



**IMPACT OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL SKILLS  
ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WHILE LEARNING  
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SRI LANKA**

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**Abstract:**

The public education system of Sri Lanka suffers from poor education outcomes and wide disparities in academic achievement across schools, and studies have revealed that students' outcomes are best when the teachers are qualified in both, the subjects they are assigned to teach and in pedagogy. Though the studies have revealed that student outcomes can be improved by improving the professional skills of teachers, any

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convincing evidence of the influence of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes in Sri Lanka cannot be found. To fulfil that gap, this study explored the influence of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes in government schools in Sri Lanka, using the pretest, posttest experimental design. Data were collected before and after the 8-week intervention period, from a sample consisting of 102 students and four teachers of English, that were observed quantitatively. Findings revealed that teachers' professional skills as one of the most influential factors that decide the student outcomes directly of a school, which offer valuable recommendations to the education system in Sri Lanka, in order to enhance student outcomes by taking steps to improve the professional skills of teachers.

**Keywords:** Teacher's Professional Skills (TPS), Student Outcomes (SO), English as a Second Language (ESL)

## 1. Introduction

The social and economic development of a country is directly linked with the student outcome, as it produces the manpower for the country which is responsible for the economic and social development of the country.

In Sri Lanka, the public education system suffers from poor education outcomes and wide disparities in academic achievement across schools (Abayaekara A. et al., 2018). G.C.E. O./L. English Language Evaluation Report 2018, Sri Lanka, reveals that 'the number of candidates who obtained marks within the interval of 31 - 40 is 75392 and its percentage is 17.21%. The number of candidates who have obtained marks below 40 is 275707 and its percentage is 62.95%. According to the researchers, one of the most influential factors that affect the student outcome is the teacher. Students' outcomes are best when the teachers are qualified in both, the subject they are assigned to teach and in pedagogy (Arunathilaka et al. 2017). According to Al Seghayer K. A. (2014), teachers are the key figures in the learning-teaching process. Teachers fuel their students' interests and efforts, or tackle the lack thereof, making their influence fundamental to students' progress and teachers can have a far-reaching, long-term, and suggestive impact on their students' ESL learning journeys. Successful English Language teachers should have the cognitive knowledge dimension of language teaching; profound knowledge of related content, that is, disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge; attain a high level of English language proficiency; possess certain unique personality traits.

Though the studies have revealed that student outcomes can be improved by improving the professional skills of teachers, any convincing evidence of the influence of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes in Sri Lanka cannot be found. To fulfil that gap, this study explored the influence of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes in government schools in Sri Lanka.

## 2. Literature Review

Evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007–No. 033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs> (cited by Yoon et al., 2007), the links among professional development, teacher learning and practice, and student achievement.

The Model of Effective Professional Development (Kennedy, 1998; Guskey & Sparks et al., 2004) suggests that professional development's effects on student achievement are mediated by teacher knowledge and practice in the classroom and that professional development takes place in the context of high standards, challenging curricula, systemwide accountability, and high-stakes assessments.

It is assumed that professional development affects student achievement through three steps. First, professional development enhances teacher knowledge and skills. Second, better knowledge and skills improve classroom teaching. Third, improved teaching raises student achievement. If one link is weak or missing, better student learning cannot be expected. If a teacher fails to apply new ideas from professional development to classroom instruction, for example, students will not benefit from the teacher's professional development (Yoon et al., 2007).

Bloom et al. (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives attempted to list the different categories of learning outcomes in each of three domains: cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling), and psychomotor (doing). The cognitive domain, for example, is broken down into six categories of intellectual skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Kyriacou, 1989). The affective domain involves feelings, emotions and attitudes. This domain is broken down into five subdomains which include receiving; passively paying attention, responding; actively participating in the learning process, valuing; ability to see the value of something and express it, organization; creating own value system, and characterization; acting according to the values that internalized. This hierarchical structure is based on the principle of internalization. It means from general awareness to internalized and controls the behaviour.

