"Quit Lit"? The Rising Star of ELT, the Declining Fortunes of English Studies and the "Crisis" in Humanities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract **-** This paper draws attention to a "crisis" that may, at one level, be generalized under the broader crisis in the Humanities but could, at another level, be unique to English Studies in Sri Lanka. I refer to the "fall" of "English" and the corresponding rise in ESL or ELT degrees at state universities in Sri Lanka. I discuss how this displacement of the one and its gradual replacement by the other would have been unthinkable a century ago when the idea of a Ceylonese University was first mooted and the University of Ceylon was established. I will highlight the complex constellation of factors, *from* post-independence national policies relating to English and English language teaching, the emergence of English as a global language, and funding priorities of international (World Bank) donor agencies to improve the "employability" of graduates *to* shifts in perceptions vis-à-vis English as well as perceivable trends in English language competencies among the youth, that have brought about this situation and how current course offerings in both state and private universities in Sri Lanka reflect these new demands. The paper asks what this means specifically for English Studies as it was traditionally conceived and practiced in Sri Lanka, and for Humanities education in general. Would it finally convert the *kaduva* [=sword] into an *hända* [=ladle], thus ensuring more equitable access to English, one that is, at long last, regarded in purely instrumental terms? Is English Studies in Sri Lanka necessarily elitist and neocolonial in orientation? Pedagogically speaking, is literature, which is a key component in a holistic Humanities education, necessarily expendable in the ELT classroom?

Keywords **-** *English Studies, English Language Teaching, Democratizing English, Literature in ELT classrooms.*

I would like to begin by explaining my use of the term Quit Lit. This is a term that Lucas Moe adopts (in his piece "Love's Labor, Lost and Found: Academia, 'Quit Lit,' and the Great Resignation", 2022) to describe books by disaffected American academics (not surprisingly many of the academics writing such books are English professors) who are quitting their jobs in frustration at

certain current trends in the corporate university. In "Quit Lit", they describe their reasons for quitting, principal among which is the steady encroachment of the market model into the academy that has seen merciless cuts in programmes of study and tenure-track positions in the name of efficiency and the bottom line. The disciplines that have suffered the most under this model are the traditional Humanities disciplines such as history, philosophy, languages, and literature with even the traditional bastions of Liberal Arts education giving a nod to the new dispensation by including at least some disciplines coming under Business and STEM in their programme offerings. For the disaffected Humanities scholars, it is not just the shock therapy of brutal cuts in funding and axing of degree programmes that hurt. It is also the devaluation of the Humanities disciplines that that implies. Adding to the disaffection is what is termed the "casualization" or "adjunctification" of academic labor that is fast turning teaching from a vocation into *just* a job. In "Quit Lit", they express their frustration at this unwelcome metamorphosis in their beloved profession and explain their reasons for taking up alternative avenues of employment albeit sans the illusions that they had entertained when entering academia.

The sense in which I use the term in this paper is somewhat different (though not very different as will become evident later). I use the term, Quit Lit/Quit Literature in a more literal sense, to draw attention to an observable trend in English Studies today that would have been inconceivable one hundred years ago when tertiary education, which at inception gave pride of place to disciplines falling under the Humanities (Amarakeerthi, 2021, p. 43), commenced in Ceylon. The trend I am referring to is the displacement of English Studies as it had been *traditionally conceived* and its replacement by ELT (English Language Teaching) the course content of which makes hardly any mention of literature, let alone literary studies. I say "inconceivable" because in 1921 not only was the place of English assured in the Ceylon University curriculum but that of literature, too, as an integral component of the study of English (Amarakeerthi, p. 44). Who would have thought that English, whose place in the 1921 curriculum went undisputed unlike Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, and Sanskrit (later grouped under Oriental Studies) for which impassioned arguments had to be made by advocates of the Ceylon University Movement on the basis of their vital role in reviving national culture (Amarakeerthi, 2021, p. 40) would one day find itself facing the axe or contemplating possible oblivion? The irony is that the existential threat to English does not stem from where, logically, it should, i.e., Sinhala and Tamil, the two local languages, vernaculars in the true sense of the word, but from a branch of

English Studies–TESL or ELT–the origins of which as an area of study is more recent and whose rising star is aided by declining standards in English competencies locally and the indisputable status of English as the premier language of international communication globally. In this paper, I address the following questions:

- If the rise of the ELT degree is part of an effort to democratize English by increasing English language competencies in the country, will it have more success than English Studies?
- Does literature have no place in an ELT syllabus?
- Is the rise of ELT at the expense of English Studies, in any way, symptomatic of the larger malaise facing the Humanities today?

