

Classroom Management, Learning Resources, and English Language Skills Development of Sri Lankan Students: Listening Activities as a Method of Improving Language Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

In the process of learning English as a second language, teaching methodology plays an important role. The aim of this research study was to identify how far listening activities as a methodology effective to acquire language. The researcher initiated this study to investigate the actual situation of students when they take part in listening activities. This study used qualitative research methodology, and a case study research approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, classroom observations, and questionnaire administration. The sample was comprised of nine students, six teachers, six parents and three coordinators selected from an English course conducted by an English institute in Colombo. The students represent government schools, private schools, and international schools. Though the students are from different age levels and backgrounds equal competency level they have performed at the admission test was a decisive factor in selecting them for the sample. This study has identified that listening activities are a highly effective method to improve the proficiency of English as a second language, especially for those who lack opportunities to be exposed to the language. However, the students face challenges in improving their listening comprehension due to lack of resources. The most important suggestion is that listening activities can be an effective methodology to improve every aspect of the English language, for instance, sound system, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar rather than learning in isolated contexts. It will be a solution to the current issue of unemployment as many people fail to find employment due to the lack of competency in English.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, English as a second language, English language, Learning resources, Classroom management

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of listening activities as a strategy are used in the teaching-learning process in learning English as a second language classroom in Sri Lankan school context. At present English language proficiency has become a necessity to deal with numerous functions in daily routine. Thus, constant attention is paid to utilizing effective strategies to enhance the English language proficiency of the students. Therefore, this study intended to highlight the theoretical background of language learning and how listening activities can be incorporated into second language learning classroom for better results. Second language acquisition has become a widely discussed concept in many contexts as the phenomenon of the global village has become a reality due to the rapid advancement in modern technology. It is not to say that in the past it was less important field, but comparing to the antiquity, in the modern world this concept is becoming more popular as international relations grow rapidly. Acquiring English as a second language has a prominent place as it is widely using the second language in the world.

The English language was implemented as the medium of instruction in the ancient Sri Lankan education system with the introduction of British education policies by the British colonizers. Thus, most of the

people of the lower strata of society failed to receive even basic education. Then due to political reasons as when many people were uneducated, it was difficult to rule a country, the Morgan committee started vernacular schools in Sri Lanka. As a result, only a few people were able to acquire knowledge and skills of English while the majority remained ignorant. There were several issues regarding English medium education until the independence in Sri Lanka. However, when Sinhala and Tamil became the state language and the English language was considered as the second language and gave less priority as Sinhala and Tamil were used in formal functions in the aftermath of Independence. Consequently, in the education system, too little attention was paid to teach English as a second language in spite of its practical importance. Hence, effective teaching-learning methodologies have not been developed for some time. But at present due to new trends in the world, the importance of improving the proficiency of English in students has been understood. Therefore, at present educationists and other personals are looking for effective methodologies to overcome the issues regarding teaching and learning English as a second language.

Teaching English as a second language to all Sri Lankan school children irrespective of their social, economic or geographical background has been a major educational policy of successive governments in Sri Lanka since the early 1950s. This continues to be the declared government educational policy as in recent years more than ever, the county's need for English-speaking citizens has come to be realized. The teaching of English as a second language has been reinforced especially since the 1990s in order to find a solution to the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict which was developed into a devastating civil war, retarding economic and social development of the country (De Mel, 2001). A further goal of education in Sri Lanka is to equip students with the necessary knowledge and technical skills required for

the modern employment market. The teaching of English is also considered an appropriate means of achieving this goal (De Lanerolle, 1991; De Mel, 2000). The English Language, therefore, has played and continues to play a distinctive role in the country's development.

This study investigated the listening activities as a method of improving the proficiency of the English language of the students as a second language in the Sri Lankan context. Education has an important role to play, in preparing the students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. If the students are to face the challenges posed by the technologically advancing world confidently, they should possess effective linguistic communication skills. The "world language English" would definitely open up new avenues for the future generation. In 1945, English was made a compulsory second language for the entire school children island wide. The objective was to give proper knowledge of English to all on an equal basis. However, "English for all" continues to be a "dream" yet to be realized. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) found that listening as a very important component in learning language because it provides input for the learners. They further stated listening as a complex skill that should be developed consciously. They revealed that use of listening teaching strategies affects learners' self-concept, beliefs, and attitudes towards listening comprehension. Through the study of Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) found that the significant roles of the teachers, listening to teaching strategies, and techniques of teaching on improving the learners' listening comprehension. They found out that if learners committed to improving listening skill, the practice is a must activity for that. However, the learners need to be provided with appropriate learning materials and suitable activities in which they can learn how to improve the English language. They emphasized the listening to native speakers' speech, to develop their listening skills and then do not get disappointed.

