INTRODUCING INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO ESL UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN SRI LANKAN ARTS FACULTIES: A SURVEY

Abstract: At present, e-learning practices have penetrated the global education scenario at an aggressive rate. In the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), the transition of traditional classroom setups to blended learning environments has become a common practice in most countries that teach English as a foreign or second language. In such a context, this descriptive study was conducted by administering a survey type questionnaires to a set of Arts undergraduates for the purpose of gathering information regarding the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for purposes of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the framework of Sri Lankan state university Arts faculty education. The data was gathered using numerical scores and scales so as to generate statistical data for purposes of tabulation. The final results were presented either through percentages or total mean scores. A total of 102 Arts undergraduates responded to the student questionnaire and the primary objective of the study was to consider the feasibility of introducing Computer Assisted language Learning (CALL) practices to enhance the English courses being offered to Sinhala or Tamil medium Arts undergraduates attached to government universities. Data was gathered using the convenience sampling method from four Arts faculties. The main findings of the study reveal that the target population is already convinced about the potential benefits of using ICTs for purposes of learning English as it demonstrated high levels of motivation when considering the possibility of such a synthesis. In fact, the use of CALL seemed a highly welcome and worthwhile move from the perspectives of these ESL learners. The fact that most of them appear to be already familiar with ICTs is an added incentive when considering the feasibility of using ICT for teaching English since the findings indicate that not much training or convincing is required in order to get these undergraduates to learn how to use and engage in technology enhanced learning practices.

Keywords: ESL, technology, second language, undergraduates, CALL, proficiency

Introduction

In the Sri Lankan context English proficiency has become an inevitable educational and social requirement for individuals when securing lucrative employment opportunities and for upward social mobility. Indeed, from the time of colonization in the 1800s, Sri Lankan English speakers have often been placed in a highly privileged category that has resulted in them being granted access to myriad benefits that the non-English speakers tend not to enjoy. Additionally, the fact that English acts as a 'lingua franca' used to bridge the communication gap between different ethnicities in the island has increased its utility value. Therefore, the need to become proficient users of English has been largely acknowledged by the Sri Lankan community and recent governments have made various attempts to promote and facilitate the acquisition of the second language (L2). This is notably so in the education and higher education sectors. For example, the number of subjects offered at the Government Certified Advanced Level Examinations (GCE A/L examination) was reduced to three instead of four with the additional inclusion of two core subjects; namely General Knowledge & IQ, and General English. During the past decade, World Bank funded projects have been used to inject billions of rupees for purposes of developing English skills mostly at the undergraduate level.

ICT Penetration in Sri Lanka

In terms of the penetration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Sri Lanka, inspite of the fact that they were introduced only a few decades back, there is no denying that it has managed to infiltrate all spheres of modern living in the country including social, political, economic and educational milieus. Out of these, much attention has been paid to the task of incorporating the use of ICT in the field of education. Here, since a primary focus of the study is on the possibility of adapting computer technology for educational purposes, some key statistics with regard to its availability, use and awareness are presented.

Looking at a study with regard to the presence of ICTs in Sri Lanka conducted by Indralal De Silva, out of 2921 respondents, 57% answered in the affirmative to the question as to whether they can use a computer (De Silva, 2013, p.32). Moreover, the findings revealed that the highest level of computer literacy was evident amongst individuals between the age group of 18 to 24 years (De Silva, 2013, p.34). This information can be further substantiated by observing the computer literacy surveys conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka over the years. For instance, the 2016 report on Computer Literacy issued by the Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka states that out of the 28% of computer literate people in the island, a majority falls into the age category of between 15 to 19 years with a percentage of 63 computer users. The swift infiltration of technology is even more obvious in the report as the data reveal that at least one computer was available in 21.6 % of households in the country by the end of 2016 (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, p.1).

Moreover, a major prerequisite when considering the possibility of the introduction of technology enhanced learning practices into the Sri Lankan Higher Education sectors; in this case, tertiary education, is the availability of internet facilities. Based on the United Nations Human Development Report presented in 2016, a percentage of over 20 Sri Lankan citizens have access to the internet and there is a large annual internet penetration growth rate of 9% (United Nations Human Development report, 2016). These details demonstrate the large extent of ICT penetration in our social system; as a result, they point positively towards the feasibility and sustainability of using ICT technologies in the field of education.

