# EXPLORING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN ARTS-BASED LEARNING APPROACH TO ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS: A CASE STUDY

P.B.S.L. Pushpakumara [1]

Rashmi Senevirathne [2]

**Corresponding author:**

P.B.S.L. Pushpakumara et al.
sampath@sjp.ac.lk

[1] Department of English Language Teaching and International Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

[2] University of Sri Jayewardenepura

## Abstract

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study explored the university students' perception of an arts-based learning approach to enhancing English language learning among first-year students in a Faculty of Arts at a state university in Sri Lanka. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire, six focused group interviews, and reflective essays. Findings revealed that arts-based learning approaches create a relaxed, low-pressure classroom atmosphere that enhances motivation, reduces anxiety, and encourages active participation. These methods also support the authentic use of language, promote imagination, and cater to diverse learning styles. Students perceive music and drama, the selected arts activities as enjoyable and memorable ways to engage with the language while building cultural empathy and a sense of community. By connecting theory with practice, this study highlights the potential of creative arts in ESL

education and calls for learner-centered, innovative teaching strategies. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in developing more engaging and effective language learning environments.

**Keywords:** arts-based learning approach, English language skills, university students

## Introduction

English language education has long held an important position in Sri Lanka, tracing back to colonial times. The British colonization in the 1830s marked the beginning of formal English language instruction on the island, primarily serving administrative and elite purposes (Liyanage, 2021). Since independence, English has been recognized as a second language and continues to function as a link language among the diverse linguistic communities in the country (Kandiah, 1984). However, despite its official status, English is often perceived and experienced as a foreign language by many Sri Lankan learners, especially those in rural or under-resourced areas.

As shown by the researchers the general education reform of 1997 has provided a new momentum for teaching English in primary schools through the Primary English Language Program which was established under a set of guidelines that supported student-centered learning. It also shows that from grade one to three, the students were introduced to activity – based English (Little et al., 2018). From grade three onwards, English is taught by trained English teachers or English graduates, and the subject remains compulsory up to grade eleven. It is assessed at the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Ordinary Level Examination. Notably, only reading and writing skills are tested at this level, while listening and speaking components are excluded due to infrastructural and logistical constraints (Little et al., 2018).

Following the O/L examination, students who enroll in Advanced Level (A/L) classes study General English, which aims to improve their functional language skills. However, many students due to various reasons, such as lack of motivation, lack of facilities etc. tend to deprioritize it during their A/L period (Abdul Halik & Umashankar, 2022). As a result, a significant gap in English language exposure occurs

during these two years, often leaving students underprepared for English-medium instruction at the tertiary level.

In Sri Lankan universities, different programs are conducted to enhance the English language skills of the students pursuing different disciplines. The Departments of English Language Teaching (DELT) of state universities in Sri Lanka are entrusted with this responsibility.  Although students pursuing STEM subjects in science, technology, engineering and medical faculties and students in the management faculties complete their degrees in the English medium and secure employments, students of the arts, humanities and social sciences faculties mostly follow their degrees in the local languages, Sinhala and Tamil and consequently find it difficult to secure suitable employments (Gunaratne, Ramanayake & Panagoda, 2018). Wickramarachchi (2008 as cited in Ariyawansa, 2008) too claims that by now, most of the degree programs in management streams have widely been modified and the mode of delivery of lectures including conversion of the medium of instruction into English has shown a progress of employability. However, Ariyawansa (2008) and Chandrakumara (2015) argue that graduates who pass out from Sri Lankan state universities, in particular arts and humanities and social sciences faculties, do not have required professional skills such as communication, negotiation, interpersonal, teamwork, analytical and intellectual skills. In response to these empirical findings, some humanities and social sciences faculties of the Sri Lankan university system have introduced bilingual instruction in arts and humanities and social sciences faculties where students can choose either English/ Sinhala or Tamil medium instruction.

**Literature review**

Garner and Alexander (1989) argued that students cannot be evaluated or taught on the basis of assumptions that they all have a similar level of intelligence. Instead, they divided the levels of intelligence into eight categories and identified them as "Multiple Intelligences" (Garner & Alexander, 1989).  Therefore, different pedagogical approaches are needed to enhance the English language skills of the students. Incorporating creative arts in language education has become popular as an effective approach for improving language acquisition. Traditional language

learning approaches frequently place an emphasis on memorization, grammatical accuracy, and repetitive practice; but these approaches may not be engaging enough to foster true language mastery. In contrast, arts-based approaches like visual arts, music, and drama offer an immersive, interactive experience that stimulates students' emotions, passions, and imagination. Through the use of language in relevant, everyday situations, this method promotes students to become more engaged and active participants. Recent studies suggest that arts-based learning can deepen students' connection to the material, make abstract language concepts more tangible, and contribute to greater retention and motivation (Maley & Duff, 2005). As such, integrating the arts is increasingly recognized as an effective complement to traditional teaching methods, especially in fostering communicative competence and cultural understanding.