The success of an educational program is determined to a large extent by the effectiveness of the methodologies used in the teaching-learning process. Even the students engage in learning English for a long time if they are not exposed to an effective way of acquiring the language, they would not be able to achieve the necessary proficiency level at the end of the day. Hence, the goals of education will never be fully realized. The importance of listening as an effective language teaching methodology is embodied throughout the process of learning English as a second language. In language learning exposing the learner to the target language is crucial and no teaching scheme will succeed unless the learner is made a co-communicator in a linguistically rich environment. Teaching strategies should, therefore, provide opportunities for students to be familiar with the language linguistically. As indicated by Hamouda (2013), the listening skill of someone is an important element in obtaining understandable input. Further, Hamouda (2013) stated that listening comprehension of a person provides the proper opportunity for improving other language skills. Similarly, Rost (2002) indicates that the importance of improving listening skills and its relationship with the attainment of proficiency in speaking the English language.

According to Pourhosein, Gilakjan, and Ahmadi (2011), listening performs a very important role in the communication process of a person. As stated by Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Sabouri, (2016) listening skills help people to understand the real world which they live and around them, and it plays a significant role in creating successful communication. Purdy (1997) has expressed that listening as a method of receiving, making meaning from, and answering to verbal /or nonverbal messages. Hamouda (2013) provided a definition for listening as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in making meaning for which they listen. Nadig (2013) also has defined listening comprehension as a

process of understanding and making sense of spoken language. As cited by Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Sabouri, (2016) the listening comprehension involves knowing speech sounds, comprehending the meaning of individual words, and understanding the syntax of sentences. The listeners employ their best knowledge of words, syntax, and grammar to work (Rubin, 1994 as cited in Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). The listening process is connected with the listener's linguistic knowledge of the related languages.

According to (Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Ahmadi, (2011) the listening comprehension process comprised of a bottom-up process, top-down process, and interactive process. According to them, the interactive processing, top-down and bottom-up listening processing should be combined with each other increase listening comprehension. When the listening text or information is unfamiliar to the listeners, they make use of their linguistic knowledge, mostly the lexical and syntactical knowledge to understand the information which they are being received (Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Ahmadi, (2011). Further, the listener study the input is available in the memory, then analyses the language code begins and encoding process transform or decode the input into meaningful representations (Anderson, 1995).

Listeners face problems in understanding spoken language by native speakers if the particular listeners are not enough familiar with the rules for segmentation (Anderson, 1985 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Doff (1995) and Ziane (2011) emphasize that listening has an important effect on developing speaking skills of a person. There are context, facial languages, and body gestures/ signals that are very vital for the listeners to understand the things conveyed by the speakers or presenters (Ziane, 2011). According to Rost (1994) and Ziane (2011), listening comprehension is very significant for a person as it is an important process through which people get

input and without its comprehension learning does not happen. Hedge (2000) indicates a piece of very interesting information which is; the listening comprehension plays a very significant role in everyday life of the people, and when people are involved in communication nine percent is spent to writing, 16 percent to reading, 30 percent to speaking, and 45 percent to listening. Hence, it seems that listening is very significant in the communication process of peoples' everyday life.

As indicated by Hedge (2000) it seems that the people in the current society tend to divert from printed media towards other media of communication. Thus, listening cannot be ignored at the moment. He further emphasized that listening as a great important aspect and also a significant component in English language classrooms and English language learning and teaching process. Macháčková (2009) has indicated eight key roles for teachers in teaching languages. For instance, the teacher as a prompter, students must be given recommendations toward activities that are carried out by the students or learners. The teachers are supposed to provide necessary assistance to their students during every stage of listening activity. The teacher as a participant is expected to be taken part in the listening activities. The teacher as an investigator needs to directly observe the listening activities and measure student performance. Chamot (1990) and Ak (2012) also have suggested dividing listening activities into two groups; bottom-up strategies and top-down strategies. Vandergrift (1999) and Ak (2012) indicated that listening strategies as metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies.