Use of ICT for teaching English

Under these circumstances, the potential successfulness of the systematic integration of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) practices into university ESL programmes seems to be inevitable. Evidently, in a context where the students' knowledge of Information Communication Technologies appears to exceed that of their English competency levels, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) should exploit the use of the former to strengthen their students' English language skills by acknowledging the fact that the use of CALL for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) can obviously widen the scope of English language learning/teaching opportunities among the adult student population.

However, with regard to the current educational set up in Sri Lanka, the purposeful and effective synthesis of CALL into ESL study programmes still remain at the very infantile stages even though the use of ICT has rapidly infiltrated the community- notably among the younger generation. To start with, this is due to the limited number of computers, poor or no internet facilities in state universities,

and the lack of easy access to language learning and/or computer laboratories which have impinged the successful implementation of technology-enhanced learning practices in the higher education system. The positive aspect of this situation is that many teachers and students now have their own laptop or desktop computers, smart phones and/or tablet PCs which are internet-enabled so that once they discover the possibilities of improving their knowledge - in this case, English knowledge - through ICT, they can be easily persuaded to use it for learning or teaching the L2.

Furthermore, the rapid infrastructure facility developments in the education sector - notably in higher educational institutions focusing on the development of ICT and English literacy skills of students - have paved the way for introducing effective methods of using technology for learning and teaching purposes. In fact, with the speedy development and availability of technology - often at very low costs - the use of technological gadgets has become ubiquitous even in a developing country such as Sri Lanka. For example, when considering the statistics regarding the number of cellular mobile telephone subscriptions in the country amounting to 25,869,563, it can be noted that there are more subscriptions than the total population of the country amounting to approximately 21.203 million by mid-2016 (Colombo, Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, 2016, p.4) Moreover, according to this report, in the same year, 4,558,583 had also subscribed to fixed or mobile broadband packages for the use of internet facilities as well (p. 5)

Teaching English as a second language in Sri Lankan universities

Since this study is based on a feasibility survey of introducing CALL for teaching ESL to Arts undergraduates, a cursory glance at the way on which the L2 is taught at universities is required. In all state universities in the country, either English Language Teaching Units (ELTU) or Departments (ELTD) have been established with the objective of improving the level of English of the undergraduates so that they may be able to use it for general as well as academic purposes. In the case of the undergraduates who are required to follow their degrees in English medium such as those following their degree programmes in medicine, engineering, science, architecture, management, commerce, law and technology, they do not have any option other than to acquire the English language by whatever means possible because such degree programmes are only offered in the medium of English. Consequently, the motivation factor for learning English among the English medium undergraduates is very high for obvious reasons.

Nevertheless, the above scenario considerably differs in faculties involving the study of the Arts and Humanities since the majority of students are either compelled to select the medium of instruction as either Sinhala or Tamil (their first language) due to the unavailability of the courses in the English medium or by virtue of the fact that they make the choice of following the degree in their mother tongue (even if in a few Arts faculties selected Arts subjects are offered in both the first and second languages). Given the above circumstances, Sinhala/Tamil medium Arts undergraduates tend to pay very little attention to learning English as there is hardly any motivation or instrumental need for them to acquire it. Considering the 2013/2014 intake, an approximate total of 6,730 university students enrolled in Arts courses (Colombo, University Grants Commission, 2015). Regarding the limited availability of following Arts courses in English, there is possibly close to a total of 80% students who belong to the population of state university undergraduates who do not follow their degree programmes in the English medium.