Paradoxically, the dethronement of English as the official language of communication in 1956 through the passage of the Official Languages Act (and the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act 1958) for the purpose of restoring Sinhala and Tamil to their rightful place in the national imaginary of the newly independent state of Ceylon did not have an impact on English Studies at university. Although 1956 resulted in the exodus of a significant percentage of English-speaking Burghers, among them, the first Professor of English EFC Ludowyk (Perera et al. 2021), it did not diminish in any way the status of English Studies at university (or, for that matter, English in the country). Instead, "1956" had the opposite effect: the alienation of the Tamil-speaking population. The unfortunate fallouts of that shortsighted move are only too well known by now. Indeed, unlike in the case of Tamil, the pre-eminence of English in the university and in the country did not rest on numbers—whether speakers or students–as it has become amply evident since then. So, in 1952, the popularity of English was such that 50 of the 300 students admitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ceylon opted to study English (because of the "avantgarde reputation" of the Department, as Ashley Halpe put it, qtd in Perera et al., 2021, p. 144). But, this number had dropped drastically by the 1960s so that there were only 12 students in total offering English as a subject for the degree between 1962 and 1966 (Perera et al., 2021). Whether this decrease was due to the intensification in anti-English sentiments post-1956 or the diversification in course offerings at the university itself is not clear. What is clear is that, although there was an absolute increase in student numbers at the University of Ceylon in 1960 with the admission of *swa bhasha*[1] students, it is unlikely that these students who had sat the entrance examination for university in Sinhala or Tamil would have opted to

[1] Monolingual speakers of Sinhala or Tamil in the present context.

read English as a subject at university given the language barrier. Thus, contrary to expectations, among users of English in the country as well as students of the university, 1956 only consolidated the status of English as the exclusive possession of a few that bestowed on them privileges that were denied to the monolingual, vernacular-speaking majority. Therefore, what ought to have been a logical outcome of 1956 did not materialise: the marginalization of English. Instead, to date, English remains a means of marginalising vernacular speakers. What surprising constellation of factors, then, has brought about the possible demise of English Studies that the recent trends in ELT v English Studies augur?

Over the years, many English scholars have commented on the vicissitudes of English in post-independence Sri Lanka, among them, Thiru Kandiah and Arjuna Parakrama. Simply put, the question that they have examined is what explains the continued 'power' of English in a country where a vast majority of speakers are first-language speakers of Sinhala and Tamil, both languages with lineages and histories going back many hundreds of years. Commenting on the use of the term *kaduva* for English among Sinhala speakers, Thiru Kandiah, in his landmark essay titled "*Kaduva*: Power and the English Language Weapon in Sri Lanka" (1984), argued that the attempt to turn English from "a badge of privilege" into a "utilitarian second language, assisting the other languages at the points at which they were inadequate or lacking, in the task of development…" (49) had come to naught and, instead, it had become "a weapon for separating those with power from those without and a gatekeeper to corridors of power" (42). In an essay titled "'*Naduth Unge, Baduth Unge*'" published in 2010, Arjuna Parakrama held that the failure lies with those in charge of English education in the country, whose lesson materials and planning are inadequately sensitive to the realities of the learners that they seek to educate. As a result, despite the colossal amounts spent on human and material resource development, English has failed to reach a substantial percentage of students from monolingual, Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking backgrounds. While Parakrama analyses O/L English language results from the 1990s to come to this conclusion (83), a cursory look at O/L English results for 2020, the latest year for which tabulated data are available (DoE, 2020), shows that, to date, there has not been a noteworthy change in pass rates (at 60%) although the O/L English textbook has undergone a significant facelift since then. The pass rates for General English at the GCE A/L examination, at 56%, tell a similar story (DoE, 2020). Thus, it is clear that English hardly serves the function that it has been assigned in the 1978 Constitution as the "Link Language", if by a "link language" we mean one that is

capable of bridging communities and differences to facilitate communication across those divides. Indeed, while there may be ethnic and other demographic differences in attitude to English among those aspiring to learn English and, according to Parakrama, *kaduva* or *kadda* itself may not be in use much any longer, other terms have taken its place (for example, *para bhasha*, among Sinhala-speaking university students, in the recent past, in state universities) so that "the concept metaphor of the sword - as a weapon of materialist empowerment or epistemic dismemberment – still holds sway" (Parakrama et al., p. 198).[2]

It is, partly, to break the formidable reputation that English has acquired in post-independence Sri Lanka, which also impacts learning, that English language teachers over the years have experimented with possible methods to turn English from the injurious weapon that it is perceived to be into a *hända* or ladle that would allow more people to partake of its benefits. Perhaps the first such attempt to do so came with the entry of *swa bhasha* students in 1960 to the University of Ceylon when Doric de Souza introduced the ESL teaching programme to assist these students to learn some English as the ability to independently access the teaching material that was mostly in English was deemed crucial at the university level (Perera et al., 2021 & Parakrama et al., 2021). De Souza was well aware of what a mammoth task it was going to be given the imperial origins of the language. The challenge, as De Souza saw it, was to reinvent English as a neutral medium of communication for utilitarian purposes in an academic context. He, therefore, placed emphasis on the following in the programme: "the idiom of academic exposition and of formal correspondence and a certain amount of colloquial English, also of a formal rather than an intimate character" (1979, p. 33). His preferred term for this type of English was "English for purposes". Since then, many such terms have been coined to describe English programmes designed to improve the English competencies of undergraduates at the university for academic purposes, among them, ESP, EAP, and Business English. At the school level, too, many catchy titles have been invented to sweeten the "bitter pill" of English for a reluctant student populace, among them, "English with a Smile" and "Speak English Our Way". All of these efforts have been aimed at stripping English of its status as a "badge of privilege", as Thiru Kandiah described it (1984, p. 48). Yet, despite these pronouncements and efforts,

