

Chart 1: Average marks for each question: Siddhartha College

According to the data, the highest average is 66 which have been received for the question one- word order. In contrast the lowest marks are obtained for 3rd person singular.

The marks obtained by the students of Sri Chandananda College are as follows.

Table 2: Average marks obtained by the students for each subject in Chandanada College

| Grammar structures tested       | Average of marks for each question Sri Chandanada college % |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Wh questions                    | 100   |
| Yes/no questions                | 49  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular | 84  |
| Auxiliary verbs                 | 87  |
| Pronouns                        | 72  |
| Nouns (persons)                 | 90  |
| Nouns (singular)                | 87  |
| Articles                        | 36  |
| Present progressive             | 97  |
| Word order                      | 62  |

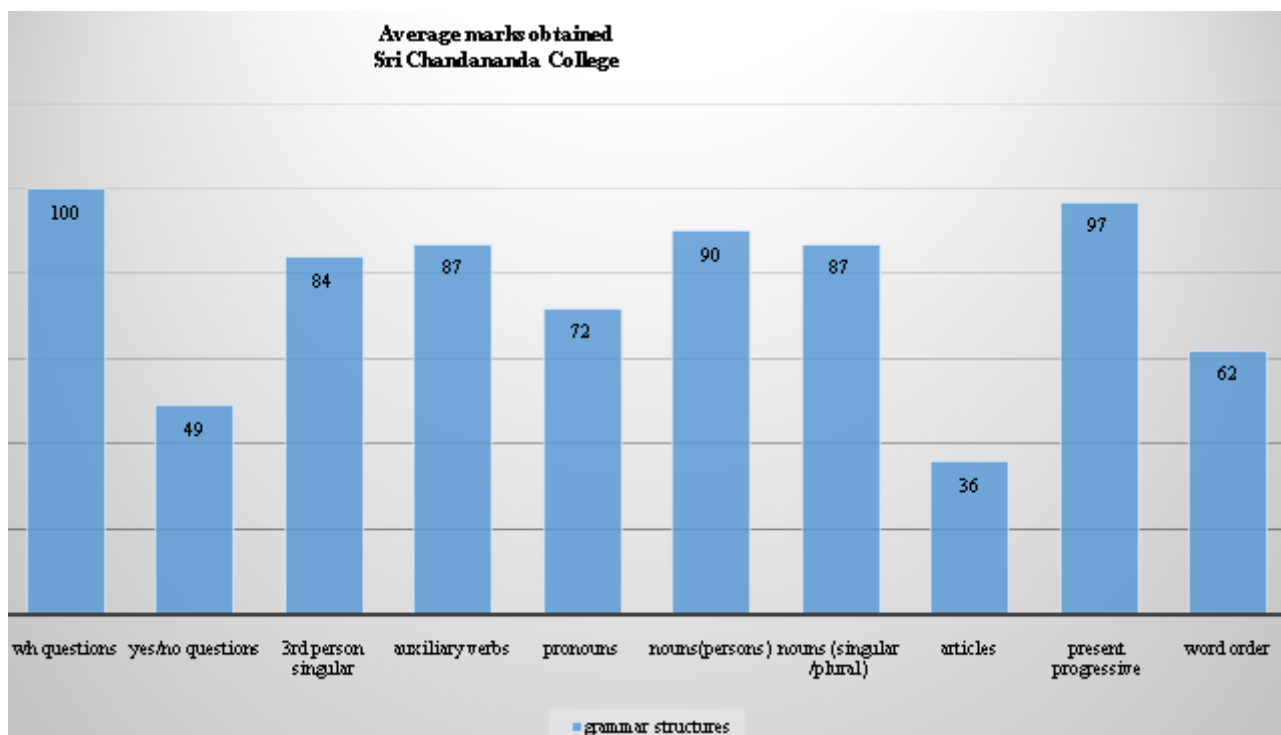


Chart 2: Average marks obtained by Chandanandians

Chandanandians have been able to score their highest average as 100% for wh questions. Their lowest average is

