

GLOBAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA



GARI International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN 2659-2193

Volume: 06 | Issue: 02

On 30th September 2020

<http://www.research.lk>

Author: Dr. K.S.N. Prasangani

(Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka)

GARI Publisher | E-Learning | Volume: 06 | Issue: 02

Article ID: IN/GARI/ICEDL/2020/117 | Pages: 05 - 14 (09)

ISSN 2659-2193 | ISBN 978-955-7153-02-5

Edit: GARI Editorial Team | Received: 20.08.2020 | Publish: 30.09.2020

ISSN 2659-2193 | Volume: 06 | Issue: 02 | 30-09-2020

MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH VIA ONLINE DURING NOVEL COVID 19 PERIOD

Prasangani K.S.N.

*Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka*

nilushikap@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The current study examined the motivation to learn English language via online during the COVID 19 period. Dramatic change has occurred in online learning due to the fall of COVID 19 in Sri Lanka. Thus, this study aimed to find the motivation of Sri Lankan learners to learn English via online. Mixed method approach was applied to collect data from the participants of secondary and tertiary levels. Adapted online motivation questionnaire consisted with 60 items was used to collect data from 150 participants. Interviews were conducted for randomly selected participants to examine the motivation profile further. SPSS correlation analysis was applied to find the core relationships of L2 Motivational Self System. The results have shown that Sri Lankan learners' ideal L2 self is highly stronger than the ought to L2 self and L2 learning experiences. In contrast to earlier findings this study found strong positive correlations between the motivation and the ought to L2 self and learning experiences. Surprisingly, Sri Lankan learners highly motivated to learn from formal English classroom than the online English learning classroom. This is an important issue for future research. Furthermore, these learners use internet for self-English learning purposes, using social media in English, and entertainment purposes. Finally, this study suggests the importance of having a proper policy for online learning in Sri Lanka to facilitate the learners for better learning.

Keywords: L2 motivation, Online English Learning, Novel Covid 19, L2 Motivational Self System

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka education system had faced several challenges during the period of civil war, tsunami, natural disasters and terrorist activities (Bitter & Edirisinghe, 2016). Anyhow, until the spread of COVID 19 Sri Lankan education system did not identify the importance of distance learning, specially the online teaching and learning. Online teaching and learning has become a new challenge to the Sri Lankan education system due to the lack of connectivity, knowledge, devices, and cost of data; ("Distance education for school children in Sri Lanka in the time of COVID-19," 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020; Vincent & Kitnasamy, 2020). Teachers and students started to use WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, YouTube, Learning Management System (LMS), Zoom, Google classroom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx and etc. for their learning and teaching at different levels. At this juncture it is worthwhile to investigate the learners' motivation for online learning.

Background of the Study

Education in Emergencies in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka faced two major emergencies in the history. Such as thirty years of civil war which was ended in 2009 and tsunami in 2004. During the civil war hundreds of thousands of people displaced, injured or killed and during tsunami 35,000 people killed and over a million of people displaced. Among the tsunami victims there were 200,000 school children and university students, and 3000 of teachers (Bitter & Edirisinghe, 2016;Uyangoda, 2013). During the period of civil war Sri Lankan government had to continue the education in the LTTE controlled areas in north and east of Sri Lanka. That was a great challenge, because the government had to ensure the safety of educational officers, teachers and students. Similarly, due to the tsunami, 182 schools were damaged and 287 schools were converted as camps for the tsunami victims. In fact, classroom teaching was halted for many weeks (Bitter & Edirisinghe, 2016;Uyangoda, 2013). These two major emergencies created the need of policies and regulations in Sri Lankan education system, because continuation of education system in the country was challenged during the two emergencies.

Furthermore, drought in 2001, landslides in 2006, flooding in 2008, cyclone in 2010 and Easter Sunday Attack in 2019 highlighted the necessity of preparedness of the education system during the emergencies (Uyangoda, 2013). It was a great challenge for the country to implement a common policy by protecting the right of free education and providing equal access. Anyhow, during the civil war period Sri Lankan education system was able to conduct all government examinations of Ordinary Level, Advanced Level, and Grade Five Scholarship Examination in the LTTE controlled areas with the support of teachers and education officers simultaneously with the other parts of the country (Uyangoda, 2013).