[2] Anecdotally, it appears that (as recently as September 2022) the term "kaduva" or "kadda" may still be popular among university students. A young undergraduate at the University of Peradeniya, who is fluent in English, was overheard using the term "kadda" when asking a friend what the hours for English classes were on the time-table.

some 66 years later, the quest to expand access to English or to make a large enough population of students acquire the requisite proficiencies remains something akin to the quest for the Holy Grail.[3]

I will not spend too much time here delineating the evolution of ESL teaching in Sri Lanka or its relative successes and failures. A lot has been said in this regard and a lot more can be said. I am drawing attention here to the history of the English language and the emergence of ESL or ELT as a discipline in the country only for the purpose of showing how its gradual and unforeseeable rise is leading to what I would like to call the "big thaw" in English Studies in Sri Lanka.

But what *is* English Studies? To borrow a phrase from Godfrey Gunatilleke, English Studies approaches English as a "living language" (1954, p. 121), something that gives the students access to the full range of expression in its many domains. ELT, on the other hand, is intentionally limited in its objectives. Acknowledging the immense utilitarian value of English today, both locally and internationally, ESL/ELT aims at facilitating only limited access to the language which would enable "access to modern knowledge, particularly, scientific and technical knowledge" as English has now been endowed with new roles "as the instrument of development, [as] the medium of international communication and of the reciprocal discharge of international responsibilities and commitments, [and as] the means of procuring desirable jobs and getting on in life, and so on" (Kandiah, 1984, p. 56). However, I ought to mention here that writing in 1954, the young English graduate, Godfrey Gunatilleke, who graduated with a First Class in English, did not believe that English could ever become a "living language" in the hands of a formerly colonized people that did not share a culture with the writers whose literature nurtured the language (1954) and, I suppose, to extend his argument further, who had not contributed to the enrichment of that language in a meaningful way. His prediction was that English in Sri Lanka would therefore turn into a "language without metaphor" (1954). However, 66 years on, very few naysayers would deny that English *has* become a living language in Sri Lanka with a language and literature that Sri Lankans can proudly call their own. And, Godfrey Gunatilleke himself has lived to witness its slow but sure emergence as the one-time Chair of the Gratiaen Trust entrusted with implementing the vision of its founder, Michael Ondaatje, "to recognize and promote creative writing in English" through the Gratiaen Prize. In saying this, I

[3] Census of Population and Housing data indicate that English literacy is just 22% among Sri Lanka's population above 15 years of age (qtd in IPS 2018).

do not mean to imply that Sri Lankan English is by any means an equalizer. The presence of what is termed Standard Sri Lankan English, particularly in terms of accent, only makes the acquisition of the "right" accent or pronunciation the next big hurdle in the way of adult learners of English as Parakrama noted (2010). Removing this hurdle even became the aim of a media campaign in 2009 supported by the Office of the President of Sri Lanka, no less, titled "Speak English Our Way" although little information is available on how successful it was in arriving at its stated objective of "a neutral South Asian accent" (Fernando, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite the expressed interest in and concerted efforts towards improving English, ESL or ELT, which is the pedagogic arm to accomplish that objective, initially occupied the status of a poor relative vis-à-vis the more traditional *and* "elite" English Studies. In fact, until the 1980s, ESL remained a sub-department of the departments of English in state universities, with both administrative and pedagogical direction given by members of the Departments of English. Although the sub-departments had a separate teaching staff, classified as "academic support staff", they occupied a "no man's land" in terms of wages and status in the university hierarchy because, as "instructors", they were perceived to play a lesser, service function. The fact that they mostly offered non-credit courses to students of different abilities and competencies in English meant that most students did not take the classes seriously although both the students and the authorities were quick to point fingers at the teachers for the continued failure of students to pick up enough English even for limited or specific functions. Things began to change only in the 1980s when the sub-departments were revamped as ELTUs and brought directly under the Vice Chancellors with a management committee made up of deans of faculties to give it the direction it needed to serve the different English needs of students of different faculties. Given the clear-cut division of labor between English and ELTU, there were no overlaps in course content or pedagogic interests between the two entities historically and, thus, no cause for tensions and frictions over territorial demarcations in academic foci between them. Relations remained mostly cordial as the vast majority of teachers in ELTUs were, in any case, graduates of English departments.