Problem Statements

The most obvious drawback of the above situation is the low English proficiency levels amongst Arts undergraduates who follow their degree courses in their first language. This is mostly because of limited L2 exposure, lack of need to acquire English and poor motivation to learn English as a result of the fact that the Sinhala and Tamil medium students are more focused on obtaining good grades for their main subjects rather than on developing their English language skills. Therefore, it is of no surprise that when bearing in mind the higher education (HE) sector in the country, the least proficient users of the English language are found in Arts faculties. For example, the "Grandaunt Employment Census- 2012" (Ramayakake, Porage, Jayamanne and Muttetuge., 2012), which presents insights into the employability of graduands using the target population of graduands in all 14 state universities, can be used to validate the above claim. During this large-scale study, the subjects were handed out a questionnaire at the time when they came to collect their graduation cloaks for the convocation held several months after the completion of their degrees. The number of students in the study amounted to a total of 16,967 with an overall response rate of 91%. The findings of this study are bleak as the percentage of Arts graduands who had been employed at the time was as low as 32%. In order to understand the correlation between graduate unemployment and English proficiency of learners, the data presented on page nine of this report is an eye-opener. The following is a direct quotation from this research: "The percentage employed was the highest (71%) from the graduands with very good English proficiency. There seems to be a positive relationship between the percentage employed and the English proficiency" (2012, p. 9).

Significance of the study

As a crucial prerequisite for successful language acquisition is constant exposure to a particular language, there should be mechanisms in place to ensure such consistent language input. One feasible strategy could be the introduction of Computer-Assisted Language Learning practices when teaching ESL. This will not only reduce teacher-dependency to a large extent but also empower L2 learners to develop the target language (TL) by using autonomous means. The fact that these learners are invariably attracted to and familiar with technology is advantageous since the lukewarm attitude towards learning English can be overcome to a large extent by the novelty of using multimedia, online coaching, computer-based exercises and chat sessions etc. which could provide the additional impetus required for developing their English skills.

In order to overcome some of the challenges faced by Arts undergraduates with regard to the acquisition of the English language, it is crucial to obtain a bird's eye view of the current landscape of CALL in the university system in Sri Lanka. Therefore, at the initial level, a general understanding of the target population's English and IT literacy levels, their motivation and need for acquiring the English language, and at the secondary level, the extent of the use of technology for teaching/learning the L2 and their feelings regarding the integration of ICTs for second language acquisition are presented in this study.

Both the views regarding the use of CALL and the current ICT literacy levels of Arts undergraduates in government universities were analyzed so as to identify how feasible the integration of CALL into the English programmes is under current circumstances. The data collected during the research can be used to provide feasible, sustainable and productive mechanisms for the introduction and

incorporation of technologically-enhanced learning practices into the Higher education system. As a result, the finding of this study can be used as guidelines for policy makers, administrators and educators who are considering the smooth integration of computer technology for ESL learning purposes in the Sri Lankan higher education sector.

Brief review of the literature

In order to discuss the possible synthesis of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into English programs offered at the Arts faculties in Sri Lanka, a brief review with regard to this subfield coming under the field of applied linguistics is required. According to Levy's often quoted citation of the definition of CALL (1997, p.1) it is considered as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning". Yet another succinct definition rendered for CALL is given by Beatty whereby CALL is defined as "any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language" (p. 7). Despite Beatty using the word "computers", this field has now come to encapsulate the uses of associated computer technologies of all types (such as laptops, mobile phones, tablet PCs, interactive white boards, iPods and MP3, MP4 players) for the purposes of developing L2 skills.

Even though the field of second language acquisition (SLA) consists of multiple theoretical frameworks, perspectives and applications, those related to CALL are still quite ambiguous and volatile. However, one thing for certain is that CALL studies cannot be described in isolation of SLA theories and approaches since they are the cornerstone of all CALL related ones. Yet another important fact about CALL is that it is an interdisciplinary subject; as a result, apart from being enriched with various theories and concepts from the field of applied linguistics, it also draws on fields such as information communication technology (ICT), instructional design, psychology, and artificial intelligence.

A significant number of CALL research has been concerned with the pedagogical implications of CALL usage by L2 learners. Arcos, Ortega and Amilburu (2004) considers the possibility of adapting a blended learning approach to teaching ESL using Moodle. They introduced blended learning which is an amalgamation of face-to-face instruction and online learning activities to a set of adult ESL learners and concluded by stating that teachers should devote classroom time for communicative activities while using CALL for reading, listening and writing instruction followed by online exercises. Researchers Gruba (2004,) and Smidt & Hegelheimer (2004), Gordin & Means, (2000) state that students' higher order skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and scientific inquiry increase as a result of engaging in complex, challenging and authentic CALL activities conducted mostly through collaborative work. Based on the significant pool of studies on CALL, there is no denying the fact that SLA which integrates information communication technologies has become popular, and has generated a notable impact on the language learning process. Based on the available studies, the most significant impact of introducing CALL appears to be the increase in L2 motivation and TL proficiency development.