Majorly, during the civil war and tsunami periods Sri Lankan education system adopted teaching methods of Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), Catch up Education (CUE), and home-based teaching in the areas of north, east, and coastal areas to continue the education without disruption (Uyangoda, 2013). ALP helps the students those who face the long-term disruption of education. It facilitates the multi-level and multi grade teaching. In fact, students were able to reach the expected competency levels without considering the physical age. ALP was applied in the North during the civil war period (Uyangoda, 2013). CUE focuses on the students of short-term education disruption. This was practiced after the tsunami disaster to prepare the students for public examinations. Catch up classes were conducted by the teachers in the afternoons and students were rejoined to the normal classes once they reached the required competencies (Uyangoda, 2013). Home based teaching was introduced after 2005 to the war affected areas of Sri Lanka. Under this teacher in the nearby locations of the students taught and guided the students based on the self-study materials. This was also targeted to prepare the students for government examinations (Uyangoda, 2013). Anyhow, the unexpected spread of the COVID-19 disease has caused to sudden shut of schools and higher educational institutes in all over the country by disrupting the education system. This is the very first time Sri Lankan education system experienced a long closure of the educational institutes with uncertainty. In addition to that it is a great challenge for the country to ensure the safety of the teachers and students and equal access of education.

Ministry of Education (MOE) and University Grant Commission (UGC) initiated the online teaching as a solution during the pandemic period. The sudden

initiation of online teaching in education system created certain problems in the country. It has widened the educational inequality among the students, because number of students have no wealth to purchase the necessary devices to connect with the lessons, there are lot of electricity and internet disruptions in the country. Only 40% of the school going households in Sri Lanka have internet connection and 90% of them access via mobile networks. On the other hand, teachers faced a big embarrassment due to the sudden conversion of online teaching, because they were not ready to use it due to the lack of knowledge (Kadiragamar & Thiruvarangan, 2020; Vincent & Kitnasamy, 2020; "Distance education for school children in Sri Lanka in the time of COVID-19," 2020). This condition will lead the poor user experiences in the education, but some believe the new hybrid model of education will lead for the betterment of the students in the long run, because online learning helps to retain information, save the time (Li & Lalani, 2020).

Motivation for Online English Learning

Motivation is a key impetus for learning English. Several studies were conducted to examine factors related to the formal English language classrooms and self-learning (outside classroom). Several researches were conducted to examine the motivation of English learners in different Asian contexts based on L2 Motivational Self System (Dornyei, 2009). According to Prasangani (2014a; 2014b) Malaysian learners' ideal L2 self is the strongest contributory factor of their English learning. Furthermore, interestingly their social goals strongly contribute to form their ideal L2 self. The similar pattern appears among the Sri Lankan undergraduates (Prasangani & Nadarajan, 2015). In the Sri Lankan context it is somewhat surprising that among the rural English learners ideal L2 self is stronger

than the urban learners in their English learning motivation (Prasangani & Nadarajan, 2015; Prasangani, 2018b). Although, among Chinese and Indonesian rural English learners ideal L2 self was weak due to the lack of exposure and facilities (Lamb, 2012; You & Dornyei, 2014). On the other hand, learning experiences are the most contributory factor of English learning motivation among the Pakistani learners (Islam, Lamb, & Chambers, 2013). This finding is parallel with Iranian, Japanese and Indonesian learners, because attitudes to learn English seemed as the strongest contributory factor of motivation in English learning (Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009; Lamb, 2012). Added to that the recent motivation study by Shahbaz, Islam, & Malik (2017) emphasized the high motivation based on ideal L2 self of the girls in Pakistani context.

More recent attention has focused on motivation to learn English via online. Recent studies of Lamb and Arisandy (2019) and Prasangani, (2019) discussed certain aspects of learner motivation in learning via online. Lamb & Arisandy (2019) found high level of English use for entertainment among Indonesian cosmopolitan learners. Added to that Prasangani (2019) emphasized the Sri Lankan English learners' high motivation to use English in digital devices, internet, and social media. These studies indicated the preliminary findings of motivation to learn English via online. Anyhow, dramatic change has occurred in online English teaching with the fall of COVID 19 in the world. Until recently, there has been very little attention paid for the motivation to learn English via online during the COVID 19 period. Thus, the current study aimed to investigate how Sri Lankan English learners motivate to learn English via online during the COVID 19 period. The major objective of this study was to investigate the motivational profile and recommend some suggestions to

improve online English teaching in Sri Lanka and similar contexts in the world. Based on that the current study aimed to answer the following research questions;

1. What is the nature of motivation among Sri Lankan English learners?
2. What is the nature of motivation to use English outside of the formal classroom environment?

