A STUDY OF PERFORMING ARTS UNDERGRADUATES' NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ESL AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL: INSIGHTS FOR SYLLABUS DESIGN

R.M.S.N. Embogama

Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Dance & Drama, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka
sumudu.e@vpa.ac.lk

Abstract - Prior to any revision or redesign of a syllabus, it is crucial to conduct a needs analysis in order to gather the expected requirements of a course. The objective of the research was to investigate the needs and perceptions of a group of dance and drama students as ESL learners of a tertiary-level English language programme. The research focused on the students' language learning requirements, their motivation to learn the L2, their preference for learning different language skills and tasks, perceptions about the existing English program, and preferred learning styles. Using the purposive sampling technique, data were gathered through a survey-type questionnaire. The research comprised a sample of 215 performing arts undergraduates majoring in either dance or drama at a Sri Lankan state university. The research findings revealed that these students need to learn English primarily for purposes of verbal communication. They preferred to learn by doing presentations in English and also indicated their willingness to adopt computer-assisted language learning to develop ESL proficiency as autonomous learners. The majority expressed their satisfaction with the existing English programme although some were of the view that it should be more speech-oriented. The overall research results indicated that the students preferred an activity-based curriculum that focused more on developing their English-speaking skills. Moreover, it showed that the respondents were highly motivated and aware of the importance of developing their English language skills to function in their general and academic contexts.

Keywords: ESL curriculum; language learning needs; performing arts undergraduates; syllabus design