The use of arts in language education is supported by a number of theoretical frameworks that highlight the variety of ways in which students learn. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1983) posits that people have different types of intelligence, which include Musical, spatial, and kinesthetic intelligences. This theory promotes teaching strategies that cater to different intelligences, making visual arts, music, and drama one of the options for diverse learners. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes authentic communication as the main objective of language learning, encouraging teachers to create real-life scenarios in the classroom, which is frequently accomplished successfully through the art of role-playing and drama (Canale & Swain, 1980). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which holds that experience and reflection are the best ways for students to learn, is another relevant theory. Students can experience language use in real-world contexts through creative arts, which fosters deeper understanding and improves language memory. These ideas offer a solid basis for integrating the arts into language instruction, arguing that they support a deeper connection with the subject matter and accommodate various learning preferences.

## Music and language learning

The use of music and songs in the language classroom is one of the popular approaches that can be used to develop English language skills. There is empirical evidence that incorporation of songs in the English language classroom is beneficial.

For instance, Wahyuni and Hardiyanti (2020) point out that the use of English songs in the ESL classroom has a positive impact on the development of vocabulary. According to Saricoban and Metin (2000), songs can enhance all four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Integrating music, especially songs, can help learners learn the target language naturally and enthusiastically if they enjoy what they do in the classroom. Therefore, incorporating songs in the process of ESL teaching can help teachers improve the language learning and acquisition of their students. Songs are a particularly good way to teach fluency and pronunciation in language classes as rhythmic and melodic elements of music, as argued by Jalongo and Bromley (1984), help learners improve pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary retention while making learning fun and memorable. Jalongo and Bromley (1984) point out that by enabling students to imitate genuine speech rhythms and intonations, which can be difficult in conventional spoken practice, phonetic and rhythmic alignment within songs promotes accurate pronunciation. Thus, music can help children learn the target language by exposing them to the target language sounds and patterns in a structured and repetitive manner. Songs provide a "Musical memory" for the students, making it easier for them to retain language structures. According to Murphy (1992), students can practice the target language without pressure by singing familiar songs, which reduces the cognitive load that comes with language acquisition (Murphey, 1992). Shen (2009) too shares a similar view and claims that songs are effective tools in teaching language. He defines the lyrics of the songs as authentic teaching materials for EFL learners. Since the songs are meant to be used in real life to convey feelings or messages rather than for educational objectives, the language used in them is authentic. It enables learners to learn language more effectively. Moreover, it provides the learners with a window into the culture of the target language. Students can learn language structures and acquire knowledge of the history, beliefs, and daily lives of native speakers by listening to culturally relevant music. According to Baker (2011), exposure to cultural context is essential for developing intercultural competence, which is important in language education. Moreover, music can create a relaxed, stress-free learning environment, which is conducive to language acquisition. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, lower anxiety levels correlate

with greater language acquisition as students are more likely to absorb language when they feel comfortable and engaged (Krashen, 1982). Music naturally relaxes students, allowing them to immerse themselves in the language without the performance pressure. Thus, music can be used as a source of motivation in the language classroom if the teachers can use it more appropriately and effectively (Medina, 1993).

Apart from the abovementioned benefits on the individual, music fosters a sense of community and collaboration in the classroom. Students form bonds through shared activities when they sing or compose music together, which increases their motivation and willingness to engage in language tasks. This collaborative nature of music-based learning fosters a positive learning environment in the classroom where students can practice their language skills without worrying about being judged (Lake, 2013). So, by using singing activities, teachers can improve students' willingness to communicate and foster a positive language-learning community.

Finally, music in a language classroom has several benefits. It offers learners a fun and emotionally stimulating method of language education, enhances retention through repetition, and fosters a relaxed environment that promotes language use. Furthermore, the ethnic diversity of music exposes pupils to real language in context, which promotes cooperation and understanding across cultural boundaries. Integration of auditory, emotional, and cognitive components through music and songs can offer a comprehensive and successful method of language learning that tends to complement learners' innate learning styles.