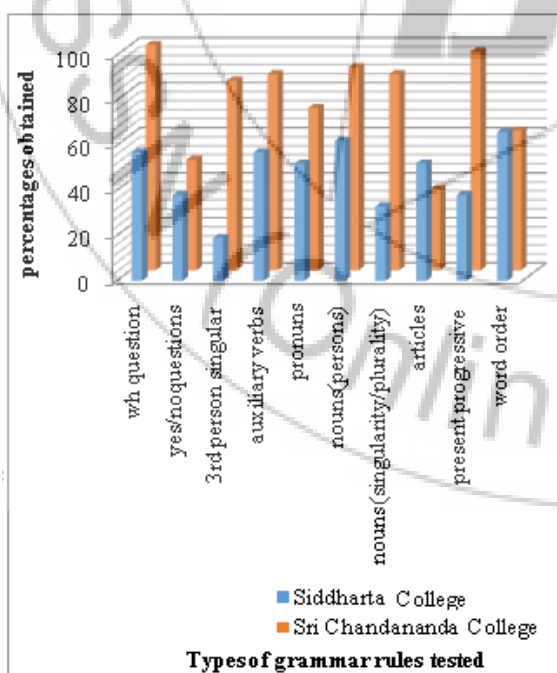
for the sentence on articles. That is as low as 36%. However except for three items their marks range between 72 -100.

Graphical presentation of the averages of each question obtained by Chandanandians places them in a somewhat superior position compared to their counterparts in Siddhartha College. In the following table the average of total marks obtained by both groups are displayed. (Average was obtained by dividing the aggregate of total marks obtained for each paper by the subjects in the group by the number of subjects sat for the paper. Aggregate of total marks is calculated by di)

The tested hypothesis of this study involves examining whether formal English instruction in grades 1 and 2 could have a significant impact on SL language development in children. The results of the grammaticality judgment test tabulated above show a noticeable gap between the two groups. Subjects were grouped based on whether or not they received formal instruction in English in grades one and two. The results of the grammaticality judgment test stand as strong evidence to prove that formal instruction in English in grade one and two have significantly influenced the proficiency level of grade three students. The following table positions the average marks obtained by each group side by side making it easier for comparison.

**Table 3:** Average marks obtained by Siddhartha College and Sri Chandananda College

| Grammar rules tested             | Average marks obtained |                           |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                  | Siddhartha college %   | Sri Chandananda college % |
| 1. Wh questions                  | 57                     | 100                       |
| 2. Yes/no questions              | 38                     | 49                        |
| 3. 3rd person singular           | 19                     | 84                        |
| 4. Auxiliary verbs               | 57                     | 87                        |
| 5. Pronouns                      | 52                     | 72                        |
| 6. Nouns(persons)                | 62                     | 90                        |
| 7. Nouns(singularity/ plurality) | 33                     | 87                        |
| 8. Articles                      | 52                     | 36                        |
| 9. Present progressive           | 38                     | 97                        |
| 10. Word order                   | 66                     | 62                        |



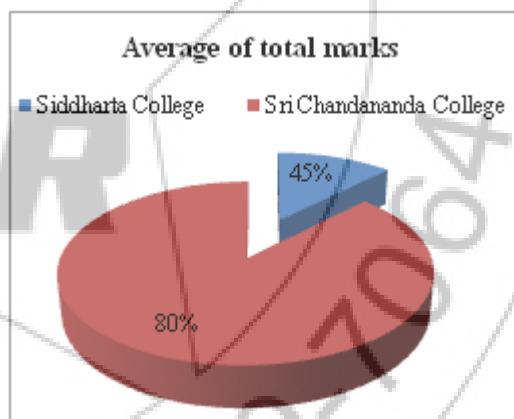
**Chart 3:** percentages of the correct answers given for each question by the two groups of subjects.

