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## **CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FOR G.C.E. O/L EXAMINATION IN PUTTLAM SOUTH EDUCATION DIVISION**

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**Abstract:** English proficiency plays a pivotal role in shaping students' educational achievements and future career prospects. The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by students in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) for G.C.E.O/L in Puttlam South Education Division. The survey was conducted based on the data collected from six schools in Puttlam South Education Division where the fail rate of G.C.E.O/L examination is more than 60% continuously over five years. This study adopted the mixed method design using quantitative data collected from 265 students of Grades 9, 10, and 11 of selected six schools and qualitative data collected from 6 English teachers through in-depth interviews. The collected quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the research indicated that all the participants encountered linguistic challenges such as limited exposure to four language skills, vocabulary, and grammar while they faced socio-cultural challenges such as peer pressure and lack of support. Furthermore, as educational challenges, they encounter a lack of suitable learning environment, difficult to get attention and as motivational challenges, they face a lack of interest in learning due to less motivation provided by the families. Finally, psychological challenges fear, anxiety, and negative attitudes were identified as barriers that hinder the process of learning ESL. Additionally, the findings revealed that Linguistic factors, Cultural factors, Educational factors, Socio-economic factors, Technological factors, Psychological and Motivational factors affected the challenges. The findings of this study highlight that while English proficiency remains a significant challenge for students in the Puttlam South Education Division, targeted interventions and support systems have the potential to gradually improve their language skills and overall exam performance

**Keywords:** Challenges, English as a Second Language (ESL), General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E.O/L)