**Drama as a tool for language learning**

The use of drama as a teaching and learning tool in English language classrooms is yet another popular approach. There is empirical evidence that introducing drama activities in language classrooms positively supports language acquisition. For instance, Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020) investigated the effects of teaching English language through drama and found that the use of drama develops participants' language skills, especially the communicative ones such as interactions and conversations. Also, the study showed that the use of drama in the English classroom yields higher proficiency levels as it motivates them

to become more engaged in the learning process (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020). McCaslin (2006) too revealed that creative drama enhances the participants' confidence level and communication skills. Similarly, Zakhareuski (2018) highlighted the importance of incorporating drama in English language classrooms and argued that acting not only promotes learners' self-confidence and self-esteem but also lowers speaking anxiety. When learners are less anxious, their affective filter will be low, and consequently, they learn better (Krashen, 1982). Drama also offers students an engaging way to practice language skills in a social, collaborative setting. Through the use of communicative scenarios, drama allows students to practice English in a more social and supportive environment. Students can go beyond rote memorization and internalize language in meaningful ways by participating in drama activities, which frequently require them to take on specific roles and practice language in realistic circumstances. According to Maley and Duff (2005), dramas integrate language skills in a natural way. The integration of reading, listening, and speaking occurs as students engage with the text, listen to others, and perform their roles, resulting in a natural and effective language learning experience. During this process, as argued by Fuentes (2010), students actively engage in performing the drama, resulting in a learner-centered approach to education. Research has shown that drama helps learners develop language skills by encouraging authentic use of language because it involves using the language in a specific context. This promotes meaningful language learning as students can understand the relationship between the language form and its function (Phillips, 2003).

Kao and O'Neill (1998) argued that drama encourages impromptu communication in language classes, requiring students to make immediate choices, think quickly, and modify their language in reaction to their classmates. Researchers have shown that the interactive nature of drama creates a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks. Dramatic exercises help learners communicate more freely by lowering the perceived pressure of language production, which gradually improves accuracy and fluency (Sam, 1990). By utilizing body language and facial expressions, pausing and interrupting, and displaying emotions in their interpretations of the play, dramas enable students to acquire the language in a natural way. It helps learners increase confidence. Moreover, it

can be helpful for shy or introverted students to participate more actively because drama allows learners to adopt alternative personas, which helps them distance themselves from possible embarrassment or fear of criticism (Even, 2008).

Hoetker (1969) has shown that the inclusion of drama activities in the classroom can support the learning of literature and communication skills and can be useful for visual or kinesthetic learners to learn language material better. Hoetker (1969) further argues that dramatic activities can help students develop their international communicative skills, stimulate their imagination, and enable contextually situated interaction in foreign language classrooms.

Studies on the effectiveness of drama in language learning show quantifiable improvements in both verbal and nonverbal communication skills. For instance, a study by Miccoli (2003) on Brazilian ESL students, discovered that drama-based training greatly enhanced students' communicative abilities as they grew more comfortable with active listening and language improvisation. Moreover, these drama activities help the students to internalize vocabulary, syntax and even grammar unintentionally through their own mistakes and experiences (Fuentes, 2010).

Beyond the linguistic skills, drama contributes to cultural understanding and empathy as it often involves stories and characters from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Stinson and Freebody (2006), dramas enable students to investigate diverse perspectives on culture, improving their comprehension and admiration of various beliefs, traditions, and social norms. Additionally, drama fits in well with constructivist teaching methods, in which students actively and cooperatively create meaning. Drama offers a scaffolded framework for language practice in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which was proposed by Vygotsky in 1978. The ZPD holds that learners benefit the most from tasks that are just a little bit above their current skill level (Vygotsky, 1978). As students collaborate, negotiate, and co-create dialogues, they push each other's language competencies, promoting mutual learning and self-discovery (Liu & Ding, 2009).

In conclusion, drama promotes a whole language learning process that surpasses conventional language teaching approaches. It lowers anxiety, promotes the use of real language, and creates a cooperative setting where students can study cultural narratives and develop empathy. Drama offers a dynamic, hands-

on approach to language learning that addresses linguistic and intercultural competencies through role-play, improvisation, and embodiment. However, embarrassment, lack of confidence, shyness and the chaos created by drama practice are identified as challenges to incorporate drama in the language classroom (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020). All in all, despite some challenges, advantages gained from drama activities still outweigh the disadvantages.

