefore, SLA literature in the 1950s laid more importance on the language learning environment in the form of correct models” (Perera, 2001d; p.55). These findings underscore the necessity of adequate training to ensure effective ABOE implementation.

Furthermore, integrating ABOE into ERA received unanimous support, as trainees recognized its importance for vocabulary development and engagement. However, their limited awareness of ABOE’s integration into other subjects, such as Mathematics, suggests a knowledge gap that should

be addressed in teacher training programmes. Additionally, nearly all trainees found ABOE enjoyable and beneficial for their own English proficiency, reinforcing the value of incorporating oral activities into their learning process

Despite the overall positive perceptions, some trainees expressed dissatisfaction with the opportunities available for using and teaching English through ABOE, citing insufficient time and inadequate language proficiency. When recruiting candidates for the Primary Education Course at NCoEs, Ordinary Pass (S) for the English language at G.C.E. (O/L) examination is accepted as the minimum and the only English language requirement. Moreover, as the only skills assessed in the final external examination of English are grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, less prominence is placed on listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, the non-English environment at HNCoE, where Sinhala is the main medium of instruction, is detrimental especially in improving

speaking. These theoretical insights support the argument for improved training and support mechanisms to enhance ABOE implementation.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study reveals that teacher trainees at HNCoe hold positive perceptions of ABOE and recognize its significance in primary education. They strongly support its integration with ERA and its assignment to primary teachers, emphasizing the benefits of early exposure to English. However, challenges such as limited awareness of ABOE objectives, inadequate training, and language proficiency concerns highlight the need for improved teacher preparation. Addressing these gaps through enhanced training programmes and better language support mechanisms will be essential for the effective implementation of ABOE.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance the implementation and



effectiveness of ABOE in teacher training programmes:

1. Strengthening Teacher Training on ABOE Objectives

It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on ensuring teacher trainees fully understand the primary objectives of ABOE. This can be achieved through targeted training sessions, workshops, and continuous assessment of their comprehension.

2. Enhancing English Language Proficiency

Given the concerns regarding primary teachers' language abilities, additional language support should be provided. Encouraging trainees to engage in English-speaking activities and increasing exposure to spoken English within the NCoEs can be beneficial.

3. Expanding ABOE Integration Beyond ERA

Awareness campaigns and curriculum adjustments should ensure that trainees recognize ABOE's

applicability beyond ERA, particularly in subjects like Mathematics. Training should include strategies for integrating oral English activities across various subjects.

#### 4. Increasing Opportunities for Practicing ABOE

To address concerns about insufficient opportunities to use English, more interactive activities, such as peer teaching, micro-teaching, and role-playing exercises, should be incorporated into training programmes.

#### 5. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Teacher Educators

Regular CPD programmes should be conducted to ensure that teacher educators are well-equipped with updated methodologies and best practices for implementing ABOE effectively. This would enable them to provide better guidance and feedback to teacher trainees.

#### 6. Conducting Further Research

Since this study highlights intra-college variations in perceptions, further research should be conducted across multiple NCoEs to examine inter-college differences. This would provide a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to ABOE implementation.

By addressing these recommendations, the effectiveness of ABOE can be enhanced, ensuring that primary teachers are better prepared to develop students' oral English proficiency. Future studies should explore the long-term impact of ABOE training on classroom practices and student outcomes, contributing to more informed policy decisions in English language education.

### **Abbreviations**

|      |                                     |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| ABOE | Activity Based Oral English         |
| A/L  | Advanced Level                      |
| CLT  | Communicative Language Teaching     |
| CPD  | Continuous Professional Development |
| ELT  | English Language Teaching           |
| ERA  | Environmental Related Activities    |

|       |                                         |
|-------|-----------------------------------------|
| GCE   | General Certificate of Education        |
| HNCoe | Hapitigam National College of Education |
| NCoE  | National Colleges of Education          |
| NDT   | National Diploma in Teaching            |
| NEC   | National Education Commission           |
| NIE   | National Institute of Education         |
| O/L   | Ordinary Level                          |

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental Studies subject was integrated to primary curriculum from 1972 and from 1999 it is entitled “Environmental Related Activities” which is a broad- based subject. It provides effective learning opportunities to students to become sensitive persons to social environment, biological environment and physical environment and help them to cope with life situations since most of their livelihood will depend on the environment.

<sup>2</sup> The academic component comprises of the subjects Primary English, Primary Sinhala, Tamil, Primary Mathematics, Environment Related Activities and Primary Buddhism/ Catholicism.

<sup>3</sup> The professional component comprises of the subjects Educational Psychology, Educational Sociology, Educational Guidance and Counselling, Educational Measurement and Evaluation and Elements of Education and School Management.



<sup>4</sup> The general component comprises of the subjects Information and Communication Technology, Health and Physical Education and Aesthetics.

<sup>5</sup> Internship provides direct experience to teacher trainees of various roles of a teacher including teaching and developing command over the subject. It also provides the opportunity to integrate theoretical knowledge on strategies and methods and instructional aids with practice.

### **Biographical Note**

Ushettige Premani Kumari Perera is a Lecturer in pre-service teacher education at the Hapitigam National College of Education, where she has served for almost six years. Prior to this, she worked as a teacher of English in the government school system for more than twenty-one years before joining the Sri Lanka Teacher Educators' Service (SLTES). She currently teaches English and Education Practice to

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