

# Difficulties Faced by G.C.E. (A/L) Students when Learning English as a Second Language

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to examine the difficulties encountered in written tasks of General English subject when learning English as a second language by the first-year students of G.C.E. (A/L) in the academic year 2018 -2020 at KM/ST/ Dharussalam Maha Vidyalaya, Sammanthurai. The specific objectives of the study are to identify the grammatical difficulties made by the students when accomplishing written tasks; to provide the language teachers with new techniques and methodologies of language teaching by analyzing the student's difficulties and to make the students aware of their syntactic errors. The Research samples were 30 monolingual students who learn English as their second language. These students were selected randomly. A pre-test and post-test which comprise grammatical and paragraph typed questions based on the General English subject were administered. A quantitative data analysis approach was implemented to analyze the pre and post-test scores of the experimental and controlled groups. EA method was deployed to analyze the grammatical errors. The findings of the study show that many students face difficulties in the grammatical components such as parts of the speech, syntactic structures, and vocabulary due to lack of exposure to the English language, mother tongue interference, incompetence in English grammar, incomplete application of rules, omission, addition, bad formation of sentences and redundant lexical choice. The study suggests assigning the students plenty of written tasks continuously, using effective syntactic strategy in the authentic classroom to get the interest of the students, improving the skills on the grammatical components by using visual aids, strengthening teachers with smart classroom facilities to carry out the teaching process and building up the culture of using the second language in the learning and teaching process. These efforts as remedies were used to solve the difficulties faced in written tasks by G.C.E. (A/L) students when learning English as a second language in Sammanthurai. The study hopes to help ESL teachers and educators to be familiar with the most frequent difficulties faced by L2 learners and to adopt an appropriate strategy in preparing learning teaching activities.*

Keywords: EA, ESL, Grammatical Components, Second Language, Syntactic Analysis

## 1.1 Introduction

In the context of Sammanthurai, a town in Ampara District in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, Teaching English as a second language to Advanced Level students in a secondary school with the teaching experiences of the researcher, A/L students encounter difficulties in written communication with various aspects of English language in this educational zone. They are grammatical elements such as vocabulary, parts of speech, and syntactic structures. These difficulties are because of the lack of subjection to the English language, and mother tongue influence. lack of ability in English grammar, defective application of rules, deletion, inclusion, poor origination of sentences, and inessential lexical alternatives. These dares block students of advanced level from learning the second language English.

Further, the researcher observes that the General English subject in G.C.E (Advanced Level) classes has been disregarded by most of the students as it is not a compulsory subject to get admission to the university whereas they focus their entire attention on the core subjects. Although English subject has been included in the curriculum from grade three onwards, A/L students poorly perform in General English at their A/L. There is criticism against the teachers of English from Principals, ISAs- English, ADEs - English, Zonal Officials, Provincial Officials, and Parents as many of the students secure a weak pass in General English in the A/L examination whereas they qualify for university entrance by performing greater in their core-subjects. Therefore, this research focuses to inspect the troubles came across in the written tasks of General English subject by the first-year students of G.C.E. (A/L) in the academic year 2018-2020 at KM/ST/ Dharussalam Maha Vidyalaya, Sammanthurai when learning English as a second language.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Grade Twelve G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Students in Sammanthurai lack linguistic competence in written communication. They find it difficult (1) to use the way that words and phrases are put together to form sentences in the English language (Syntactic Errors), (2) to study the meanings of words and phrases (Semantic Errors), (3) to arrange the forms of words (Morphological Errors), (4) to handle the words in English (Lacking vocabulary), to use the linguistic competence, and to practise the target language due to the interference of the mother tongue. Therefore, by developing linguistic strategies, performance in written communication could be improved.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the research is to inspect the troubles came across in the written tasks of General English subject by the first-year students of G.C.E. (A/L) in the academic year 2018-2020 at KM/ST/ Dharussalam Maha Vidyalaya, Sammanthurai when learning English as a second language.