## Research gap

Although there is empirical evidence to support the view that the use of songs and drama helps learners enhance English language skills (ELS), limited studies have been conducted to examine the learners' views regarding the incorporation of both English songs and dramas together in the ELS programs. On one hand, studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of songs on language learning. On the other hand, studies have been conducted to examine the effects, benefits and perception of the use of drama in language learning. However, limited number of studies have been conducted to investigate the learner perception regarding the incorporation of both target language songs and drama activities together in the language classroom. The present study below, therefore, sets out to fill this gap by systematically investigating the learners' views regarding the incorporation of English songs and dramas in an ELS program offered to the students of a humanities and social sciences faculty of a state university in Sri Lanka.

## Methods and Material

## Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and Qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of the first-year undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts in a state university in Sri Lanka regarding the use of music and drama in the English language education. In order to gather rich and diverse data the study employed multiple data collection methods, including questionnaires, focused-group interviews and reflective essays. These methods were chosen to capture not only measurable trends but also personal experiences, insights, and suggestions from the students.

By triangulating these sources, the research aimed to develop a nuanced and in-depth perspective on how creative art-based approaches influence language learning, student engagement and classroom dynamics.

## Research Questions and Objectives

### Research Questions

1. How do university students perceive the effectiveness of English songs and dramas in their English language proficiency?

2. Which forms of creative arts (dramas, songs) do students find most useful to develop specific language skills (e.g. speaking, listening, reading, writing)?

3. How do English songs and dramas influence students' motivation and engagement in English language learning?

### Objectives

1. To explore university students' perceptions of the integration of English songs and dramas in English language learning.

2. To identify which creative art techniques (dramas and songs) do students consider most useful to develop specific English language skills.

3. To examine how English songs and dramas motivate students to learn English.

## Participants

A total of two hundred and thirteen (N = 213) first-year undergraduate students participated in this study. The participants were selected from a larger group of over 1,200 students who are currently enrolled in the compulsory General English program at a state university in Sri Lanka. The selected group included both male and female students. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23 years. All participants had completed secondary education in Sri Lanka and had passed the G.C.E. Advanced Level examination, qualifying them for university admission.

These students are required to attend a structured English course conducted by the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) in that university. Classes are held every weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. for two consecutive semesters, totaling approximately 300 hours of instruction. The full cohort has been divided into twenty-one parallel classes, each comprising 55 to 60 students. Each class is co-

facilitated by two English instructors, ensuring consistent exposure to communicative and grammar-focused instruction.

The curriculum is designed to strengthen core language skills, including grammar, reading, writing, and speaking. In addition to daily instruction, a key component of the course is the weekly co-curricular event held on Wednesdays. On this day, three selected classes take turns performing on stage through English-language items such as songs, role-plays, and short dramas, written by themselves with the help of their class teachers. The succeeding paragraphs below present a concise description of the implemented co-curricular event.

Using drama in language learning helps students develop communication skills by encouraging natural speech through role-plays and dialogues. It enhances vocabulary and grammar as learners engage with authentic scripts and improvisations while also fostering creativity, emotional engagement, and self-confidence. Drama promotes teamwork, empathy, and critical thinking as students collaborate, interpret roles, and explore cultural and social perspectives.

Similarly, songs make language learning enjoyable and memorable by improving listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary retention through rhythm and repetition. Music increases learners' motivation, supports grammar learning through lyrical patterns, and provides cultural exposure. Overall, both drama and songs create active, learner-centered classrooms that integrate multiple language skills and nurture linguistic competence alongside creativity and emotional intelligence. Hence, the performances by students aim to build students' confidence, enhance their speaking and listening skills, and promote active participation. Importantly, every student in the performing classes is required to participate in some aspect of the performance, ensuring inclusivity and engagement.

The remaining eighteen classes constitute the audience, providing peer feedback and exposure to spoken English in varied and creative forms. To further enrich the learning experience, a guest speaker, typically a well-known public figure such as a motivational speaker, television presenter, or actor, is invited each week to deliver an inspirational talk in English. This component of the program is intended to expose students to real-world uses of English and to foster positive attitudes toward English language learning.

The students selected for the study were distributed across multiple classes and had been exposed to both the academic and co-curricular components of the program for at least one semester at the time of data collection. Their consistent exposure to interactive English learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom, made them an ideal group for examining the effects of co-curricular interventions such as songs and dramas on language development and learner motivation.