The graphical presentation of data indicates that Sri Chandananda College has outperformed their counterparts. The first comparison involves acquisition of wh question construction. Only 57% of the subjects of Siddhartha College got the answer right in contrast to the 100 % score of their counterparts in Sri Chandananda College. However the largest discrepancy in figures can be observed in 3rd person singular (Q.3) where difference reaches 75%. Subjects representing Sri Chandananda College have performed better than their counterparts in eight questions out of ten. Siddhartha college also have performed better in Articles (Q8) and word order question (Q: 10) In Q: 8 the difference as a percentage is 16% In Q: 10 the difference is only 4%. Another question where there is a significant difference is Q: 9 –Present progressive. Subjects of Chandananda have obtained a higher percentage of the correct answer where the difference between the two groups is 59%.

As for the total marks obtained by two groups, once again Sri Chandananda College stands ahead. According to table 2 average of total marks obtained by the subjects of Siddhartha College is 45 % while Sri Chandananda College have obtained 80% as the average of their total marks. Meanwhile students of Siddhartha College have scored an average total of only 45%.

**Table 4:** Average of total marks

| School                        | Average of the total marks |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Siddhartha college-Ampitiya   | 45%                        |
| Sri Chandananda college-Kandy | 80%                        |



**Chart 4:** Average of total marks

The above pie chart graphically presents the overall performance of the subjects. Far better performance of Sri Chandananda College in comparison to their counterparts in Siddhartha College provide empirical data in support of the hypothesis formal instruction in English from grade one has a strong positive impact on the acquisition of L2.

### 3. Discussion

Teachers, parents and even principles revealed in the interviews that delaying to teach writing and reading of English makes it very difficult for students to follow the text book in grade three. Moreover many expressed the view that children should be exposed to rich input of second language from an earlier grade. Though many parties concerned,

opted for an earlier start, they would not be permitted to do so owing to the restrictions laid down by the curriculum.

But, on the other hand private bodies of education use their autonomy to address the issue. Deviating from the common curriculum they would resort to supplementary texts and materials to impart formal instruction of L2 from the very first grade. Through the grammar test it was proven that formal instruction from grade one has impacted the level of knowledge of the students in grade three in a positive manner.

In theoretical point of view, subjects of *Chandananda College* were probably given more opportunity over a longer period of time to practice grammar structures in a formal setting. The test proves they had a stronger sense of right and wrong where grammar is concerned or they had a better "feel" for accuracy. (Krashen 1982) Accordingly it is reasonable to assume their better performance in the test is a result of automatization of L2 rules through continuous practice over a longer time period. Researchers postulate that automatization is crucially important in L2 acquisition because it leads to improved L2 performance (VanPatten, 1987)

The other obvious reason why formal English instruction has been excluded from the initial grades is the widely held notion that early L2 instruction might affect L1 development of children negatively. In any society L1 proficiency is generally valued over that of L2, and promoted especially during the first years of school life. (Hayes 2005 p. 27)) Some educationists are of the view that early instruction in English might cause confusion between the two languages- L1 and L2 (Chang K S, p. 63). On the other hand the results and findings of the study did not bring forth any empirical evidence to reinforce the opinion of the alleged negative effect of L2 on L1. For example sample of Chandananda College of the grammaticality judgment test was far better than their counterparts. They had received formal instruction in English from grade one. An inquiry into their performance at public examinations such as G.C.E Ordinary level exam and scholarship examination in grade 5, has negated any such negative notion regarding the influence of L2 on L1. Particularly in Grade 5 scholarship examination candidates' creativity in mother tongue is one of the assessment criteria. In 2014 percentage of pass rate of grade 5 scholarship exam is 20% which is regarded as a high percentage (School sources Sri Chandananda College Kandy 2014) satisfactory pass rates in public exams stand as strong proof in favour of their unaffected L1 proficiency.

#### 4. Conclusion

Many countries in Asia consider L2 instruction in primary grades mandatory. Countries in Europe too have identified the significance of early L2 instruction. The need for taking formal L2 instruction seriously has been felt by many nations world over owing to the rapid development in technology. It has been understood that proficiency in the global language is mandatory for all citizens in the world to interact and communicate with one another in any kind of situation. Consequently many nations world over have identified earlier commencement of formal L2 instruction

would yield fruitful results in making more proficient speakers of L2. An overview of the international scenario reveals that many nations were considering lowering of formal L2 instruction to the initial grades.

