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Learning English in Sri Lankan primary schools: opportunities, pedagogy and development goals

1 ABSTRACT

International research demonstrates variations in time use between teachers and classes and a positive relationship between the amount of time spent by students in learning curriculum-relevant material, the quality of the time spent (or pedagogy) and learning achievement. Much of this has focussed on the learning of mathematics and first language. The teaching and learning of English as a second or third language is an education policy integral to the development goals of economic growth, the formation of national identity in ethnically divided societies and international identity in a globalising world, and the promotion of equity in both education and labour market opportunities.

This paper describes research in Sri Lanka on the *time* in the national curriculum allocated for the teaching and learning of English in primary grades 3, 4 and 5 and the *quality of time* use (pedagogy). The study was conducted in 60 schools and 180 Grade 3, 4 and 5 classes in the Central province. The research explores the following questions; (i) On how many days per year are schools expected to be open and how many days are available for teaching? (ii) Who are the teachers of English? (iii) How much time is allocated for the teaching of English and how much time is lost? (iv) How do English teachers spend their time in classrooms?

2 INTRODUCTION

International research demonstrates variations in time use between teachers and classes and a positive relationship between the amount of time spent by students in learning curriculum-relevant material, (opportunity to learn), the quality of the time spent (content and pedagogy) and learning achievement (Stallings, 2000, Jukes, Vagh and Kim 2006, Abadzi, 2007, Venalainen, 2008, Sankar, 2009, Frost and Little, 2014, Bruns et al 2015). Much of this research has focussed on the learning of mathematics and first language. Less attention has been given to the teaching and learning of foreign or second languages. In Sri Lanka the policy priority given to English, both as curriculum subject and as medium of instruction, has been subject to swings of democratic politics since the time of independence (Nesiah 1945, Perera, 2000, Perera, Wijetunge and Balasooriya, 2004, Hayes, 2010). As the language of the former colonial power, the role of English as a medium of instruction for the few was transformed into a subject of instruction for all in the 1950s and 1960s. The general education reforms of 1997 gave fresh impetus to the teaching of English in primary schools through the Primary English Language Programme (Coleman and Edirisinghe, n.d.). And in recent years English is being re-introduced as a medium of instruction in selected schools, grades and for certain subjects. In the current era of globalisation the role of English is perceived by many sections of society less as a language of oppression and more as an international language of importance within a more internationalised economy and society. Moreover, after thirty years of civil war the teaching and learning of English plays a vital role in the creation of common identities among young people divided by ethnicity and class (Little and Hettige 2013). English is one ingredient in Sri Lanka's search for sustained peace, sustained economic growth and increased equity. But how much opportunity do young people have to learn English in schools and what is the quality of the teaching?

Research on opportunity to learn and the quality of instruction draws on that of Carroll (1963) and Bloom (1968, 1974). Carroll suggested that the degree of learning is a function of time spent on learning (TSL) in relation to the time needed for learning (TNL). TNL is determined by aptitude (defined as the amount of time needed to learn a task under optimal conditions), the ability to understand instruction and the quality of instruction. TSL is determined by the time allowed or opportunity to learn (i.e. the amount of time the school and teacher allot to a particular task or subject area) and learner perseverance, or the amount of time a learner is willing to engage actively in learning. In his learning-for-mastery strategy Bloom focussed on the elements of these relationship most influenced by the teacher: i.e. the opportunity to learn (i.e. time allocated to learning) and the quality of instruction.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the opportunity to learn English in Sri Lankan primary schools and how that time is being used, and by whom, in relation to official Government expectations. The study investigates the following four research questions:

- a) On how many days per year are schools expected to be open and how many days are available for teaching?
- b) Who are the teachers of English?
- c) How much time is allocated for the teaching of English and how much time is lost?
- d) How do English teachers spend their time in classrooms?

The study was undertaken between January and November 2014. The empirical work in schools and classrooms was conducted over a nine week period between mid September and mid November. The sample of classes for this study was selected from Grades 3, 4 and 5 in primary schools and schools with primary grades in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. It covered three districts: Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya and the three demographic sectors: urban, rural and estate. The final sample consisted of 180 classrooms in 60 schools. The research team visited 60 schools unannounced. Their intention was to observe 360 English classes, 120 from each of Grade 3, 4 and 5 and to observe each teacher teach the same grade twice. In the event, because some teachers taught more than one grade and we observed them more than twice, the number of English teachers in our study is 112. The study employs documentary evidence, interviews and observations to address the research questions. Documentary evidence was used to identify the amounts of academic time allocated officially in the school calendar for all activities in the school and the amount of academic time allocated to English activities in Grades 3, 4 and 5. Interviews were conducted with school principals, English language teachers and class teachers to identify the amount of time available for formal teaching and learning in their respective schools. Class observations were used to identify how teachers use the available time for teaching and learning.