### Data collection methods.
### Reflective essays.

One day after a performance, a convenience sample of one class was selected, and they were asked to reflect and share their views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the DELT assembly. Thirty-five students shared their views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the assembly. Among the four items, students' speeches, English songs, dramas and the talk of the guest, the learners' perceptions regarding English songs and dramas were explored in this study because English songs and dramas are entertaining items, and students generally perform them in groups. Hence, it was assumed that learners may hold positive views regarding the songs and dramas compared to students' speeches and the speech of the guest, which belong to a different non-entertainment genre. Therefore, after the students shared their views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the assembly in general, the reflective essays were qualitatively analyzed using thematic content analysis in order to find Themes and categories related to English songs and dramas.

### Focused group interviews.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions regarding the use of English songs and dramas in the assembly, six focus group interviews were conducted with the same group of learners. Each focus group comprised five to six students, allowing for meaningful, small-group discussions where participants could comfortably express their views and build on one another's ideas. These sessions were conducted in a relaxed and supportive environment, encouraging students to share their honest thoughts and experiences.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, guided by open-ended questions designed to prompt critical reflection and encourage elaboration. Sample guiding questions included: "Which specific activities do you find more effective?", "How do you feel these activities impact your English language learning?", and "What specific skills do you think you have improved through these performances?" These questions aimed to explore students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement with the activities.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis. This process allowed the researcher to capture not only the verbal content of the discussions but also non-verbal elements such as tone, emphasis, pauses, and expressions of enthusiasm or hesitation, which enriched the subsequent thematic content analysis.

**Survey.**

In order to further investigate and validate the emerging Themes identified through the reflective essays and focus group interviews, a Google Form questionnaire was developed and distributed among the students. The design of the questionnaire was informed by both the thematic findings from the qualitative data and relevant literature on the use of arts-based activities in language learning. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather a broader range of student opinions regarding the effectiveness and impact of the assembly activities, with a particular focus on English songs and dramas.

The questionnaire included a total of eleven closed-ended questions designed to measure students' engagement, perceived benefits, and preferences. These questions employed a Likert-scale format to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement with various statements. In addition, one demographic question regarding gender was included to explore any potential gender-based patterns in student responses. To complement the quantitative data, an open-ended question was also provided at the end of the form, allowing students to share any additional thoughts or experiences in their own words.

A total of 178 students completed the questionnaire. Figure 1 presents the gender distribution of the respondents, offering insight into the composition of the sample and supporting further analysis based on gender perspectives.

## Data analysis

The data collected through the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative methods to produce descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and averages. This analysis helped identify overall trends in students' responses and provided measurable insights into their perceptions of the English assembly activities, particularly songs and dramas. The statistical data offered a clear overview of students' preferences, levels of engagement, and perceived benefits from participating in these creative components of the program. In parallel, the qualitative data, including the open-ended responses from the questionnaire, reflective essays written by the students, and transcripts from the focus group interviews, were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved coding the responses, identifying patterns, and organizing the data into Themes and sub-Themes that reflected recurring ideas and unique viewpoints. Through this process, a deeper understanding of students' attitudes, emotional responses, and experiences with the assembly activities emerged.
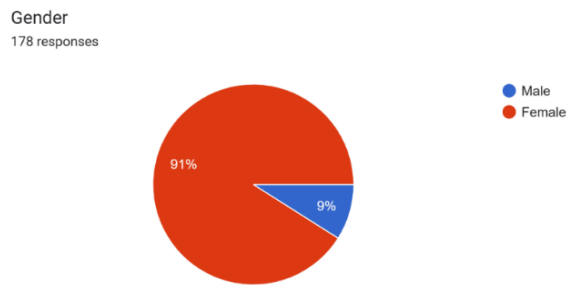


**Figure 1.** Gender Distribution of the Respondents

By integrating both the quantitative and qualitative findings, the study was able to present a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of learners' perspectives. This mixed-methods approach enhanced the reliability and richness of the findings, addressing the research objectives from multiple angles.

## Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval for this research was formally obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the university prior to the commencement of the study. All participants

were clearly informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the research, both verbally and in writing. They were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. To uphold ethical standards, participant anonymity was guaranteed by assigning codes instead of names, and all data were kept confidential and securely stored. The ethical procedures ensured that the dignity, rights, and welfare of the students were fully respected throughout the research process.

## Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of using English songs and dramas in language learning, several limitations must be acknowledged. The data relied heavily on self-reported responses through reflective writing, interviews, and questionnaires, which may be subject to biases such as exaggeration, social desirability, or selective memory. Furthermore, the research was conducted within a single faculty at one state university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings or student populations. Future studies could consider broader sampling across faculties or institutions and incorporate additional data sources such as classroom observations or teacher feedback.

## Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed using mixed methods, using responses from the survey questionnaire, focus group discussions, and reflective essays. The analysis revealed strong evidence that integrating creative arts, particularly music and drama, positively influenced students' English language development, confidence, motivation, and cultural awareness.

The initial survey questions explored whether the DELT assembly, an event providing students with opportunities to perform songs and dramas in English, was perceived as useful or a waste of time. The majority of students (approximately 88%) disagreed with the statement that the DELT assembly was a waste of time, while about 74% disagreed with the suggestion that the time allocated for the assembly should instead be used for traditional classroom teaching. These results

clearly show that students valued the DELT assembly as an educationally useful activity.

In addition, 96.6% of participants stated that the DELT assembly should continue in the future, further emphasizing its perceived value as an interesting and effective platform for learning English.

These results support the study's main goal and show how effective pedagogical tools the creative arts can be in promoting active learning and skill development in ESL classrooms.

### Enhancing Language Skills

Both qualitative and quantitative results showed that DELT assembly played a significant role in enhancing core language skills of students, especially in speaking and listening. Approximately 61% of students reported that participating in performances enhanced their speaking skills, while 52% indicated improvement in listening. Comparatively fewer students felt that the assembly improved writing (13%), reading (29%), grammar (23%), or vocabulary (28%), indicating that the most substantial benefits were achieved through oral-aural engagement.

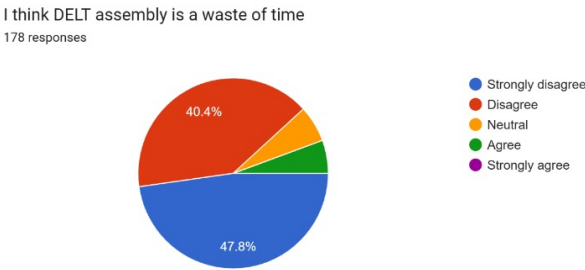Qualitative evidence further supports this finding. Many participants stated



**I think DELT assembly is a waste of time**
178 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

40.4%
47.8%

**Figure 2.** Learner views regarding the usefulness of the DELT assembly



Instead of DELT assembly, those two hours can be used for classroom teaching
177 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
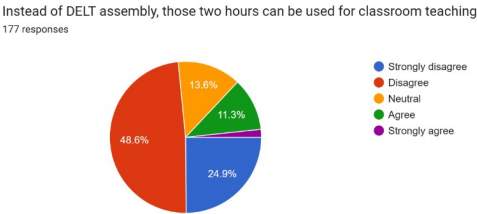- Strongly agree

13.6%
11.3%
48.6%
24.9%

**Figure 3.** Time allocated for the DELT assembly could be used for classroom teaching.

that these activities helped them "improv[e] English Language skills, especially speaking". Moreover, many of the participants pointed out that frequent exposure to new vocabulary and sentence structures through songs and dramas helped them
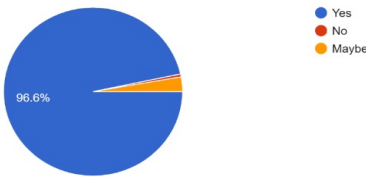


**Figure 4.** Time allocated for the DELT assembly could be used for classroom teaching.

internalize grammar and word usage more naturally. These results align with studies by Saricoban and Metin (2000) and Lestari and Hardiyanti (2020),  who found that songs and drama enhance all four language skills, particularly vocabulary and oral fluency. Similarly, Fuentes (2010) emphasized that experiential and performance-based learning fosters deeper language retention through self-correction and contextual application.

## Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety

One of the major Themes emerged from the data was the enhancement of students' self-confidence and reduction of language anxiety. Over 90% of students stated that the DELT assembly helped them overcome their fear of using English, while 92% reported developing a more positive attitude towards the language.
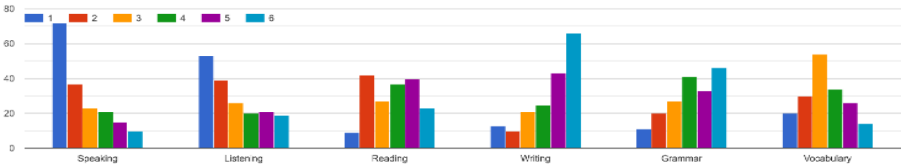


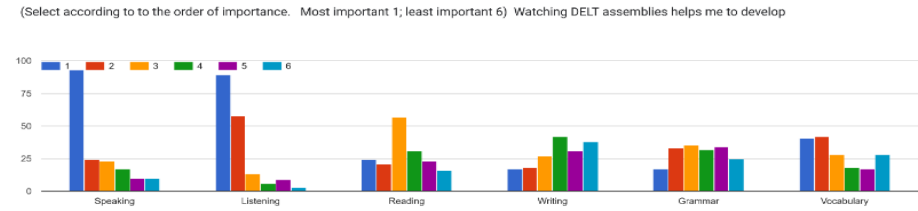**Figure 5.** Skills development through performance.