This status quo began to change in the 2000s, mainly due to the intervention of World Bank Higher Education grants, which require universities and HEIs to compete for grants by submitting proposals, a requirement that pits universities and faculties, and even study programmes against each other for the

dazzlingly high and enticing amounts available to successful bidders. There have been at least three such block grants up to now: IRQUE, HETC, and AHEAD. There is a common refrain to the CfPs of the World Bank for the three grants disbursed so far: improving or enhancing the "quality" and "relevance" of degree programmes (World Bank n.d.). Despite ongoing criticism of the criteria and standards stipulated for determining "quality" and "relevance" at the state universities that the grants and the attendant academic ethos have engendered, which have been described as skewed and superficial (Mantillake, 2022; See also essays in this volume), there seems no letup in enthusiasm over and insistence on "quality culture" if the University of Peradeniya is anything to go by. Although there are different emphases in the stated objectives of World Bank CfPs, they have one thing in common: a dedicated amount for improving the English language competencies of students, which the university does not have to compete for but can access by submitting a list of activities along with a budget. Under AHEAD (Accelerating Higher Education Enhancement and Academic Development), as the current round of funding is called, the ESL grant is given the acronym ELSE (English Language Skills Enhancement). While the extent of improvement in English language skills of students subsequent to the injection of these funds, which include funds for postgraduate training of staff of the ELTUs, has not, to my knowledge, been tested, the grants have required extensive revisions in teaching and study materials; use of technology-assisted teaching; enhancement of skills of the teaching staff through training workshops and programmes by experts, etc. The training of the spotlight on the twin skills of English and IT of undergraduates as the "magic bullet" to address the problem of employability under World Bank funding has made university authorities pay more attention, UGC downwards, to English language teaching, hitherto regarded more in the light of a "necessary evil". Arguably, this interest is a principal cause of the change in perception among authorities towards ESL, hitherto treated as an irrelevant entity that exists on sufferance on the margins of the academe.

National imperatives have combined with international donor agency funding and interest to give prominence to enhancing English language skills. It is widely accepted now that events surrounding 1956 may have resulted in throwing the baby out with the proverbial bathwater meaning, in this instance, throwing away the opportunity to retain English as a value-neutral language by taking the sting out of it through expanding access to it. This was the plan initially when the idea of the Central Colleges was first mooted in the 1920s by the colonial government (Coperahewa, 2009). When these state-funded schools came

to be finally established in the early 1940s, they offered English-medium instruction to students from underprivileged backgrounds who showed promise and who were admitted to the Colleges based on a selection test.[4] The attempt was to break the stranglehold on English-medium education and its attendant privileges that, until then, were reserved for the select few who could afford to study at the fee-levying, mostly missionary, schools. But many other factors intervened to prevent that. One was the resentment towards the power accruing to the English-speaking elite in post-independence Ceylon that naturally extended to the language which gave them such power. Another was the loss of a generation of well-trained and competent English teachers due to short-sighted policies and planning as has been pointed out by others. This continues to put English beyond the reach of many and concentrates it in the hands of an elite circle who have the means to make it available to their offspring. Nevertheless, efforts to widen access to English, now as a solution to the issue of employability, continue apace.

A noteworthy reform towards this end is the introduction of a Bilingual Education (BLE) stream starting in grade 6, which modified the policy of compulsory mother-tongue education till university that had been introduced starting in the 1940s. The BLE policy gives the option for students to study some subjects in English and some subjects in Sinhala or Tamil.[5] The BLE programme, which was introduced in 2009, however, reported mixed results in its early years, (Wickramagamage et al., 2010) and still does not quite adopt the CLIL method (content and language integrated learning). But some believe that this is, relatively speaking, the most successful of the various measures to expand access to English tried so far and, as has been reported by teachers, there are discernible gains in English language competencies of students as they advance from one grade to another. Alongside the government interest is the interest of parents and even some students to improve their English as cross-border opportunities open up for travel, studies, collaboration, employment, or migration. The mushrooming English tuition classes, even residential English camps (where they promise to *make* you speak English!), the demand for and sales of English language textbooks, the popularity of British Council English classes (though beyond the reach of the majority given its high tuition fees) all attest to the demand for

[4] English-medium instruction at these central schools or colleges did not survive long once *swa bhasha* or mother tongue education became the stated policy of the post-independent state.

[5] While students can choose between bilingual and monolingual education from Grade 6, they cannot choose which subjects to study in English and which subjects to study in Sinhala/Tamil. That decision remains the prerogative of the Ministry of Education.

English. This demand may in fact be fed by the myth that English constitutes the *abracadabra* that will open hitherto closed doors, locally, for those looking for employment, particularly in the burgeoning private sector. It is assumed to be the case, to some extent, even for state-sector jobs although doubts have been raised about the efficacy of using a Credit Pass at the O/Ls as an accurate gauge of English competencies. The continued fear of English is thus, paradoxically, paralleled by a keenness to learn it.