Instruments used included questionnaires about the school, the English language teacher, and the class teacher interview and a classroom 'snapshot observation' tool and a classroom information sheet. These instruments were adapted from the instruments used in the time on task study conducted by Sankar (2009) in three Indian States. The classroom snapshot observation instrument which was originally developed by Stallings (1980) was adapted to suit the Sri Lanka context, including, where possible activities prescribed by the National Curriculum. Observers were trained in the use of the tool.

Measures of opportunities for learning and the quality of learning are discussed in the literature using various terms, including officially allocated time, available time for all activities, available time for teaching and learning, time loss, engaged time, time use, time on task/off task, teacher-centred/student centred learning etc.

Opportunity and loss of opportunity

In our discussion of opportunities for teaching and learning we distinguish opportunities for teaching and learning in the school as a whole from opportunities for the teaching and learning of English. We examine the official expectations of both as set out in government documents. We recognise that actual opportunities for teaching are corroded gradually and for many reasons.

Losses of opportunity for teaching (all subjects) occur when

- A school closes for unofficial/unplanned reasons
- School days are used for non academic activities

Losses of opportunity for learning English occur when

- The school timetable allocates less time for English than the official guideline prescribes
- Teachers are absent from the timetabled English class
- Lessons start late or finish prematurely

- Teachers and students are 'off task' during the lesson

Each of these sources of opportunity loss will be estimated.

The quality of time use

The measure of the quality of time use employs a set of 18 student and teacher activities (e.g. questioning, reading aloud, copying). Following much of the extant literature on the subject, these 18 are classified into 'on task' and 'off task' activities, the former referring to activities intended by the teacher to contribute to the learning of English; and the latter to activity or non activity unrelated to teaching. 'On task' activities are classified further as 'academic' and 'non academic' activity, the latter referring to classroom management and discipline. 'Off task' is assumed to be non academic and will be used in this study in two ways. As a measure of time loss it is incorporated into the time loss calculations above. As a description of activity/activity it is presented within the overall picture of how time is being used in the classroom. 'On task' academic activities are classified further in 'teacher-centred', 'student-centred' and 'rote learning'.

3 TIME FOR SCHOOLING

3.1 Official school days

According to the school activity calendar the time allocated for all school activities in Sri Lankan Government schools for the year 2013 was 210 days. Within these official school days a number were allocated to activities beyond formal teaching and learning. These are stipulated in a government circular and include, for example, days for the sports meeting, end of term/year examinations.

3.2 School closures

The number of days on which schools were closed during the period of our study ranged from 0-5 days (average 0.9 days). When the days lost due to school closures for various reasons during the same period was subtracted from the allocated days (210), the available time for all activities in the schools is an average of 209.1 days (see Figure 1).

3.3 Non academic school activity

Available time for all activities in the schools is sometimes curtailed due to special activities stated in the school activity calendar and unscheduled events specific to each school. This study found that an average of 18.9 days has been lost due to these activities. That means that after subtracting the days schools were closed and the days devoted to special activities and/or events, the available time for teaching and learning is an average of 190.2 days (Figure 1).

3.4 Loss of opportunity

Figures 1 and 2 show the time lost for teaching and learning in relation to the school year of 210 days, for the Central province and by district and school location.

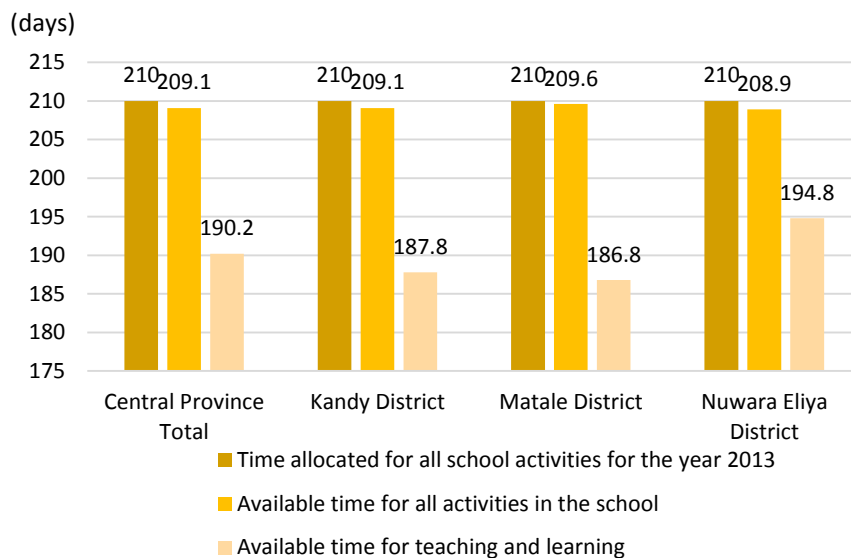


Figure 1: Allocated time and mean of available time in a school calendar in 2013 (days), by district