Ak (2012) emphasized the significance of employing suitable listening strategies in order to develop learners' listening skills. According to Chao (1997), Berne (2004), and Ak (2012) it seems that the skillful listeners utilize many listening strategies and use existing linguistic

knowledge to understand better what they listen. Rixon (1986) and Rubin (1995) suggested using different teaching techniques in classrooms like authentic materials and technology. McBride (2009) and Rost (2007) stated that the significance of employing new technology in order to encourage the development of listening comprehension by providing learners with technological and digital materials.

Jansen & Vinther (2003); Robin (2007) and Ak (2012) have mentioned that the utilization of information technology while applying authentic resources to solve difficulties faced by the learners in enhancing listening skills. As indicated by Hinkel (2006); Snow (2005) and Ak (2012) listening can be applied to develop reading or speaking skills. Gilbert (1995) and Nunan & Miller (1995) have stressed the development of listening skills with pronunciation as an effective strategy that can be used in English classes. Pourhosein, Gilakjani & Ahmadi, (2011) have expressed that every listening comprehension lessons need to have specific goals. Listening comprehension lessons should be carefully and regularly planned, it should be catered the demand and active student participation, it is necessary to provide a communicative necessity for developing concentration, and it should be focused on the conscious memory task, and the focus of listening comprehension lessons need to be on teaching not testing. As stated by Morley & Lawrence (1971) also there are general principles for teaching listening comprehension.

According to Ahmadi (2016), the listening component has been given less priority by stakeholders in second language learning, research, and teaching. Further, indicated that by providing teachers' assistance and proper learning resources and activities, the learners' listening comprehension can be developed (Ahmadi, 2016). As indicated by Kurita (2012), learners believe that listening skill development is difficult, and therefore, the teachers need to change their listening

teaching strategies and activities effectively. As Pourhossein, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) specified, listening includes listening for thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Hamouda (2013) has mentioned that listening means that the understanding of what the listener has heard, and it is the learner or listener ability to repeat the text in spite of the fact that the listener may repeat the sounds without actual understanding.

Ahmadi (2016) found that the capability to comprehend the spoken language has a significant role in second language learning. It can be identified as a skill for oral communication between native and non-native speakers. Ahmadi (2016) further revealed that with guidance and practice, learners will be able to develop listening comprehension. Language teachers need to be responded to the needs of their students to develop listening skills by making listening comprehension. Ahmadi (2016) believes that if learners need to practice for improving their listening skills. Further, he indicated that language learning students are supposed to be provided with suitable materials and activities to improve English language skills. Ahmadi (2016) recommended for teachers to choose texts spoken by native speakers as teaching materials and activities. Ahmadi (2016) believes that appropriate teaching strategies can be able to decrease listening nervousness, and it provides the best opportunity for learners who can effectively improve listening skills in learning languages.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) revealed that listening comprehension activities have been disregarded in many English language programs. They commented on the importance of using suitable listening strategies to teach the students by the language teachers. However, they indicated that there is no one ideal method that appropriates all types of English classes. Hamouda (2013) revealed that the learners face critical challenges in listening comprehension since universities pay attention to grammar, reading, and

vocabulary but not to the listening activities. Chastain (1971) has defined listening as the capability to comprehend native speech at normal speed. Goh (2000) mentioned that the importance of teaching listening strategies to students and the needfulness to increase learners' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology.

According to the researcher's personal understanding, and anecdotal experience, though some schools attempt to use listening activities it was a failure due to ineffective implementation as the teacher reads for children to listen and complete a task sheet. Further, students were not encouraged or guided properly to acquire language through those activities and teachers' lack of competency in the language was another drawback for the failure. In the past, most teachers paid attention to methods such as grammar translation method which is an outdated method in the field.