G.C.E. O./L. English Language Evaluation Report 2018, Sri Lanka, under Comments and suggestions regarding the teaching-learning process emphasises that; teachers should be familiar with the syllabus, the textbooks and the Teachers' Instructional Manual (TIM), and teachers should plan their lessons well to make teaching more interesting and productive, teachers should use resources available to them to facilitate the teaching-learning process, The candidates should be given more opportunities to read and write and listen and speak English in the classroom, teachers should encourage maximum pupil interaction in English in the classroom through group work and pair work, teacher's questioning techniques in classroom teaching helps the performance of the candidates in the examination, candidates should be made aware that

marks are awarded for spelling, grammatical accuracy, mechanics of writing, format and organization, and that a simple mistake would result in losing marks. The teachers must get their knowledge updated to be competent in teaching the subject using the correct methodology to facilitate and motivate the learners.

Studies have revealed that teachers' general education, professional certification, teaching experience, professional development, pedagogic skill, teachers' subject content knowledge, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of assessment, managerial skills and communicative skills etc. as some of the main skills of a teacher that affect the student outcome (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Corcoran, Shields, & Zucker, 1998; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Elmore, 1997; Little, 1993; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

According to Syed Kamal (2014) school, teachers' professional skills, student attitude, books at home, parents, community and environment are some of the factors that affect student outcome. In his study, he further reveals that; absenteeism and irregular participation of students, passive participation of students, lack of Teacher Student Relationship, and lack of Student-Student Relationship as some of the major reasons for low student outcomes, as a result of the lack of teachers' professional skills on the areas of subject content, curriculum, syllabus, teaching techniques, classroom management, formative assessment and communicative skills. When the teacher is unable to create activities according to the level of the students from simple to complex, students who are unable to do the given task, become demotivated with a lack of confidence and become passive participants and they see school as an unpleasant place (Yoon, K. S. at el., 2007; Syed Kamal, 2014).

According to TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science) Curriculum Model, three aspects are considered as the factors that affect students' achievements; the intended curriculum – the areas of science and mathematics and science that the society intends for its students to learn and to facilitate this learning, the implanted curriculum- how the intended curriculum is interpreted by teachers and made available to students; what is actually taught in the classroom, and achieved / attained curriculum – what students have learned, as inferred from their performance on tests (Mullis, Martin, Ruddock, O'Sullivan, & Preuschoff, 2009; cited by Shah, 2014).

The National Education Policy (NEP) 1998 and NEP 2009 recommend that national, provincial and school-level capacity should be developed to assess and improve students' learning achievement and establish an efficient and cost-effective mechanism for continuously assessing students' performance and teachers' competency at the elementary level (Grades 1–8) is, therefore, seen to be emerging as a high priority.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes in the Sri Lankan context. It was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the Teacher's Professional Skills and Student Outcomes.

### 3. Methodology

Using the pretest and post-test experimental method, this study explored the impact of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes of Senior Secondary students in government schools in Sri Lanka. Data were collected before and after the eight-week intervention period, from a sample consisting of 102 male and female students and four teachers of English, in the schools of Type 1AB, Type 1C and Type 2 in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, that was observed quantitatively. A stratified random sampling technique was used.

As the first step of the procedure, a pretest was conducted for teachers and students using structured observation and interviews and the marks obtained by the students of the selected sample for the English Language paper held at the provincial level, when they were in grade 10. After having a friendly discussion with the teachers on the subject and the difficulties they face while teaching and each student was asked about the difficulties they have while learning English as a Second Language. For further clarification of the difficulties and for assisting the teachers to take necessary remedial steps for the feedback students were asked to write 15 sentences on 'Myself'. When their essay on 'Myself' and the Pretest English Language answer scripts of the third term test of grade 10 was observed, the said difficulties were seen very clearly, by the researcher as well as the teachers.