**Figure 6.** Skills development through watching the assembly.

Many students reflected that performing in front of their peers allowed them to practice English in a low-pressure and an enjoyable environment. Singing and drama created safe spaces for expression, helping learners gradually overcome their fear of mistakes. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which asserts that reduced anxiety facilitates more effective language acquisition. Supporting this view, Chuang (2011) found that creative arts help learners engage in linguistic experimentation in psychologically safe environments. One participant expressed, "Performing songs and dramas in English made me more confident to speak in public without fear." Thus, the DELT assembly successfully fostered emotional comfort and linguistic risk-taking, two key elements for fluency development.

### Making Learning Memorable and Enjoyable

This study also revealed that the integration of creative arts helped make the language learning process more memorable and enjoyable. Nearly 93% of students agreed that the DELT assembly helped them learn English "in a fun way."
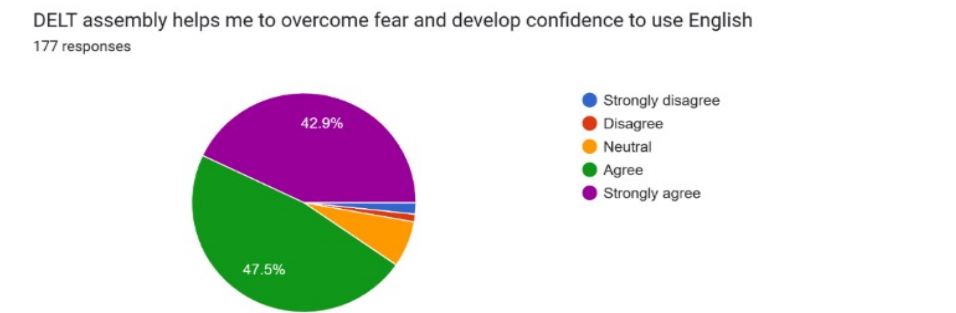


**Figure 7.** DELT assembly helps to overcome fear and develop confidence to use English.

Students frequently described the learning experience as fun, enjoyable, and highly engaging. Unlike conventional language learning tasks, activities involving songs and drama were perceived as more exciting and interactive. This enjoyment led to increased motivation and active participation. This aligns with Maley and Duff's (2005) argument that drama transforms classrooms into interactive learning spaces that promote deep cognitive processing. Similarly, Gardner (1983) noted that multisensory activities strengthen memory and motivation, especially among second language learners. The findings suggest that when students enjoy the process, their language learning becomes more meaningful and sustainable.

**Fostering Collaboration and a Sense of Community**

Another key finding is the role of creative arts in fostering collaboration and the sense of community among the students. Over 94% of participants agreed that participating in the DELT assembly helped them develop collaboration and creativity.

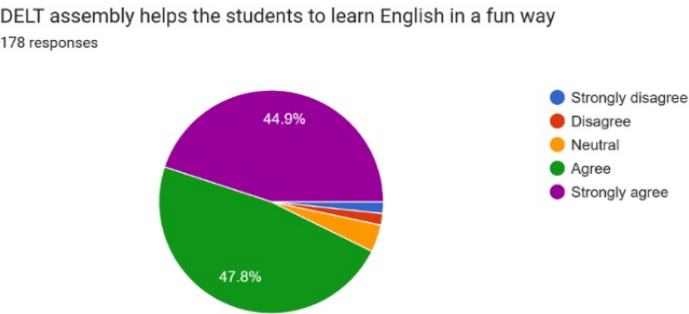Students highlighted how they learned from each other and supported one



**Figure 8.** DELT assembly helps the participants to learn English in a fun way

another throughout the preparation and performance process. This collaborative dynamic not only improved their language skills but also strengthened classroom rapport and created a sense of belonging within the learning community. One student commented, "We helped each other and became closer friends through rehearsals and performances." Such experiences reflect Johnson and Johnson's

(1989) social interdependence theory, which highlights the benefits of cooperative learning environments. Drama and group singing naturally require coordination, negotiation, and shared responsibility, fostering a strong sense of community. These findings echo Winston (2004), who emphasized that drama enhances empathy, teamwork, and communication, skills essential for effective language learning.