Several studies apparently show that formal learning environments are best for attaining second language proficiency as it supports both acquisition and learning. (Krashen 1986 p.6) Accordingly, it is evident that subjects from Chandananda College are doubly advantaged over their counterparts in terms of opportunities for practice in L2 structures and age of commencement of formal instruction in L2.

The findings suggest that students of Sri Lankan government schools are at a disadvantage owing to delaying of formal instruction in English. The delay starting formal L2 instruction seemingly could have other repercussions too. For example, it can affect their ability to follow studies in English medium from grade 6 onwards. Sri Lankan government has introduced English medium education from grade six onwards in the educational reforms in 1997. Though it is an ambivalent phenomenon in the field of education in the country, theory questions the success as regards the adequacy of English proficiency level of the average student in government schools. According to the research, in order to be able to follow education in English, students should have learnt it at least for five years. Studies have revealed that it takes at least five to seven years of learning to reach a level of English language proficiency sufficient for academic success in English (Cummin, 1979; Collie, 1987, Thomas and Collie, 2002) Such studies suggest that 3 years of formal instruction in English probably does not provide a strong foundation for English medium education in grade 6.

It is evident from the grammaticality judgment test conducted in *Siddhartha College Ampitiya* and *Sri Chandananda College Kandy* that those subjects who received formal instruction in grade 1 and two seem to have a noticeable advantage over those who did not receive formal instruction in English. They seem to be more familiar with the structures found in grade three text books. They may not be explicitly aware of the rules of L2. But they seem to have developed a stronger sense of grammatical accuracy. On the other hand lack of exposure partly owing to the deliberate down play of importance attributed to L2 in public schools (NIE publication) seems to have hindered their L2 development.

#### 5. Findings

- 1) In the year 1997 Activity Based Oral English was first introduced to grades one and two into the school curriculum of government schools. The main objective was to provide equal opportunities to all students in government schools to acquire language skills in English. (NIE publication 1998) Yet the study reveals there are shortcomings in implementing ABOE practically in schools. For example many class teachers find that they lack confidence to deliver the content of ABOE syllabus in English.

- 2) Teachers teaching English in grade three claim that students lack the competence to follow the content in the text book of grade three. They further said it would be much beneficial if the students were taught at least the alphabet in first two grades.
- 3) Principals of the government schools who were interviewed strongly believe students of grade one and two should be receiving English instruction of formal kind. Most of them try to impart some extra knowledge to students by way of projects conducted by English trained teachers who are found in excess in most urban and semi-urban schools.
- 4) Parents who have realized the necessity of English knowledge as a basic skill try to seek outside help to teach their children English as they believe in school they are not taught adequately for them to be able to reach a high proficiency level and they prefer to start teaching their children English as early as possible.
- 5) But the situation is different in the private school sector. Though they follow the local syllabus in mother tongue, formal English instruction begins in grade one itself. The reason is that they are aware of the demand for English and the advantages of starting to learn it early. Moreover they are independent of the strict inspection of department of education, being private bodies. Therefore they have the freedom to teach English in a formal manner from grade one itself under a specialist teacher in English.
- 6) However it seems one of the primary objectives of ABOE syllabus has been abated in practice. Namely whether ABOE has been able to provide equal opportunities to all Sri Lankan students is doubtful as the most deprived group in this regard seems to be the students of rural schools –the children of the rural areas. They seem to be getting the least exposure to English as usual.
- 7) In many countries in the world policy makers are considering lowering the start age of formal instruction in English. This is due to the increasing awareness worldwide that English has become the major global language and it is a basic skill that should be imparted to children while their very young. There is no internationally accepted age to start Formal instruction in second language. Yet fuelled by such theories that claim the importance of age factor in language learning there is a considerable tendency towards lowering the start age of teaching English formally as a second language in the first grade at school.
- 8) Reasons for excluding formal instruction in English seem to be both cultural and psychological in the Sri Lankan situation as discussed in the research earlier. Yet the researcher is of the view with carefully designed teaching /learning materials to teach primary grade students, any possible impediment of cultural sensitivity could be avoided.
- 9) Further the public opinion held by certain sectors of society that early L2 instruction may cause confusion with their L1 development can be easily refuted with the findings of the research. For example the high pass rate in grade five scholarship exams in the recent years of Chandananda College disapproves any such notion. Those figures vouch for their unaffected L1 development in spite of receiving formal instruction in English.
- 10) Moreover if one expects to follow English medium education from grade 6 onwards in a government school, three years of formal instruction in English would not be adequate to reach the expected proficiency level.
- 11) Results of the grammaticality judgment test strongly supports the hypothesis that formal instruction in English from grade one onward have brought the students to the expected level of proficiency in grade three.
- 12) Average marks obtained in the test by each group for each question show that subjects of Sri Chandananda College Kandy have done better in eight questions out of ten.
- 13) There is also a vast discrepancy in the total marks obtained by each group. Average of total marks of the student group of *Sri Chandananda College* is 80% while it is only 45% among the subjects of *Siddhartha College Ampitiya*.
- 14) It is also seen the highest mark range is dominated by the students of Chandananda College Kandy. For example 59% of the students of *Chandananda College* have obtained 80-100 marks. Conversely only 9% of students in *Siddhartha college* fall within that range.
- 15) All in all, test results of the grammaticality judgment test stand as empirical data to claim that formal English instruction in grades one and two has had a strong positive effect on the expected level of proficiency in grade three students.

