CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1. Prelude

"Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground."

- Noah Webster

English in Sri Lanka is usually discussed under the twin rubrics, teaching English and the status of English. The first is compact with the whole argument about the failure of teaching English in Sri Lanka and related issues encompassing causative factors and remedial measures. The second aspect covers the varieties of English including the popular standard, non-standard nomenclature and its equally famous debate. Both aspects have been clearly demarcated, cleverly articulated, skillfully argued yet the fact remains that teaching English is unsuccessful and that non-standard varieties exist notwithstanding less tolerance. However, there are instances where the aforementioned two aspects have been presented together as non-standard English comes into being due to bad teaching. This study has been designed to deal with a segment of the first aspect, the undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka. An attempt has been made to widen the scope of it encompassing the aspects that are connected to the larger picture of language issues in the country. This is with the assumption that the potential root causes for the failures lie far behind the arena of teaching English as a second language.

In spite of having studied English for nearly 10 years during their school career and being the best groups in their generation to have passed the highly competitive university entrance examination, undergraduates face difficulties in achieving the English language proficiency demanded upon them by the employment sector. The
end-result of teaching English to students throughout their academic life, commencing from school and culminating in university has so far resulted in failure. As per the authorities of education and popular notions in the society, the problem of graduate unemployment in Sri Lanka is due to graduates’ high level of unemployability because of their inefficiency in two main areas: English language proficiency and vocational skills. It is well justified if one expects that university English language teachers\textsuperscript{1} with their degrees in English and a plethora of professional expertise would certainly be able to produce better results with students of the creamy layer. With best groups to teach and best groups to learn, one would also expect the mechanisms used for teaching English that failed with different ability groups in schools with teachers on whom allegations have been made as being unable to master English\textsuperscript{2} would work well in the university set up. Quite disappointingly, it is similar to that of the school system if not worse. The answers to how and why questions are generally known, scientifically and empirically proven: The potential answers are either teaching methods or materials in use or both. From outside, it is the environment that is not conducive to learning English which includes home background as well. Over the years, we seem to have not gone beyond these aspects in proving the deficiencies of teaching English to students from all walks of life. Couldn’t there be reasons beyond these ostensibly correct causes?

With the aforementioned as the milieu, the two chief reasons that led to the pursuit of this study should be mentioned here. The first reason originated from the experience of teaching English first in school and later in the university with the subsequent comparisons that emerged from the two domains. The divergences of the two contexts in the viewpoint of a teacher surfaced and questioned the status

\textsuperscript{1} Throughout this study, both lecturers in English language and instructors in English who engage in university English language teaching are referred to as teachers as a general term and in some instances as university English language teachers.

\textsuperscript{2} The Ministry of education recruited teachers those with G.C.E. (Advanced Level) and even those with G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) qualifications in English....The paper in English language at the G.C.E. (O.L.) for the last ten years has been set at such a low level that candidates can pass it without being able to speak or write connected English...the need for qualified teachers of English poses very acute problems (Goonatilleke, 1981).
The second reason was the urge to do away with the panacea of blaming the past (school ELT) for its failures, and to situate and examine the university ELT as an independent entity. This may seem unrealistic and illogical. Yet a flame of hope kindled as countries such as China and Russia proved foreign students who were capable of reaching the level to follow a degree programme were also capable of 'picking' languages that were required for cognitively demanding endeavours. In regard to the first reason, the views elaborating the areas of incongruence between the two contexts namely, school education and university education are put forth in terms of teacher characteristics and responsibility in order for situating undergraduate ELT as an independent discourse. The second reason that triggered this study determined the focus for scrutiny, which will be set forth subsequently.

The comparison between the teachers in the two contexts in terms of responsibilities and professional training brings out a number of differences: In school education, the professional qualification often referred to as the 'training', which is a must for a school teacher of English in the present Sri Lanka. An average teacher of English, prior to the appointment, is given professional training with two years of course work in Colleges of Education and one year of practice teaching in schools. In the case of teachers being absorbed into the profession without such pre-service training, (which used to be in practice till about the first couple of years of the 21st century) teachers were motivated to obtain the 'training' as non-trained teachers were not considered 'professional'. In addition, the salary increment for a trained teacher was considerably larger than that for a non-trained teacher and this too acted as an incentive. The average teacher of English today gets the opportunity to participate in in-service teacher training programmes which helps empower him/her with current trends in the profession. This may involve some monetary incentive as well. A duty leave is granted and a certificate is given for participation. In the event of assignment as the 'English teacher' to a particular grade/class, he/she is provided with course books, teacher's guides and a time table. In addition, the amount of syllabus content that has to be furnished is pre-determined.
and teachers simply have to 'cover' the syllabus. An instructor of zonal/provincial level supervises teacher performance in class. A reader may not be misled that such a scenario is nearly perfect. There are discrepancies in this system, despite such logistics being implemented. However, an average school teacher's (English) responsibility is largely limited to teaching and paper marking and the rest is shared by personnel at different levels of the strata of the school education system.