The distinct objectives of the study are to recognize the grammatical challenges faced by the students when fulfilling written tasks; to issue the language teachers with new techniques and approaches to language teaching by examining the student's difficulties and to create awareness among the students about their syntactic error.

### 1.4 Research Question

According to this research, the following research questions are to be addressed.

1. What are the reasons affecting the A/L students in Sammanthurai in the process of learning English as a second language?
2. How can language difficulties in written tasks be minimized?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The results of this research will give helpful suggestions to the G.C.E A/L students to minimize the language difficulties in written tasks when learning English as a second language.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

According to Krashen (1983), the acquisition could be a raw process without linguistical configuration as extended as educating is extremely mindful about the fallacy corrections along with laws. While O'Neil (2001) recorded that children's way of language learning, or first language acquisition, is not a single system, many linguists agree that practicing communicating and listening to adult speakers helps them to learn. Krashen's (1983) theory of second language acquisition consists of five hypotheses.

The first one is the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis. The acquired system and the learned system are the independent systems of second language performance. The product of a subconscious process which is very similar to the process children undergoes when they acquire their first language is known as "the acquired system" or "acquisition".

The relationship with an introduction as well as educating, explain impact and conclude on the prior says by the monitor hypothesis. The observation role is the applied results of the learned grammar. Universe speculation describes the grammatical systems of language learners just as an expectable "herbal order". Feed-in conjecture is concerned with acquisition now no longer learning. The beginners boost and develop through herbal order while the collective input of a second language it is a single step at the same distance angle in the persuading hierarchy of language capability.

Affective variables of the affective filter hypothesis play a supporting character in second language accession. Those are panic, self-confidence, and encouragement. According to Krashen's view, Students who have high levels of motivation, confidence, good self-image, and low levels of anxiety are well prepared to achieve in second language acquisition.

### 2.2. Causes of Difficulties/Errors

#### *Interference from the native language*

Intervention in view that language similarly to therefore the complexness of the motive language are the reasons for fault /issues determined in 2d language acquisition. According to Mahendran (2010), he declared that it's miles a widely recognized notion that 2nd language acquisition is powerfully inspired by the manner of approach of the learner's first language. There's an ordinary perception that there may be a terrible end cease end result with inside the position of the number one language. That is, the first language receives inside the approach or influences with the studying of a second language. Therefore, the choice of the first language is transferred to the second language.

In addition, Patramongkorn (2005) exposes that "mom tongue" is genuinely the lingo of the mom that in large part is going to be the forceful lingo of a toddler's preliminary language. In line with Wilkins' remark, "a character already is aware of his mom's tongue whilst gaining knowledge of L2, it's miles this which he tries to switch.

#### *The Difficulty of the Second Language*

The change can also confirm that it is appropriate because the systems of the two languages are parallel; if so, we get "effective change" or "relief," or it may turn out to be unwarranted because the language systems are different if so, we get "terrible changes" or disruption." (Wilkins, 1972:199). Haja (1996) found that the mother tongue can cause disturbances in the areas of grammar, syntax, lexicon, and pronunciation. Richards et al, (1993) explained this in that petrification is the method by which the language features f, i are invalidated.

The use of vocabulary, grammar, and expressions can be familiar or permanent as part of learning a second language or abroad.

In line with Richards (1974), errors were classified consistent with the causes into 2 classes namely, inhome lingual errors and intralingual and developmental errors the gadget inside the int intelligence that language beginners' graph to use the device of the preceding language or the shape that stay alive so as to collect the second language is understood as interlingual mistakes. These errors result from mother-tongue interference.

During the learning process of L2 at a section, once the learners have not very acquired the knowledge, intra-lingual and developmental errors are taken place. The mistakes are triggered by way of the hassle or the hassle of L2. constant with Richards (1971) overgeneralization, backward policy restrictions, incomplete software of regulations, and false thoughts hypothesized are notions of due to the fact the foremost motives of intralingual errors.