Simultaneously, English language teaching at universities, too, has been undergoing significant reforms. The decision to offer education in the "science" faculties only in the English medium and ongoing debates on whether to switch to exclusively English medium instruction even in the social sciences and Humanities faculties have raised the bar as regards ESL instruction.[6] This has brought about significant changes in the administrative structure to manage English Language teaching at state universities. Among the first such changes was the institution of the Standing Committee on Teaching of English as a Second Language at the UGC in 2011, which subsequently proposed to upgrade all English Language Teaching Units to Departments of English Language Teaching (DELTs). Among the functions of the UGC Standing Committee as listed on the UGC webpage is to devise the "University Test of English Language benchmark (UTEL) for teaching English as a second language specific to each study programme" (UGC, n.d.). Whether the new interest in improving English language skills is an outcome of the interest of international donor agencies such as the World Bank is not clear. What is clear is that these developments have shifted attention from English Studies to ESL or ELT. To date, 15 out of the 17 state universities in Sri Lanka have upgraded their ELTUs to DELTs. [7] More importantly, 4 of the DELTs have recently begun offering a Degree in ELT with several more planning to offer a degree in ELT in the near future, among them, the University of Colombo (Table 1).[8] The DELT at Kelaniya, which commenced

[6] Some academic programmes, even in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences have already commenced offering degrees exclusively in the English medium, for example, some programmes in the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya.

[7] Of the two remaining universities, Gampaha Wickramarachchi University, of recent origin, has an English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) while the University of Moratuwa offers ESL courses through the Dept. of Languages.

[8] The UGC Circular on upgrading ELTUs to DELTs does not require the introduction of a degree programme but the application offers the entities applying for department status the option to introduce new degree programmes.

operations in 2017, claims to be the first department to offer an ELT degree[9] and admits 50 students through a special window who have offered English for the GCE A/Ls, the minimum qualification for admission being an 'S' pass for English (DELT, UOK, 2019). Students for the other ELT degree programmes of DELT, too, will be admitted through a similar arrangement.[10]

TABLE 1: TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE STATE UNIVERSITIES

University	**Dept of English**	**BA Hons in English**	**ELT Dept**	**ELT Degree**	**Plans for ELT Degree**
Colombo U	✓	✓	✓	✖	✓
Kelaniya U	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA
Jaffna U[1]	✓	✓	✓	✓	**NA**
SJP U[2]	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA
Ruhuna U	✓	✓	✓	✖	✓
Peradeniya U[3]	✓	✓	✓	✖	✓
Rajarata U	✖	✖	✓	✖	✓
Sabaragamuwa U[4]	✖	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eastern U[5]	✖	✖	✓	✖	**--**
Southeastern U	✖	✖	✓	✓	NA
Uva Wellassa U	✖	✖	✓	✖	✓
Visual and Performing Arts	✖	✖	✓	✖	✓

[9] However, according to Dr. Chitra Jayathilake, Head, Department of English and Linguistics, University of Sri Jayawardena Pura (SJP), her department was the first to offer a TESL degree in 2014. Personal communication, July 25, 2022.

[10] According to Dr. Chitra Jayathilake, her department has agreed to admit two cohorts of students to the two degree programmes offered by the department through a special intake from this year onwards. Personal communication, July 25, 2022.

University	Dept of English	BA Hons in English	ELT Dept	ELT Degree	Plans for ELT Degree
Open University[6]	✖	✖	✓	✓	✖
Vavuniya U	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖
Moratuwa U[7]	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖
Gampaha Wickramarachchi[8]	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖
Wayamba U	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖

1. JU: Dept. name is Linguistics and English.
2. SJP: Dept. name is English and Linguistics. Two degrees are offered: English & TESL.
3. UOP: The tentative title of the degree currently being planned is "B.Ed. in ELT".
4. Sabaragamuwa U: Dept. is Languages. The degree is titled English. But the Dept. offers ESL courses for the degree as a major or minor.
5. EU: Dept. is Languages. It mentions the "discipline of English."
6. OU: Dept. is Languages. The degree is titled English and ELT.
7. MU: Dept. is Languages. It offers ESL courses.
8. Gampaha WU: It offers ESL courses through the English Language Teaching Centre.

Source: Author's compilations based on information available on department and university webpages between July and October 2022 when the survey was undertaken.

How has English Studies fared in the meantime? While there has been an exponential increase in the number of DELTs since the issuance of the 2017 UGC Circular, the number of English Departments (05 in number with 3 of them

located in the capital city of Colombo) [11] has remained stagnant. Some might respond to this statistic with either a "so what?" or, worse, that it is time that these bastions of the elite were finally dismantled.[12] Those who might harbor or have this reaction, tend to consider the English Departments guilty of a multitude of sins, among them, high (too high, some would say) standards in language proficiency that keep student numbers down; failure to cater to national needs through producing competent English teachers in their numbers; esoteric subject matter of little national relevance. How valid are these criticisms? It is a fact that, next to General English and Mathematics, English records the lowest pass rate at around 60% (DoE, 2020). But it is also a fact that the number offering English as one of the main subjects at the GCE Advanced Level Exam is also low hovering in the region of 1500 per year (MoE, 2020). Only a few schools offer English as a main subject for the GCE ALs and they are mainly located in urban areas due to lack of teachers.[13] Furthermore, to obtain a pass in English at the ALs, students have to demonstrate a high level of competence in English, something hard to attain given the falling standards of English teaching in the country unless one speaks English at home or is able to receive supplementary support from competent private tutors, something that depends on both location (urban) and parental income. At the university too, at least a pass in the A/L exam for English remains a prerequisite to offering English in the first year. For these reasons, the number of graduates from traditional English Departments has been low.