In the undergraduate English language teaching, the picture is different. Teachers are involved in every aspect pertinent to the discourse of English language teaching. There is considerable freedom in terms of many aspects from dress code to paper marking, a freedom shared by the university ELT community with a considerably collective agreement. Nascent to the university profession, one would observe teachers themselves getting together and designing and modifying lesson materials; a senior teacher being titled as 'level coordinator' briefing his/her colleagues; teachers themselves setting papers and discussing the marking band; the same teachers carrying lesson materials to the class, distributing among the students and teaching. Later years to come, the 'no longer novices' would too involve in most of the above activities. Mandatory teacher training prior or after the appointment is not a prerequisite. In-service short-term training programmes are not heard of. Conferences are few and far-between without, in most cases, any financial assistance available to enable teachers to attend them. And there are no supervisors to give performance appraisals. In short, a completely different scenario prevails in the university ELT from that of the school system.

With the gravity of the task of teaching English to undergraduates while shouldering all the responsibilities involved in the entire enterprise singlehandedly, university English language teacher one would perceive as a rare species when compared to the school teacher. Unfortunately, all such labour and commitment seem to have not had a special impact on the end-product, the graduate output. Graduates in contemporary Sri Lanka are criticized as being unemployable. As

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1 For instructors in English, who comprise the large segment of the ELT community in universities, teacher training is not mandatory.
stated before, one of the chief causative factors for this unemployability is the lack of English language proficiency. Graduates, predominantly from the Faculty of Arts, are left with a degree certificate, which does not qualify them for modern professions.

With considerable autonomy in planning the curriculum, one would like to explore the reasons for the academia's inability to improve English language teaching standards despite their unrelenting efforts. Before the recent bifurcations of the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU)s from the Departments of English, undergraduate ELT was completely under the authority of the Departments in most of the universities\(^1\). Departments of English in the Sri Lankan universities have highly qualified academic personnel. From the time when ELTUs were under their patronage, and even after obtaining the autonomous status, undergraduate ELT could not change the image of an average graduate as being proficient in English. Helping students to master English within 3-4 years is by no means a simple undertaking with students who come with learning experiences of varying sort. The examples from China and Russia teaching their languages to foreign students within six months to follow programmes that demand high cognitive skills would leave one with a desire to make 'inquiries' as to see the secret behind their success and our failure. Is it the compulsion that makes students left with no choice? Is it the intensity with which those languages are taught? Is it the environment that enhances their learning? Though this study did not attempt to compare or contrast the English language teaching in Sri Lanka with language teaching in the aforementioned countries, the latter led to the development of the main research question. Thus, this study was designed to probe into the matter of undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka with reference to policy, practice and perspectives.

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\(^1\) Only in some universities, E.g. University of Peradeniya, that the ELTUs have been independent with no influence from the Departments of English. In some universities, E.g. University of Kelaniya, the Head of the Department of English has been the Head of the ELTU as well.
1.2. Research question, aims and objectives

What are the policy, general practices and perceptions of undergraduates and university teachers of English in relation to English language teaching in the Sri Lankan universities?

The main thrust areas of this study are given below:

- To reflect on the national and institutional policies in relation to language issues
- To discuss the benchmarks for undergraduate English language teaching and to examine the extent to which the curriculum complies with them
- To reflect on the teaching methods used by teachers of English in universities
- To evaluate the lesson materials used in teaching English to undergraduates
- To reflect on the existing system for student assessment
- To examine the issues related to medium of instruction

Having established the main aims of this study, we wish to list out the related objectives:

* To reflect on the language policy of the country
* To examine the language practices in the universities
* To investigate some of the popular notions of the society in relation to English
* To explore undergraduates’ attitudes towards the English language and the culture it represents
* To examine undergraduates’ perceptions of the content of the syllabus/materials
* To examine undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English language teaching methods in use

* To investigate undergraduates' perceptions of current assessment practices

* To explore undergraduates' views on English medium instruction

* To see the differences of perception of the aforementioned issues between the students of the Faculty of Arts and those of the Faculty of Management.

* To synthesize the contextual differences such as geographical location, age, etc. of universities and their bearing upon student perceptions.

* To examine the nature of training university teachers of English as course designers possess in making lesson materials

* To reflect on the theories university teachers adhere to in teaching English.

* To investigate the teachers' awareness of the language policy of the country and university language practices

* To examine teachers' views on the current assessment practices.

* To synthesize the differences of perception of the aforementioned issues between the teachers of the Faculty of Arts and those of the Faculty of Management.