METHODOLOGY

In most recent studies of motivation was examined based on the mixed method. This study also adopted the mixed method

to collect data. Mixed method is appropriate for this study, because through quantitative only it is difficult to gain the opinions of the learners. Thus, mixed method will provide a balance picture of motivation. The questionnaire was adapted from Lamb and Arisandy (2019) and Prasangani (2018). Questionnaire consisted with 60 items and 5-point Likert scale. Interviews were conducted with randomly selected two participants. 150 participants participated the online voluntary questionnaire survey. The link for the online survey was sent via emails and WhatsApp groups. Table 1 shows the participant profile of the study.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Age	14-20	30%
	20-26	70%
Gender	Male	19%
	Female	81%
Residence	Urban	47%
	Rural	53%

Only participants aged between 14 and 20 years were included in the study. 30% of the participants were between the age of 14 years and 20 years and 70% of the participants were between 20 years and 26 years. Further, 30% of the participants were secondary students and 70% of the participants were undergraduates. The majority of the participants were females (81%). In addition, sample consisted with almost equal urban and rural participants (47% and 53%). Collected data analysis was performed by using SPSS. After the questionnaire adaptation pilot study was conducted among five participants. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

The reliability of the questionnaire can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability of the Items

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.973	.975	60

The Cronbach's Alpha scores in Table 2 and Table 3 were above 0.7 which is in accordance with the accepted Cronbach's Alpha requirement (Pallant, 2007).

Table 3: Reliability of the variables of the questionnaire

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Use English Outside Classroom	.938	20
Use internet for studying	.931	7
Motivated Learning Behavior	.948	10
Ideal L2 Self	.918	8
Ought to L2 Self	.860	4
Formal English Class	.921	5
Online English Class	.863	6

The Cronbach's Alpha values proved the reliability of the items and variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What is the nature of motivation among Sri Lankan English learners?

Correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between the

dependent variable of motivated learning and independent variables of ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self, formal classroom learning, and online classroom learning. Table 4 provides the correlations between the variables.

Table 4: Nature of Motivation

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Motivated Learning Behaviour	Ideal L2 Self	.836**	.000	150
	Ought to L2 Self	.601**	.000	
	Formal Classroom Learning	.757**	.000	
	Online Classroom Learning	.569**	.000	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

It is apparent from Table 4 that Sri Lankan English learners' ideal L2 self is highly correlated with the motivated learning. This study further confirms the findings of Prasangani (2018a;b) which confirmed the strongest contribution of ideal L2 self to the motivated learning. It may be that these learners benefitted from English. Further, English is the medium instruction in most of the higher education institutes. As well as due to the fall of COVID 19 students identified the

importance English to learn via online. In fact, it can be suggested that Sri Lankan learner's ideal L2 self is stronger in their English learning motivation. Anyhow, this result is different from previous motivation studies, because they found classroom learning as the strongest correlative factor in English learners' motivation (Islam et al., 2013; Martin Lamb, 2012; Lamb & Arisandy, 2019; Taguchi et al., 2009). Sri Lankan learners' ideal L2 self can be discussed further through Table 5.

Table 5: Ideal L2 Self Descriptive Analysis

Questionnaire Item	Agree
I can imagine myself studying in a Sri Lankan university where all my courses are taught in English and spoken in English	74%
I can imagine myself writing e-mails/letters fluently in English.	82%
The things I want to do in the future involve English.	92%
I often imagine myself as someone who's able to speak good English.	83%
I want to be the kind of Sri Lankan who speaks English fluently	88%
I see myself one day communicating in English with western speakers.	90%
Studying English is important to me because I would like to become close to L1(US/British/Australian &etc) speakers of English.	83%
Studying English is important to me because I would like to become close to L2 (Sri Lankan/Malaysians/Indians &etc) speakers of English.	71%

In accordance with Table 5 it is visible that Sri Lankan learners highly visualize their future career in English. It is interesting that their aim to be fluent English speakers and move with the western world. This finding is parallel with Prasangani (2018a) which found a greater desire of Sri Lankan and Malaysian learners to communicate in English with western speakers.

In contrast to earlier findings of motivation studies (Prasangani & Nadarajan, 2015; Putri & Hadisantosa, 2018) ought to L2 self has a significant positive correlation to the motivated learning. This might be because the sample consisted with secondary school students and their parents play a special role in the Sri Lankan education system. Sri Lankan students always try to fulfill their parents' dreams. However, this finding should be studied further to generalize. Learning experiences or classroom learning is a major component in L2 Motivational Self System. In this study learning experiences were divided into two as formal classroom learning and online classroom learning. Online classroom learning became popular in the Sri Lankan education with the spread of COVID 19. According to the data of Table

4 formal classroom learning has a high significant positive correlation to the motivated learning than the online classroom learning. This can be explained via the difficulties faced by the students via online learning. In Sri Lankan context lot of students have no wealth to purchase necessary devices to connect with the lessons, and there are lot of electricity and internet disruptions in the country (Kadiragamar & Thiruvarangan, 2020; Vincent & Kitnasamy, 2020). In addition to that Sri Lankan students used to depend on the teachers heavily. They expect personal attention and close relationship from the English teacher (Prasangani, 2019b). It is difficult to create such a background in a virtual environment with lack of technological knowledge and experiences. In fact, online platform seems less popular among them. Anyhow, this situation can be changed in the future once the teachers and students get used to the online platform. However, with a small sample size caution must be applied when applying the results to future studies.

