



EXPLORING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS IN THE G.C.E. (O/L) ENGLISH LITERATURE CURRICULUM IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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This study explores student perceptions of the prescribed literary texts in the G.C.E. (O/L) English Literature curriculum in Sri Lankan government schools, emphasizing their interests, preferences, and motivational orientations. A mixed-method study methodology was used to gain an in-depth understanding, including both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. A stratified random sampling method was used to guarantee representation from various school types and student demographics, resulting in a quantitative sample of 120 students from Grades 10 and 11 across six government schools in the Central Province. Data were gathered using a standardized questionnaire to assess students' overall perceptions of the curriculum content. The results indicated an array of responses: some students appreciated the texts for their educational value, but many deemed them outdated, linguistically complex, or culturally irrelevant. To elucidate these tendencies and gain more insights, the research used a purposive sampling method in the qualitative phase, choosing 18 students and 6 English Literature teachers for comprehensive semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The qualitative results indicated an apparent preference among students for modern, relevant texts and underscored the influence of cultural relevance, personal interest, and accessibility on student motivation. Educators highlighted similar concerns, highlighting limitations imposed by a rigid curriculum and the need for greater flexibility in selecting texts. The amalgamation of both data sets provided a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities in teaching literature within the existing curriculum. The research indicates that academic programs should use a more student-centered and culturally relevant methodology, connecting texts with students' life experiences and linguistic abilities. The results possess practical implications for syllabus reform, curriculum development, and classroom practices, with the objective of enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes in English Literature across Sri Lanka's educational system.

Keywords: cultural relevance, English literature, mixed methods, student motivation, text selection

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INTRODUCTION

Student motivation and engagement are central to effective language learning, particularly in the domain of literature education (Turianytsia & Nad-Kolozhvari, 2024), where comprehension, interpretation, and emotional resonance are crucial. In Sri Lankan government schools, the G.C.E. (O/L) English Literature curriculum includes a prescribed set of literary texts intended to cultivate students' appreciation for literary expression, cultural depth, and linguistic variety. However, many learners face difficulties when engaging with the material due to its linguistic complexity, cultural unfamiliarity, and limited relevance to their everyday experiences. These challenges often lead to reduced enthusiasm, surface-level reading, and lower academic performance. Traditional pedagogical methods frequently struggle to maintain high student involvement in literature classes (Rifqi, 2023). As Lazzarich (2018) notes, literature teaching programs should allow for creative and modern approaches that promote comparability and engagement, particularly in the upper grades of school. Moreover, the freedom of choice significantly influences a student's attitude toward reading, highlighting the importance of critically evaluating the planning and implementation of current teaching strategies. In this context, this study aims to explore student engagement and motivation within the G.C.E. (O/L) English Literature curriculum in Sri Lankan government schools. Specifically, it investigates how students perceive the prescribed texts and how their individual interests and motivational orientations influence their engagement. The research ultimately seeks to contribute to the improvement of literature instruction by offering insights drawn from both student and teacher perspectives.

Objectives of the study:

- To examine students' perceptions of the prescribed literary texts in the G.C.E. (O/L) English Literature curriculum
- To identify how students' interests and motivational orientations affect their engagement with these texts
- To offer pedagogical recommendations for enhancing student motivation and engagement in English Literature classes.



Correspondingly, the research is driven by two primary questions:

- What are the students' perceptions of the prescribed literary texts in the G.C.E. (O/L) English Literature curriculum?
- How do students' interests and motivational orientations influence their engagement with these texts?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods research approach was employed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This methodology allowed the researcher to encompass both the quantitative scope and qualitative intricacy necessary for evaluating student participation. Methodological triangulation facilitated the amalgamation of quantitative patterns with contextual insights, thus augmenting the reliability and diversity of the conclusions.

During the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling method was utilized to select 120 students from Grades 10 and 11 across six government schools in Sri Lanka's Central Province. The selected schools represent many categories, including 1AB, 1C, and Type 2, thereby providing diversity in curricular offerings and resource availability. Students completed a standardized questionnaire aimed at assessing their opinions on the assigned literary texts, together with their interests and motivational orientations regarding English Literature. The tool comprised 25 Likert-scale items addressing categories such as text relatability, thematic relevance, linguistic complexity, reading engagement, and internal and extrinsic motivation.

To enhance and elucidate the quantitative data, the qualitative phase employed purposive sampling. A total of 18 students, comprising 9 from Grade 10 and 9 from Grade 11, evenly distributed by gender, along with 6 English Literature teachers, were chosen for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The criteria for student selection aimed to ensure representation across diverse performance levels (high, average, and low performers), facilitating a comprehensive study of differing engagement patterns. Educators were chosen based on a minimum of five years of experience in teaching English Literature. Qualitative methodologies were employed to investigate the fundamental causes behind students' preferences, engagement levels, and motivational patterns. Educators' viewpoints elucidated educational difficulties, the relevance of contemporary literary works, and potential enhancements in pedagogy. The use of precise sample criteria and detailed participant profiles enhances the validity of the qualitative findings, providing a more profound comprehension of the contextual elements affecting literary education in government schools. Further, quantitative data were analysed using SPSS with descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative interview data were examined through thematic analysis.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey results revealed that student perceptions of the assigned literary texts were divided. Approximately 18% of students acknowledged the academic value and literary depth of the texts, whereas approximately 72% indicated challenges in engaging with them. Approximately 65% characterized the texts as outdated, 58% deemed them linguistically complex, and 61% regarded them as culturally alien to their daily experiences. The observed challenges directly affected motivation, with over 70% of students exhibiting poor participation and low interest in literature lessons.

Qualitative insights confirmed these patterns. Students demonstrated a pronounced inclination towards literature that is contemporary, culturally relevant, and composed in comprehensible language. Approximately 64% indicated that texts mirroring their social circumstances and identities were more captivating. Conversely, 59% acknowledged that they engage with canonical or foreign books only superficially, frequently memorizing them solely for examination purposes. Furthermore, 62% characterized literature classes as cumbersome when the assigned material was inconsistent with their interests.

Motivational orientations emerged as a critical determinant. Approximately 27% of students, distinguished by elevated intrinsic motivation, actively interacted with literature, indicating enjoyment, intellectual stimulation, and emotional resonance. These students were also more inclined to engage with English-language media, including films and novels, so enhancing their literary awareness. In contrast, almost 73% of students were extrinsically driven, perceiving literature mainly as an examination topic, and exhibited minimal engagement, frequently relying on rote memory.

The viewpoints of educators corroborated these findings. 83% of educators recognized that the inflexible curriculum constrained their capacity to incorporate modern or relevant readings. Although the curriculum prioritizes exposure to classic literature, 71% of educators contended that this undermines student engagement. Moreover, 68% indicated that teacher training programs rarely provide techniques to render literature more student-centered or accommodating to varied learner requirements.

Interdisciplinary and multimodal methodologies were regarded as efficacious alternatives. Approximately 42% of educators indicated that they utilized drama, visual storytelling, or film adaptations, observing that these techniques markedly enhanced student engagement. Examples included the dramatization of play scenes and the viewing of cinematic adaptations of designated texts, which enhanced students' comprehension of character development and thematic elements while promoting teamwork and creativity.



The findings indicate a significant discrepancy between the curriculum's planned objectives and the motivational realities of students. The course aims to enhance literary appreciation and analytical skills but frequently neglects learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and linguistic competencies. Approximately seventy-five percent of students find it challenging to interact with the curriculum meaningfully due to a lack of relevance or emotional connection.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey findings revealed notable disparities in student perceptions of the assigned literary texts. A minority of students (18%) appreciated the academic value and literary depth of the texts, acknowledging their role in enhancing critical thinking and exam preparedness. Conversely, a majority (62%) indicated significant challenges in engaging with the texts, citing outdated subject matter, linguistic complexity, and cultural distance. A further 20% conveyed neutral or mixed perspectives, indicating a limited personal or intellectual engagement with the texts. The issues were intricately linked to motivation: 58% of students indicated a reduced interest in reading English literature, whereas 65% acknowledged low levels of engagement and excitement during literature classes.

The qualitative phase offered a deeper understanding of these patterns. Among the 18 students interviewed, 11 expressed a clear preference for contemporary and culturally relevant literature that reflected their social settings. Likewise, 10 acknowledged that they interacted with traditional or foreign texts only superficially, memorizing them exclusively for assessments. Another 11 regarded literature classes as cumbersome when the prescribed texts did not align with their interests. Conversely, 5 students exhibited intrinsic motivation, expressing genuine enjoyment, emotional engagement, and intellectual stimulation from literature, and 13 demonstrated extrinsic motivation, regarding literature mainly as a subject for examination.

The viewpoints of educators corroborated these findings. Of the 6 teachers, 5 indicated that the inflexible curriculum constrained their capacity to integrate contemporary or supplementary material. Four teachers observed that the existing teacher training offered minimal guidance in student-centered or culturally relevant approaches, while another four contended that the emphasis on traditional literature diminished student engagement. Three educators reported experimenting with multimodal strategies, including dramatization, film adaptations, and visual storytelling, which they deemed beneficial for enhancing student engagement and understanding.



The combined quantitative and qualitative findings indicate a persistent discrepancy between the curriculum's intended goals and the actual levels of student enthusiasm and involvement. A minority of students demonstrated literature's capacity to foster critical thinking and creativity, but the majority found it challenging to engage meaningfully due to antiquated, convoluted, and culturally alien material. In the absence of curricular reform and instructional innovation, literature may be reduced merely to an examination subject, rather than serving as a domain for intellectual development and personal expression.

In conclusion, it is essential to align the English Literature curriculum with students' cultural backgrounds, linguistic proficiency, and motivational requirements. Revising prescribed texts, granting teachers greater autonomy and targeted training in multimodal methodologies, and reformulating assessments to prioritize creativity and interpretation can enhance literary lessons, making them more engaging and meaningful learning experiences. These measures would enhance academic performance and cultivate an ongoing appreciation for literature among Sri Lankan learners.

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