In the second step, the intervention was taken place. By conducting three hour two training sessions, the researcher discussed the following areas with the teachers of English in each school to help them to improve their professional skills which are helpful to improve the student outcomes: the structure of the question paper - G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) English Language, Competencies and Competency Levels, Essential Learning Outcomes and Desired Learning Outcomes, Text types and Testing Techniques, making activities from simple to complex to help the students at different levels in the same class, Marking Criteria, and the importance of knowing about those areas by the teacher as well as students, the difficulties the students of grade 11 have; letter formation, mechanics of writing (capitalization), reading difficulties, grammar, vocabulary, essay writing (content – facts, spelling, vocabulary, and organization) etc. and the remedial steps to be taken to overcome them. The problems the teacher faces while teaching; classroom management, methodology etc. and the measures that can be taken to overcome those problems.

In the third step, once a week, the researcher herself became an active participant in the group while observing the students' and teachers' behaviour and improvement and did different types of language activities that help the teachers as well as students (see Appendix 1).

Collection of data was done during the intervention period at the meeting of each group, once a week; by the researcher as an active participant, a moderate participant and a passive participant in the process of observation of both teachers and students, and the marks obtained at the provincial level first term test of grade 11 held at school at the end of the eight-week intervention period. After going through all the records kept in each

observation, the data related to each variable were entered into the observation sheets, and the collected data was analyzed using SPSS 26.

#### 4. Interpretation of Findings

The objective of this study was to analyze the impact of teachers' professional skills on student outcomes. It was assumed that there is a positive relationship between the Teacher's Professional Skills, and the student outcomes of the Government schools in Sri Lanka.

**Table 1:** Correlation between Student Outcome and Teachers' Professional Skills after Intervention

Correlations		SO-post	TPS-post
SO-post	Pearson Correlation	1	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
TPS-post	Pearson Correlation	.350**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables teachers' professional skills (TPS) and the student outcome (SO), shows that there is a positive correlation between the two variables ( $r = .350$ ,  $n = 102$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). As the direction of the relationship is positive, it is statistically proven that there is a positive relationship between the teachers' professional skills and the students' outcomes. The results support the findings by the Model of Effective Professional Development (Kennedy, 1998; Guskey & Sparks et al., 2004). It is statistically proven that by improving the teacher's professional skills, the outcome of the students, can be improved.

In this study, the researcher personally experienced the difficulties the teachers have; lack of adequate knowledge of the curriculum the teacher implements, the competencies and the competency levels the students to be achieved in each grade, essential and desired level learning outcomes, the activities from simple to complex that can be applied to help the students to achieve the essential level and desired level, that is in different levels, the importance of the teacher-student relationship that motivates the students to reach the teacher to solve their problems; academic as well as personal.

After identifying the above difficulties of the teachers, the researcher conducted three-hour two training sessions on improving the professional skills of teachers. Table 2 depicts the teachers' professional skills before and after intervention and illustrates the impact of the professional skills of the teacher on students' outcomes.