## References

- [1] Activity Based Oral English Syllabus Grade 1 and 2 2000 NIE Maharagama
- [2] Birdsong D (1999) Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis Lawrence Earl Baum Publishers, London
- [3] Chang K 2007 Innovations in Primary English Language Teaching and Management of Change Retrieved: November 12<sup>th</sup> 2013 www.british council.org
- [4] Clark B First and second Language Acquisition in Early Childhood ecap.crc.illinois.edu Cool. V 2003 Effects of the Second Language on the First Cromweel Press Ltd.
- [5] De Silva A (2000) Primary Education Reforms Educational Publication Department .Colombo
- [6] Ellis R 2010 SLA research and Language Teaching Oxford University Press
- [7] Fernando R and Mallawa M (2001) Research Study on Implementation of ABOE
- [8] Freeman L and Long M (1991) An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research The Electronic Journal for English Teaching New York Longman Publications
- [9] Genesee F (1978) Is there an Optimal Age for Starting Second Language Acquisition McGill Journal of Education
- [10] Hayes D 2007 English Language Teaching and Systematic Change at the primary level retrieved: November 12<sup>th</sup> 2013 www.british council.org

- [11] Klein W, 1986 Second Language acquisition retrieved on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 [www.oblongman.com](http://www.oblongman.com)
- [12] Lidvinia S and Mihaljevic J 2007 Early Foreign Education in Croatia [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)
- [13] Lily F 1991 Early Childhood Research Quarterly vol.6
- [14] Logan G (1989) Critical Period Effects in Second Language Learning
- [15] Lucien C 1997 Age and Language Learning Babel: Journal of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Association retrieved: 10 September 2014 vol.2
- [16] Madrid D (2001) A Conceptual Framework for Teaching of Foreign Language in Infant Education Grupo Editorial Universitario pp 145-152
- [17] Nikoav M 2000, An Early Start :Young learners and Modern languages in Europe and Beyond European center for Modern Publishers
- [18] Nunan D (2001) TEOSL Quarterly Volume 37 pp 589-613
- [19] Ratwatte H (2002) Basic Principles and Theories of Second Language Learning Open University of Sri Lanka Press. Nugegoda
- [20] Stekka H and Todd. M (2000) Three Misconceptions about Age and L2 Learning TESOL Quarterly vol34 pp9-34
- [21] Taner J and Harackiewicz M, 1998, Evaluation and Intrinsic motivation, Kluwer Academic Publishers
- [22] Venkatesh varen S 2009 Principles of Teaching English Vikas Publishing House
- [23] Ying L and Shufan L (2001) Is Age the Major Factor in Second Language Acquisition: An Examination of Critical Period Hypothesis Jilin University Press