Under the educational reforms in 1997 (General education reforms in Sri Lanka) a new subject called General English was introduced for Advanced Level examination from 1999. Listening activities were one component of the syllabus. This attempt would have been more fruitful if such activities were introduced from the beginning as children acquire language quickly at early stages and according to certain linguists after the critical age (after puberty) it is difficult to acquire a new language. There is biological evidence to prove the above argument, that is after the puberty muscles and the organs in the human vocal tract are no longer soft and flexible to be adjusted to pronounce a new language.

It appears that there is a general belief, which is that listening activities are not important as a methodology as the main focus is for teaching strategies of writing and reading rather than speaking or listening activities. In fact, the first language is learned by listening to the speakers of that language (mother, caretaker, etc.) The children will be able to acquire the second

language by being exposed to authentic use of language. Listening comprehension has become the foundation of a number of theories of second language acquisition that focus on the beginning levels of second language proficiency. The primary assumption underlying these theories is that language acquisition is an implicit process in which linguistic rules are internalized by extensive exposure to authentic texts and particularly to comprehensible input that provides an appropriate level of challenging to the listener. When applied in instructional settings, these theories suggest that modified teacher input will enhance, comprehension, and enhanced comprehension will, in turn, promote acquisition (Long, 1985).

Hence, in this study, the theoretical framework was based on “The input hypothesis” that had been introduced under Krashen's “*Second Language Acquisition (SLA) model*”. Krashen (1981), he indicated that the ‘input hypothesis: issues and implications’ have made an effort to discuss and review the evidence supporting the input hypothesis. First, he reviews the theoretical framework, in which the ‘input hypothesis’ is embedded; five hypotheses that attempt to provide the foundation of a theory of second language acquisition. Krashen (1981) advocated that the ‘input hypothesis’ as the central part of an overall theory of second language acquisition that consists of five hypotheses.

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis - There are two independent ways of developing ability in second languages. ‘acquisition’ is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, while ‘learning’ is a conscious process that results in ‘knowing about language’.

The Natural Order Hypothesis - According to Krashen (1981), this hypothesis was first proposed for second language acquisition by Corder(1967). It states that people acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others late. The

order does not appear to be determined solely by formal simplicity and there is evidence that it is independence of the order in which rules are taught in language classes

The Monitor Hypothesis - This hypothesis states how acquisition and learning are used in production. People ability to produce utterances in another language comes from their acquired competence, from subconscious knowledge.

The Input Hypothesis - The “Input hypothesis” claims that humans acquire language in only one way-by understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input which is an environmental factor. As per Krashen (1981), according to natural order hypothesis input contains structure whereas according to Input Hypothesis input contains structures that are a bit beyond our current level of competence. Therefore, people are able to understand language containing acquired grammar with the help of context, which includes extra-linguistic information, people knowledge of the world, and previously acquired linguistic competence. The caretaker provides extra-linguistic context by limiting speech to the child to the “here and now”. The beginning language teacher provides context via visual aids (pictures and objects) and discussion of familiar topics.

Krashen (1981) presents two corollaries of the Input Hypothesis for his discussion as speaking is a result of the acquisition and not its cause. Speech cannot be taught directly but ‘emerges’ on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input; if the input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher needs not to attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order-it will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input.

However, there are views against the arguments and the conclusions derived from the input hypothesis. As Krashen (1981)

explains the idea that we acquire in only one way may not be fully acceptable, at present individual variations are considered a priority. There is enough evidence to prove that people differ in many ways, and these variations affect the acquisition of knowledge in general, for instance, the field dependence-field independence distinction, left and right cerebral hemisphere preference, differences in cognitive style. Yet Krashen (1981) also points out that there are some things we all do the same, and some functions we acquire in the same way. The visual system, for example, is structured similarly and develops similarly in everyone. Chomsky (1975) operates in fundamentally the same way in everyone. Further, Krashen has presented the fifth hypothesis which highlights an aspect that the input hypothesis has overlooked.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis - According to this hypothesis comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition, but it is not sufficient. The acquirer needs to be 'open' to the input. The 'affective filter' is a mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition. When it is 'up', the acquirer may understand what he hears, but the input will not reach the LAD. This occurs when the acquirer is unmotivated, lacking in self-confidence, or anxious, when he is 'on the defensive' (Stevick, 1976) when he considers the language class to be a place where his weaknesses will be revealed. The filter is down when the acquirer is not concerned with the possibility of failure in language acquisition and when he considers himself to be a potential member of the group speaking the target language (Krashen, 1981). Further, Krashen (1981) has suggested that the filter is lowest when the acquirer is so involved in the message that he temporarily 'forgets' he is hearing another language (Krashen, 1982).