* To investigate whether core-subjects have a bearing upon English language teaching and learning

1.3. The relation between experimental design and the problem

A variety of data-gathering procedures and a number of sources are required to get a realistic picture of the status of undergraduate English language teaching in the country. Interviews, questionnaires, legal documents, etc. have been designed as tools to procure data. The study is to deal with three aspects. In so doing, it was
hoped that examining the existing situation of the undergraduate English language teaching would accrue credibility: Firstly, from the policy angle, the study sought to examine the provisions given and the restrictions imposed by the State policy for language issues in the country in general and in the universities in particular. In addition to this, the study aimed at exploring the areas where State policy was not active, yet popular notions determined the use of languages. This may happen without having clashes between the above two, namely State-controlled policy and community-controlled practice. Yet, there could be areas where the above two collide. There is a need to find out the reasons for the large-scale societal demand to study English and the inability of the graduate output to meet the expectations of the employment sector. This may be the result of the belief that controversies exist between governmental policy and societal needs. At the same time, the study aimed at seeking the kind and the degree of freedom universities as autonomous bodies enjoyed and the stance the university administration took in relation to language issues: What was the influence that flowed from the top strata? How were the decisions arrived at in deciding language practices in universities?

Secondly, the viewpoints of the university English language teachers were deemed vital for the study. This is due to two main reasons: (a) The university teacher is the prime agent of curriculum development. They are the main contributors to the undergraduate English language programmes. (b) Teachers are aware of the fact that educational reality is different from what has been planned and what takes place in the classroom. The notion that planning equals teaching and that teaching equals learning is naïve (Nunan, 1988). The study sought to find out how teachers viewed the discrepancy between what they planned and what they taught. Moreover, it was apt to know how they perceived and responded to the responsibilities that were on their shoulders as course planners, materials preparators and evaluators. Having to face the dual impact of being the course planners as well as teachers of the same programme necessitate reflection upon their task in the backdrop of graduate inefficiency in English language. The study took interest in discerning the teachers’ views in terms of this duality.
Thirdly, the goods are to be delivered to the needy. How would students receive what has been planned and taught? Research show that students' as recipients do not necessarily learn what is taught (Allwright, 1986). It would not mean that they do not learn anything and that teaching is wasted. As was mentioned previously, the criticism against graduates as unemployable and English being one of the main reasons, it was of paramount importance to know the causes for the failures. Is it the unsuccessful delivery of what has been planned? Or is it the deficiencies in planning that made no impact even with efficient teaching? Or are the failures due to the drawbacks in both? The answers for the aforementioned from students' view point deemed necessary.

A reader may find this research as diagnostic, exploratory and descriptive. With the intention of examining the status quo of the English language teaching in the Sri Lankan universities, at some points the attempt was to find out the prevalent situation. In some instances, the effort was to dig and delve deep into certain areas to find out the causative factors. Descriptive analyses have been provided for certain areas for better understanding of the situation. Through this study no attempt has been taken to find solutions to the diagnosed problems. Based on the findings, the study sought to point out areas that lack strength and the scope for future research pertinent to the undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka in particular and to address issues pertinent to the ELT in Sri Lanka in general.

This study is problem-oriented than theory-oriented. The discussion is based on a pragmatic viewpoint acquired from the perceptions of those who are involved in the discourse. There is no a particular over-arching theory available in the ELT discourse to encompass the three main areas under scrutiny namely, policy, practice and perspectives that are applicable to undergraduate ELT. Theories have been used to describe various aspects of ELT as and when required without having clashes in terms of their ideologies.
1.4. The organization of the study

The remainder of this chapter briefly touches upon English in Sri Lanka and discusses in detail the three universities that have been selected for the study in terms of their characteristics such as age, geographical location, culture and sub-culture, etc to justify the selection of them for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study: It includes current theoretical perspectives on Communicative language teaching; theoretical assumptions behind teacher training; the theoretical basis that had gone into the planning of the undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka in the past; the recent local research and other aspects such as learner needs and perceptions, lesson materials, student assessment, motivation, English and culture, etc, that are related to English language teaching. Chapter 3 discusses the policy aspect of language and language teaching. It entails a description of the language policy of the country and its implications, standard language practices in the universities and some of the popular notions of graduates' English language proficiency and graduate unemployment problem. Chapter 4 examines the students' perceptions of the current undergraduate English language programme. The information pertaining to the expectations, affective needs and attitudes of students are used to find out the extent to which the existing English language programme has been able to fulfill them. Chapter 5 deals with teachers' perspectives of the programme. It entails teachers' views on student performance, teaching, assessment practices, medium of instruction and language policy of the country and that of universities. Chapter 6 brings together the above three chapters that run on parallel lines and attempts to weave the aforementioned three aspects together. Further, it examines the significance of the outcome to undergraduate English language teaching in particular and English language teaching in the country in general.
1.5. English in Sri Lanka, a brief note