Learning experiences or classroom learning was further examined through the interviews of the students. Through the interviews the two learners explained their real-life classroom experiences.

Learner 1

I like the online classroom, because it is very easy for us. We can learn from anywhere and at any time, but lot of my friends have connection problems and they don't have smartphones or laptops. Some friends have no suitable place to study...

Learner 2

Online classroom is good, but I can't continue the lessons. Sometimes I lose the connection or sometimes teacher lose the connection. There were some instances that I did not have electricity during the rainy time...

In accordance with the interview data it is visible that learners like online classroom, but they have certain problems on it. They have connectivity problems, no devices, and no education friendly environment at home. Those reasons may cause to the high favour for formal language learning classroom, because learners are comfortable with the formal learning environment in the school or university.

What is the nature of motivation to use English outside of the formal classroom environment?

With the expansion of the technology smartphones and tablets became very famous among the learners. This automatically created an informal English learning environment for the learners via certain apps. Further, during the COVID 19 period government and internet providing companies offer free packages and promotions to promote online learning. Table 6 shows Sri Lankan learners' motivation for using internet for informal learning or incidental learning.

Table 6: Motivation for Using Internet for Informal Learning

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Motivated Learning Behavior	Use internet to learn English	.665**	.000	150
	Use internet in English for other activities	.642**	.000	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

What is interesting in this data is use internet to learn English has a significant positive strong correlation to the motivated learning than use internet in English for other activities. This can be further discussed through Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7: Use Internet to Learn English

Questionnaire Item	Agree
Study English grammar and vocabulary online	69%
Read articles related to my subject area or my work in English	70%
Purposely develop my English language skills online	66%
Do online quizzes in English.	55%
Use Wikipedia in English	66%
Use the internet to learn about the English language	71%
Follow online English courses like Coursera	52%

In accordance with Table 7 it is apparent that learn about English language, reading related to subject area and learn grammar and vocabulary are popular online learning activities among Sri Lankan learners. This indicates that these learners are eager to develop their English via internet. In

addition to that it is visible that online courses are not yet popular among Sri Lankan learners.

Table 8: Use Internet for other activities

Questionnaire Item	Agree
Watch English language TV shows (news, sports, entertainment)	70%
Watch YouTube videos in English	76%
Read websites in English	77%
Read English song lyrics online	62%
Play digital games in English	50%
Listen to English language songs	77%
Book accommodation or travel tickets in English	45%
Watch films in English without Sinhala/Tamil subtitles	72%
Read comic strips in English	50%
Online shopping is in English	64%
Watch foreign films with English subtitles	69%
Write blogs or fan fiction in English	54%
Use English for my social media's (Facebook's, WhatsApp, etc.)	80%
Contribute to online English language forums related to my hobbies.	60%
Write photo captions on Instagram in English	49%
Write Facebook or Twitter posts in English	59%
Communicate with foreign friends in English online (through email, WhatsApp etc.)	54%

Follow Twitter posts in English	42%
Talk with foreigners in English on Skype	33%
Make videos in English (e.g. on Snapchat, FB)	53%

Table 8 shows that how Sri Lankan learners use internet in English for their other activities. In accordance with data it is apparent that they use English highly for social media. In addition to that they prefer to listen English songs, read English websites, watch YouTube videos, watch films and TV shows respectively. Anyhow, Skype is the least popular online activity among these learners. This might be because Skype is not a popular web-based activity among the younger generation in Sri Lanka. Further, during the COVID 19 period internet providers provide free or extra data for social media, YouTube and educational websites.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study investigated the motivation to learn English via online during the COVID 19 period. The results have shown that Sri Lankan learners' ideal L2 self is stronger than the ought to L2 self and learning experiences. The study was also shown the great desire of Sri Lankan learners to be fluent English speakers. In contrast to earlier findings this study found strong positive correlations between the motivation and the ought to L2 self and learning experiences. Further research is required to establish the findings on ought to L2 self and learning experiences. Surprisingly, Sri Lankan learners motivated to learn from the formal English classroom than the online English learning classroom. This is an important issue for future research. Furthermore, these learners use internet for self-English learning purposes, using social media in

English, and entertainment purposes. Although, the current study is based on a small sample, the findings suggest the importance of paying attention to improve the facilities and resources for online English learning. Finally, this study suggests the importance of having a proper policy for online learning in Sri Lanka to facilitate the learners for better learning.

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