Further, studies have been done using children to see whether humans inherit language from genes. According to

Chomsky (1965, 1980), LAD is available to human beings to acquire a language but knowledge of a particular language is not inherent. Studies show when a child is separated from its parents at the very beginning and brought up in a new social setting, he or she speaks the language of the adopted parents. Further the famous case study on Genie about "critical period of language acquisition" proves the importance of "input" to acquire or learn a language. Hence, the discussion of the theories and the review of literature provide multiple perspectives in understanding the importance of listening as a methodology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, it was investigated the effectiveness of listening as a methodology to improve learning English as a second language through the experiences of the teachers and stakeholders of an English institute in Sri Lanka. The main research question was: how listening as a methodology improves learning English as a second language in Sri Lankan students? The specific objectives of the study were: identify the importance of listening as a method among the other methods of language acquisition, explore how to incorporate listening activities to enhance the proficiency of English as a Second Language (ESL) student and recognize the effectiveness of the activities that are being implemented.

The researcher used a qualitative research methodology, and a case study approach to study the research problem. Multiple case study approach was employed to understand the real situation of the effectiveness of using listening activities as a methodology to teach English as a second language in the Sri Lankan context in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the course coordinators, teachers, students, and parents related to an English course. Thematic analyzes and simple statistical tools were used to analyze the data in this study. Qualitative research uses a variety of interpretive research

methodologies that seek to investigate the quality of relationships and experiences (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was more appropriate in this study, because this research also was aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using listening activities as a methodology to teach English as a second language in Sri Lankan context. The case study research approach has been used by qualitative and interpretive researchers for a long time in disciplines (Burns, 2000) because it has a number of advantages. Since this study intended to explore deeply the perspectives of the stakeholders who involve in the process of learning English as a second in their institute case study research approach was more appropriate.

The interview is a more appropriate method of accessing people's insights, sense, and definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most significant ways we have to understand others (Punch, 2009). As this study planned to explore the perceptions of course coordinators, teachers, students and parents of the effectiveness of teaching English as a second language in Sri Lankan context interviewing was more appropriate for data collection. In addition to interviews, informal discussions and informal observations were used to gather data. All the instruments were pilot tested before the implementation of this study. In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, a coding system was used to identify the participants. In addition, pseudonyms were used when the interview and data gathering with the participants. Information sheets were provided, and the necessary permissions were taken before data collection. Member checking was used to confirm the data provided by the participants.

Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Best & Kahn (2006) suggest purposive sampling permits the researcher to choose the participants who provide the richest information. All together three-

course coordinators and six teachers from three levels, six parents and nine students participated in this study from an English institute in Colombo. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analyzing strategy that starts in the data and pursues identifiable themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994). Therefore, thematic analysis was used in this study to analyze the data gathered through interviews, informal discussions, and informal observations. In addition, percentages also used when to analyze the data in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Methodologies used for teaching English