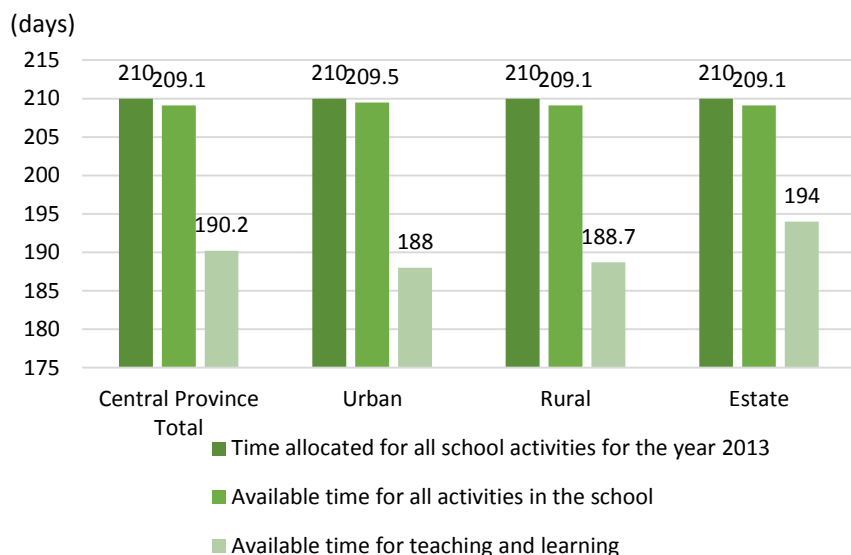


Figure 2: Allocated time and mean of available time in a school calendar in 2013 (days), by location

While 210 days were allocated by the government for schooling in 2013 this figure is reduced to an average of 190.2 days when school closures and days spent on activities other than formal teaching are deducted. This represents an overall loss of 9.4% of time. This loss is greater in the Kandy and Matale districts than the Nuwara-Eliya district and greater in urban and rural schools than in the estate schools.

3.5 The Arbiters of Time in English classes

The critical arbiters of time in the teaching and learning of English are the teachers. But who are our teachers? In this study 112 teachers of English were interviewed about their education and training backgrounds. Although we had planned to observe each teacher on two occasions some

of our teachers were teaching English to more than one grade and were observed more frequently. The figure of 112 is the number of teachers observed. Who are they, are they trained in the teaching of English and how many years of experience do they have?

Table 1 shows the distribution of teachers by gender, appointment, educational qualifications, professional qualifications, and teaching experience and by the district and locations of their schools.

Table 1: The characteristics of English Teachers

Background Information	Total (%)	District (%)			Location (%)		
		Kandy	Matale	Nuwara Eliya	Urban	Rural	Estate
Gender							
1. Male	21.4	14.6	9.5	34.9	12.5	16.9	33.3
2. Female	78.6	85.4	90.5	65.1	87.5	83.1	66.7
Appointment							
1. English Teacher	71.4	83.3	76.2	55.8	100	78.9	48.5
2. Other	28.6	16.7	23.8	44.2	0	21.1	51.5
Educational qualifications							
1. Degree	8	2.1	9.5	14	0	4.2	18.2
2. GCE AL	84.8	87.5	81	83.7	100	85.9	78.8
3. GCE OL	7.1	10.4	9.5	2.3	0	9.9	3
Professional qualifications							
1. PGDE/TESL	2.7	2.1	0	4.7	12.5	0	6.1
2. Dip in TESL(NIE)	3.6	6.3	0	2.3	12.5	4.2	0
3. Trained/PRINSETT	46.4	56.3	52.4	32.6	37.5	52.1	36.4
4. NCOE Diploma	15.2	18.8	19.1	9.3	37.5	19.7	0
5. Other	2.7	0	4.8	4.7	0	2.8	3
6. No Prof. Qualifications	29.5	16.7	23.8	46.5	0	21.1	54.5
Teaching experience in years							
1. Less than 10	41.1	20.8	57.1	55.8	12.5	38	54.6
2. 11-20	25	25	33.3	20.9	12.5	26.8	24.2
3. More than 20	33.9	54.2	9.5	23.3	75	35.2	21.2
Followed PELP programme	39.3	45.8	42.9	30.2	62.5	42.3	27.3