History of English in Sri Lanka has been discussed by many scholars in detail. The forthcoming chapters describe English in Sri Lanka with reference to past and contemporary times at length as such discussions are pivotal to the aspects that are dealt with in each chapter. In view of avoiding repetition, therefore, what is put forth here is a brief account of the history of English in the country with reference to major twists and turns that took place in the Sri Lankan history. The first encounter that Sri Lankans had with the English language was when the British merchants came to Sri Lanka in 1600s. In 1681, Robert Knox documented about the Sri Lankans and their life-style for the first time in English. In 1796, British took control over the Dutch in Sri Lanka. In 1815 Sri Lanka became a British colony. In 1948, Sri Lanka gained independence from the British. Till the Swabhasha policy was introduced in 1956, English was the only official language of the country. During the colonial period, and after 1948 till 1956, English was the language of administration in the higher echelons of the administrative hierarchy. In 1987, with the 13th amendment to the constitution, both Sinhala and Tamil were equalized in terms of status as the national and official languages of the country while English was made the link language. From 1956 till date English has been taught as a subject in schools.

1.6. English language teaching in Sri Lankan universities

Some key events that took place in relation to English language teaching in universities are described below:

- 1960s Sub-Department of English (language) was established at the University of Peradeniya.
- 1970s University Grants Commission (UGC) was established.
- 1980s UGC Standing Committee on English was appointed.
Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and MA in ELT at the University of Colombo started.

- **1990s** MA at the Colombo University was abandoned due to lack of staff.
  Very little inter-university collaboration
  Status of ELT teachers was debated.

- **2000** Resolution of ELT Teacher status.
  Benchmarks for University English Language Teaching created.

MA in TESL at Open University started.

In the 1960s, the Sub-Departments of English (language) at the University of Peradeniya commenced. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in the 1970s. Subsequently, the UGC Standing Committee on English was appointed. During the same decade, Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and MA in English Language Teaching was commenced in the University of Colombo. Unfortunately, the next decade, i.e. the 1990s, the MA programme had to be abandoned due to lack of staff. There was very little inter-university collaboration prevailed during this period. The status of the ELT teachers in the universities was debated. However, with the turn of the century, considerable efforts have been made to develop ELTUs, previously known as Sub-Departments, especially with their newly gained autonomy owing to recent bifurcations of English Departments. For instance, a number of projects have been started and benchmarks for University ELT have been decided upon. As specialists in the field recognize, the ELTUs in universities have challenges to face: developing professionalism in all aspects pertaining to work, defining content in Sri Lankan terms, recognizing and responding to contemporary modes of communication i.e. making pedagogical strategies for ELT in universities and creating awareness about the aspirations of the learners (Raheem, 2006).
In the light of the above, and with the new policies being introduced to make English the medium of instruction in the education system, and with the awareness that there are challenges to face, it is our understanding that the analysis of the existing curricula and pedagogical strategies in relation to ELT in the Sri Lankan university system is of prime importance for improving the undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka. The remainder of this section is on the three universities selected for the research and the rationale for selecting them.

1.7. The selected universities for the study

For this study, we have selected students from six groups in three universities: University of Colombo, University of Jaffna and the Sabaragamuwa University. The six groups consist of the following:

The University of Colombo;

1. Faculty of Arts

2. Faculty of Management & Finance

The University of Jaffna;

1. Faculty of Arts

2. Faculty of Commerce & Management

Sabaragamuwa University;

1. Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages

2. Faculty of Management Studies

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1 In this analysis, Faculty of Management & Finance of the University of Colombo and the other two Faculties of Management in both University of Jaffna and Sabaragamuwa University have been referred to as Faculty of Management as a common term for easy reference considering the similarity of subject streams offered in the Faculties of the three universities.

2 In this analysis, Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages has been referred to as Faculty of Arts as a common term for easy reference considering the similarity of subject streams offered in the Faculties of the three universities.
Currently most of the Faculties of Management in the Sri Lankan universities have English medium instruction. Their programmes have a career-bent in them. In contrast, the Faculties of Arts in most universities have predominantly mother tongue instruction. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages (referred to in this study as Faculty of Arts) of the Sabaragamuwa University conducts lectures in the medium of English with additional support of Sinhala when required. Most of the subjects that are taught in the Faculties of Arts do not have an overt career-bent in them. Therefore, it was our intention to find out whether the medium of instruction or main subject streams would have any bearing upon undergraduates’ opinions and teachers’ views in regard to various aspects pertaining to English language teaching.