It is obvious that all the stakeholders namely, course coordinators, teachers, parents, and students are on the view that it is very difficult to learn English as a second language since it is very much different from Sinhala and Tamil language. For instance, according to them at national level examinations, only about 40% of students usually get through English language examination paper. According to the stakeholders, one of the reasons for that is lack of using effective methodologies in teaching the English language. As Student 2 of Level 2 revealed, *"In school, we cannot understand what the teacher says. So, the teacher always speaks in Sinhala. When she gives us questions, she puts the answers also on the board. We copy down and she marks our books correct. Now, I am in grade 10. I am struggling and struggling to understand English."* So, it is clear that the low performance of the students of government schools in English is partly due to the lack of effective and appropriate methodologies used by the teachers. Those students are not well exposed to the language through listening and usage. Consequently, when there is no input for the students to grasp the knowledge of English, they lag behind the acquisition process. The majority of students (more than 65%) do not happy about the strategies employed by the English language teachers to develop the listening skills of the students.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) found that the significant roles of the teachers, listening to teaching strategies, and techniques of teaching on improving the learners' listening comprehension. It appeared that most of the teachers have applied traditional methods for teaching English in their classes. One student (Student 1 of Level 1) expressed her views on that as: *"I felt sleepy when some teacher taught us. They did not give us adequate chances to improve our listening comprehension, sometimes, the play recorders did not work properly, therefore, the voice was not clear for us to do our activity"*. A teacher (Teacher 2 of Level 3) indicated her opinions on the resources provided to teach students as: *"I think it is needful to enhance the quality of resources which we use for teaching English in this course. I have an experience that in many occasions some instruments did not work properly, and at that time we were embarrassed and helpless"*. The majority of teachers (90%) are agreed that the teaching strategies which they employed to teach their students in this course are appropriate. One teacher (Teacher 1 of Level 2) stated her ideas about that as: *"we believe that the methodologies which we apply for teaching are appropriate and more student-centered. Only thing is that the less commitment of the students, especially, when we examine their listening comprehension, they showed a poor listening comprehension level. They do not have the skills to understand what the native English speakers communicate"*. However, the majority of parents (70%) are indicating that the practical exercises are not adequate in improving English language skills by their students. Since they do not have an English-speaking home background, they expect more opportunities through the course in practicing the language in order to improve the students' English language skills.

Ak (2012) found that the significance of employing suitable listening strategies in order to develop learners' listening skills. Similarly, Rubin (1995)

suggested that to use different teaching techniques in classrooms like authentic materials and technology. One parent (Parent 4 of Level 3) expressed his views on that. *"I think since most of our children do not have a very good English-speaking background at home, they need to be given maximum opportunities as much as possible to practice English in the class. That's what the parents and our children expect from this class"*. According to the views of the majority of the participants in this stud, it appears that the teaching strategies used and the resources provided are not satisfactory in teaching English and improving listening skills as well.

Listening activities - As a teaching methodology

Teachers are on the view that young students acquire the knowledge of English through listening tasks so effectively. According to the teachers, students whose parents are not much educated, exhibit low performance in classroom activities, but when they are exposed to the listening activities regularly in the classroom, they improve so quickly in using English. As Teacher3 of Level 3 revealed, *"Student 2 of Level 3 did not perform well in level one since she was not familiar with the language. But now she is the best in the class, and she was selected to take part in a tour to England. Mainly she improved in vocabulary and sentence structures. It was so obvious that she got used to catching up words and phrases through listening tasks and used in writing tasks, especially, in writing descriptions. Then, little by little she used those words and phrases in speech. After some times, she became fluent in English. Therefore, at every level, we use listening tasks every day."* One student (Student 2 of Level 2) stated her understanding about the listening activities which are employed in this course for improving their listening comprehension as: *"I believe if we are poor in English or weak in catching up lessons or activities, the teachers need to employ new strategies, technology, resources, effort to enhance the*

situation, but I do not see most of the teachers or the coordinators make any effort to do their best in enhancing our language skills. They work with the students who perform well and drop the weak learners". One coordinator stated the real situation they face in conducting the courses. "We do not have much money to hire well-qualified teachers, and also to purchase a sufficient number of learning and teaching materials. We try to manage the available resources, and I know the teachers also face difficulties in using them during class time. We try to improve the situation. We have advised the teachers to do their best by using new teaching methodologies also. We will provide a few new voice playing instruments very soon to these students". As mentioned by the students, teachers and course coordinators, it seems that although the coordinators advised the teachers to use new appropriate teaching methodologies in teaching the English language in this course, the students and teachers face difficulties in the teaching and learning process due to lack of resources and also lack of qualified teachers. As mentioned by the coordinators, usually, well-qualified teachers request a high amount of fee for their service, and the coordinator has to go for the second best. Therefore, it seems that the students have to face challenges in improving especially, their listening comprehension skills.