As for catering to the national demand for competent English teachers through increasing the number of English graduates, efforts have been made over the years to address this need. In the 1970s, Ashley Halpe attempted to increase the number of English graduates by successfully negotiating with the UGC to increase the intake for English through provisions such as the Special/Additional

[11] In addition, Open University offers a B.A. in English and English Language Teaching under the Dept. of Language and Sabaragamuwa University offers a BA in English under the Dept. of Languages.

[12] Although the one-time presidential advisor and head of the taskforce on English, Sunimal Fernando does not directly hold the Departments of English responsible, he blames "the old, conservative, outdated, elitist Sri Lankan ideology of English" for the failure to educate a wide enough class of Sri Lankan students in English in the launch of the initiative "English as a life skill" (2009, p. 3).

[13] In his essay titled "*Naduth Unge, Baduth Unge*" (2010), similar observations were made by Parakrama. Nothing much has changed since then although a few more schools beyond the traditional urban centres have commenced offering English as a main subject at the GCE ALs since then.

Intake for English as well as a quota for English teachers from state schools on conditional release from the Ministry of Education to ensure that they return to state sector schools upon completion of the degree. The justification for the bigger share of the Special Intake for English was based on national relevance. But, admittedly, these measures have proved to be a mere drop in the bucket given the demand. It is a fact that, to date, there are still schools that do not have the required number of English teachers, let alone competent and qualified ones.

Another accusation often leveled against the English Departments is that they are neocolonial holdouts teaching irrelevant subject matter that has little relevance to their location in a post-colony. "You teach Shakespeare", which implies a doubt regarding its relevance.[14] Beyond the relevance of Shakespeare in postcolonial Sri Lanka, a survey of syllabuses of Departments of English suggests that "English" is a catch-all phrase that covers a good mix of courses from English language studies and critical and cultural theory in addition to literature, which includes literature in translation and thematic approaches to literature covering topics in migration, labor, and gender/sexuality studies. Universities of Peradeniya and Jaffna even offer a survey course on Sinhala and Tamil Literature in addition to Sri Lankan English literature, which aims to introduce students of English to the indigenous literary traditions of the country. The course invites students to locate themselves in the specific socio-cultural contexts that they inhabit.

The diversion in focus from English Studies to ELT shows, nevertheless, that the policy planners are impatient. They are keen to increase the number of English teachers and thereby improve English competencies in the country. But a question remains: Will the new degree succeed in addressing the national need where the traditional English Departments have supposedly failed? Will it succeed in vaporising the "extra linguistic value" (Parakrama, 2010, p. 93) that attaches to English in Sri Lanka?

As stated in the DELT syllabus of the University of Kelaniya, the TESL degree is designed "to meet the needs of those students wishing to pursue a career in teaching English as a Second Language" (DELT, UOK, 2019). Although the syllabus does not say so, one assumes that it will more pointedly cater to the "national demand" by training competent English teachers. A survey of the course titles of the DELT syllabus at Kelaniya suggest this: Technology Enhanced

[14] It was revealing to read a similar criticism leveled against the place of Shakespeare in New Zealand in the context of a decision by "Creative New Zealand" not to fund a school Shakespeare festival (*The New Zealand Herald*, 2022).

Language Learning; Principles and Practices of Classroom Management; Second Language Acquisition; Language Testing and Assessment; Pedagogical Grammar; Teaching Young Learners, etc. But there is one important area of English Studies that this syllabus is deficient in: literary studies. According to documents available on the department webpage, until 2019, the syllabus had only one course that had literature in its title: "Teaching literature in the second language classroom". But three literature courses, introductory courses on Drama, Fiction, and Poetry, have come to be added since 2019 to fulfil a requirement for "inclusivity-sensitized courses" in the curriculum in order to comply with the provisions of a World Bank grant (DELT, UOK, 2019). It is possible that the decision to leave literature courses out arose from the dizzying range of subjects now available in the thriving field of ELT and the university-imposed cap on the maximum number of credits for an undergraduate degree. But as the exclusion is the result of a choice, it begs the question whether literature has no place in or no relevance to English Language Teaching.