The majority of teachers are female (78.6%), have received government appointments as English teachers (71.4%), have been educated to the GCE A Level (13 years of formal education) (84.8%), have received some type of professional training in the teaching and English (67.9%) and have more than ten years of teaching experience (58.9%). The majority (62.5%) have not participated in the in service Primary English Language Programme which ran intensively in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There some marked differences between districts and locations. In the estate sector schools there are proportionately fewer female teachers (66.7%). All teachers in urban schools have received government appointments to teach English, compared with only 78.9% and 48.5% of teachers in the rural and estate sectors respectively. All teachers in urban schools have been educated to the GCE A level. In rural and estate schools there are small numbers of those with GCE O level and degrees. All teachers in urban schools have received some form of professional training in the teaching of English. In the rural and estate schools the proportions of teachers having no professional qualifications are 21.1% and 54.5% respectively. Teachers in urban schools have more years of teaching experience than those in rural and estate schools. And, partly

because of that, more have participated in the intensive in-service PELP programme organised in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Some of these locational differences are reflected in district differences. The provincial capital is located in Kandy district. Kandy and Matale districts have higher proportions of female teachers than Nuwara-Eliya (85.4% and 90.5% respectively vs. 65.1%), higher proportions of teachers appointed as English teachers (83.3% and 76.2% vs. 55.8%), lower proportions with no professional qualifications (16.7% and 23.8% vs. 46.5%). Kandy district has higher proportions of teachers with more than ten years experience than Matale and Nuwara-Eliya (79.2% vs 42.8 vs. 44.2%).

4 TIME FOR LEARNING ENGLISH: OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AND LOSS OF OPPORTUNITY

4.1 The official school timetable

The official school timetable allocates 180 minutes (3 hours) a week for the teaching of English in Grades 3 and 4 and 210 minutes (3.5 hours) in Grade 5. Schools have discretion about how they distribute this time across the week.

On the basis of an analysis of school profiles English is timetabled by the schools for an average of 6.4 fewer minutes per week than that prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The time loss is 3.4%. Table 2 shows averages by grade, district and location. The average time loss is 7.5% in Grade 3, 2.5% in Grade 4 and just 0.6% in Grade 5. Variations between the district averages are not marked. The urban schools in our sample show the largest losses *and* gains of time. Grade 5 classes experience almost 10% more time than officially mandated; while Grade 3 classes suffer a loss of 12.5%.

Table 2: Officially Allocated Time and Mean of Available Time per Week for LLE Activities (minutes)

	Officially allocated time per week (minutes)	Mean of Available Time per Week for LLE Activities (minutes)						
		Central Province Total	District			Location		
			Kandy District	Matale District	Nuwara Eliya District	Urban	Rural	Estate
G3	180	166.5 (-7.5%)	165.8 (-7.9%)	171.7 (-4.6%)	164.5 (-8.6%)	157.5 (-12.5%)	168.4 (-6.4%)	164.1 (-8.8%)
G4	180	175.5 (-2.5%)	175 (-2.8%)	175.8 (-2.3%)	175.9 (-2.3%)	170 (-5.6%)	175.9 (-2.3%)	175.9 (-2.3%)
G5	210	208.7 (-0.6%)	206.5 (-1.7%)	210.8 (+0.4%)	210 (0%)	230 (+9.5%)	208.7 (-0.6%)	203.5 (-3.1%)
All		183.6 (-3.4%)	182.4 (-4%)	186.1 (-2.1%)	183.5 (-3.4%)	185.8 (-2.2%)	184.3 (-3%)	181.2 (-4.6%)

4.2 Teacher presence/absence

The research team visited 60 schools unannounced. Their intention was to observe 360 English classes, 120 from each of Grade 3, 4 and 5. Of the 360 planned observations, only 307, or 85% were undertaken (Table 3). Fifteen per cent of classes could not be observed because the class was not held, mainly because the teacher was on leave from the school. In six cases the teacher was in school but attending to other duties. In 21/53 classes some form of 'cover' was provided. A substitute teacher was available but taught the students a subject other than English. These classes were not observed. In the 307 classes observed the vast majority of lessons (94.8%) were conducted by a teacher appointed to teach English.