Research methods

For the study, the descriptive research design was adapted in order to generate an accurate picture of the context in which CALL would be implemented. Although descriptive research "may be

characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is" (Ethridge, p. 24), it is also "aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables [a researcher] to describe the situation more completely than is possible without employing this method" (Fox & Bayat, p.45). Similarly, obtaining a birds-eye view of the present circumstances was necessary in order to deliberate on the various aspects that needed to be studied when evaluating the feasibility and sustainability of the implementation of CALL into our university system. For instance, an examination of the sample population and their requirements for learning English, current use of computer technology in these faculties, students' attitude towards ICT use notably with regard to the possible usage of it as a tool for second language acquisition - was required.

The research population consisted of Arts undergraduates attached to Sri Lankan state universities following their degree programmes in their first language. The sample size responding to the CALL questionnaire included a total of 102 Arts undergraduates in their first or second year of study following Arts degree programmes offered in either Sinhala or Tamil medium. The total sample consisted of 79% females and 21% males falling into the age groups of between 20 to 24. This research focused on several Arts faculties in the Sri Lankan university system. It managed to gather data samples from the first and second year Arts undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya, University of Sri Jayawardanapura, South Eastern University, and the University of the Visual & Performing Arts. The above mentioned universities are situated in various parts of Sri Lanka such as the Western, Central and Eastern provinces.

Given the ability for convenience sampling to grant access to data from volunteer respondants who are compatible with the sampling criteria, this sampling design was selected. Primary data collection was done by using a survey type questionnaire. The rationale for using this type of questionnaire was that it allows researchers to gather information that participants are able to report about themselves such as their beliefs and motivations (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In addition, secondary data were obtained from government censuses, surveys, reviews, research publications and online databases so as to supplement and cross validate the primary sources of information.

This survey consisted of 52 items which were categorized into four main sections. These included: Background information and English proficiency, Information Communication Literacy (ICT), Awareness, Use and Interest in CALL, and ESL learning preferences and motivation to learn English. The questionnaires were either hand-delivered or mailed to the respective ELTUs or ELTDs. The data was gathered using numerical scores and scales which were used to generate means scores or percentages so as to generate statistical data for purposes of tabulation.

Results

Research Questions 1: How proficient are the Sinhala/Tamil medium Arts undergraduates in the English language?

In order to gather details regarding the respondents' English proficiency levels, details of the grades obtained for English during the G.C.E. Ordinary Level Examinations and the G.C.E. Advanced Level Examinations were gathered. Only 24% of the sample have obtained distinction passes (100 – 75 marks) with 15% receiving B passes (very good pass- 74.9 – 65) and 24% of them ending up with credit passes (64.99 – 55). Being a relatively easy examination that questions the students on General

English, the above pass rates cannot be viewed as impressive since 27% of the respondants had obtained only ordinary passes (54.99 – 40) and 11% had in fact failed the test.

The statistics with regard to their performance at the English examination faced at the G.C.E Advanced Level Examinations is bleaker. As low as 14% had obtained Distinction or Very Good passes with more than four thirds of the respondants scoring below 54.99 marks out of a score of 100. Even more striking is that almost half of them had failed this English test.

Research Question 2; How ICT literate are these Arts undergraduates and what is the availability of the resources for ICT engagements?

Just as the English proficiency of the students need to be considered for CALL to be adapted, their IT literacy levels also have to be gaged. This type of understanding is crucial for this research since it focuses on the issue of English Language teaching and the use of computer technology in that process. To measure the extent of their ICT literacy, a set of questions were presented in the format of "Can do" statements indicating the respondants' ability or inability to perform a particular computer related task.