Creating a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language by learners is known as an overgeneralization error. For example. She can plays / We are write.

Unawareness of the rule restrictions is that the untrained persons notice guidelines to the contexts the place they are now not improbable. For example. The lady who I noticed her/ He made me to rest.

An incomplete package deal of guidelines means that the beginners fail to apply a completely advanced shape. i.e. AN assertion shape is in addition used as a query, one in each of the ameliorations can also additionally moreover be a set is likewise omitted, or a query word should moreover clearly be similar to the assertion form.

For example, you need to dance? / why you want it? as soon as the freshmen do not completely recognize a difference at periods the goal language, the fake speculation is taken place. it is defined mistreatment the example that the form "changed into" can be understood because of "is" as a member of present tense and the member of beyond. As an instance She is speaks Sinhala / it absolutely changed into happened.

Referring to Bootchuy's (2008) study, interference errors or Lingua Franca errors, developmental errors and intra-lingual errors described by Richards (1993) have been acquired as the main error types. Errors caused by interference from the learner's first language are called interlingual errors. Errors that replicate the general characteristics of rule learning are called intralinguistic errors. Overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, and incomplete application of rules are divided into three. Errors that seem a result of the learner's attempt to build up hypotheses regarding the English language from his or her restricted experiences of it within the classroom or textbook may be referred to as developmental errors.

## **2.4 Error Analysis**

In view of Richards et al, (1993) remark that, error evaluation is the learning about and evaluation of inaccuracy made by using L2/EFL learners. Similarly, Sharma (1981) explains that error evaluation at the beginning and for the duration of the various steps of an overseas / 2nd language-teaching programme are regularly beneficial. Inside the mild of Srichai (2002), the success and additionally the failure of the programme can be exposed, and there are blessings for lecturers to fashion the right fabric and applicable instructing plans.

Norrish (1983), helps for the ideas defined on the pinnacle of in relation to blunders evaluation that it is able to be visible as a fine system for every lecturer and researcher. For teachers, they are able to expect not unusual place sorts of mistakes that their college students might manufacture, and also, they understand how their college students can keep away from mistakes.

With reference to researchers, several strategies are taken to investigate the sorts of mistakes made by second language beginners. According to Corded (1974); cited in Ellis (1994), the mistake assessment research consists of five procedures, namely; sample of learner language collection, the identity of mistakes, outline of mistakes, clarification of blunders, and evaluation of mistakes. Ellis' Study (1994), highlights that the most important step in analyzing a learner's blunders is to identify such faults. Then errors are delineated and categorized into schooling as quickly as they all were identified. Significantly, the identity and outline of errors layout to make clear why they're made. Ellis furthermore shows that the ambition of the mistaken assessment is too useful resource beginners examine L2 successfully, in order that they need to degree mistakes. Four steps in studying mistakes were proposed with the aid of using Bell (1981) and James (1998). Identification, description, rationalization, and assessment are the stairs of their proposal.

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Theoretical and practical concerns with error analysis of Sharma (1998) contains of six steps. They are conceptual body (brief definition of error), choice of partakers for the diagnostic test and planning and setting up a diagnostic test; categorization, order of errors and observations; detecting errors to their origins and illustration of errors.

Concerning Srichai's study (2002), international and native errors framework were acquired. Lexicon, syntax, morphology, and orthography are the classifications because the kinds of errors. Misapply, deletion or spelling mistakes of structures and forms of English lexicon, morphological and syntactic options are the outcomes of errors.

In view of what Na-ngma found out about (2005), the sorts of blunders have been categorized by means of instructing rides in marking written assignments. The twenty-one grammatical kinds are as follows: phrase order, her framework started out with deficient sentences, varying from a sentencing stage to phrase level, going along with the aid of run-on sentences, there-be, gerunds and infinitives, voice, tenses, agreement, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, auxiliary/ modal, possessive ('s), conjunctions, prepositions, capitalization and spelling, punctuation and articles. Additionally, the above-mentioned strategies of error evaluation share four frequent steps namely embody identification, description of the error, explanation of the error, and comparison of errors.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Setting**

The study was conducted at KM/ST/Dharussalam Maha Vidyalaya, Sammanthurai which is located in the Ampara District of Eastern Province.

#### **3.2 Research Variables**

This research consists of two variables namely, the independent variable and the dependent variable. The Independent variable is the effective use of syntactic strategy which was used by the teacher in the classroom during the process of teaching English to minimize the students' difficulties in written tasks of General English subject.

The dependent variable is the improvement in written tasks without facing difficulties in the grammatical components.

#### **3.3. Research Instruments**

A pre-test was conducted to collect the primary data. After the intervention programme, a post-test was administered.

#### **3.4 Sample of the Study**

The research samples of thirty monolingual first-year students of G.C.E. (A/L) in the academic year 2018-2020 in a state school in the Sammanthurai Educational Zone were chosen on the basis of a written test in line with the General English subject. A random sampling technique was deployed to choose the subjects of the research. They were split into two groups namely, the control group and the experimental group for the study.

#### **3.5 Design of the Study**

A pre-test in line with G.C.E. (A/L) General English subject was conducted to find the language troubles experienced by the students when facing written tasks in General English subject. Two-and-a-half-hour test which consists of two parts. Part "A" is about grammar whereas part "B" is about writing. Six questions were set in Part – A. There are as follows.

1. Complete the blank with an appropriate preposition from the list given
2. Fill in the correct form of the pronoun given in the brackets in each blank.
3. Choose the correct form of the verb from the brackets and fill in the blanks.
4. Construct questions to get the words in bold print as the answer. Use the question words given in the box.
5. Complete the sentences by putting the words in brackets in the correct order. (Initial word has been given)
6. Combine the pairs of sentences using suitable conjunction from those given in brackets.

Four questions were set in Part "B". They are as follows.

1. Select any five words from the list given and make meaningful sentences using those words.
2. Write a paragraph beginning with the given sentence. 75-100 is the word limit. Do not exceed the word limit and do not write more than a paragraph. "Eating a balanced diet is dynamic to lead a durable life....."

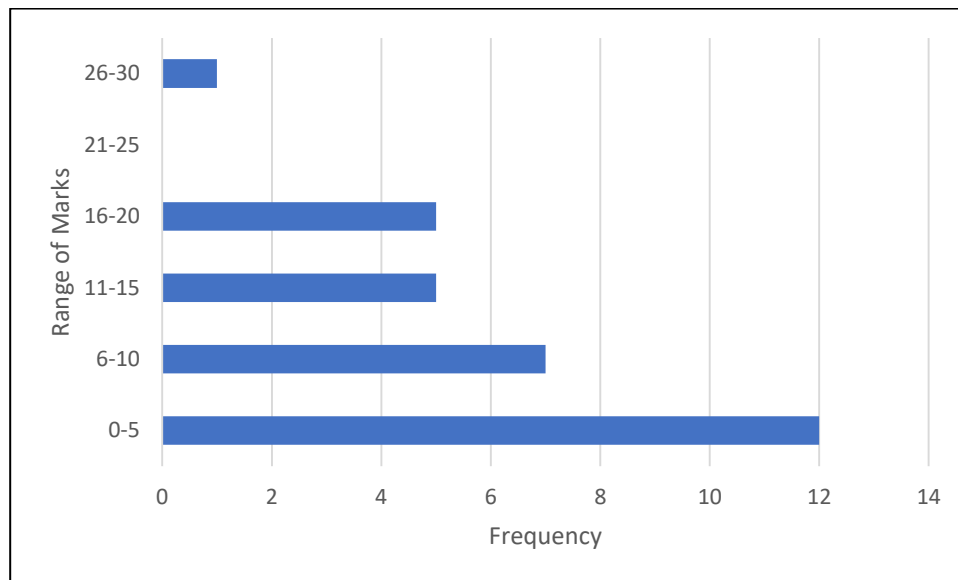
3. Imagine that you became the first on the island according to the A/L results of this year. Immediately after you came to know this, you thought of writing a letter to a friend of yours, expressing how you felt and saying who and what helped you to obtain this result. Write this letter. Use about 125-150 words and do not exceed the word limit.
4. Some people think that homework and assignment are burdens for children while others believe that they are useful in learning. Write an essay from your point of view regarding this. Use about 200 words and do not exceed the word limit.

The answer scripts were marked by the researcher and the data obtained was analyzed by the quantitative data analysis approach.

After the test, the research samples were taught by the researcher to apply the effective syntactic strategy in the actual classroom. The PowerPoint lessons, and audio-visual lessons using multimedia, and printed materials were conducted for a duration of a term in the context of state school. After the intervention program, a post-test was administered to evaluate the participants' improvement in the written tasks. Again, the answer scripts of the post-test were marked and analyzed as a process of evaluation. Collected data were analyzed with the EA method and quantitative data analysis approach.

### 3.6 Investigation of data

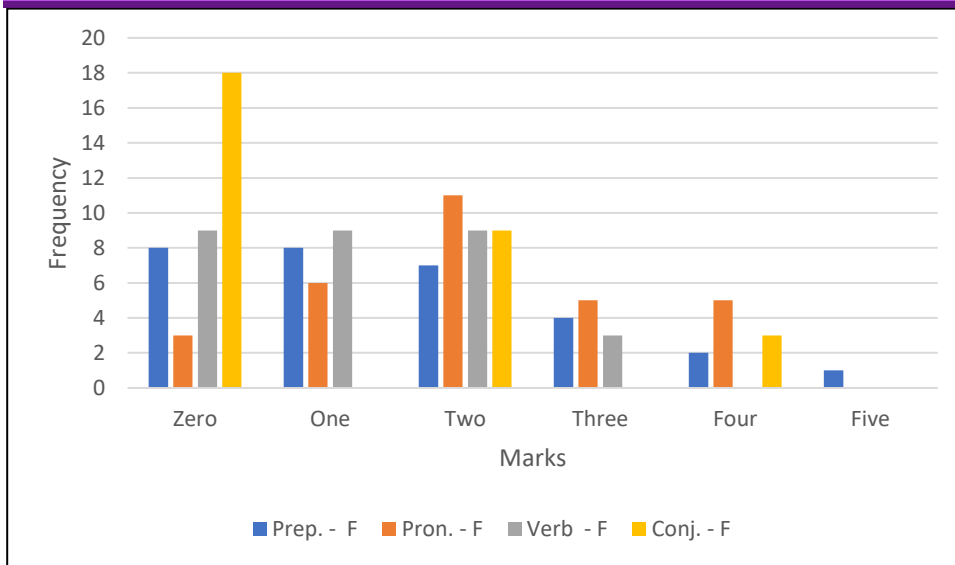
The selection of the subjects for the study was 10% from the Commerce stream whereas 90% from the Arts stream as the research setting was 1C Type state school. In addition, 30% of the male students and 70% of the female population were taken into the study. The pre-test score of the samples is hereby illustrated.



**Fig 1: Pre-Test Scores of the samples**

According to the given clustered bar chart, the frequency is shown in the “x” axis while the range of marks obtained in the pre-test by the sample is given in the “y” axis. Though the total mark of the test was 100%, the performance of the samples was below 30% as the language difficulties encountered when learning English as a second language in the A/L context.

Struggles encountered by the A/L students when learning English as a second language are to be explored. Very first, Troubles in the grammatical elements such as parts of the speech namely, prepositions, pronouns, verbs, and conjunction are illustrated as follows.

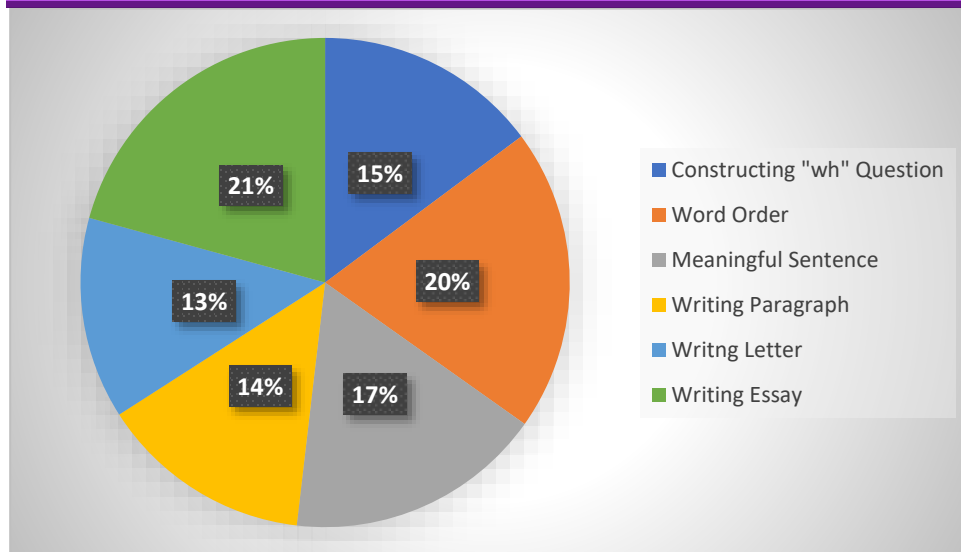


**Fig 2: Difficulties in Grammatical Components**

As per the given bar chart, there is a clear indication that most of the samples struggle with grammatical components, especially in the usage of parts of speech. Preposition as parts of speech is concerned, out of the samples, 27% of students secured zero out of five, whereas 3% secured five out of five. 27% of students scored one out of five, while 23% obtained two out of five. According to the data analysis, it is clear that A/L students face difficulties in grammatical components. If the pronoun is considered on the basis of the given data, 83% of the students obtained 0-3 marks out of five whereas 17% scored in the range of 4-5marks. Considering verbs as the parts of the speech, 90% of the samples scored in the range of 0-2 marks out of 10 whereas 10% of the subjects obtained scores between 3-5 out of 10. It is confirmed that the struggles demotivate second language learners in learning English. The problematic area in which the samples face great difficulties in conjunction. According to the data analysis, 60% of the subjects poorly performed and secured zero out of ten, 30% obtained two out of ten whereas 10% gained four out of ten in the pre-test in the section of grammar. On the basis of the data collected, it can be proved that when learning English as a second language A/L students face language difficulties.

According to the data, difficulties in the writing tasks given in the pre-test are analyzed as follows. The samples were expected to show their written performance in the following area. They are constructing “wh” questions, word order, writing meaningful sentences, writing paragraphs, writing the letter, and writing essays in the context of General English subjects in A/L. 67% of the subjects were unable to construct ‘wh’ questions and obtained zero marks out of ten whereas 90% of the subjects failed in the aspect of word order. 77% of the students faced difficulties in making meaningful sentences and obtained zero marks on the pre-test. 63% of the samples failed to attempt to write a paragraph while 60% of them secured zero marks in the task of writing a letter. 93% of the subjects were unable to write essays on the given topic and obtained zero marks on the test. The following pie chart shows a clear-cut interpretation of the data.

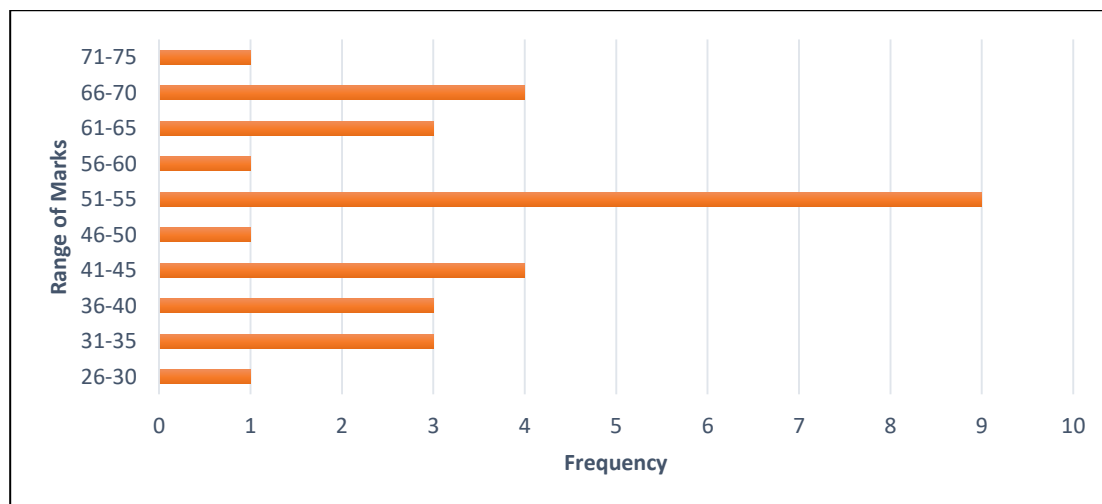




**Fig 3: Zero Marks in Writing Task**

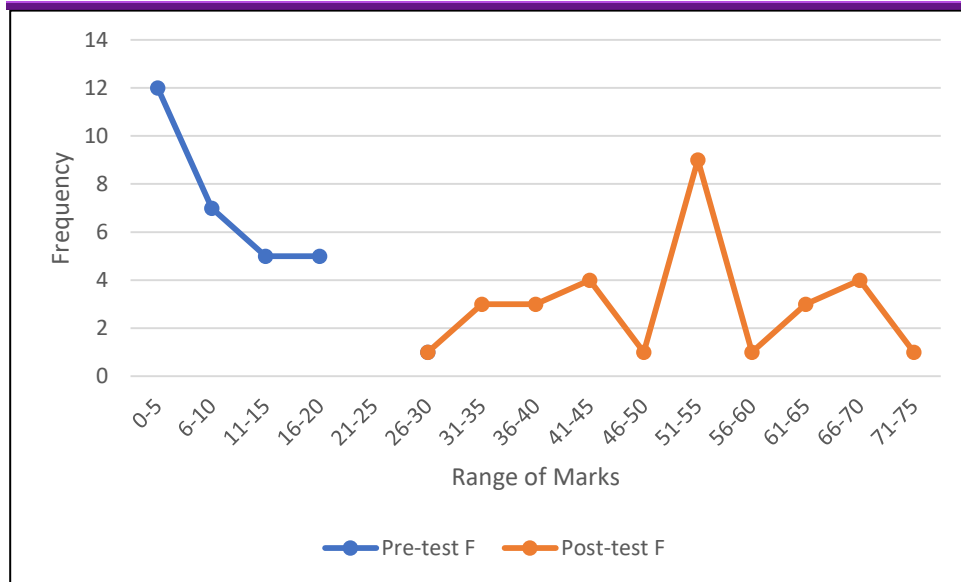
As per the pie chart, it reveals the real situation of the A/L General English subject when they learn a second language in the context of English.

The post-test score is shown below to have a comparative study and to notify the improvement of the assigned written tasks in General English subject.



**Fig 4: Post-Test Score**

In view of the given clustered bar chart, the post-test score shows a healthy indicator in the performance of written tasks. It clearly remarks that there is a gradual improvement in written communication as there was a low performance exhibited of below 30% in the pre-test, it increases quantitatively. The difference is shown below.