In the University of Colombo, the English language teaching programme is designed to group students according to their English language proficiency at the placement test upon their entrance to the university. Those who are weaker are absorbed into the English Language Proficiency Course which has levels I to III with the weakest placed in level I. Students with higher marks are placed in the Certificate Course which has two levels in it, namely Certificate Course Part I and Part II (equivalent to level IV & V respectively). The English language course is non-credited. Attendance is not compulsory for the undergraduates. Those who study in the first year gain five marks for 80% or more attendance. The only requisite is that students have to pass the level they have been initially absorbed into, in order to obtain the Degree certificate.

In the University of Jaffna, students are grouped according to a system similar to that of the University of Colombo. The English language programme is credited (one credit is allotted) for the first year students only. For all the others it is non-credited but the undergraduates have to pass all three- or four-year English papers in order to get the Degree certificate.

In the Sabaragamuwa University, the students of the Faculty of Arts are grouped according the proficiency level at the placement test at the entry point (similar to
the procedure of the other two universities). The course is non-credited. In the Faculty of Management, the English language teaching has been incorporated into the Business Communication course and therefore, it is a credited course.

In the following section, a description of the three universities are given in terms of their establishment, missions and visions, contextual features such as age, geographical location, sub culture, student population, etc.

The University of Colombo

Establishment

The University of Colombo, the first university college in Sri Lanka, is a well established institution located in the heart of the island's de facto capital and commercial capital, Colombo. Being the oldest campus in Sri Lanka, the University of Colombo is a sprawling complex occupying over fifty acres of prime land in the heart of the city;

The history of Higher Education in Sri Lanka is closely linked with that of the University of Colombo which traces its beginnings to the establishment of the Ceylon Medical School...in June 1870. In 1880 the School was raised to the status of College permitting it to award the Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMS) and in 1889 the College was recognised by the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom when holders of its license became eligible to practice in Great Britain.

The University of Colombo has six Faculties all of which have English medium instruction apart from the Faculty of Arts. The Faculty of Arts is currently at a transition stage with some Departments having English medium instruction as an

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option and others considering about the medium of instruction while students are given the option only to sit examinations in the medium of English but without English medium lectures for some subjects.

The making of the University of Colombo has been influenced by eminent scholars at the time:

The academic re-organization of the new University was largely based on these recommendations made by Professor Thistlethwaite to the NCHE (Sessional Paper XXVI of 1967)... The academic structure of the University of Colombo proposed in the Thistlethwait report has been modified, but in planning and developing its curricula the University of Colombo continues to follow his wise exhortation that "Colombo should capitalise its position as the University in the heart of the country's metropolis. It should draw strength from and contribute to the characteristic activities of the capital city; government, and administration, diplomacy and international relations, law, finance, trade, commerce and communications. It should specialise in the education of recruits for these occupations; and it should draw upon specialists from these occupations for expert part-time teaching ....." and to maintain its position as the "metropolitan University, modern and international in outlook and character". Colombo endeavours to meet this challenge

Vision and Mission

Vision

The University of Colombo, as a metropolitan national University with historic links to the First University College, strives to be a centre of excellence of regional and international repute, that will create new knowledge and sustain a culture of learning and critical inquiry, and foster a

1 http://www.cmb.ac.lk/ retrieved on 10.03.2008
spirit of service and commitment to national development and democratic values in a plural society. (University of Colombo Handbook, 2007)

**Mission**

To be a centre of excellence in teaching and research, with commitment to producing men and women of high ethical standards and social responsibility who are capable of creative, analytical and independent thinking, and facilitate the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and contribute to national development through partnerships between staff, students and relevant sectors of society. (University of Colombo Handbook, 2007)

**Geographical location**

University of Colombo, being a metropolitan university is constantly influenced by the urban culture. Its six Faculties are situated in three locations in Colombo.

**University of Jaffna**

**Establishment**

Established on 01 August 1974 as the sixth campus of Sri Lanka, it received the autonomous status as The University of Jaffna on 01 January 1979. According to the website of the university, a full fledged university has been a long felt need by the people of Jaffna:

The establishment of a full fledged University in Jaffna had been a long standing aspiration of the people of Jaffna. This was fulfilled when a campus of the University of Srilanka was established in 1974 by an order made by the Honourable Minister of Education.

With the implementation of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, and by Gazette notification dated December 22, 1978, the Jaffna Campus became
an independent and autonomous University with the name University of Jaffna with effect from January 01, 1979.¹

Initially, the campus had been limited to thirty acres of the then Parameshwar College founded by the veteran philanthropist, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and consisted of three Faculties by the time it gained its independent status in 1979. A brief account of the history of the university till 1979 is given below (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: A brief account of the history of the University of Jaffna

