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Needs analysis in planning a degree curriculum for Hindi as a Foreign Language

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අවශ්‍යතා විශ්ලේෂණය, උපාධි විෂයමාලාව,
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සැලසුම්කරණය, වෘත්තීය කුසලතා

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අවශ්‍යතා විශ්ලේෂණය විෂයමාලා සැලසුම්කරණයේ සහ සංවර්ධනයේ මූලික පියවරකි. උපාධි පාඨමාලාවන් සඳහා විදේශ භාෂා ඉගැන්වීමේ ක්‍රමවේද උසස් අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රමිතීන් සහ කාලීන ශාස්ත්‍රීය හා වෘත්තීය අවශ්‍යතා අනුව යාවත්කාලීන විය යුතු ය. හින්දි පිළිබඳ ශාස්ත්‍රවේදී ගෞරව උපාධිධාරීන්ගෙන් කුමන ආකාරයේ නිපුණතා සහ වෘත්තීය කුසලතා අපේක්ෂා කෙරේද යන්න මෙහි දී අධ්‍යයනය කෙරේ. මේ සඳහා ශ්‍රී ලංකාවෙහි හින්දි භාෂාව ප්‍රයෝජනවත් වන වෘත්තීන් හා සම්බන්ධ පාර්ශ්වකරුවන්, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ හින්දි පිළිබඳ ශාස්ත්‍රවේදී ගෞරව උපාධිධාරීන්, එම උපාධිය හදාරන විද්‍යාර්ථීන් සහ එහි ඉගැන්වීම් කටයුතු කරන කථිකාචාර්යවරුන් වෙත ප්‍රශ්නාවලි යොමු කරමින් සමීක්ෂණයක් සිදු කර රැස් කළ දත්ත සංඛ්‍යාත්මක සහ ගුණාත්මක මිශ්‍ර ක්‍රමවේදය භාවිත කර විශ්ලේෂණය කරන ලදී. විදේශ භාෂාවක් ලෙස හින්දි සඳහා උපාධි විෂයමාලා සංවර්ධනය කිරීම පිළිබඳ කෙරෙන අධ්‍යයන සඳහා මෙම පර්යේෂණය වැදගත් වේ.

Introduction

‘Curriculum’ is an important term associated with education system and its management which indicates towards a framework for teaching and learning of an educational institution. A degree curriculum supports to administer the educational experience of a Higher Education institute. Foreign languages are offered for the study in Higher Education institutes to foster international, interlingual and multi-disciplinary research and to assist international relations in diverse areas by supporting potential communication purposes. Hindi is offered at some universities in Sri Lanka as a Foreign Language for the Bachelor of Arts degree, Bachelor of Arts Honors degree and some postgraduate research degrees. Foreign Language programs in Higher Education need to have an organized approach in planning, execution and evaluation of the total academic experience rather than merely teaching language. The main objective of an undergraduate degree curriculum is to plan the study program to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and mindset of its learners to prepare them for employment or postgraduate education. The curriculum cycle is performed through four main stages: needs assessment, design, implementation and finally, evaluation of outcomes. (Peyton and Peyton, 1998 as cited in Mckimm, 2003). Being the first step of curriculum planning, needs analysis helps the curriculum planners to identify and evaluate deficiencies, problems and their causes associated with an educational experience and then to be proactive in addressing the needs and developing a suitable curriculum.

Literature review

‘Curriculum means the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives’ (Indiana Department of Education, 2010 as cited in Glatthorn et al., 2012, p. 4). Social and educational factors cannot be excluded in planning educational experiences as education is a social process. Joshi and Salunke (2006, pp. 41-42) state that vocational aims and human development should be considered as basic factors which influence a curriculum when preparing adult learners for their social role. Vocational aims will address problems of unemployment and livelihood and reinforce the hope for better education of future generations as well, whereas human development based on physical, intellectual, emotional and moral aspects support developmental tasks anticipated by the society.

Foreign language education assists in strengthening co-existence and intercultural communication in this globalized world. McLaren and Madrid in a book chapter about Foreign Language curriculum (2004) have mentioned that a Foreign Language curriculum is a combination of language teaching/ learning and elements of the learners like their knowledge, interests, needs and personal experiences. They further state that educational policies and curricular principles are essential factors which affect the Foreign Language curriculum. Moreover, a degree curriculum should be concerned about the employability and the timely academic and industrial needs as well. Thus, a degree curriculum for Hindi as a Foreign Language is required to be planned after concerning about Foreign Language educational methods as well as Higher Education policies and timely requirements of the country.