Based on the tabulated data, 93.1% of the respondants reported that they can start, use and shut down a computer, 59.4% stated their ability to use a word processor such as Microsoft Word, 70.3% said they can create presentations using PowerPoint, and 71.3% mentioned that they can use either and/or laptop computers, tablet PCs and smart phones. In addition, 70% of them claimed to be able to use a smart phone, laptop or desktop computer. In terms of their ability to use the internet, the majority (76%) mentioned that they are able to use it to gather information while close to 63% mentioned that they use it for social networking purposes. Close to half of the sample claimed that they use the internet for developing their English skills. In order get more specific data regarding their ability to engage with the World Wide Web, details regarding their online activities were gathered. Students' motivation to use ICT is clearly evident as close to 90% reported to have email accounts with a large percentage of 77.5% claiming to own Facebook accounts.

The next few questions in the student questionnaire was intended to obtain an understanding of the amount of time that learners spent using ICT. Most of the respondants appear to spend an average of around 4 to 6 hours per week in front of computers. Close to half used the computer between 1 to 3 hours and about 30% of them used it within a range of 3 to 9 hours. Out of the time they spent with computers, 51.5% said they devoted the time for study purposes while 38% mentioned computer usage for entertainment related activities purposes and only one fifth of them said they used this time for learning English.

Since this was a preliminary survey of the context in which CALL could be integrated, another important aspect of its implementation was to find out about the availability of the resources that are needed for IT related engagements. Based on the analysis, out of the total number of respondants, 36.1% had desktop computers and 60.7% had laptop computers. Even in cases where learners did not have their own personal computers, 85.3% mentioned that they owned phones with internet capability.

Apart from learning about the students' personal availability of the types of technologies receptive to CALL, information was gathered in order to find out about the availability of resources at the

university level. Only 31.3% of the respondents stated that they had access to Language Learning Labs (LLL) at the universities and in fact, only half of the students had even heard of the existence of such labs.

Research Question 3:

Have the Arts undergraduates already been exposed to CALL during their English courses and if so to what extent has it been integrated into their English programmes?

As a means of discovering the extent to which technology enhanced learning practices had been adopted up to the point where the survey was taken, several inquiries were made. To the overarching question: "What is the most prevalent mode of instruction that your English teachers uses at present?" almost half of the student population stated that it was done without the use of computer technology. On the one hand a percentage of 28 stated that the teachers often used computer technology during classes, on the other hand 26% indicated that its usage was occasional.

Research Question 4: Are these learners receptive to the adaptation of CALL for learning ESL?

In order to identify the ESL learners' inclination towards the adaptation of the blended mode of learning whereby the use of technology is amalgamated into the teaching/learning processes, they were asked which mode of instruction they preferred the most for acquiring English.
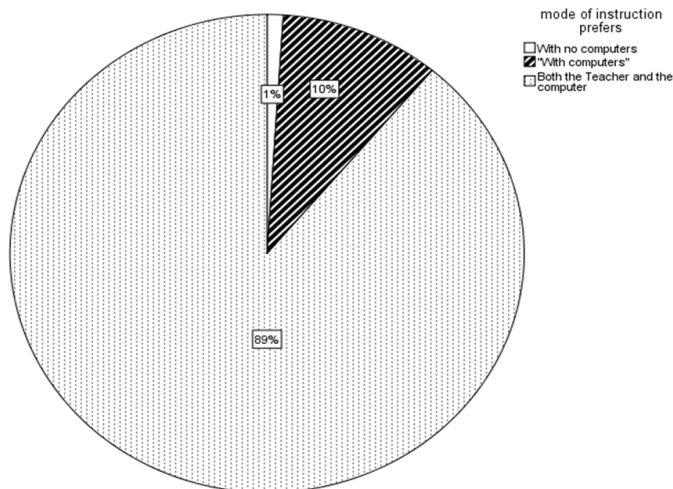

Figure 1 Sri Lankan Arts undergraduates' preferred mode of instruction in ESL classes in percentages

As can be observed from the pie chart above, we can clearly see that the preference towards the adaptation of computers in the class is strikingly high as 89% insisted on going for the blended mode of instruction while 10% of the cohort went so far as to claim that they preferred only computer-led instruction. Strikingly, only 1% ended up opting for the teacher-fronted mode of instruction.