Table 3: Teacher presence/absence in English class

		No.	Total
English class was observed	Lesson was conducted with English teacher	291	307
	Students were taught English by the class teacher or another teacher	16	
English class was not observed	Teacher was in the school but did not come to the class	6	53
	Teacher was on leave	14	
	Both teacher and students were not in the class	3	
	Teacher was on leave but substitute teacher was available but students were taught a subject other than English	21	
	Teacher was available but students were outside of class	1	
	No specific teacher for English and formal English was not taught	8	
Total		360	360

4.3 Lesson start and finish times

In the 307 classes observed researchers recorded whether lessons started late or finished early. The average time loss was a modest 1.4 minutes per class period, which means that students lose average 4.4% of time in one class period. Table 4 shows the average time loss per period (in minutes and percentages). The average time loss increases in Grade 5 and appears to be almost twice that in Grades 3 and 4. In all districts and locations, time loss is greatest for Grade 5. Average time loss is greater in estate schools than in urban and rural schools.

Table 4: Official Period Duration and Average Time Loss per Period (Minutes and Percentage) by Grade, District and Location

	Official period duration (mins)	Central Province Total	District			Location		
			Kandy District	Matale District	Nuwara Eliya District	Urban	Rural	Estate
Grade 3	30	1.0 (3.2%)	1.1 (3.8%)	0.9 (3.0%)	0.7 (2.4%)	0 (0%)	0.9 (2.9%)	1.5 (4.9%)
Grade 4	30	1.1 (3.6%)	1.4 (4.6%)	0.6 (2.0%)	1.0 (3.2%)	0.9 (2.9%)	1.0 (3.5%)	1.2 (3.9 %)
Grade 5	35	2.3 (6.5%)	2.2 (6.3%)	3.1 (8.8%)	1.8 (5.2%)	2.1 (6.1%)	2.2 (6.1%)	2.6 (7.3%)
Total		1.4 (4.4%)	1.6 (4.5%)	1.5 (4.3%)	1.2 (3.2%)	1.0 (2.5%)	1.3 (3.8%)	1.7 (5.1%)

4.4 On task/off task

Once a lesson is in process teachers and students engage in a wide range of activities, most of which are academic. Our snapshot tool employed 18 activities. Teachers were observed once in every three minutes and the main activity being undertaken at that time noted. In the later section on the quality of instruction we present evidence on detailed activities and whether they are student or teacher centred. Here we focus only on whether teachers and students are involved in some form of activity (on task) or no activity (off task). Our data suggest that 97.9% of time is spent 'on task' and 2.1% 'off task'. If 'on task' activity that is devoted to classroom management and discipline rather than teaching is regarded as 'on task but non academic' then the proportion of off task time increases to 4.2% (see detailed discussion in 5.1).

4.5 Opportunity and loss of opportunity

Let us now estimate the total opportunity and loss of opportunity for the teaching of English in the Central Province, using the four estimates of time loss presented above (see Table 5). In the Central province 1403 schools offer schooling from Grades 1-5. Let us assume, for the sake of the calculation, that each school has one Grade 3 class, one Grade 4 class and one Grade 5 class rendering a total of 4209 classes.

We start by calculating how much time per week is available, in principle, for the teaching of English across all 4209 classes. With 190 minutes on average available per class grade this amounts to an opportunity time 'pool' of 799,710 minutes. Second, we have found that, on average, 3.4% of the 190 minutes was lost in the translation of the official timetable to the school timetables. This reduces our pool of 799,710 minutes by 27,190 and the remaining time to $(799,710 - 27,190) = 772,520$ minutes. Third, on any given day in any given week 15% of English teachers or teachers able to teach English are likely to be absent. This reduces our time pool of 772,520 minutes by 115,878 to 656,642. Fourth, there is a further 4.4% loss of time due to lessons starting late and/or finishing early. This reduces our time pool of 656,642 minutes by 28,892 to 627,750. Fifth, since teachers were observed to be 'off task' 2.1% of the time, this reduces the 627,750 minutes by a further 13,183 to 614,567. However, if, as noted earlier, 'on task' time devoted to classroom management and discipline is treated as 'off *academic task* time' the percentage of time loss increases to 4.2%, a loss of 26,365 minutes, with a total pool of time remaining of 601,385 minutes. We may treat the percentage of 4.2% as an upper estimate of 'off task activity' and the figure of 2.1% as a lower estimate. Using these two estimates we indicate a range of the total time remaining for the teaching of English in an average week and the time loss. The total time remaining ranges from 601384 to 614567 minutes. The total time loss ranges from 23.2% to 24.8%, almost one quarter.