**Table 2:** Statistics of Student Outcomes Before and After Intervention

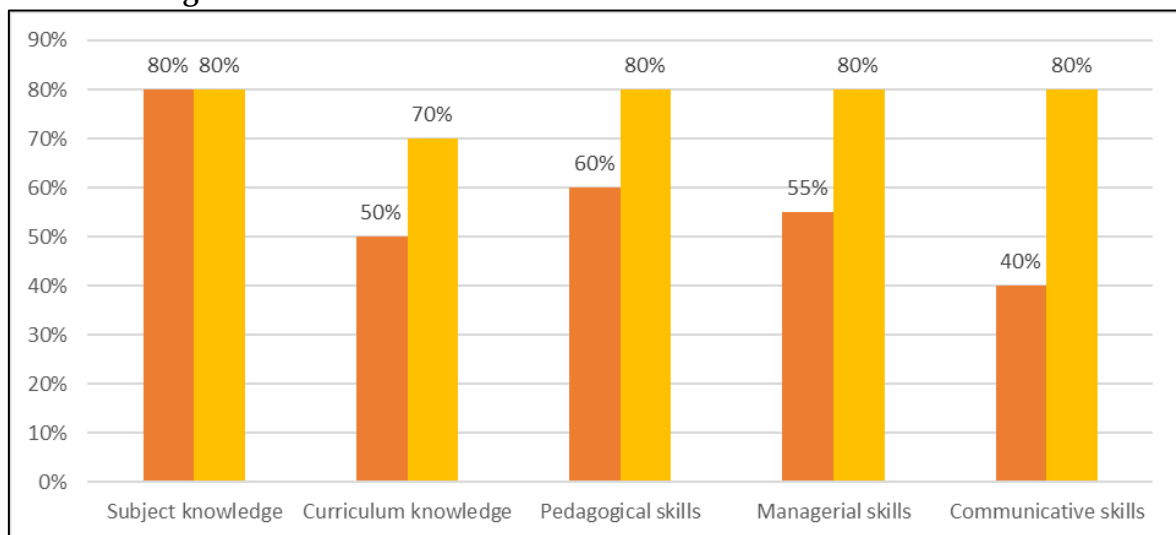
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student Outcome Pre-test	102	49.68	14.081
Teachers' Professional S-Pre-test	102	14.35	.852
Student Outcome Post-test	102	50.58	13.538
Teachers' Professional S-Post-test	102	19.60	.493
Valid N (listwise)	102		

There was a statistically significant increase in TPS scores pretest  $M = 14.35$ , posttest  $M = 19.60$ , SOs scores pretest  $M = 49.68$ , posttest  $M = 50.58$ .

Table 2 shows that the mean score of student outcome before intervention was 49.68 and after the intervention, it is 50.58. there is an improvement in the mean score of student outcome by 0.9, while the professional skills of the teachers' mean score have been increased by 5.25. it is statistically proven that teachers' professional skills influence student outcomes positively.

At the pretest of the professional skills of the teachers of English, it was revealed that, the subject knowledge of the teachers was very good and it was 80%. Their knowledge of English and pronunciation skill was very good, but the knowledge of the curriculum was not enough to help the students to achieve higher. At the pretest, it was revealed that the teachers' knowledge of competencies and competency levels related to the English language to be achieved by the students was not adequate to help the students. It was 50%. After providing training, in the teaching-learning process, the researcher was able to see the difference, which was increased up to 70% which was very effective.

**Figure 1:** Teachers' Professional Skills Before and After Intervention



The pedagogical skills of the teachers at the learning teaching process were another important dimension that come under teachers' professional skills. In this research, at the pretest, it was revealed that the teachers' awareness of using multi-level

tasks that suit the level of students was very poor. Most of the time they used the same activity for the whole class without considering the students at different levels.

Most of the teachers were unaware of using simple to complex activities which help the students to achieve particular competency, and the common activity they use was treated as a technique of assessing the student, and a remedial action which is essential, was not taken to help the students who couldn't achieve the target. Before providing training, their pedagogical skill was 60%, but after training the teachers' teaching methodology has been improved drastically, and it was 80% effective.

Managerial skills of the teacher are another important aspect of teachers' professional skills. That is the ability to manage the physical resources as well as the human resources of the classroom. When the teacher does not consider the levels of comprehension of students, when the students are unable to achieve the expected targets, students become demotivated to learn the lesson. As a result of that they become uneasy and uncontrollable (Yoon et al., 2007; Syed Kamal -Ud-Din Shah, 2014; Meyer L., 2018; Harne A., 2017).

On the other hand, if the teacher does not consider the classroom arrangement, seating arrangement, and fringe areas of the classroom, the teacher is unable to get the attention of the students to the lesson he/she is teaching. Before providing training, their managerial skill was 55%, but after training the teachers' managerial skill has been improved drastically, it was 80% effective.