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>The Faculty of Humanities was renamed the Faculty of Arts and the number of Departments increased to ten.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1975</td>
<td>Faculty of Science commenced offering courses in Biological and Physical Sciences with five Department of study, namely Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics and Statistics, Physics and Zoology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 December 1975</td>
<td>The administration of the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts was brought under the administration of the Jaffna Campus and started functioning as a unit under the Department of Fine Arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1978</td>
<td>Faculty of Science was shifted to Thirunelvely premises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 August 1978</td>
<td>Faculty of Medicine was established at Kaithady in the building of the Ayurvedic Hospital Kaithady. Jaffna General Hospital was elevated as a Teaching Hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 January 1979</td>
<td>The Jaffna Campus became an independent and Autonomous University bearing the name University of Jaffna.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: website, *The University of Jaffna*²

¹ [http://www.jfn.ac.lk/](http://www.jfn.ac.lk/) retrieved on 11.03.2008
² [http://www.jfn.ac.lk/](http://www.jfn.ac.lk/) retrieved on 11.03.2008
Vision and Mission

Vision

Our vision is to be a leading centre of excellence in teaching, learning, research and scholarship.¹

Mission

Our mission is to be a leading centre of academic excellence in producing intellectual, professionally competent and capable graduates by providing quality teaching, learning, and carrying out research to meet the emerging needs of the national and international community with special emphasis on the social, economical and cultural needs of Northern Sri Lanka.²

Geographical location

The University of Jaffna is situated in Thirunelvely, about 4km away from the Jaffna town. From a small beginning in the thirty-acre campus of the then Parameswara College premises, the university has grown enormously and is today the home of eight Faculties with fifty seven academic departments, several service/academic/support units and centers and a campus at Vavuniya, about 130 km from Jaffna. In addition, a few more Faculties, Departments and Centres are scheduled for development and will, in time, further open the university's door to the public and increase its role, responsibilities and commitments to the region around it.

Sabaragamuwa University

Establishment

Sabaragamuwa University had been promoted from Affiliated University status to the National level and is a newly established (7th November 1995) regional

¹ http://www.jfn.ac.lk/ retrieved on 12.03.2008
² http://www.jfn.ac.lk/ retrieved on 12.03.2008
university located in a small suburban town. This university has five Faculties all of which have English medium instruction.

The affiliated Universities in Sri Lanka were a new concept for the country at that time. The primary objective behind introducing such a facility to the Island had been to give a chance in higher education for students in the periphery with no opportunity to enter mainstream Universities. It was also meant to provide the less privileged people and institutions in distant corners of the country with higher education, thereby making the contribution made by them to national development.

The Affiliated University Colleges (AUC) were established with the intention of giving an option to the students who could not enter the mainstream universities by failing in 2-3 marks at the Advanced level examination to either (a) seek employment with the university diploma or (b) seek further education immediately after the diploma up to a degree and later even for higher qualifications (Wijesekara, 2000, p.5). But this failed and as a result, the AUC were built up to full fledged universities. Yet the basic concept of providing job-oriented courses has been adhered to. Recently the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages has introduced Sinhala medium instruction only for the students in the second year (in the first year English medium instruction is compulsory) as an option for the students who find it difficult to cope with the English medium instruction.

**Vision and Mission**

**Vision**

To be an Internationally Acclaimed Centre of Excellence in Higher Learning and Research producing Dynamic Managers, Leaders and Nation Builders to guide the destiny of Sri Lanka.²

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¹ http://www.sab.ac.lk/index.htm retrieved on 28.2.2008
² Sabragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, at a glance, 2006
Mission

Our Mission is to search for and disseminate knowledge, promote learning, research and training to produce men and women proficient in their respective disciplines possessing practical skills and positive attitudes enabling to contribute towards sustainable development of the country.

The Sabaragamuwa University still caters to one of the initial objectives of the establishment of its kind according to the Corporate Plan (1992-1996) as one of the Affiliated University Colleges (AUC) at its inception, i.e. to increase professionalisation and vocationalisation of university education. The AUCs were envisaged to differ from the conventional universities mainly in the following respects: (a) They should first cater to the needs of the provinces in which they are located, (b) They should increasingly utilize the human and material resources available locally, (c) They confine mainly to vocationalized and professionalized courses with relatively large scope for self employment (Indraratne, 1995, p.16). A number of courses adhere to the first, i.e. cater to the needs of the provinces including English for Public Servants, Post-Graduate Diploma in Ayurvedic Management, Certificate Course for School Leavers, etc. To meet the third objective, the university has initiated the first Food and Technology Course and the Surveying Science Programme in the Sri Lankan universities. So far, it is the only university that offers a degree in Surveying Science in Sri Lanka.

Geographical location

The Sabaragamuwa University is situated in 165km away from Colombo, in a village called Belihul Oya. It is about 50 - 60km away from Ratnapura, the main city of the Sabaragamuwa Province and it is considered to be situated in a remote area. The locale is the Samanala weva reservoir project, which aimed at developing the rural area by providing the water required for farming.

