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**A modernist approach to individual differences versus traditional class-based standpoint about adult learners of English from rural backgrounds**SGS Samaraweera<sup>1</sup>

Individual differences that are innate in the ESL learners are decisive in determining the quality of language learning attainments. In the process of achieving proficiency in English as a second language, individual differences in intelligence, personality, memory, motivation and anxiety play a pivotal role. Although the lesson materials, the curriculum, the physical setting of the classroom and the competence and commitment of the teacher are properly orchestrated the expected outcomes may not transpire unless the teacher observes individual differences while developing and applying classroom management strategies. It is noted that most teachers of the Extension Course in English conducted by English Language Teaching Unit at the University of Ruhuna, usually do not consider individual learner differences in the process of enhancing their ESL proficiency. As there is a very close relationship between individual differences and second language achievement levels, with the help of a comprehensive account of individual differences, the ESL teachers should create a language learning setting that reduces the impact of individual differences on classroom management and provide students with the opportunity to evaluate themselves and manage their individual differences by developing confidence in the application of the target language. Language teachers have to be concerned, not only with the learners linguistic and cognitive development, but also with his/her emotional, social and interpersonal, cultural, psychological and physical development. The objective of the present paper is to discuss the major differences of adult ESL learners which in effect are the major findings of a survey conducted by the researcher in relation to a group of ESL adult learners of the Extension Course in English conducted by the ELTU at the University of Ruhuna. The methodology comprises classroom observation, interview, and a formal questionnaire with about hundred students, aims at investigating the ESL adult learner differences in enhancing ESL. The study examines the differences with reference to the relevant theoretical background. The pilot study findings reveal that the individual differences such as intelligence, aptitude, learning styles, personality, motivation and attitudes, and learner beliefs affect negatively in the process of enhancing ESL in adult learners.

**Key words:** *English, Individual differences, Adult learners, ESL*