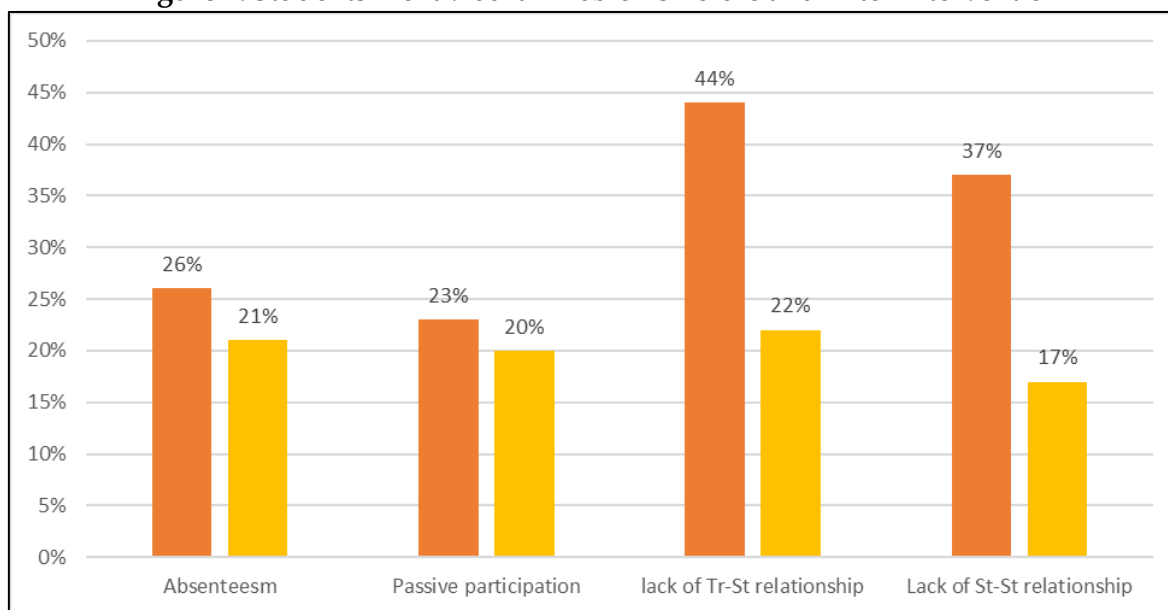
Another important aspect of the teacher's professional skills is teacher communicative skills; the ability to communicate clearly about course objectives, content and instructions according to the level of the students which helps to create a friendly relationship between the teacher and the pupil. If the teacher does not try to understand the nature of students' minds and if the teacher has no friendly approach towards the students and has no friendly rapport between the teacher and the students, students do not reveal or discuss the problems they have with the teacher, the student is demotivated to learn the subject (Yoon et al., 2007; Syed Kamal -Ud-Din Shah, 2014; Meyer L., 2018; Harne A., 2017).

In this study, during the observation process it was revealed that; before providing training, their communicative skill was 40%, but after training the teachers' communicative skill has been improved drastically, it was 80% effective.

Before the intervention, the behavioural problems of the students that are, absenteeism of the students was 26%. After intervention; meaning after providing professional training, it could be seen that absenteeism has decreased from 5%. Passive participation has been decreased by 3% (from 23% to 20%). The lack of teacher-student relationship has been decreased by 22% (from 44% to 22%). The lack of student-student relationship has been decreased by 20% (from 37% to 17%).



