

The Importance of an Intensive Course in English for University Entrants: Teachers' and Students' Experience and Perception

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Abstract : This paper attempts to emphasize the benefits of conducting an intensive course in English for university entrants. In the Sri Lankan university context, an intensive course in English is usually conducted amidst various obstacles. In the 1970s and 1980s, undergraduates had intensive programmes in English for two to three months. Towards the end of the 1990s, a programme called General English Language Training (GELT) was conducted for the new students, and it was done outside universities before they entered their respective universities. Later it was not conducted, and that also resulted in students' poor performance in English at university. However, having understood its importance, an eight week long intensive course in English was conducted for the new intake of the Faculty of Science, University of Ruhuna. As the findings show, the students heavily benefited from the programme. More importantly, they had the opportunity to refresh their knowledge of English gained at school and private institutions while gaining new knowledge. Another advantage was that they had plenty of time to enjoy learning English since the learners had adequate opportunities to carry out communicative tasks and the course was not exam-oriented, which reduced their fear of making mistakes in English considerably. The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire given to 60 students, and their oral feedback was also taken into consideration. In addition, a focus group interview with 6 teachers was also conducted to get an idea about their experience and perception. The data were qualitatively analyzed. The findings suggest that an intensive programme in English undoubtedly lays a good foundation for the students' academic career at university.

Keywords : intensive course, English, teachers, undergraduates, experience, perception

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