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PAPER

The Struggle of Level 1 Undergraduates in Coping with Writing Requirements

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In a technologically driven world, the government, with the consultation of responsible authorities has been adopting numerous methods in improving the English language proficiency of its citizens, especially the undergraduates. Despite its initiatives, it has been observed that the number of Level 1 (Beginner's Level) students has been increasing over the past few years, especially in the Faculties of Arts and Management.

This research was conducted in relation to the writing difficulties of Level 1 students in the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo. Level 1 students were selected since their situation in this Faculty is very serious as the medium of instruction in this Faculty is English. Writing difficulties were selected as worthy of investigation since writing is frequently observed as a difficult skill for any language user. As Richards (1990:100) states, "...learning to write in either a first or second language is one of the most difficult tasks a learner encounters and one that few people can be said to fully master."

In conducting this research a placement test was administered for the first year undergraduates (2011/2012 batch) to identify Level 1 students. The sample was selected through disproportionate stratified random sampling. Their writing difficulties were identified through the answer scripts. Incorporating their difficulties a Remedial English program was designed and conducted. At the end of the course a post test was given. Further, questionnaires were administered to students, subject experts and English teachers.

The post test given at the end of the Remedial English program showed that 88% of students in the selected sample have improved their writing skills. This program benefitted the students with the lowest proficiency level of English. However, there is still a long way for them to go to achieve language fluency. Therefore, throughout their academic career they should be constantly supported and guided in order to empower them with English language proficiency in an environment in which English plays a key role.