Kurita (2012) revealed that the learners believe that listening skill development is difficult. Ahmadi (2016) further revealed that with guidance and practice, learners will be able to develop listening comprehension. Language teachers need to be responded to the needs of their students to develop listening skills by making listening comprehension. Ahmadi (2016) believes that if learners need to practice a lot to improve their listening skills. Further indicated that the language learning students are supposed to be provided with suitable materials and activities to improve English language skills

Listening activities -As a learning methodology

Students showed favorable attitudes towards listening tasks. They expressed their preference for listening activities as a methodology to learn English. According to them, listening tasks are very practical methodology since they are able to learn the usage of English language naturally while experiencing curiosity. As Student 2 of Level 3 stated, "at the beginning, English was a very boring subject. But in this course when listening activities are used every day little by little, I became familiar with certain words. When it comes to writing, I remember those words to write. Regular practice improved my knowledge when time passes. I was able to get better marks for term test papers also." Thus, it can be seen that regular practice of listening tasks make the students familiar with the language as they receive input for them to acquire the English language. One teacher (Teacher 1 Level 1) indicated that her opinions as: "we provide many listening related activities in the class. In some occasions, we face challenges due to lack of recourse for conducting activities in the class. However, we always advise students to practice at home to improve their listening comprehension skills. Another student (Student 1 Level 2) indicated his ideas about listening activities. "I personally very weak in listening comprehension. Especially, I face difficulties in understanding native English speakers' language, so, I expect more smooth methodologies in enhancing my listening comprehension". One parent (Parent 2 Level 3) expressed her understanding of the listening activities made at home by her children. "I have noticed that my daughter always listens and watches English channels at home. It is a problem for others since others select Sinhala channels. However, I do not know her progress in listening comprehension". According to the views of the majority of participants in this study, it appears that listening comprehension is a difficult component in the course. Due to many reasons, students face difficulties in improving their skills related to listening

comprehension. For instance, lack of resources, home background, student background, teaching methodologies which are employed in the course, and so on. Ahmadi (2016) discovered that the appropriate teaching strategies and appropriate activities decrease listening nervousness and it provides the best opportunity for the learners who can effectively improve listening skills in learning languages.

Challenges for implementing listening activities

In fact, all the stakeholders accept the effectiveness of listening activities in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language. Parent 2 of Level 2 explained his view as “*that listening activities can be an effective methodology to improve every aspect of English language, for instance, sound system, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar rather than learning in isolated contexts*”. However, they are in the view that in order to implement listening activities in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language, there many obstacles in certain circumstances. For instance, though listening activities can be used in private institutions, in government schools there are many barriers since it is necessary to find monetary aids to purchase necessary resources. Not only that but also there are problems regarding a sufficient number of competent teachers to implement listening activities in government schools. According to Binabdulloh & Wongleedee (2019), communication competency such as effective listening is one of the most important areas. They revealed that the majority of students who works with committee members have only a medium level of satisfaction on the listening activities. They found that the anxious to work with an adult committee is one of the reasons for their lower satisfaction. They recommended practicing listening every day is a great way to get the maximum from a conversation with a native English speaker

as much as possible, and to increase day to day listening activities.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) revealed that listening comprehension activities have been disregarded in many English language programs. They commented on the importance of using suitable listening strategies to teach the students by the language teachers. However, they indicated that there is no one ideal method that appropriates all types of English classes. Hamouda (2013) revealed that the learners face critical challenges in listening comprehension since universities pay attention to grammar, reading, and vocabulary but not to the listening activities.

CONCLUSION

Most of the students who are studying in this institute are from government schools. Since the government schools do not have sufficient facilities as well as motivation to implement listening activities in the teaching and learning process these students are looking for those facilities from this type of private institutes. However, the English institution which was selected in this study is a private institute, and they also believe that, they do not provide all the required facilities sufficiently, and enough support to practice listening activities for the students. According to the information provided by the participants in this study, it is realized that many challenges faced by all the parties/ stakeholders in improving listening comprehension skills of the students. For example, lack of resources and well-qualified teachers, inappropriate teaching methodologies used by the teachers, less conducive home environment of the students, less commitment of the course coordinators and poor student background, etc. However, the teachers believe that they employ appropriate teaching strategies in the classes to teach English.

Recommendations

When the government introduces new reforms, which encourage listening

activities in formal teaching, adequate measures or supervisory actions must be taken to ensure that children will be benefited from those reforms. Necessary attention needs to be paid to methodologies employed in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language. Due recognition must be given to listening activities as a significant methodology in teaching and learning of English language as a second language.

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