**Figure 2: Students' Behavioural Problems Before and After Intervention**

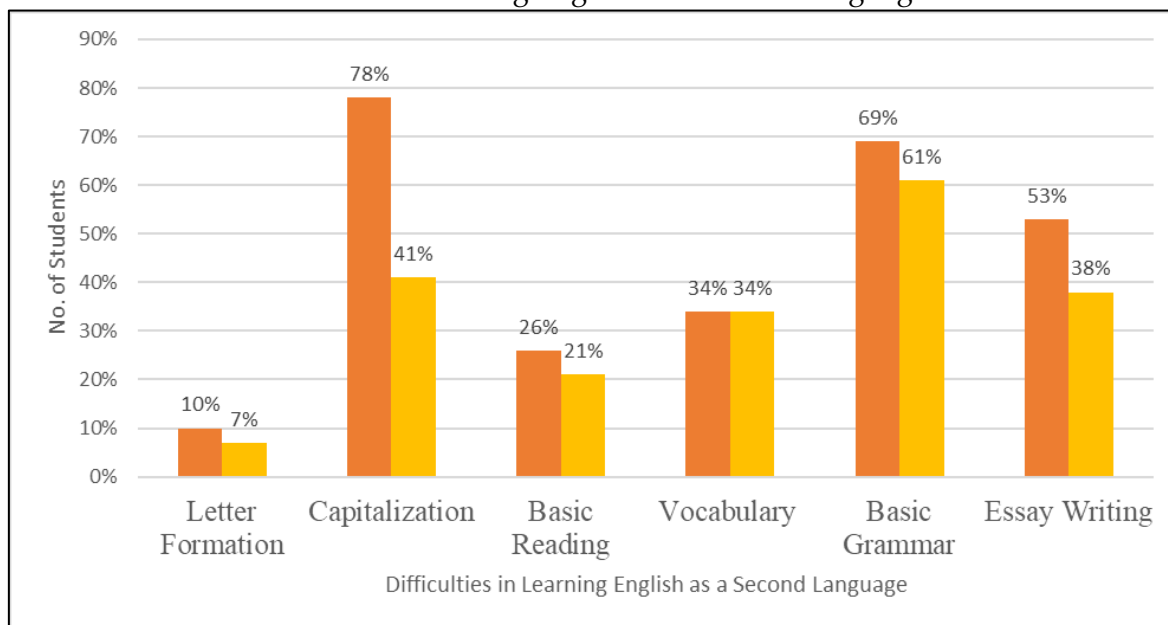


These statistics prove that the professional skills of the teacher influence the students' behaviour considerably. At the first meeting with each group in each school, the researcher was able to collect data related to the difficulties that the students face while learning English as a Second Language.

Out of 102 students in four schools, 10 students were unable to write the letters of the alphabet in English Language properly, 80 students were unable to use capitalization where necessary, 26 students were unable to read the words as they couldn't identify the sounds that each letter represents, 35 students were unable to comprehend the meaning of the new vocabulary as they no practice guess the meaning contextually, 70 students were unable to use the basic knowledge of grammar, 54 students were unable to write even a simple essay on a familiar topic.

After the intervention, it was revealed that the number of students that were unable to write letters decreased from 10% to 7%. Students that were unable to use capitalization where necessary decreased from 78% to 41%. Students that were unable to read the words as they couldn't identify the sounds that each letter represents decreased from 26% to 21%. Students that were unable to comprehend the meaning of the new vocabulary as they have no practice in guessing the meaning contextually has remained the same. The number of students that were unable to use the basic knowledge of grammar has decreased from 69% to 61%. While the number of students in that was unable to write even a simple essay on a familiar topic has decreased from 53% to 38%.