Systematic evaluation of the cycle of curriculum planning is important as it is an interrelated process. Curriculum development is not done in isolation, but it is one step in the cycle of curriculum. As Mckimm (2003) states, planning, development, implementation and review are the main steps of the curriculum cycle. According to Nunan (1988), “Curriculum’ is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programs.’ In addition, Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick has developed the *Kirkpatrick Model* of four stages: reaction, learning, behavior and results, for evaluating and training of educational programs (as cited in Kurt, 2018). Reaction as defined by him measures how participants react to the training or educational experience. In addition, Nation and Macalister (2010, as cited in Sulistyani, 2018) have proposed twenty principles in language curriculum design which can be divided into three main categories: 1) Content and sequencing, 2) Format and presentation, 3) Monitoring and assessment. As Sulistyani (2018) reviews these principles, the aim of the first set of principles is to make certain that the learners are gaining something beneficial from the course. The second set of principles are concerned about what actually happens in the classroom and during the learning process and the third set of principles give attention to ongoing needs, environment analysis and feedback. Based on these principles, Nation and Macalister have stressed the importance of doing a needs analysis at the beginning of the process of course planning (Ibid.).

A needs analysis is executed at the beginning of the process of curriculum planning. Collecting feedback from the participants of a study program and analyzing them can support the curriculum planners to identify the academic and industrial needs. The same action can further benefit in evaluating the reception of an existing curriculum, when revising or updating the curriculum. Needs analysis was introduced into language teaching through the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement during 1960s (Umam, 2016, p. 25). It can also support second or foreign language teaching as well.

Needs analysis is the systematic collection and analysis of all information essential for defining a defensible curriculum (Brown, 2009 as cited in Umam, 2016). According to Kaufman (1999, as cited in Irfadila and Noprika, 2022), needs analysis or needs assessment is a process which is used to identify gaps between current outcomes and expected ones. Collection of information, identification of gaps, performance analysis, identification of obstacles and sources, identification of student characteristics, identification of priorities and goals and formulating the problem are the components in curriculum needs analysis as stated by Kaufman (Ibid.). Among the tools or methods which can be used in a needs analysis, analysis of available information, questionnaires, interviews, observation of classroom activities and self-assessment of learners are mostly used. Feedback, reviews and perceptions of the participants of an educational program are pivotal for analyzing the needs of the educational program, which will be addressed when developing its curriculum. Therefore, a needs analysis can be executed with the responses of lecturers, recent graduates, undergraduates, stakeholders and sometimes independent stakeholders, who are considered as the participants of a degree program.

Objectives

- To assess the competencies and professional skills of BAHons (Hindi) graduates.
- To identify the skills and professional needs expected from the BAHons (Hindi) graduates.

Methodology

This research was intended to find answers for the questions: how the BAHons (Hindi) graduates perform after completing their degree? and what are the skills and

professional needs expected from the BAHons (Hindi) graduates? Having a viewpoint of pragmatism aiming to contribute to the advancement of language education, this research is done as a step of curriculum development. This research followed the inductive approach as the specific observation can be generalized for undergraduates and graduates who study Hindi as a Foreign Language. Mixed-method design was used to analyze data. Research strategy which was mainly used is survey method while open-ended questions were also asked. Questionnaires were designed to collect quantitative as well as qualitative data. Data collection was conducted within the first half of 2020; the time horizon of the study was cross-sectional. Graduates and undergraduates were provided with questionnaires in both English and Sinhala (first language of the majority) for them to choose a preferred language, aiming better comprehension and reception. The survey was done online using Google Forms and the request was made through email, social media and mobile messages.

Feedback of stakeholders, graduates, undergraduates and university teachers is important when conducting a needs analysis at the beginning of curriculum development. First, identified stakeholders from the industry were requested for feedback about the competencies and professional skills of BAHons (Hindi) graduates. Most of the stakeholders are employers of BAHons (Hindi) graduates. Secondly, BAHons (Hindi) graduates of University of Kelaniya were taken into consideration. By the time of data collection, there were approximately 60 graduates who have followed the existing curriculum, yet only 42 graduates could be reached to request feedback, marking 70% of the total amount of graduates. Among them, only 27 have responded, marking a 64% response rate. Thirdly, there were 18 undergraduates who follow the BAHons degree in Hindi at the same university yet only 13 undergraduates responded to the online survey; response level of undergraduates was 72%. In addition, members of the permanent academic staff of the Department of Hindi Studies, University of Kelaniya were taken into consideration as potential university teachers of the BAHons degree in Hindi can provide feedback with an insight of organizational requirements and benchmarking.

Analysis and discussion

Firstly, the stakeholders were asked a few questions to get their feedback about the BAHons (Hindi) graduates they are familiar with. When asked about their

observation about the hard skills or abilities which the graduates have acquired and enhanced through practice and education, they have responded as follows.

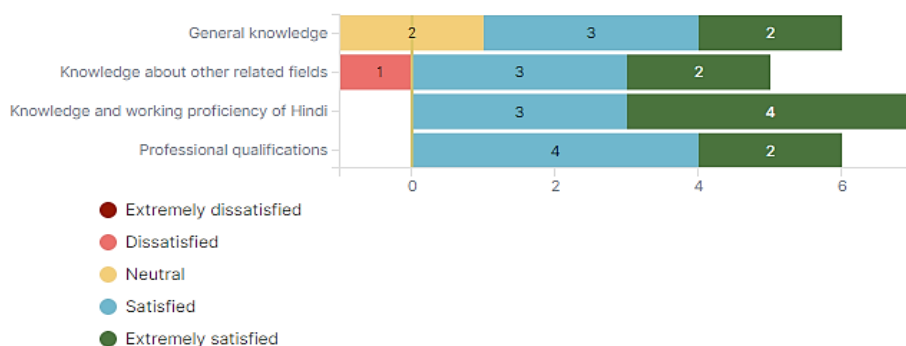


Figure 1: Hard skills of graduates - Stakeholders

According to figure 1, stakeholders are satisfied with the knowledge and working proficiency of Hindi but two respondents out of seven are neutral about the general knowledge of graduates and one respondent is dissatisfied about knowledge about other related fields.

The stakeholders were then asked about their observations about the 21st Century Skills of the graduates they are familiar with. These 21st Century Skills are recognized globally as pivotal skills needed for success in any field in the present context. They can be broken into three main categories as *learning skills*: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, *literacy skills*: information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy and *life skills*: flexibility, leadership, initiative, social skills, productivity (Stauffer, 2020).

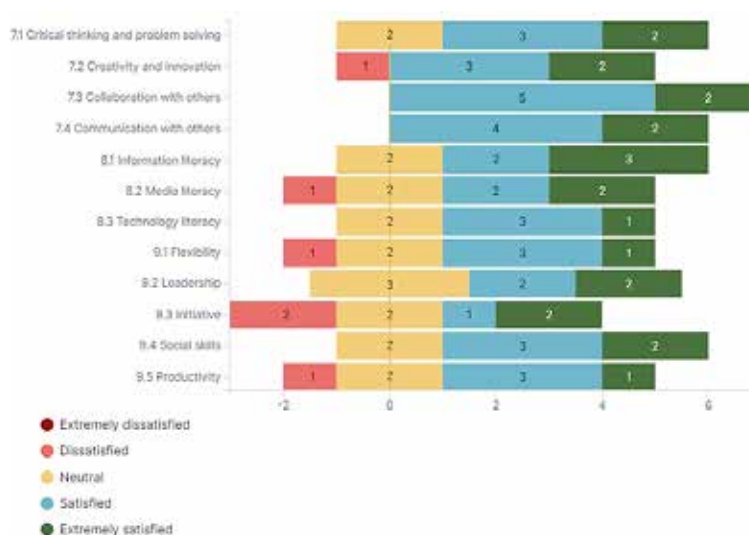


Figure 2: 21st Century Skills of graduates - Stakeholders

In figure 2, skills like creativity and innovation, media literacy, flexibility, initiative and productivity have recorded cases of dissatisfaction. Additionally, skills like critical thinking and problem solving, information literacy, technology literacy, leadership and social skills have neutral ratings as well. Collaboration and communication are the only skills which have satisfied all the stakeholders.

The observation of stakeholders about the professional skills of BAHons (Hindi) graduates are recorded in figure 3.

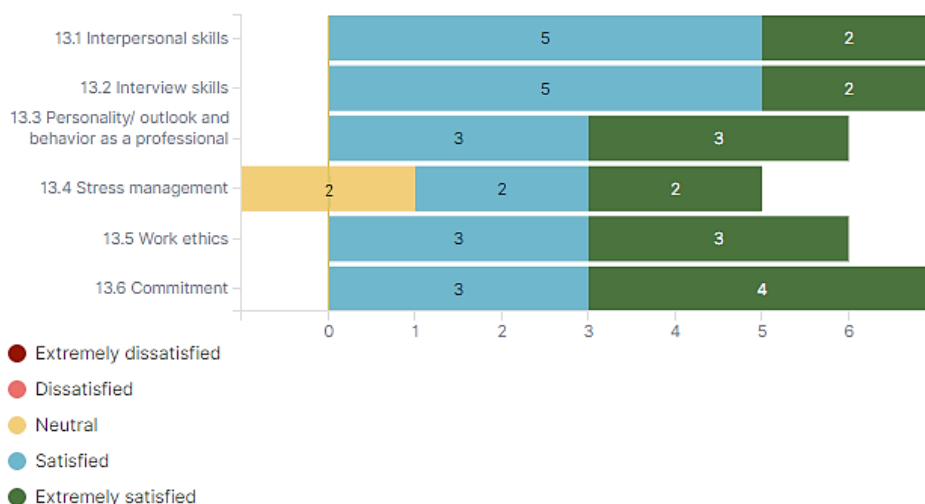


Figure 3: Professional skills of graduates - Stakeholders

According to figure 3, two stakeholders are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the stress management of BAHons (Hindi) graduates.

Then, the stakeholders were asked about their observation about the eligibility of BAHons (Hindi) graduates for employability.

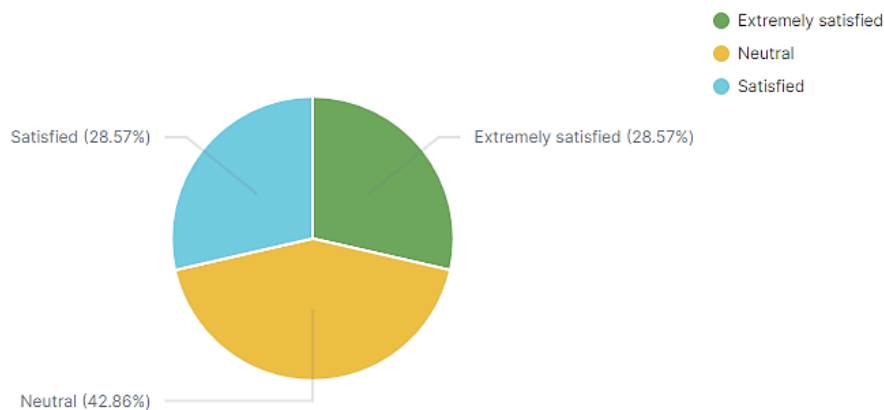


Figure 4: Eligibility of graduates for employability- Stakeholders

Figure 4 implies that none of the stakeholders responded to the survey are dissatisfied with the eligibility of our BAHons (Hindi) graduates for employability yet 42.86% of the respondents are neutral about the fact which means they are neither satisfied.

The observation of stakeholders about graduates' working proficiency in languages is visualized in the chart below.

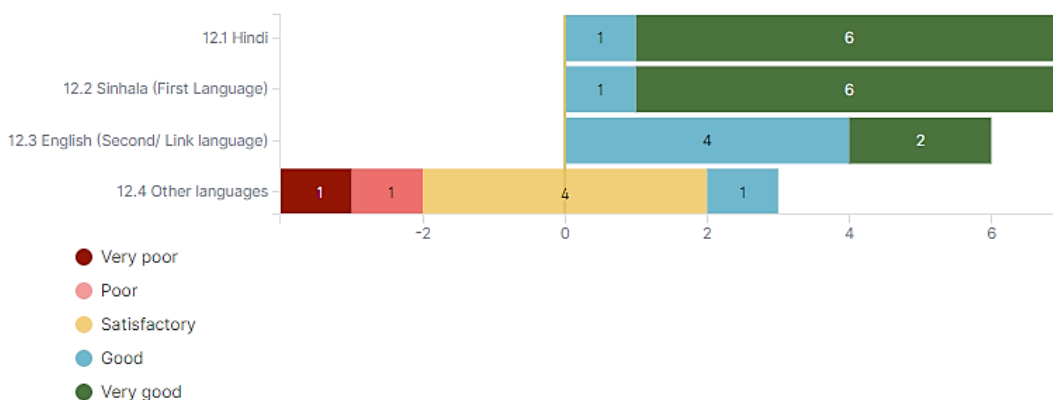


Figure 5: Working proficiency in languages- Stakeholders

According to the figure 5, stakeholders say that the BAHons (Hindi) graduates are good in working proficiency in English yet not as much as Hindi and Sinhala and they possess a poor working proficiency in other languages.

In addition to the stakeholders, graduates were asked to self-evaluate their working/ academic language proficiency.

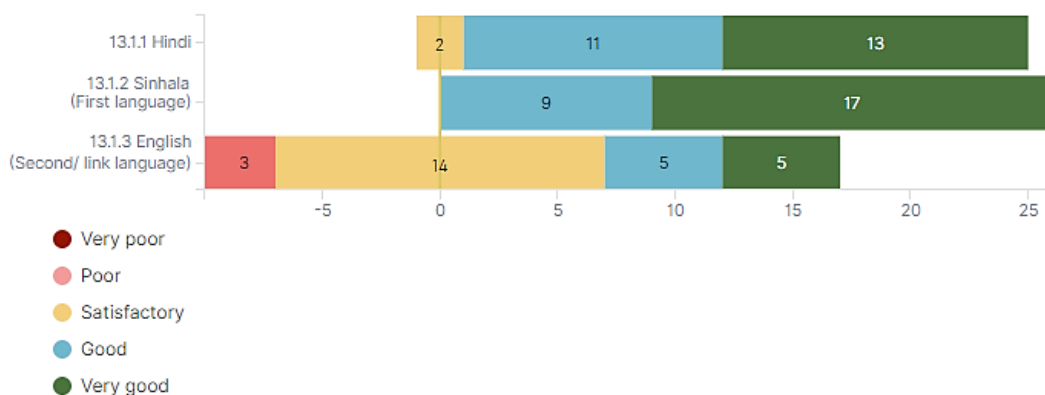


Figure 6: Working/ academic language proficiency of graduates- Self-evaluation

It is clear in the figure 6 that majority of the BAHons (Hindi) graduates do not believe their working/ academic language proficiency in English is good.

Self-evaluation of working/ academic language proficiency by undergraduates are visualized in figure 7.

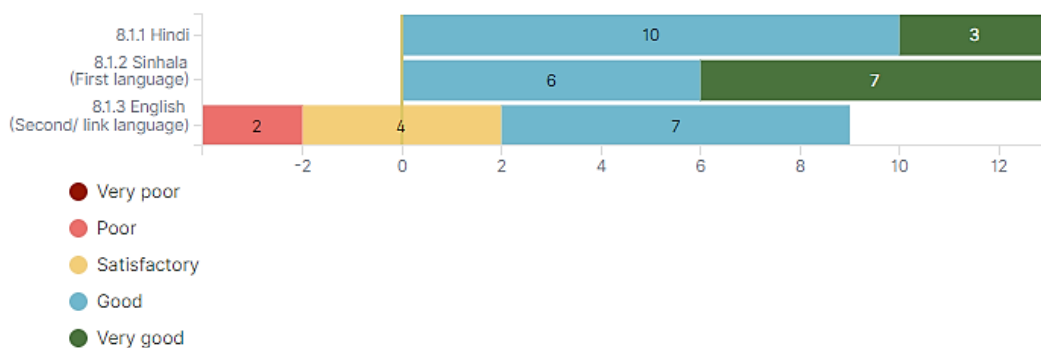


Figure 7: Working/ academic language proficiency of undergraduates- Self-evaluation

In the case of BAHons (Hindi) undergraduates, 6 out of 13 are not confident that their working/ academic English proficiency is good. All the respondents believe they are good in Hindi and Sinhala.

University teachers were also asked about the working/ academic language proficiency of BAHons (Hindi) undergraduates.

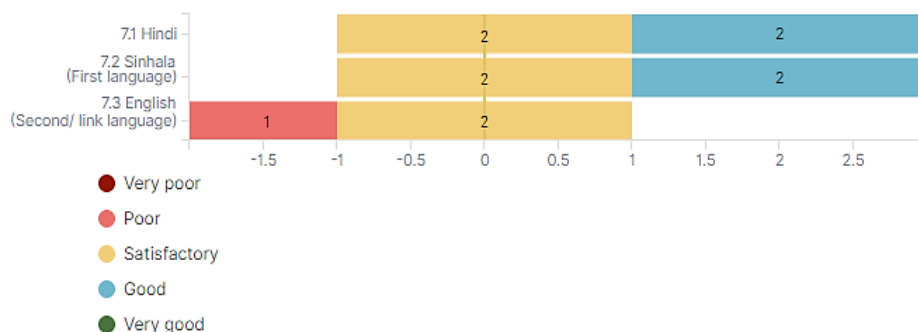


Figure 8: Working/ academic language proficiency of undergraduates- University teachers

As demonstrated in figure 8, university teachers who teach BAHons (Hindi) undergraduates do not believe that they have a good working/ academic in English. Half of the teachers believe that the working/ academic proficiency of undergraduates even in their first language Sinhala is not good enough.

In addition to the Likert Scale questions, respondents were asked a few open-ended questions to get more ideas. Firstly, stakeholders were asked what the skills are they think the BAHons (Hindi) graduates should improve to be more competent and to be more eligible for employability. Summarizing their comments, stakeholders state that BAHons (Hindi) graduates should improve confidence, soft skills like teamwork, collaboration, leadership, adaptability, interpersonal skills, ICT skills and communication skills, learning and academic skills like research skills, critical thinking, language and interlingual skills, cultural competence and attitudes. Translation of one stakeholder with an academic background provides a comprehensive comment about learning and academic skills the graduates should possess. The respondent has specified that interpretation skills must be developed as well as written translation, graduates must have a proper working proficiency in first language Sinhala even before

Hindi, they must be able to practically utilize their proficiency in Hindi, must use IT applications in working with or learning Hindi and finally, must have studied cultural aspects related to Hindi language.

Secondly, BAHons (Hindi) graduates were asked the same question. They have stated that they should improve soft skills like ICT and technological skills, management skills, organizing skills, interview skills, practical skills, creativity, professional skills, teamwork, collaboration, extra-curricular skills, confidence and personality, academic skills like research skills and teaching skills, language skills in professional use of Hindi, Sinhala and English and communication skills, especially in oral communication. Some highlight the need of opportunities like internship, career guidance and interdisciplinary knowledge to develop skills. For instance, the following comment can be quoted.

'We have to combine Hindi language with tourism side. And also improve our student's ICT knowledge. Will have to teach how to practically use Hindi language for the job market.' (Respondent 6, Graduate survey)

Thirdly, university teachers of BAHons (Hindi) graduates believe that their graduates must improve soft skills like information management, ICT skills, organizing skills, practical skills, teamwork and collaboration, language skills in other languages, communication skills and academic skills like passion for knowledge hunting. They further state the importance of effective management of available educational resources, accountability and self-responsibility of learning.

Conclusion

Considering the above analysis, it can be concluded that stakeholders are moderately satisfied with the skills and competencies of graduates employed under their supervision; hence, further improvement of competencies and professional skills of BAHons (Hindi) graduates must be given attention in developing their degree curriculum. In addition to the subject knowledge, general knowledge and knowledge about other related fields need to be encouraged simultaneously with the study program. Next, according to the observation of stakeholders, 21st Century

Skills of BAHons (Hindi) graduates must be improved more, especially the literacy skills and life skills. Moreover, improvement in stress management is expected from BAHons (Hindi) graduates.

In addition, responses about the language proficiency of BAHons (Hindi) stakeholders, graduates and undergraduates imply that their working/ academic proficiency in English must be improved. Additionally to Hindi, English and Sinhala, proficiency in other languages will be an added advantage for the BAHons (Hindi) graduates when seeking jobs or working in the industry. According to university teachers, working/ academic proficiency of undergraduates in Sinhala must also be developed. This should not be confused with the innate communicative proficiency of first language.

In conclusion, better levels of hard skills, 21st Century Skills, language skills, especially in English and professionalism are expected from graduates. Therefore, these professional needs should be considered in developing a degree curriculum for Hindi as a Foreign Language.

Recommendations

After analyzing the findings of this research, it can be recommended that a degree curriculum for Hindi as a Foreign Language should be planned and developed to encourage skill-based objectives in the curriculum along with the main objective of developing fluency in Hindi. For instance, English can be used for the teaching/ learning of one or few lessons of selected course units and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications, internet and online learning materials can be used. Hence, it will be helpful for students to achieve the skill-based outcomes of problem solving and information usage and management. Teaching methods like role-plays, presentations, co-curricular activities could be used to encourage communication skills and practical skills. Moreover, incorporating competence-enhancing opportunities like an internship, course units like research methodology, language teaching methods and intercultural communication to develop intercultural competence can be recommended. In addition, guest lectures with professionals within the organization and from outside can support basic interdisciplinary knowledge in other fields of study which are related to Hindi.

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