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1 Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, at a glance, 2006
2 In Sri Lanka, in the context of education, remote area refers to an area where educational facilities and other education-related infrastructure are assumed to be comparatively less than those of urban areas.
1.8. The issue of university culture

A sociological perspective of culture is that "the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, productions, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In regard to university culture, which is a sub-culture within the main culture of a society, how does the above definition fit in? University is an entity, which is collective and which mutually shapes patterns of norms, values, etc. that are specific to that university. One can observe two main constituents affecting university culture: the faculty members and the geographical locale of the university.

Depending on the kind of the faculty, which is shaped by the cultures of the (a) disciplines, (b) employing university or college, (c) national system and (d) scholarly profession (Austin, 1998), a university shapes a sub-culture, which may be specific to it, which in turn affects the student community at large. According to the World Bank sources, teacher-student ratio in public universities in Sri Lanka is 5:20. However, urban, well-established universities tend to have more faculty members than the regional universities resulting in faculty cultures and institutional cultures getting affected. This in turn has an influence on the student community. Geographical locale of the university influences the university culture by expanding or restricting the scope of the intellectual activities with the availability or non-availability of informal cultural and intellectual activities from outside.

The University of Colombo is constantly influenced by the urban culture. It is affected by the city which is the intellectual hub as well as the centre of popular culture. The 'next-door neighbours' of the university are the Sri Lanka National Archives and the Sri Lanka Library Services and Documentation Board which are only 0.5km away. Being a non-residential university, it has all the characteristics of a body that is subject to constant change with members bringing elements for change from outside to mould its culture. As a result, the university sub-culture fluctuates constantly maintaining dynamism as its main characteristic. The university population has the advantage of being exposed to the intellectual activities in the
city. To bring forth a couple of examples, the Public Library that is about 1km away from the university has a variety of exhibitions including book, painting, photography, etc and public lectures on its weekly agenda which propagandizes its events constantly. In addition, the Sri Lanka Library Services and Documentation Centre organizes book launches, cultural events and lecture series on contemporary socio-political issues, Literature, Art and Cinema which are often enriched by eminent scholars of universities as well as intellectuals belonging to various fields. The famous Elphinston Theatre and theatres such as Lumbini, Lionel Wendt and John De Silva are renowned for their drama staging and are located within 5km of the university locale. They provide students with a rich cultural and intellectual exposure.

The location of the University affords the student population all the advantages of a "metropolitan university" in easy access to international information/resource centres, libraries, theatres, sports complexes etc.

Generally, Colombo is the first city to embrace what arrives to the country anew that becomes ‘popular’ in the whole country later. This, to our perception is due to its perpetual interactions with the trade and commerce as the commercial city of the country. The majority of the westernized elite in Sri Lanka reside in Colombo, who acts as the mediator between the western world and the local setting. Though the sole exposure to the western way of living does not come through them to the ordinary society today, their life styles act as a catalyst in acculturating the city dwellers to the western ways (popular media, especially the television and films too play a major role in westernizing and indianizing the locals today). As Gunasekara points out:

In universities such as Kelaniya, until the turn of the 21st century, only the English Department women wore trousers; today, many women undergraduates wear trousers, instead of the customary skirt and blouse.

1. [http://www.cmb.ac.lk/](http://www.cmb.ac.lk/) retrieved on 10.03.2008
2. Personal observation
3. University of Kelaniya is located in the outer Colombo, about 5km away from the Colombo municipal area.
This may be symbolic of more gender equality in the student population than before, in addition to westernization. (Gunasekara, 2005, p.23)

In this respect, a community that is perpetually influenced by the outer intellectual and popular cultures inadvertently creates a sub culture that is unique in shape and colour.

The University of Jaffna served as an undisturbed centre for intellectuals for many years till the conflicts began in 1983. With the conflicts, the Tamil educated population who served in the southern part of the island, especially, the academics went back to Jaffna and this had a positive impact on the university in terms of its intellectual workforce. As a result, the university as an academic entity flourished and this state existed till about early 1990s. After this period academic activities declined due to the conflicts erupted with failed negotiations between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This resulted in mass intellectual exodus:

The year 1995 witnessed a mass exodus of population from Jaffna Town and the Valigamam region to Vadamaradchi and Thenmaradchi regions of the peninsula and the mainland. As a result of the exodus the University environs became depopulated and inaccessible. The administration of the University was temporarily shifted to the Agriculture Faculty at Kilinochchi. A sub-office of the administration was established at Chavakachcheri Hindu College. The exodus proved to be a disaster to the university. It lost laboratory and office equipment and furniture worth over one hundred million rupees.

The University recommenced its activities in Jaffna in July 1996. The University is slowly recovering from the traumas of the war after the signing of the MOU.1

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As the sixth oldest university in Sri Lanka, the University of Jaffna could be considered at par with others of its kind in terms of intellectual experiences and properties. Yet, it was exposed to the ethnic strife that hindered its progress.