Soon after the above enquiry, several straightforward yes/no questions were posed in order to find out their willingness to use CALL. For the question: "Do you think using computer technology can improve your learning experience?", almost all the respondents responded in the affirmative(98%). To

the query "If you were introduced to CALL would you use it to improve your English Language skills?", the response was highly positive as close to 97% said "Yes". Moreover, 96.1% stated that they were willing to engage in self-learning activities using ICT if they were to be given the necessary training and skills to do so. Furthermore, a percentage of 87 said "Yes" to the statement "I would like the teacher to use computer technology to teach us English" with only 6.1% being undecided about this claim.

With regard to the information about these undergraduates' attitude with regard to the establishment of self-access language learning centres, the statements "It will help me learn better" and "It will enable me to interact with people both locally and internationally through the medium of English as a link language" received the highest mean score of 4.2 out of 5.

Research question 5; What are these learners' preferences and motivation for acquiring English as a Second Language (ESL)?

Just the mere understanding of whether students actually prefer technology when learning English would not suffice in order to design a mechanism for the integration CALL into Arts faculty ESL courses in Sri Lanka. After all, CALL is simply the mediator that performs the task of granting the desired levels of TL exposure to L2 learners. Based on this logic, the researcher attempted to find out the ESL learning preferences of the target population of young learners. Out of the different methods of learning English, the highest mean score of 4 indicated the respondants' to acquire the language using autonomous methods. The use of role plays, dialogues, songs dramas, presentations, and CALL followed with an average of 3.9. The lowest score was presented to individual learning.

Since the integration of CALL can be fruitfully incorporated into the curricular of the ESL courses in the Sri Lankan Arts faculties, details regarding the learner needs for acquiring the second language were also gathered so as to select the most suitable CALL input methods. Here, the highest mean scores from out of five was attributed to reasons directly linked to the respondants need to acquire English for study related purpose. From out of the scores, the lowest rate was given to the need for enhanced social status attributed to the use of English.

Discussion

Research Questions 1: How proficient are the Sinhala/Tamil medium Arts undergraduates in the English language?

At the GCE Ordinary Level examination, the English Language paper is designed based on what the students have learnt from grade 9 to 10. Although close to a fourth of the respondents have managed to get a very good or good pass at this examination, almost a quarter of them have failed it. This exemplifies the limited English proficiency levels of the students who enter the Arts streams. Their lack of English skills becomes even more obvious when regarding their performance at the GCE Advanced Level examination English paper. It is unfortunate to note that almost half of the respondents had failed the exam with only a total of 13% managing to obtain very good or good passes. The above findings stand in testimony of the claim that Arts undergraduates consist of a majority of learners who are struggling to learn the English language and that their competency in the target language is mostly low even at the point in which they enter their tertiary education.

Research Question 2; How ICT literate are these Arts undergraduates and what is the availability of the resources for ICT engagements?

The fact that almost all the respondants could start, run and shut down a computer, which is the basic yardstick for measuring IT literacy, is an encouraging finding as it clearly shows that the students have already been exposed to the use of computers and that they are already able to use them. Moreover, the rest of the responses expressing their ability to engage in IT related tasks such as surfing the internet, using word processing and presentation mode software also amount to the average range of over 70% interms of capability. Since the whole point of the study is to evaluate the possibility of integrating Computer-assisted Language learning practices into ESL Arts undergraduate programmes, knowing that the respondants are proficient users of computers points towards successful integration.

When considering their ability to use the internet, it can be noted that four thirds of the sample claimed to be able to use the internet. This data indicates that students are invariably inclined towards the use of technology for interaction purposes as both emailing and social networking are modes enabling the opening of human communication and interaction through an online platform.

Based on the responses gathered in terms of the time that the students spent using computers, the statistics indicate that although the sample is largely proficient in using ICTs, the time spend in engaging in such tasks was much less than expected. In fact, the majority seems to devote only about an average number of 2 to 5 hours per week for computer usage.