It is pertinent to point out from a pedagogical point of view that the DELT degree trains English language teachers, not ESL/EFL learners. For the latter, a literary text in a language that s/he is struggling to learn would arguably be difficult or even counter-productive. But, for future English teachers who enter the programme with some degree of competency in the language and some exposure to English literature at the GCE A/Ls, it makes little sense to leave literature out as exposure to the range of thought and expression of the language available through its literature would only enrich the learning experience. Any language is as much immersed in and nurtured by its varied literary expressions as it is by the spoken and written word in formal contexts. If the ELT curriculum is attempting to produce graduates who would become competent English language teachers, the learning loss engendered through the failure to connect the students with the wellsprings of the English language through its literature can be immense. The production of English (albeit ELT) graduates who only learn about one specific and narrow area of study in English Studies may lead to the scenario that Godfrey Gunatilleke predicted in 1954, "A language without metaphor", as these students would be in charge of the future life of English in the country. To him, the ideal user of the language was someone who had control over the whole range of expression: "Distinct from [the utilitarian] aspect, there [is] another dimension in language, where words are a more intimate expression of the speaker, and deal with his inward life, the region of his feelings, his emotional response to the world in which he lives" (1954, p. 121). Of course, one possible

argument against the inclusion of literature might be that, as English teachers, these DELT graduates would teach students for whom English is a second language and with whom they would find few opportunities to discuss literature. That may be true but for the trainee teacher the opportunity to engage with English as a "a living language" (Gunatilleke, 1954, p. 121) would be invaluable. The Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and his colleagues put it best in their proposal to abolish the English Department of their university and replace it with either a Department of African Literature and Languages or a Department of Modern Languages: "Languages and linguistics should be studied in the department because in literature we see the principles of language and linguistics in action. Conversely, through knowledge of languages and linguistics we can get more from literature. For linguistics not to become eccentric, literature should be studied in the department of African Literature and Languages" (1972, p. 440).

But how do the "traditional" English Departments compare in terms of their course offerings with the standard offerings of an ELT syllabus? Do the syllabuses show disregard for the national demand for competent English teachers? My survey of English syllabuses of the 5 English departments indicates that, barring the Department of English at Kelaniya,[15] the undergraduate syllabuses of the other English Departments include a range of courses falling under English language studies and ELT in addition to literature and theory. To take the Peradeniya English syllabus as an example, it is made up of some 60% literature and theory courses but the rest constitute a good mix of topics from English language studies and ELT, namely, Structure of English, Discourse Analysis, Semantics and Pragmatics, Varieties and Norms in English, and Language Policy, Planning, and Management. I do not see how any of these courses would *not* be of benefit to an ELT graduate. In fact, the English programme in Jaffna even cross-lists courses from Linguistics and ELTD, thus enriching the English curriculum by including courses that encompass or touch upon the development of English in its many dimensions. To quote M. Thiruvarangan, "In a postcolonial setting like Sri Lanka, where the English language functions as a neocolonial tool and a class-marker, the study of English literature cannot be divorced from the study of English language. These two areas, while having their own academic trajectories, often crisscross, animate one another in productive ways and generate inter-disciplinary conversations" (2021). As evident from the above, most of the Departments have adopted the "English

[15] Department of English, UOK, offers few courses coming under ELT. I speculate that this was to eliminate overlaps with DELT, UOK.

Studies" approach to the study of English, treatingthe study of literature as inseparable from the language that feeds it and vice versa.

The battle over the inclusion of English literature in the university curriculum is nothing new. A similar battle was fought in 19th-century Britain. As Allan Bacon reminds us, Oxford and Cambridge universities remained resistant to the inclusion of English literature in the curriculum until the late 19th century on the basis that its study was not "sufficiently rigorous" (Bacon, 1986, p. 597). For these two older universities, the study of literature was synonymous with the study of the Greek and Roman Classics, which included a study of creative and noncreative texts alongside a rigorous study of Greek and Latin grammar. English first made an appearance as an academic subject in the university curriculum of the University College of London (UCL) and King's College and, then too, only because these colleges were to impart education to the children of the middle classes (Bacon, 1986, p. 599). But at UCL the focus was on English grammar and rhetoric. Those who argued for the inclusion of English literature in the syllabus in addition to the study of its grammar were opposed to a "utilitarian, material view of education" (593) and associated the study of literature with the "cultivation of taste" and "refinement of the mind" (597), an idea that resonates with Mathew Arnold's sentiments in "Culture and Anarchy" (1869). This was F. D. Maurice's view, too, who is credited with introducing the textual study of English literature to the English curriculum of King's College. Clearly, the study of English literature has come a long way since then, thanks to the counter-hegemonic approaches to the study of English literature in both Britain and its former colonies including Sri Lanka.[16] Moreover, the opportunity to cultivate and refine one's critical sensibilities and mindset and to expand one's horizons through the study of literature from different parts of the world (not only in English but in other languages, too) that literary studies offer cannot be discounted and devalued. The expansion in students' awareness of their place in the social worlds they occupy that comes from such exposure is immense and it cannot but help anyone who wishes to be a good teacher of English to students drawn from these diverse worlds.

[16] This is the argument made by Michael Neill, Shakespeare scholar at Auckland University in his criticism of the decision of "Creative New Zealand" not to fund the school Shakespeare Festival. "Shakespeare" studies, translations, and performance in the erstwhile colonies, he argues, has come a long way (15 October 2022) since the times when "Shakespeare" could be used to promote imperialist British agendas.

