

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TEACH ENGLISH AS THE SECOND LANGUAGE IN JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

There are various factors are involved in the teaching and learning process of English Language especially among the School Students in Sri Lanka. English Language is taught as a Second Language in Sri Lankan school curriculum since 1956. According to the Result Analysis of G.C.E O/L in 2021, 27.14% of students failed in English Language in Island wide and 41.24% failed in Jaffna District (www.doenets.lk). