



Religious background and language learning: Practical suggestions for deriving best practice in ELT

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ABSTRACT

Liyanage (2004) established a significant association between the ethnoreligious affiliations of high school students in Sri Lanka and their learning strategies in practicing English as a Second Language (ESL). The complex nature of affiliations contributing to this association warranted further investigation. Liyanage, Bryer, and Grimbeek (2010, Asian EFL Journal, Vol 12) examined the role of ethnicity and religion in determining the Language Learning Strategy (LLS) choices of ESL students, indicating a significantly stronger prediction from the latter. Here, we suggest implications of these findings for English Language Teaching (ELT) in localised contexts, and use the specific example of Sri Lanka to highlight the importance of accommodating ethnoreligious affiliations in instructional design.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalised world, primordial connections of people (Appadurai, 1996; Levine, Reves, & Leaver, 1996) based on race, language, ethnicity, and religion, and their ties to their communities, have been downplayed and neglected. The influence of first language (L1) in combination with religion and ethnicity on learning a second language (L2) has been overlooked. Modes of thinking and learning vary according to social practices and cultural traditions of different communities (Canagarajah, 1999), and in Sri Lanka these practices and traditions echo an ethos polished by the indigenous educational systems of its people (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, forthcoming). However, the effect of these primordial connections on ways in which learners process knowledge has largely remained obscure in the literature.

ELT teachers work for a very diverse student clientele from many cultures around the world. In any instructional setting or location, a teacher may be working with students from one culture or from several different cultures. For example, in Australia or the USA, students form multicultural classrooms, while in Sri Lanka or Japan, language classes comprise monocultural settings. However, this distinction is rarely simple because what seems to be a monocultural class of students is really not. The students' ethnoreligious backgrounds may involve sets of quite different experiences, reflecting various subcultures within the broader cultural context of a country. For example, in Sri Lanka, the student clientele typically comprises three main ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Tamil, and Sri Lankan Muslim, with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as their respective religious denominations. Minority denominations (e.g., Christians) also exist, however for purposes of our address here, the distinctive practices and values conditioned by the main ethnoreligious affiliations make for three subcultures within a Sri Lankan ELT setting.

Researchers and practitioners need to acknowledge the contribution of such affiliations to learners' development of communicative competence in English language and to accommodate them within the global professional awareness of goals shared across the diversity of learners in English language classrooms. Language teachers may be disinclined to contemplate potential influences of ethnoreligious affiliations on learning; they may be unaware of learners' preferences associated with their ethnoreligious affiliations; they may be captured by the hegemony of English language teaching as a global trend. Studies (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, Grimbeek, &

Bryer, 2010) have shown that even in the same national background, students may have different subaffiliations, and, if so, will approach language learning differently.

Sri Lanka has a diverse ethnic composition with three ethnic groups – Sinhalaⁱ, Tamil, and Muslimⁱⁱ – that constitutes 99% of the population. According to government statistics (Sri Lanka Government, 2008) the majority community, Sinhala, comprises almost three quarters (74%) of the people. Tamils comprise two groups – Sri Lankan Tamils, who are long-settled descendents from south-east India, and Indian Tamils, most of whom are migrant workers brought to Sri Lanka under British colonial rule (Somasegaram, 1969). Together, the two groups comprise 18% of the population. Muslims, who arrived in the country with Arab traders in the seventh and eighth centuries (Azeez, 1969; De Silva, 1977), comprise 8% of the country's population. The minor ethnic groups include Burghers, a community of mixed European descent, and Veddas, who are regarded as the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. These groups account for less than 1% of the population.

Language and religion are pointers of identity among the main ethnic groups. They pervade many aspects of life and constitute a basic element of diversity. Sinhalese use Sinhala as their mother tongue and more than 90% of them are Buddhists. Tamils speak Tamil and overwhelmingly are Hindus. Muslims usually prefer to speak in Tamil and are all adherents of Islam. Christians number about 7% of the population and they are from the Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher communities. The indigenous educational practices of the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims are intertwined with the religious practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

Limited consideration of Language Learning Strategy (LLS) preferences based on students' indigenous educational philosophies/practices highlights potential for educationists to do more to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of ELT (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). Given that a strong relationship between ethnoreligious affiliations and preferences for language learning strategies has already been established (see Liyanage, et al., 2010), our purpose in this paper is to highlight ways in which LLS preferences based on socio-educational values associated with learners' ethno-religious affiliations might be accommodated in ELT. We aim to achieve this purpose in a three-step process: First, we discuss teaching-learning practices inherent in Sri Lanka's three indigenous educational systems. Second, we discuss findings of two empirical studies (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, et al., 2010) that explored the relationship between Sri Lankan ESL learners' ethnoreligious

backgrounds as demarcated by their indigenous educational heritage and their preferred language learning strategy choices. Third, we suggest a metacognitive strategy framework for ESL lesson planning that we propose to help teachers to accommodate these preferences.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Buddhism and its associated cultural practices were introduced to Sri Lanka 250 years after the death of the Buddha. With the introduction of Buddhism, religious beliefs formed the background of Sri Lankan society, permeating the lives of the people of the day (Ariyapala, 1969). Temples were constructed in every village. These became the nucleus of culture and learning, and social practices of the laity were built around those of the Buddhist monks. Buddhist temples were never aloof from the society; they had strong mutual relationships with Buddhist communities within which they were situated. In fact, temples became the centres of Buddhist village life. The Buddhist temple was the exclusive place for formal education for both monks and laymen alike and a number of general themes characterised Buddhist educational practices. For example, instruction was primarily oral, and basic literacy was also provided. Memorisation of texts and debate were key elements of the teaching and learning processes (Hevawasam, 1969; Reagan, 2000).

Along with Buddhist philosophy and Pali, the language through which the doctrine had to be taught at the time, related subjects like grammar, prosody, and rhetoric were also taught. Methods of teaching were identical across; classes were conducted through lecture and discussion methods, and the chief mode of learning was listening. Tremendous importance was placed on students' abilities to memorise, as Hevawasam (1969) has noted;

“The frequent repetitions in the texts which irritate the modern reader had been purposely introduced to facilitate memorising. They had often to memorise long texts, and were quite equal to it.” (p. 1120)

HINDU EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The beginnings of a separate Hindu cultural tradition in Sri Lanka can be traced to the increasing migrations of Indian nationals from South India to the northern part of Sri Lanka during the 9th and 10th centuries AD (Somasegaram, 1969). These migrants brought Hinduism, together with its culture and educational practices, to Sri Lanka.

Given the long history of Hinduism, traditional Hindu educational practice has taken various forms and has numerous sects. However, there are important commonalities (Reagan, 2000). As outlined in the *Upanishads*ⁱⁱⁱ, the process of learning in Hindu educational practice is based on three important acts that follow in sequential order. These are *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* (Mookerji, 1951). *Shravana* is listening, that is, listening to the teacher with the purpose of committing content to memory; an oral tradition of developing command of the content knowledge of a subject. *Shravana* leads to the second act, *manana*, through which learners reflect upon what they have heard in *shravana*. *Manana* leads to the last step, *nididhyasana*, through which learners realise self and truth, and which opens avenues for such ends. Together, the principles of *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* are the basis for every different form of Hindu educational practice (Reagan, 2000). Hindu temples are the nucleus of cultural activity and a prominent part of Hindu life in all parts of Sri Lanka.

The majority of Hindus in Sri Lanka today belong to the Siddhanta school of Saivism, which is dominant in South India (De Silva, 1977). Although Hindus generally consider Vedas as the source of all religious knowledge, the Tamil Saivites consider *thirumurais*^{iv} the sacred body of religious literature (Flood, 2002). Usually every Saivite is taught selections from this collection at home.

ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The holy Qur'an occupies a place in Islam that finds no parallel in other religions of the world because to Muslims, the holy Qur'an is not only a book of religious maxims or a collection of devotional hymns, but also a code of life laying down the correct pattern of conduct (Kysilka & Qadri, 1997). For followers of Islam, education may bear no significant meaning if it is placed outside their religious context. In Islam, religious and secular education cannot be differentiated; they are inseparable and neither should be emphasised at the expense of the other. The ultimate goal of Islamic education is the inculcation of the concept of Allah in the minds and souls of Muslims (Reagan, 2000).

Although different forms of traditional Islamic educational systems can be found in different times and geographic locations, there is a common core of such practices that allows us to talk about the Qur'anic education in general. The basis of traditional Islamic education is the *kuttab*, or Qur'anic school, which developed after

the Prophet and became widespread by the 8th century AD (Reagan, 2000). Primary schools were called *maktab*^v and secondary schools were called *madrasa*^{vi}. The curriculum of *madrasa* comprised grammar, literature, logic, Islamic law, principles of Islamic law, Qur'anic commentary, mysticism, and religious philosophy. The teacher in traditional education is a figure looked upon as a model to be imitated. For this reason, in Islam he is required not only to be a man of learning but also to be pious (Husain & Ashraf, 1979).

ETHNORELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS AND LLS CHOICES

A group of almost 1000 students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in six government schools in Sri Lanka were the participants for the study. These schools are operated by the Ministry of Education in the Sri Lankan Government. The participants comprised approximately an equal number of males and females from the three dominant subcultures. The Language Learning Strategy Inventory (LLSI) of Chamot, Kupper, and Impink-Hernandez (1987) was translated into Sinhala and Tamil (Liyanage, 2004). The instrument gathers information about strategies in five learning contexts: speaking in class, listening in class, speaking and listening outside class, reading, and writing. A detailed description of its reliability statistics and statistical analyses that established association between ethnoreligious background and choice of LLS is provided elsewhere (see Liyanage, 2004). It is important to note here that, if the government education system, as opposed to the traditional and religious educational practices, had greatest influence on students' strategy choices, the strategies of students who receive a similar English language education in the school should be the same irrespective of their ethnoreligious affiliations. Liyanage et al. (2010) have shown that to some extent, they were. But to a greater extent they were different – and in quite telling ways in relation to informing teachers of ESL students.

Findings indicated significant association between students' ethnoreligious backgrounds and metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategy types. All three subcultural groups had greatest preferences for metacognitive strategies; their patterns of preference were parallel, with decreasing association from metacognitive through cognitive to social-affective strategies. Variation across the groups indicated three preferred ways of learning. Estimated marginal means for metacognitive,

cognitive, and social-affective strategies indicate that Muslim participants prefer to use all three strategy types more so than Tamil and Sinhalese participants, and Tamil subjects report using all three strategy types more than Sinhalese subjects. The marginal means for ethnicity and language learning strategy types are shown in Figure 1, and the viability of this difference is shown in the highly significant results of an ANOVA, with score on strategy type as dependent variable and ethnicity as predictor (Table 1).

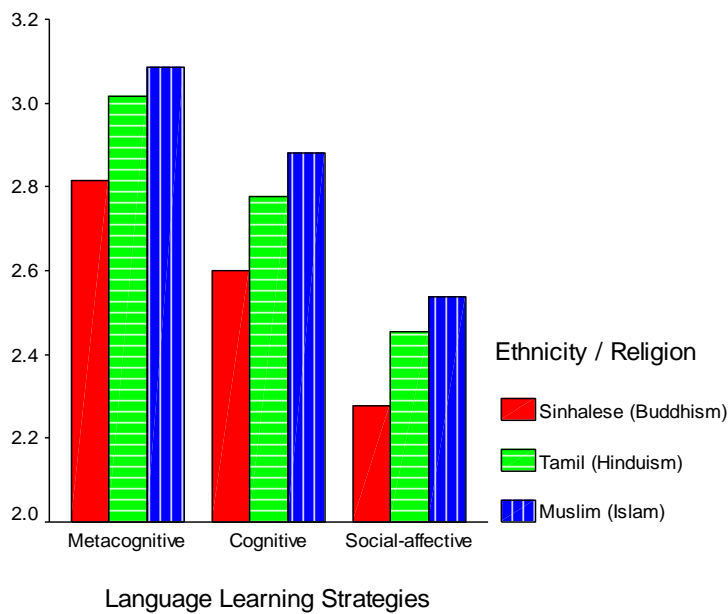


Figure 1: Relationship between ethnicity & language learning strategy (av) scores

Learning strategy	Ethnicity	Mean	Std error	95% Lower Bound	95% Upper Bound
Metacognitive (av)	Sinhalese	2.823	.024	2.776	2.870
	Tamil	3.007	.026	2.956	3.059
	Muslim	3.051	.024	3.005	3.098
Cognitive (av)	Sinhalese	2.608	.026	2.558	2.658
	Tamil	2.775	.028	2.720	2.830
	Muslim	2.856	.025	2.806	2.905
Social-affective (av)	Sinhalese	2.271	.027	2.217	2.325
	Tamil	2.438	.030	2.379	2.497
	Muslim	2.520	.027	2.466	2.573

Table 1: Estimated marginal means for ethnicity & LLS

When individual strategies that form the three strategy types were investigated in relation to ethno-religion, *metacognitive* strategies were preferred strongly by members of each ethno-religion in four of the five learning contexts, indicating participants have decided strategic preferences when *speaking in class*, *reading*, *writing*, and *listening and speaking outside the class* (See Table 2). Nothing of significance was found for *listening in class*. Paradoxically, this absence was a very interesting result, perhaps indicating that strategies either were weak or non-existent – or so automatised that their description in the LLSI’s probes failed to evoke a consciousness sufficient for participants to respond.

To exemplify how the data on metacognitive strategies operating within a learning context might align with ethno-religious background, let us briefly examine the case of Advance Organisation, shown in Table 2 as a highly preferred strategy in the learning context, *reading*. It is described in the LLSI as a metacognitive strategy for “previewing the main idea and concepts of the material to be learned, often by skimming the text for the organising principle” (Chamot, et al., 1987, pp. 136-138).

This form of strategic function gels with teaching practices in the indigenous educational systems. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam each has a religious text: *Tripitaka*, *Vedas*, and *Qur’an*. Up until the government school system was introduced, it was believed by followers of the three religious faiths that all there was to learn was written in these sacred books. Then and now, it was and is a mark of great social distinction and demonstration of one’s knowledge to be able to recite the sacred text of one’s religion, appropriately, accurately, and fully. Contents of these sacred texts are arranged in a predictable sequence, and learning the content follows this sequence. In our study, participants’ strong preferences for advance organisation indicate their need and willingness to learn text-based content sequentially and systematically - orientations very possibly conditioned by the purpose, method, process, and rewards of mastering their sacred text so similar for each of the three subgroups. This finding is consistent with other studies (Canagarajah, 1999) where Sri Lankan students’ comfort with organised, structured, teacher-directed lessons and transmission models of learning has been observed.

As shown in Table 2, significant associations were demonstrated also in four of the five learning contexts for ethno-religion and both cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. In the former, it was *listening and speaking outside the classroom* where there was a low preference, whereas in the latter, it was *reading*. It may well be that respondents believed that taking a preferential view about cognitive strategies is relatively unimportant for *out-of-class listening and speaking*, and that much of the reading they did was solitary work somewhat firewalled from socio-affective involvement – further research may better position our reasoning on such exceptions.

All three groups show a preference for note-taking as a cognitive strategy while *listening in class*. The strategy involves writing down key concepts during a listening or reading activity. As mentioned earlier, in traditional Buddhist, Hindu, and Islam educational practices listening has an important place. Both Buddhist and Hindu religions and their educational practices were passed down through the oral tradition. Knowledge was passed on primarily through teacher talk. Students were expected to listen and remember. For example, one of the mottos of Buddhist educational practice is “Suna`tha, Dha`retha, Chara`tha.” In translation, this means “listen, remember and put into practice.” The sequence and its elements underscore an emphasis on transmission in Buddhist education. In Hindu educational practice, emphasis on *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* reflects a similar transmission model. Note-taking is a strategy that education students select to help them memorise information, particularly within transmission systems of acquisition (Wegner & Bartlett, 2008). To select such a strategy, as so many of our participants did, indicates a sense that memory-building is critical and supportable, a sense that all three religious traditions represented in the present study promote in their learning.

Repetition is another of the strategic modes associated with transmission models of learning and that is measured by the LLSI. It involves the exact imitation of a language model through oral or silent practice. Of the three groups, Muslim participants indicated the highest preference for repetition in the *reading* learning context. The Islamic expectation that students should memorise the Qur’an by reciting it over and over again to a rhythm (Khusro, 1981) may explain why the Muslim students prefer this strategy more than the other strategies in the study. In general, a higher preference for this strategy by all three groups may result from how students were educated in the religious texts before the government school education system was introduced to the country. The only way to measure one’s learning was to

measure how much could be remembered. So, students studied religious manuscripts and other literary texts through various means that helped them remember. One of the favourite ways to remember is through constant repetition and it was constantly encouraged in the traditional educational practices. For example, in Dhammapadaya, repetition while reading is encouraged as “Asajjhya mala` mantha`,” meaning that “one that is not repeated gathers rust.”

More detailed discussion of how these and other strategies shown in Table 2 are preferred by students, and the likely connection with their ethnoreligious upbringing, is provided in the original study (Liyanage, 2004). However, what we have presented briefly here reminds us that pedagogical approaches not only should grow within the socio-cultural contexts of the learners incorporating aspects indigenous to the particular culture to which they belong, but also should recognise the socially situated modes of learning. The aim of such approaches would be to maximise and benefit the process of target language learning through strategies naturally preferred and sought by students. Pedagogical approaches may not be as effective as they are intended to be when they centre on strategies that are not naturally favoured by students.

Learning Context	Language Learning Strategy	Ethnicity		
		Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim
Metacognitive				
Speaking in class	Organisational planning	70.0%	86.2%	86.05
	Self-monitoring	83.5%	79.5%	81.0%
	Self-management	73.6%	78.4%	88.7%
Listening in class		No significant associations found		
Listening and speaking outside class	Organisational planning	34.7%	70.7%	71.0%
	Self-evaluation	55.1%	71.0%	74.3%
Reading	Advance organisation	63.4%	76.3%	76.0%
	Self-management	69.0%	73.5%	84.3%
Writing	Self-evaluation	81.8%	85.9%	86.7%
	Organisational planning	42.6%	84.1%	88.0%
Cognitive				
Listening in class	Note-taking	53.1%	54.1%	76.35
	Repetition	4.6%	30.0%	37.0%
	Transfer	17.2%	56.2%	51.7%
	Translation	40.6%	55.5%	61.0%
Speaking in class	Rehearsal	82.2%	67.1%	72.3%
	Translation	41.6%	55.8%	59.7%
Listening and speaking outside class		No significant associations found		
Reading	Repetition	53.1%	54.1%	76.3%
	Note-taking	59.4%	68.65	80.0%

Writing	Rehearsal	41.6%	55.8%	59.7%
	Translation	4.6%	30.0%	37.0%
	Deduction	82.2%	67.1%	72.3%
	Resourcing	38.9%	63.6%	65.7%
Social-affective				
Listening in class	Questioning for clarification	39.3%	49.8%	61.3%
Speaking in class	Self-talk	34.7%	60.8%	65.0%
Listening and speaking outside class	Questioning for clarification	65.3%	44.5%	39.7%
Reading	No significant associations found			
Writing	Cooperation	34.7%	60.8%	65.0%

Table 2: Ethnicity/Religion & reported use of metacognitive, cognitive & social affective

Our data are suggestive about where Sri Lankan learners' strategic preferences lie. For example, when participants imagined *speaking in class* where ESL is involved, all three ethnoreligious groups gave high choice ratings for the three metacognitive strategies shown. In particular, Muslim students had very high preferences for self-management and organisational planning. ESL teachers aware and alert to such learner preferences are well placed to pinpoint where and how opportunities for producing these strategies might be recognised or created by students, and even planned and managed by them. Such features of teachers' forethought are metacognitive, and in order to make best use of suggestions from our data we offer a metacognitively oriented framework in an attempt to help teachers and others in professional practice to streamline the intentions, procedures, and evaluation under consideration when envisaging a lesson.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Lesson planning is about knowledge, anticipation, and readiness to attend to issues or concerns as and when they arise in a lesson. It draws on a planner's knowledge across concerns that others (Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Sparks, 1992) remind us include content, general pedagogy, and specific pedagogy for the content area/s being addressed. It includes also knowledge of learners and learning, of how to use language and action to access and promote thinking, of where to get appropriate resources and how to use them, and of how to recognise and capitalise on learning opportunities, including unanticipated ones. It draws also on strategies a planner might use to design effective lesson plans, strategies such as metacognitively

monitoring what declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge they have and can place into their creative action. Such metacognitive monitoring, identifying, and preparing is the big-picture of design. Its components need to become procedural knowledge (how do I use this) and to link with conditional knowledge (where and when do I use it – and with what support), if teachers' strategic action when planning is to be effective and efficient. It is a mega-view strategy and we include it in our framework as a strategy additional to the seven that Chamot et al. (1987) depicted as metacognitive - *advance organisation, organisational planning, directed attention, selective attention, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-management*.

Planning an ESL lesson depends on decisions about such things as choice of sites and materials, activities, and methods, elements that are common to most content-area teaching (Brumfit & Rossner, 1982). Central to this decision-making process is an identification of and accounting for students' learning needs, including the need to build declarative, procedural, and conditional competence as learning strategies (Bartlett, 2008; Bartlett & Elliott, 2008), and development of a plan of action to fulfil those needs (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Panasuk & Todd, 2005). The quality and effectiveness of decisions made regarding these aspects depend largely on a teacher's ability to draw on knowledge of English as the target second-language, students and their needs as strategic learners of ESL, teaching methods, and teaching style, and their ability to draw on their experience.

Our adaptations of the original definitions of these strategies as they apply to lesson planning are shown in Table 2 (see Chamot et al., 1987, pp. 136-138 for original definitions of these strategies as they apply to language learning).

Metacognitive Strategies	Adapted Definition as Applied to Lesson Planning	Planning Instance
Meta-View	Recognising declarative, procedural, and conditional elements involved in the planning task	Throughout
Advance Organisation	Previewing students' needs, cultural backgrounds, learning preferences, proficiency levels, and available resources (time, infrastructure, texts), and delineating overall aim/s to achieve within these parameters	Planning the Lesson Content
Self-management	Understanding aspects such as one's own preferred teaching style, strengths, & weaknesses, knowledge of content covered within the planned lesson, and arranging for the presence and/or understanding of these	

Organisational Planning	Planning the parts (stages/steps within the lesson), delineating teaching (pedagogic) objectives for each stage/step, choosing TLAs (Teaching & Learning Activities) best conducive to achieving the pedagogic objectives and to see how these help achieve the overall aim/s of the lesson	
Directed Attention	Deciding in advance to attend to/spend more time on a particular step/TLA that is more relevant and crucial in attaining the overall aim/s, to weigh the relative importance of TLAs, and to ignore information that can be irrelevant and distracting	Planning the Content Implementation
Selective Attention	Deciding in advance to attend to a specific concept, morpho-syntactic structure, word - its spelling or meaning within a step, and how such items are relevant and important in achieving the pedagogic objectives and, in turn, the overall aim/s	
Self-monitoring	Checking and placing-in measures such as observation or questioning to monitor whether the used TLAs are working as they were intended, and if and how students are engaged during the lesson	Planning the Lesson Evaluation
Self-evaluation	Using appropriate measures to know how efficiently (a) both pedagogic and overall aims have been achieved with a view to improving future planning and teaching, and (b) the learning objective/ and, aim/s have been achieved	

Table 1: A Lesson-Planning Adaptation of Chamot et al.'s (1987) Classification of Metacognitive Language-Learning Strategies

The Lesson Plan

Various stages of the lesson, from the development of aims through to evaluation, are represented by numbers and letters in Figure 2. Aim/s (A) are followed by steps through which the overall aim/s is intended to be achieved (B). Each step has a teaching and learning activity (TLA) represented as (C) and the resources and materials used to support the step as (D). Where the step is associated with a specific pedagogic objective/s, we have used (E) measures to monitor whether TLAs are working as intended; and whether learning outcomes for a step are achieved is shown as (F). The step-specific pedagogic objectives will flow from one to the other, forming knowledge structures (G) that are simple to complex in nature while facilitating achievement of the overall lesson aim/s (A).

A full explanation of the framework in action for planning lesson content, planning implementation of the designed lesson, and planning for evaluation of the effectiveness of learning and teaching is provided elsewhere (Liyanage & Bartlett,

forthcoming).

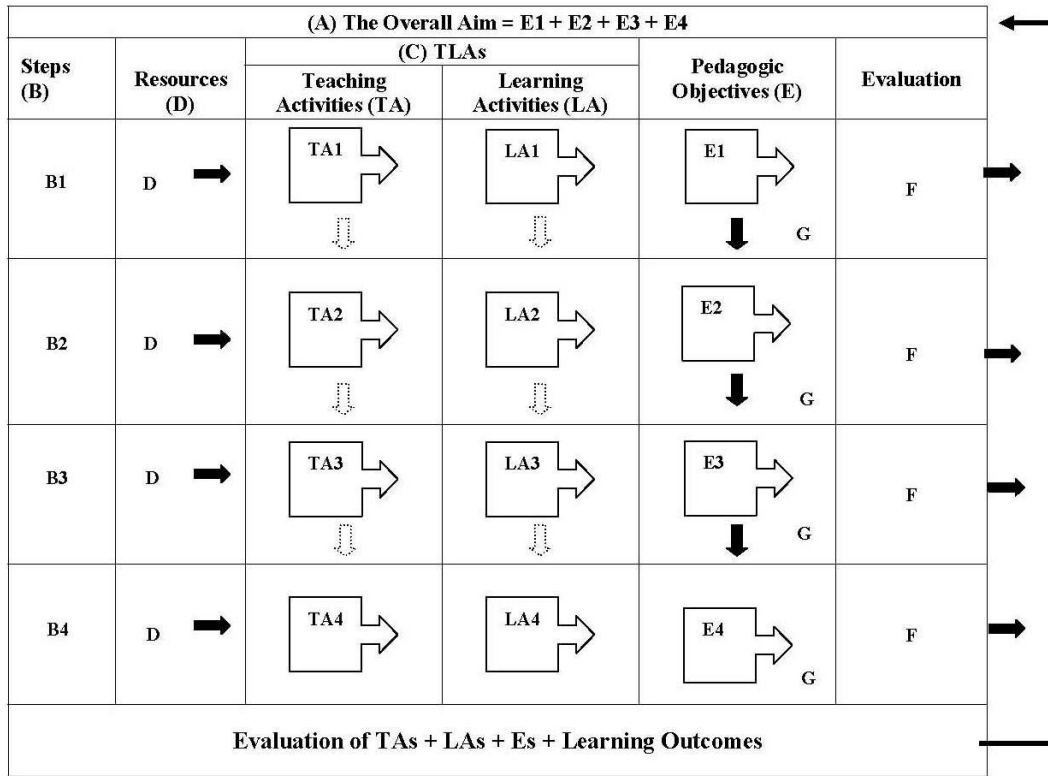


Table 2: Lesson Plan

Summary and Conclusion

Links reported between the ethnoreligious background and preferences Sri Lankan students expressed for strategies as ESL learners (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, et al., 2010), raise cautionary interest not only in relation to how the patterns of research results at national level might be interpreted where there is subgrouping on religious grounds, but also in relation to more proactive consideration of how education might accommodate similarities and differences associated with subgroups and their strategic preferences.

We have attempted a beginning in addressing the second of these interest areas by using a metacognitive framework for lesson planning (Liyanage & Bartlett, forthcoming) to indicate where teachers may give explicit and systematic attention to knowledge of strategies that students in multi-ethnoreligious classes prefer in various ESL learning contexts. Specifically, any such address is informed by three general principles inherent in the research, such that teachers

wishing to tailor an informed view of students' preferences are better placed to know:

- Which strategy types and which specific strategies are preferred by Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students for ESL learning *when speaking in class, when reading, when writing, and when listening and speaking outside class.*
- Where preferences are strong but different for the three ethnoreligious groups, such as with the metacognitive strategy of organisational planning for students working in an ESL *writing* context where the preference is twice as strong with Tamil and Muslim students as it is with Sinhalese students.
- Where there are no clear patterns of choice, such as with metacognitive strategies useful for *listening in class.*

Our suggestions that have arisen from the students' data may assist teachers with lesson planning. Teachers who are aware not only of students' knowledge of strategies, but also of their predilections to calling them into play when in ESL learning contexts, seemingly are well placed to optimise teaching moments through students' intelligently strategic learning. Using lesson planning as the basis for keeping such awareness at the forefront of teachers' work is a start. The framework we have presented may help to extend this "start" somewhat because we have conceptualised awareness of students' strategic preferences into planning broadly, and teachers-as-planners will be preparing across the task base from aims and objectives through evaluation of students' learning and their own teaching.

However, our attempt may or may not be effective and efficient. Research is needed to monitor, improve, and extend this application, and an action research model, where action in planning and positive change are built into cycles of improvement, would be an ideal means of progressing what we know about the utility of what has been reported and suggested here.

The recognition and inclusion of metacognition in theorising what teachers do in lesson planning allows educators to more comprehensively explain and predict

critical points in the planning process, as we have identified, with content, implementation, and evaluation. Further, it permits us, through such constructs as a teacher's mega-view, to take a step beyond describing what a teacher knows of planning to conceptualise his or her acumen in the procedural and conditional know-how of best organising the declarative knowledge.

Clearly, lesson planning involves teachers in conceptualising how a lesson will unfold and in making decisions, prior to the lesson, about content, implementation, and evaluation of how what they do works and with what outcomes. A systematic framing of these decisions will help the teacher not only prepare the plan but also to master it. We have suggested that a mega-view provides metacognitive involvement and a mental omnipresence for a teacher in envisaging the lesson as a real event and in decisions taken in planning for that reality. Such a framework remains exploratory at this stage, and close observations need to be carried out on lessons prepared using it, if it is to be systematically validated in teaching practice.

In anticipation of such validation, we conclude with a three-part position statement that will form the basis of testing:

1. Teachers who have a metacognitive twist to their planning are likely to have better alignment across intentions, procedures, and outcomes in application and, therefore,
2. Their teaching will be both effective and efficient.
3. It is better to be systematic than reactive; it is better still to be both.

CONCLUSION

These findings once again remind us that pedagogical approaches should not only grow within the socio-cultural contexts of the learners, incorporating aspects indigenous to the particular culture to which they belong, but also recognise the socially situated modes of learning. The aim of such approaches would be to benefit the process of target language learning through strategies naturally preferred and sought by the students, as pedagogical approaches may not be as effective as they are intended to be when they centre on strategies that are not naturally favoured by students.

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ⁱ In literature, the words ‘Sinhala’ and ‘Sinhalese’ are used interchangeably to refer to the language group and ethnicity.

ⁱⁱ Sri Lankan Muslims’ ethnicity is Moor. However, in Sri Lanka their ethnic and religious identities are essentially the same and are interchangeably used. In this chapter the word ‘Muslim’ is used to refer to their ethnicity.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Upanishads (in Sanskrit, *upa* means “near”, *ni* is “down”, and *sad* is “sit”-“to sit down near to,” that is, to sit at the feet of the guru) comprise the final portion of the revealed part of the Vedas (Stepaniants & Behuniak, 2002, p. 107).

^{iv} “The *Thirumurais* consist of the *Thevaram*, and *Thiruvacakam* and the philosophical texts. The *Thevaram* and *Thiruvacakam* are collections of hymns of the Saivite saints of the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth centuries A.D written in simple, easily understood language” (De Silva, 1977, p. 390)

^v “... a primary school often attached to a mosque, the chief business of which is to instruct boys (and girls) in those portions of the Koran” (Azeez, 1969, p. 1147).

^{vi} State supported secondary schools (Azeez, 1969))