**Figure 3: Difficulties of Grade 11 Students in Nine Schools in Learning English as a Second Language**

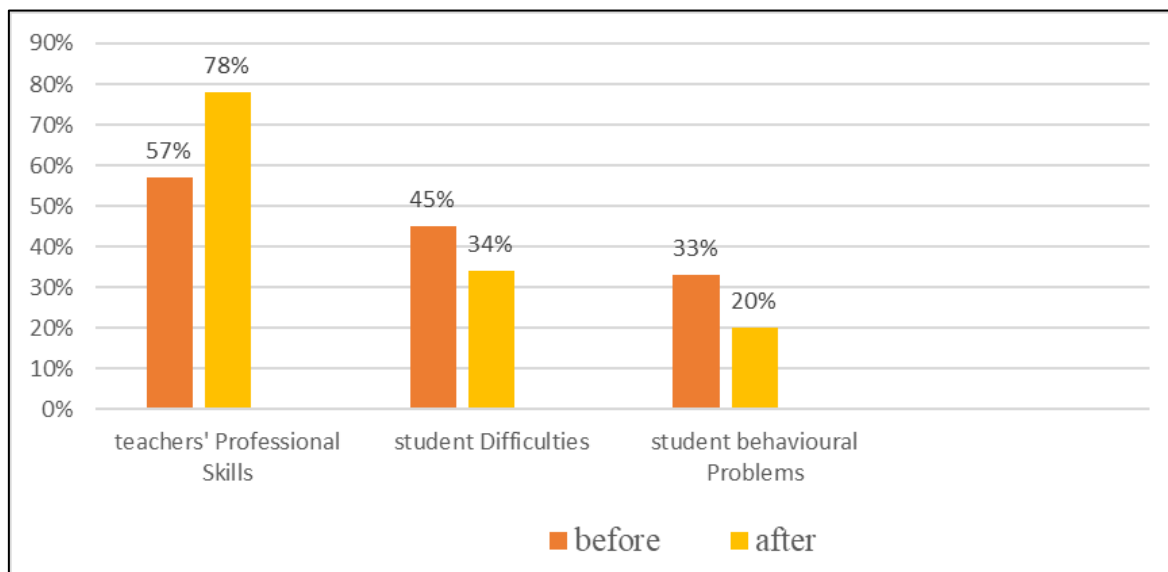


Before intervention teachers were frustrated as some students in each class were troublesome and unable to reach the expected level. Students and teachers couldn't tolerate each other. They didn't have a healthy relationship. They didn't want to listen to each other. But after intervention teachers tried to understand the students' difficulties and created multi-level tasks to support them. As a result of this friendly approach, they began to respect each other and students became confident enough to create a healthy rapport between teachers as well as their peers. Students' aggressive, uncontrollable nature and behaviour changed into self-motivated, friendly, and self-controlled behaviour.

This behavioural change in the classroom has directly influenced the students' academic outcomes. Learning teaching process became enjoyable for both parties to some extent. At the post-test, it was revealed that teachers are competent enough to select appropriate teaching techniques and tasks that help the students to achieve the outcomes related to each competency level and teachers' use of multi-level tasks has created a kind of interest in students to learn the language in an enjoyable manner with confidence. As a result of this self-motivation, students showed a kind of self-discipline instead of aggressive behaviour.

Figure 4 shows that when the teachers' professional skills were increased by 21% after the intervention, difficulties of students and student behavioural problems decreased by 11% and 13% respectively.

**Figure 4: Teachers' Professional Skills, Student Difficulties & Behavioural Problems of Students Before and After Intervention**



## 5. Significance of the Study and Recommendations

These findings will assist Government schools in Sri Lanka to improve student outcomes by improving the teachers' professional skills; subject knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical skills, managerial skills and communicative skills. It is evident that student behavioural problems can be lessened by an effective learning-teaching process.

The information gained through this study will shed some insight into the policymakers, curriculum developers, curriculum implementers, teachers and teacher educators in the field of education. The importance of continuous professional skill development programmes on curriculum, syllabi, learning outcomes, methodology of achieving the objectives and outcomes, knowledge and skill of creating simple to complex multi-activities etc. will be understood and those professional development programmes should be conducted while monitoring the implementation of the curriculum in the schools in Sri Lanka to increase the student outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the professional skills of a teacher are an effective tool that can be used to improve the poor educational outcomes of the public education system of Sri Lanka.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix 1:

For example, some language activities done:

1. Writing capital and simple letters in the Alphabet of English Language – to help them to identify the differences, formation,
2. Using capital letters where necessary- at the beginning of a name of a person, animal, place, the word 'I'- to help them to use capital and simple letters where necessary
3. Sounds of the letters – vowel sounds, consonant sounds – a, e, i, o, u three letter words, four letter words, - to help them to read the words correctly
4. Re writing the sentences using capital letters where necessary - to help them to use capital and simple letters where necessary
5. Listen to a simple text and fill the form using the given words – to improve listening skill – listening comprehension
6. Read the text and fill the form – read and find specific information- reading and writing skills
7. Prepare a form and complete with their information – form filling
8. Practice asking questions on personal information - speaking - like a game
9. Prepare a form and fill with friend's information – using the language – speaking, listening, reading and writing skills
10. Writing on 'Myself' using the model given. – parallel writing
11. Give a speech on 'Myself'.
12. Writing about 'My Best Friend' using the model given. – parallel writing
13. Give a speech on 'My Best Friend'.
14. Comprehension questions on 'Vandalism' – Unit 1 – lesson 1- Grade 11- Reading and writing – group work – answers in complete sentences. Ask them to find words they can understand and create their own definition for vandalism.
  - i. What is vandalism?
  - ii. What are the two levels of vandalism?
  - iii. Explain each level with examples.
  - iv. What are the reasons for vandalism?
  - v. What are the bad effects of vandalism?
  - vi. How can we stop vandalism?
15. Write the answers on the board by the students in each group. Discuss the answers with the other groups and do the needed corrections by the students on the board.
16. They do the corrections in their writing books.
17. Students practice asking and answering the questions orally in groups. They help each other speaking
18. They make a circle. Pass the ball and ask and answer the questions by each. They help each other when needed.
19. They write an essay on 'Vandalism' using the answers.



## Appendix 4

**Table 2: Operational Definitions of the Variables in this Study**

Variable	Operational Definition	Items of the Questionnaire / Observation Sheet	Source & Scale
(SOs–Affective Domain)	Affective Domain of the students - Student Behavioural Outcome	1. Absenteeism - No. of students of each class (irregular participation) 2. Passive participation 3. Lack of Teacher Student Relationship 4. Lack of Student - Student Relationship (Participatory Observation)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) No. of students of each class
Student Cognitive Domain	Students' Academic Outcomes	1. Letter Formation 2. Capitalization 3. Basic Reading 4. Vocabulary Comprehension 5. Basic Grammar 6. Essay Writing  (Active Participatory Observation and interviewing)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) No. of students of each class with these each difficulty
Teacher's Subject knowledge (TPS)i	Competencies related to sounds of English language, mechanics of writing, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary and Grammar	Ability of using English as a Second Language  (Passive Participatory Observation)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) 5-point Likert Scale
Curriculum Knowledge (TPS)ii	Understanding of Competencies, Competency Levels Learning outcomes essential and desired level to be achieved by the students in English Language.	1. Knowledge on basic competencies to be achieved by students 2. Knowledge on learning outcomes (Passive Participatory Observation and interviewing)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) 5-point Likert Scale
Pedagogical Skills (TPS)	Knowledge and skills of using the methodology of TESL (Teaching English as a second language) in the learning teaching process; teaching techniques, teaching aids, and assessment procedure	1. Using multi-level activities (simple to complex) 2. Assessment – more formative & feedback & summative	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) 5-point Likert Scale

		(Passive Participatory Observation)	
Managerial Skills (TPS)	Management of physical and human resources of the classroom	1. Physical resources (classroom environment-classroom arrangement 2. Human resources (eye contact, Individual Attention (Passive Participatory Observation)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) 5-point Likert Scale
Communicative Skills (TPS)	Communication between teacher and the student in the classroom	Teacher -Student relationship (Passive Participatory Observation)	(Adapted from Syed Kamal – Ud- Din Shah 2014;) 5-point Likert Scale
Student Academic Outcomes (SOs)	Achievements levels of Competencies related to Reading, Writing, Vocabulary and Grammar	Marks obtained for English Language Grade10 Last Term Test Paper (Pre-Test) & Grade 11 First Term Test Paper (Post Test)	Test Papers prepared at Provincial Level

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