Since not just the IT literacy, and the time devoted to computer usage but also the availability of equipment for IT related activities is a prerequisite for successful CALL implementation, the survey gathered information regarding the availability of such resources. The findings were encouraging because the majority ascertained to the possession of having one or more of the following ICT empowered devices: desktop computers, laptop computers, smart phone, or tablet PC. With such ready access to computers at a personal level, even if computer facilities are poor within the universities, learners could still engage in CALL activities using their own machines. Hence, this finding indicates significant potential for introducing autonomous learning practices to the students using CALL.

Given that the presence of Language Learning Laboratories (LLL)/ Self-access Language Learning Centres was felt only by a little more than a quarter of the sample with only half of them having even heard of the existence of such entities, there is obvious reason to believe that they are not aware of the existence or potential of such labs. Therefore, it is clear that the LLLs need to be promoted and upgraded if they are in existence and additional ones need to be added to the system with one faculty having access to at least one fully-fledged LLL.

Research Question 3:

Have the Arts undergraduates already been exposed to CALL during their English courses and if so to what extent has it been integrated into their English programmes?

The fact that half the learners stated that their English teachers did not use any technology for teaching purposes is striking in the sense that the use of ICT for ESL had been given much attention during the past few years. The silver lining here is that a quarter of them actually noted that their English teacher often resorted to the use of technology when teaching them inspite of one fourth mentioning that there was hardly any use of ICT during the ESL programmes.

Research Question 4: Are these learners receptive to the adaptation of CALL for learning ESL?

A striking finding in the research was the fact that almost all the respondants strongly recommended the use of the blended learning ESL which when compared to the previous question was not the actual context given that less than half the teachers did not use technology for teaching English. An unexpected finding was made when 10% of the participants in the study went so far as to claim that they preferred to be taught exclusively through the use of technology rather than through face-to-face teacher fronted sessions. Two things that emerge from this data is; firstly, the fact that there is a radical and almost alarming inclination among the learners to believe that teachers are in fact replaceable by ICT. Secondly, this implicitly indicates that traditional teacher-fronted classes are not regarded as successful methods for learning English. Since the students blatantly denounced this method with almost 100% rejecting exclusively face-to-face teaching, ESL practitioners must reconsider their teaching strategies and pedagogies so as to evolve and develop with the changing educational landscape that invariably demands a "do or die" situation where there is no question as to whether one needs to consider CALL for future integration as it is indeed a ubiquitous requirement in the immediate context.

Straightforward answers to interrogations that require them to respond positively or negatively to a set of questions asking them whether they would like to use technology for learning the ESL, whether they would benefit from such a synthesis, and whether they would use ICT for learning the ESL all received very high affirmative responses that went well beyond the average of 90%. These positive answers demonstrate students' positive attitudes, high levels of motivation and recognition and awareness of the fact that technology can empower them as learners. Therefore, there is obvious reason to believe that these types of L2 learners can indeed be empowered and made autonomous to acquire the target language if encouraged to do so.

Obtaining means scores that are 4 or above in the 5-point Lickert scale (expressing strong agreement with regard to the claims being made) for all statements stating reasons why a self-access language learning centres should be established is yet another forceful pointer towards the claim that the students insist on the exposure of ICT for learning the second language. They fact that they indicate strong preference for self-learning which scored a highest mean score of 4.2 can be used to cross validate this finding as it substantiates their insistence on being empowered to learn on their own using technology.

Research question 5; What are these learners' preferences and motivation for acquiring English as a Second Language (ESL)?

The most arresting fact about the findings in relation to this particular research question was the fact that the highest score was received for self-learning and the lowest score obtained was for individual learning. This is a noteworthy finding as the act of learning individually in class and that of learning using self-educating means indicate that inspite of the fact that students seem to not prefer engaging in

ESL activities alone in class (as they indicate higher scores for interactive tasks involving their peers), they show major preference for autonomous learning as well. This result is an exciting one for CALL practitioners as it directly endorses the claim that the modern generation of learners are inclined towards technology enhanced learning practices which are the main sources of self-learning and that the introduction of CALL is bound to be a success among them. In a society that believes in empowerment and autonomy, the statistics are reflected strongly in the need to facilitate the learners' need for self-learning. The second point to note here is that out of the many reasons for using CALL, the respondants' attraction for social networking through the use of Web 2.0 which facilitates interaction among humans by transcending spatial and temporal barriers can also be manipulated to introduce interactive communicative based ESL learning tasks.