As an academic entity, the Sabaragamuwa University is alienated from its immediate surrounding which is an agrarian society. There are no theatres, art galleries, "McDonald's or Pizza Huts" as manifestations of the West within about the 60km periphery. The student population has been provided with the minimum requirements of a supportive learning environment within the university premises. It is a residential university with hostels for students and quarters for teachers. Some of the students stay at residences close to the university as boarders. It is their usual habit to go to their own residences during weekends as the university or the surrounding environment does not provide students with cultural events as in the case of an urban area like Colombo. Most students follow professional courses during weekends hence commute to cities, mainly to Colombo.

1.9. Selection criteria/preference and student population in the Sri Lankan universities

Universities as higher educational institutions in Sri Lanka predominantly engage in taught programmes for undergraduates. At the UGC level, the cut-off marks of the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) – G.C.E.(A/L) for the selection for the Faculties of major universities are higher than those of the newly established regional ones (usually this is by two or three marks). Also, there is student preference in terms of selection when they are given the choice. This is probably due to students' general notions of universities and of different Faculties. To bring forth a couple of examples from personal experience, the University of Colombo is considered as having the best Faculty of Medicine in the country whereas the
University of Peradeniya supposedly has the best Faculty of Agriculture. As these are 'generally spoken' standards, and the future undergraduate population is aware of them, such notions invariably tend to influence their preferences. In addition, there is always a preference for older, well established universities.

In terms of student population, the well established, major universities which are situated in urban areas tend to have more students than those located in areas away from main cities. This is not on student preference only, but due to the availability of facilities such as space, staff and other infrastructure.

Table 1.2: The number of undergraduates admitted in the years 2006 and 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>University of Colombo</th>
<th>University of Kelaniya</th>
<th>Sabaragamuwa University</th>
<th>University of Ruhuna</th>
<th>University of Jaffna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UGC website

As the table (Table 1.2) shows, the two older urban universities, Colombo and Kelaniya along with Jaffna have more student population admitted in the Faculty of Arts in the academic years 2006 and 2007 than those of the other two newly established, regional universities (the Sabaragamuwa University and the University of Ruhuna are both regional universities). In the Faculty of Management also the situation is almost similar with the exception of the University of Ruhuna having

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1 As an undergraduate I was aware of such notions but the conclusion has been arrived at upon informal discussions with many undergraduates as well as graduates. I owe an apology if any inconvenience or embarrassment caused to anyone in this regard.

admitted slightly more number of students than the University of Kelaniya in the year 2006, and the University of Jaffna in 2006 and 2007 but not more than the University of Colombo in the given academic years.

1.10. Missions and visions of the selected universities

The mission and vision statements of the three universities that have been selected for the study suggest that they have different goals to achieve through their establishments. Especially the newly established Sabaragamuwa University has prioritized some goals that the older universities have supposedly failed to accomplish over the years, i.e. to empower graduates with vocational/professional skills, to enhance English language competence through medium of instruction, etc.

Therefore, once examined, these three universities would represent a fairly justified cross section of the university establishment in Sri Lanka: While the University of Colombo represents older, established metropolitan universities that attempt to cater to the demands of the changing society within their already laid down policies, visions and missions, the Sabaragamuwa University represents the new, emerging, regional universities which have been established with missions and visions to cater to the changing demands of the society. And the war-turned Sri Lanka still tries hard to utilize its intellectual powers in conflict-affected zones. University of Jaffna, located in the Jaffna peninsula, functions amidst two major challenges: struggling constantly to function as a normal intellectual hub and trying to cater to a small society entrapped in the peninsula as well as to the larger society that keeps changing perpetually.
1.11. Conclusion

The first part of the chapter details out the conception of the research problem and the rationale behind it. It has been triggered by (a) the obvious comparison between school English teachers and university English teachers in terms of their responsibilities. (b) the need to locate undergraduate English language teaching in isolation in order to find causes for the failure of graduates to master the English language. This is followed by the main thrust areas and objectives of the study. Once the relation between the experimental design and the research problem is established, the next part moves on to discuss the organization of the study. The research has been planned to carry out under three main aspects namely policy perspective, students’ perception and teachers’ views. The second half of the chapter starts with a brief account of English in Sri Lanka and English language teaching in the Sri Lankan universities which deals with the historical aspects pertaining to the areas. The subsequent sections describe the three universities that have been selected for this study in terms of their establishment, visions and missions, and other contextual factors such as age and geographical location. Next, the three universities are compared in relation to the issue of culture and sub culture; student selection criteria, student population and student preferences; and the visions and missions of the three universities. The reason behind such a discussion is to show that the three universities that have been selected for the study represent a fair cross section of the university system in Sri Lanka.