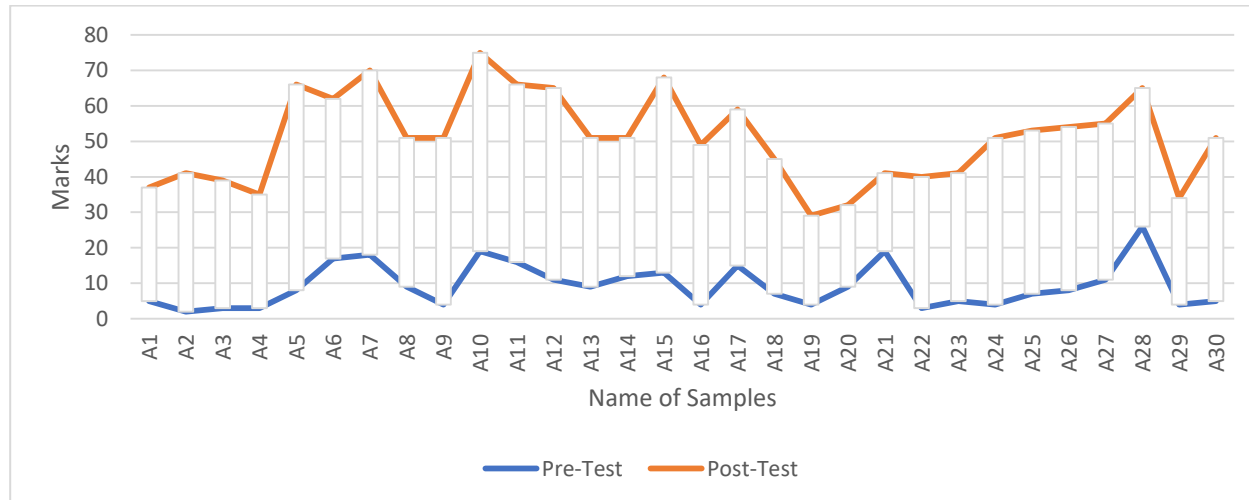


**Fig 5: Pre and Post-Test Score**

The given line chart is evidence that reveals the significant changes that took place in the process of learning English as a second language by G.C.E. (A/L) students.

#### 4. Finding of the Study

In view of the study, there is an indication that the written performance in General English subject of the G.C.E. (A/L) students has been considerably enhanced to a certain extent. The variation in the test score of post and pre-test of the sample is given under.



**Fig 6: Variation in the Score of Post and Pre-Test of Samples**

As the objectives of the study were met in examining the difficulties encountered in written tasks of General English subjects, the effective use of syntactic strategy in the actual classroom was deployed to arouse the interest of the students in the English learning context. The researcher used PowerPoint lessons and audio-video clips to stimulate the L2 learners toward learning English. In addition, as the researcher assigned the samples with plenty of written tasks, he maintained instant corrections of the tasks on regular basis. The researcher paid attention to giving methodical feedback after the corrections were taken place. Moreover, a friendly approach and positive reinforcement were deployed by the researcher on every aspect of the samples' attitudes toward learning English. Further, the target language was the medium of instruction as motivation during the intervention program as there is a culture of using the mother tongue when teaching English by most of the teachers in the context of state schools in Sri Lanka. A little amount of usage was in Tamil as well.



As per the objects of the study, the detections insist that many students face struggles in the grammatical elements such as parts of the speech, syntactic structures, and vocabulary due to the lack of subjection to the English language, mother tongue influence, inability in English grammar, defective application of rules, deletion, inclusion, poor formation of sentences and inessential lexical alternatives.

## **5. Conclusion**

In line with the study, there is a variance that could be obvious in the performance of the samples in post-test and pre-test scores. As the main objective of the study was reached, the results show that the difficulties in grammatical components, syntactic structures, and vocabulary lead the students to withdraw from learning English. The use of effective syntactic strategy, preparation of PPT lessons with motivational audio-video clips, instant correction, methodical feedback, friendly approach and target language as a medium of instruction had a positive result on minimizing the language difficulties especially when leaning English as a second language by G.C.E. (A/L) students.

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