Table 5 Opportunity and loss of opportunity for the teaching of English (4209 classes), by source of time loss

Source of time loss	% loss	Total mins per week (190X4209)				Total Time loss % (799710-X)/799710
		799710				
Discrepancy Official and actual timetable	3.4% of 799710	27190				
Time remaining (1)		772520	772520			
Teacher absence from classroom	15.0% of 772520		115878			
Time remaining (2)			656642	656642		
Lessons start/end time	4.4% of 656642			28892		
Time remaining (3)				627750	627750	
On task/off task (lower estimate)	2.1% of 614,567				13,183	

Time remaining (4) and time loss					614567	23.2%
On task/off task (upper estimate)	4.2% of 627750				26,365	
Time remaining (5) and time loss					601384	24.8%

5 OFFICIAL ENGLISH CURRICULUM

We turn now to a discussion of the quality of teaching and learning. What are the official guidelines on what and how English should be taught? The English curriculum derives from the General Education Reforms of 1997 with a set of prescriptions for education in general, the syllabi for English, the Teachers' Guides (TG), the Pupil Book (PB) and pupil workbook (WB). In principle, the PB and WB are distributed to all students cost-free.

The reforms clearly state that education should be student-centred and not teacher-centred. Emphasis is to be given to the development of the child's mind, skills, attitudes and abilities. Therefore, guided play, activity and desk work are the three elements used in the teaching learning process of the primary Grades. There is a stage wise transition in the proportion of them devoted to these three elements. At Key Stage I (Grades 1 and 2) a greater part of the time is devoted to play and components of activities with lesser amount of desk work. At Key Stage II (Grade 3 and 4) the three approaches are given equal prominence while at Key Stage III (Grade 5) desk work dominates. Teacher Guides written by the NIE for each subject stress the need to adhere to these approaches and follow them. The English course offered from Grades 3-5 which is covered by this study is also expected to follow approaches recommended for Key Stages II and III. The course aims, as stated in the Grades 3 to 5 English syllabi ¹, are to:

- lay the foundation for the gradual development of the students' abilities to communicate effectively in English through speaking, reading, writing and listening;
- enrich students participation in primary school through positive enjoyable foreign language learning experience;
- develop positive attitudes in students that encourages them to learn English further in the secondary school;
- build students' confidence in their ability to succeed in learning the language;
- provide support to acquire the basic competencies related to the National Education Policy through an additional language teaching programme; and
- provide sufficient command of the language to enable the students to use English in real life situations as and when the need arises.

The general objectives of this course according to these syllabuses are: The student

- listens to simple commands/instructions in English and responds verbally and non-verbally;
- reads and understands simple words/expressions in English;
- gives expressions orally to basic language functions in English;

¹ National Institute of Education (2000) *English Language Syllabus for Grades 3, 4, 5*.

- distinguishes and identifies words, shapes and patterns of the letters of the English alphabet;
- forms the letters of the English alphabet on paper legibly using correct hand movements;
- writes simple sentences with accuracy; and
- acquires a sufficient vocabulary related to his/her immediate environment and communication needs.

The syllabus content is organized around the four pillars of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Neither the syllabus nor the Teacher's Guide prescribes how much time should be spent on each of the four pillar activities, nor the balance between them. However, the Teacher's Guide of 2002 accords greater emphasis to the skills of reading and writing.

5.1 Pedagogy observed in English classrooms

Here we focus on the types of pedagogic activity observed in the classes². Our observation protocol employed a number of categories: 18 types of activities, 6 materials, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading writing). The activities are further grouped into three levels (Table 6).

Level 1	On task and off task activities
Level 2	On task activities categorized into academic tasks and non-academic tasks. All off task activities classified as non-academic.
Level 3	Academic tasks categorized into student centred tasks, teacher centred tasks and rote learning tasks, and off task activities categorized into student off task and teacher off task

Table 6: Various Activities Observed in the Classroom Observations.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Activity
On task	Academic Tasks	Student centred tasks	Kinesthetic
			Discussion/questioning
			Focused listening
			Remedial work/corrective feed back
		Teacher centred tasks	Reading aloud
			Demonstration/Modeling
			Assignment/Desk work
			Verbal Instructions
		Rote learning tasks	Practice/Drill
			Copying
	Non-academic tasks	Tasks that are not purely academic	Classroom management
			Discipline

² A separate paper will discuss the relative amounts of time devoted to the content of the learning, as between the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Off Task	Non-academic tasks	Student off task	Student's personal social interactions
			Student's uninvolved
		Teacher off task	Teacher social interactions
			Teacher management
			Teacher uninvolved
			Teacher out of the classroom

Figures 3, 4 and 5 show the distribution of classroom time across various types of activities by grade, district and location.