Conclusions

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that the Sri Lankan Arts undergraduates have already been exposed to the use of computers and that they are relatively familiar with its uses. The respondents' obvious preference to follow instruction that is infused with technology instead of mere human explanations highlights the requirement for ELT practitioners to change their instruction so that they suit the learners' preference. This challenges certain outdated notions held by some researchers, educators and scholars that there is too much of an alienating effect and a mechanical aspect to the inclusion of technology in the classroom in addition to the assumption that the teacher becomes subsumed in the technology and almost reduced to a nonentity. This does not conform to the findings presented above since the vast majority of students prefer the presence of both humans and machines to perform the task of educating them. In fact, there is no question about the fact that students are yearning for a well-balanced synthesis of the two elements – teachers and computers – and it is high time that action is taken to fulfill this need. Students' attraction to technology can be used to promote the acquisition of English by disseminating knowledge on how computers can be used to develop language skills in fun, educational and interactive ways. Due to the flexibility of time and place that technology-enhanced learning activities offer, it is presumed that with substantial training on CALL and subsequent exposure to it, these ESL learners would be able to considerably improve their English language proficiency by the time they graduate.

Moreover, from the research findings it can be concluded that Sri Lankan Arts undergraduates are already convinced about the potential benefits of using information communication technology and to them including these types of technologies seemed a highly welcome and worthwhile move.

In sum, the insights obtained from this study is crucial when considering the possible integration of CALL into the Sinhala/Tamil medium Arts undergraduates' English programmes. One of the most feasible options of empowering learners is through the introduction of CALL practices that can be adopted both inside as well as outside the classroom framework.

References

Arcos. F, Ortega.P, Amilburu.A., Learning English through an Lms, Face-to-Face Lectures and the Resulting Blend. Date of access: 20.04.2017.
https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/16365933.pdf

Beatty, K., 2003. *Teaching and researching computer assisted language learning*. (New York: Longman).

De Silva, Indralal & Kodikara, Pamoda & Somarathne, Ruwani., 2014. Sri Lankan youth and their exposure to computer literacy. *Sri Lanka Journal of Advanced Social Studies*. Date of access: 21.03.2017.
https://sljass.sljol.info/articles/10.4038/sljass.v3i1.7127/galley/5511/download/http://www.statistics.gov.lk/samplesurvey/ComputerLiteracy-2015Q1-Q2-final%20.pdf

Ethridge, D.E., 2004, *Research Methodology in Applied Economics* (John Wiley & Sons), pp.24.

Fox, W. & Bayat, M.S., 2007, *A Guide to Managing Research* (Juta Publications), pp.45.

Gordin, D.N. & Means, B., 2000. Changing How and What Children Learn in School with Computer-based Technologies. In *Future of Children,* Vol 10(2). pp 76-101. Date of access: 04.03.2107.
 Retrieved November 30, 2018 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/90171/.

Gruba, P., 2004, Computer Assisted language learning. In: In The handbook of Applied Linguistics, edited by A. Davies & C. Elder, (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 623-648.

Levy, M., 1997. *CALL: Context and Conceptualisation.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M., 2005. *Second language research: Methodology and design* (Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers), pp 34.

Ramayakake, Porage, Jayamanne and Muttetuge., 2012. Grandaunt Employment Census- 2012, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Smidt & Hegelheimer., 2004, Effects of Online Academic Lectures on ESL Listening Comprehension, Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition, and Strategy Use. In Computer Assisted Language Learning, Vol. 17, December, pp 517-556.

Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka, 2016, Date of access: 04.03.2017.
http://www.trc.gov.lk/2014-05-13-03-56-46/statistics.html

United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2016, Human Development for Everyone. UN Plaza, New York, NY. Date of access: 21.03.2017.
http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf

University Grant Commission, UGC Admission to Undergraduate Courses of the Universities in Sri Lanka; year of admission 2013/2014, 2015. Date of access: 04.02.2017.
http://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/admissions/local_students/Admission%20to%20Undergraduate%20Courses%20of%20the%20Universities%20in%20Sri%20Lanka%202013_2014.pdf