There may however be those who believe that the more urgent need is to broaden access to English given the extent to which English has acted to deny opportunities to those without it and that a more holistic exposure to English in its many dimensions is secondary to that. They may see ELT as more suited for that. Yet, I am wondering if it is a "universally acknowledged fact" that English literature has no role to play in an ESL classroom. The Master's in teaching Literature (in a second language context) offered by the Postgraduate Institute of English (PGIE) seems to belie that argument. Moreover, there are scholars who have argued for the pedagogical value of literature in the ESL classroom. Therefore, removing the study of literature from the ELT undergraduate curriculum does not seem like a good idea.

I would like to end this paper by connecting the declining fortunes of English Studies in universities in Sri Lanka with the demise of Humanities education in the country at large and the world in general. Much has been written about the latter. In researching for this paper, I looked at the curricula of several of the better-known "private" or "for-profit" universities in Sri Lanka to see what interest they profess in English. Indeed, as anticipated, their degrees are mainly in the fields of Engineering, Computing, Law, and Business & Management (some offer courses in Psychology) (Table 2). Only one, SLIIT, has a faculty of Humanities and Sciences but, barring Law, the only other Humanities degree is labeled B.Ed. in English. A quick scan of the course titles of this degree shows that they offer 10 English literature courses out of a total of 45 courses, a significant percentage of which fall into the category of ELT topics. Other than SLIIT, only NSBM offers a degree in English. But this course, just introduced, is titled BA/BSc in English for Business Communication. All other English language programmes of the private or non-state universities are classified as foundation or service courses, which emphasize communicative competence. Where course titles were listed, I saw no reference to any aspect of literature or the use of English literature for language teaching purposes. The message is clear: If English Studies is to survive in some form or other in Sri Lanka, it would have to be in the state universities, not in private universities where the market determines degree offerings.

TABLE 2: TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

University	B.A. Hons in English	ELT Degree	ESL or EL Courses	Other English Degrees	English Lit as part of the degree
Horizon	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖
SLIIT[1]	✖	✖	✓	✓	✓
NSBM[2]	✖	✖	✓	✓	✖
SLTC	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖
IIT	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖
APIIT	✖	✖	✓	✖	✖

[1]SLIIT: 10 out of the 45 courses are literature courses.

[2]NSBM: BA/BSc in Business English

Source: Author's compilations based on information available on department and university webpages between July and October 2022 when the survey was undertaken.

I do not wish to end my paper on a pessimistic note that is inflected with nostalgia for the halcyon days of the University of Ceylon when the Humanities gave lustre and shine to the university as has been said often and English retained its premier though somewhat contradictory status as both a subject in high demand and one more exclusive than inclusive in nature. Nor do I wish to suggest that what is happening in English is an advance warning of what awaits the Humanities in general.[17] There is a general perception at the university level and in the country at large that Humanities education produces "useless" graduates that fill the ranks of the unemployed and the unemployable who then go on protest marches demanding that they be, somehow or other, absorbed into the state sector. Leaving aside the question of whether there is a glut in the market of Humanities graduates for the moment, we have to raise fundamental questions about the role of Humanities today.[18] But as the title, "Why we need the

[17] Surprisingly, the fate of English in Sri Lanka is not shared by other countries in the region if the situation in Kerala, India, is to be taken as an example where, according to M.A. Oommen, "out of the 1.37 lakh students enrolled in colleges for B.A. courses, English, Economics and History alone account[ed] for 61% of the total enrolment in 2020" (M. A. Oommen, "Higher Education in Kerala Needs a New Chapter," *The Hindu*, June 14, 2021). Oomen is not happy with this trend as he attributes it to the limited choices in subjects available at the colleges.

[18] It appears that, in the U.S., it is not Humanities alone that are threatened. As reported, at Western Connecticut State University, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs has

Humanities in today's career-focused world" (2021), by Steven Mintz demonstrates, Humanities are called upon today to justify their existence more than ever. Nevertheless, few would disagree that, today, there is, *more than ever before*, a need for these core Humanities subjects, Philosophy, History, Languages & Literature. After all, Humanities enable us to understand ourselves among others, how we have evolved through the ages, and to cultivate empathy and respect towards others. At university, they inculcate simultaneously the powers of critical thinking to reflect on our choices, to engage in dialogue, and to justify our choices and judgments. Thus, the case for English Studies, as it has been traditionally conceived, is by extension a case for Humanities education. The growing interest in and gradual orientation towards ELT may eventually spell its demise using the same yardstick of what is "useful" (ELT) against what is "useless" (English). If there are other aspects, such as the need to broaden access to English as part of the democratization of education, certainly that has to be addressed. But, I am not yet convinced that an undergraduate degree in ELT that omits literature is the way to do that.

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recommended to the President to eliminate most of the social science majors, including Economics and Geography, on grounds of low completion and low enrolment (6 October 2022, https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/save-social-sciences-at-western?source=facebook) and concerned academics have just started a petition to the President to rescind the decision.

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