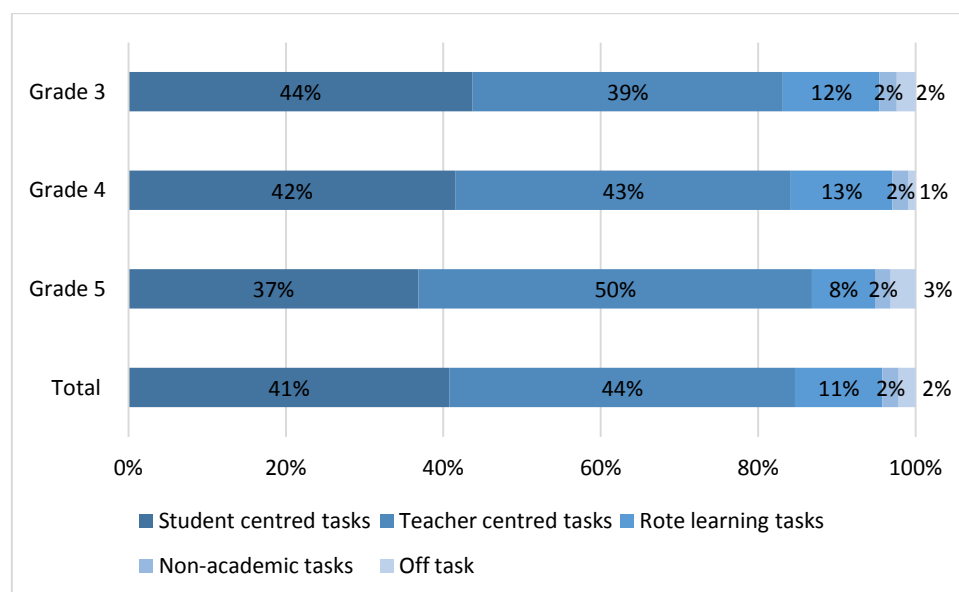


Figure 3 Distribution of Classroom Time across Various Types of Activities, by Grade

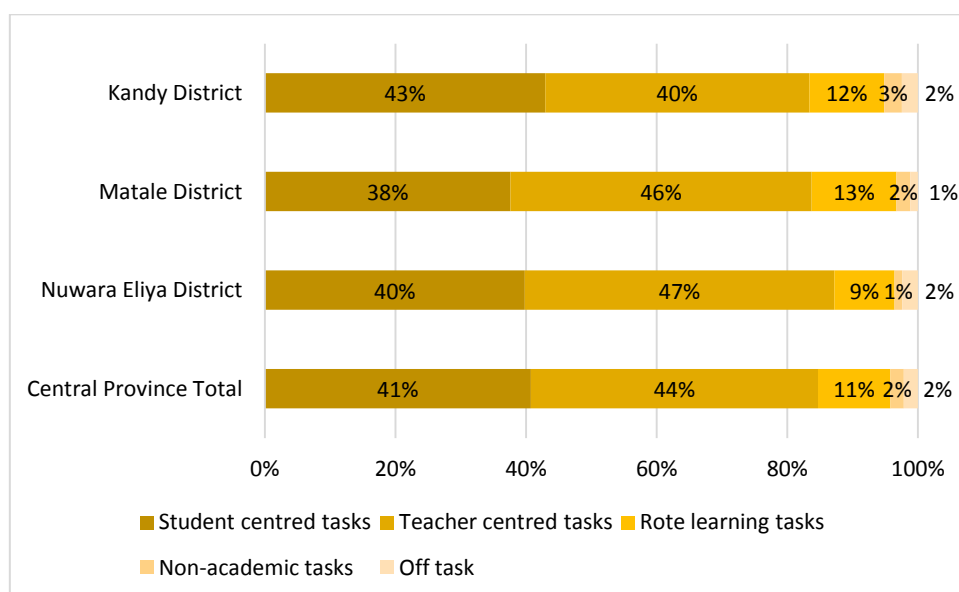


Figure 4 Distribution of Classroom Time across Various Types of Activities, by District