### Encouraging Cultural Understanding and Empathy

Students also have noted that performing culturally significant plays and songs helped them understand the social and cultural dimensions of the English – speaking communities. Through the exposure to diverse cultural contexts, learners
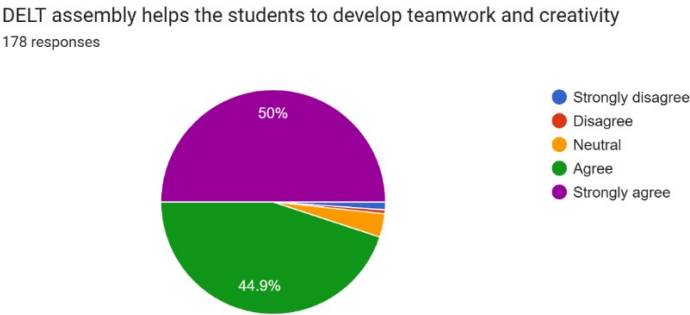


**DELT assembly helps the students to develop teamwork and creativity**
178 responses

**Figure 9.** Potential of the DELT assembly to develop teamwork and creativity skills

gained a deeper understanding of the values, customs, and communication patterns related to the target language. These experiences align with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes the link between cultural awareness and effective communication. Similarly, Schewe (1998) argues that drama serves as a bridge between linguistic competence and intercultural empathy. Reflections of the participants showed that engaging with cultural Themes made their learning experiences emotionally rich and intellectually meaningful, which also helped their linguistic development.

### Addressing Diverse Learning Style

This study also showed that art-based activities accommodated different learning styles.  Visual learners responded well to the performance elements, auditory learners benefited from music and listening tasks, and kinesthetic learners

engaged actively through movement and acting. Participants emphasized that these methods allowed them to "visualize and feel the language" rather than merely memorize it. This reflects Fleming's (2001) notion of arts-based learning as an inclusive pedagogical approach that supports multiple intelligences. Additionally, as suggested by Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, the autonomy and creativity embedded in such activities enhanced students' intrinsic motivation. The learner-centered, participatory nature of the DELT assembly thus encouraged all students to engage with the language in ways best suited to their individual learning styles.

### Authentic Language Use and Real-World Relevance

Finally, the findings highlighted that creative art promotes authentic language use in real-life contexts. Students perceived that performing self-written dramas and composing or adapting songs gave them opportunities to practice spontaneous and meaningful communication in English. Unlike traditional scripted plays, the dramas used in this activity were collaboratively written by the students themselves, with guidance from their teachers. This creative process required them to generate original dialogues, negotiate meaning, and express emotions through language, which closely mirrors real-life communication.

These findings are consistent with Sam (1990), who observed that creative performance tasks encourage practical communication beyond textbook exercises. Moreover, this approach aligns with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework, which prioritizes functional and interactive use of language over rote memorization. Through realistic and emotionally engaging scenarios, the DELT assembly helped students develop linguistic fluency and communicative competence applicable to everyday contexts.

### Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the transformative power of including music and drama in English language instruction for the first-year Sri Lankan university students. This incorporation enhances not only the linguistic growth but also the

self-confidence, teamwork, creativity and cultural awareness of the students. The DELT assemblies were perceived by the majority of participants as a purposeful and entertaining language-learning platform that allowed them to use English in real-world, interactive situations. These exercises helped them with their overall language learning process through promoted impromptu dialogue, enhanced pronunciation, and strengthened vocabulary retention.

The study also shows the broader social benefits of arts-based English instruction in addition to linguistic developments. Through performance and collaboration, students developed interpersonal skills, empathy, and a sense of community within their learning environment, which supports the development of balanced individuals.

However, the results presented other aspects such as concerns about stage fright, unequal participation, and time-consuming rehearsals, suggesting the need for more inclusive, flexible implementation strategies. These perspectives underline the importance of balancing creativity with practicality to ensure that all learners benefit.

Overall, this research emphasizes that the integration of creative arts in English language education can significantly enhance both linguistic and personal growth. Future research should look into long-term effects on students' confidence and communication abilities as well as applicable models of this method in various educational contexts.

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