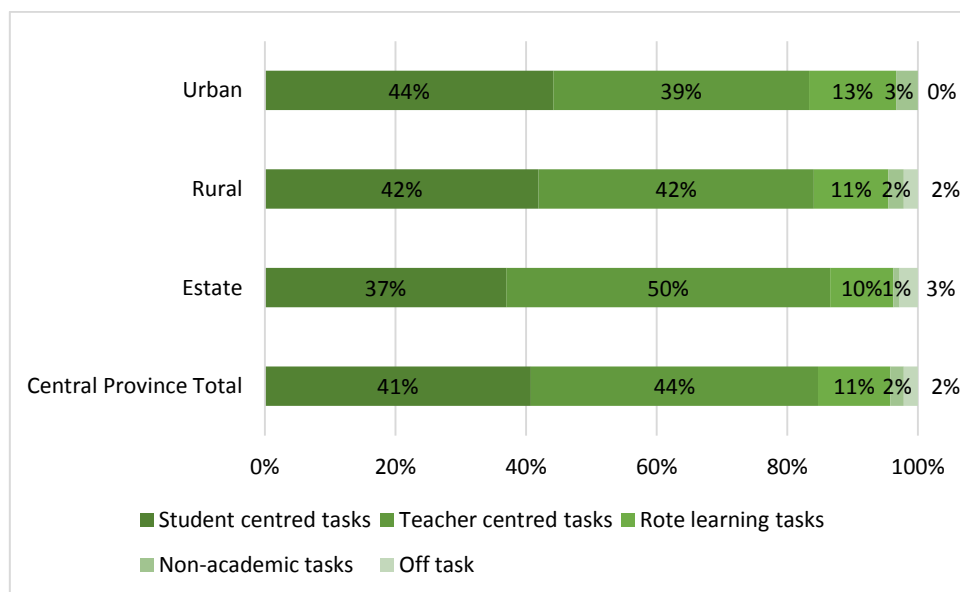


Figure 5 Distribution of Classroom Time across Various Types of Activities, by Location

The evidence suggests that broadly similar amounts of time are devoted to what we have classified as student-centred (40.7%)³ and teacher-centred (43.9%) activities. Teachers of Grade 5 students appear to devote more time on teacher centred tasks than Grades 3 and 4; teachers in Kandy district slightly more time on student-centred activities than in the other districts; and teachers in estate schools more time on teacher-centred tasks.

At 2.1% the percentage of off task time is small. However if we include the time the teacher spends on classroom management and discipline (classified above as 'on task non academic') the total percentage of off task time rises to 4.2%.

6 CONCLUSION

In this study we have explored opportunities, measured in terms of time, for primary schooling and for the teaching of English, in relation to official expectations and school, teacher and class level practices. Officially 210 days of schooling were made available to children in 2013. In practice, after taking account of school closures and time devoted to non teaching activity, these reduced, on average, to 190.2 days, a time loss across the school year of 9.4%. The time available for the teaching of English is prescribed in terms of minutes per week, rather than days. Across Grades 3, 4 and 5 these average 190 minutes per week. But this time is corroded for a variety of reasons. There are discrepancies between the official timetable and the timetables drawn up at school level. Teachers are absent from class and lessons cannot be undertaken. Lessons sometimes start late and/or finish early. And once a lesson is in process, not all time is utilised for teaching. Our estimates suggest that between 23.2% and 24.8% of time is lost between official prescriptions and classroom practices.

As for the use of time the curriculum prescribes that teachers should place an emphasis on what are termed 'student-centred activities'. Our estimates suggest that broadly similar amounts of

³ Percentages in the Figures have been rounded to whole numbers.

time are devoted to student-centred and teacher-centred activity. Since none of the official guidance indicates how much time be devoted to different types of activity one cannot pass an evaluative judgement on these figures. Nonetheless, they should be instructive to curriculum developers as they undertake their current review and revision of the English curriculum.

Opportunities for the learning of English show variations by grade, district and location. Schools are more likely to be available for academic activity in the estate sector than in the rural and urban sector. At the same time, estate sector schools show a greater discrepancy between the official and school timetable for English and greater time loss through late start/early finish times. Inside the classes, there are more teacher-centred activities in Grade 5 classes than in Grade 3 and 4, and also in estate schools. Conversely, student-centred activities are more apparent in Grade 3 and 4 than in Grade 5 and in urban schools. To what extent these grade, district and location differences correlate with the background characteristics of teachers is unclear at this stage. However it is clear that the teachers given the responsibility of teaching English vary considerably. Urban teachers are more likely than teachers in rural or estate schools to have received government appointments to teach English, to have received some form of professional training in the teaching of English and have more years of teaching experience than those in rural and estate schools, and, partly because of that, more have participated in the intensive in-service Primary English language programme organised in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While school principals may be the main arbiters of time in relation to school closures and the school timetable, teachers are main arbiters of time in the classroom.

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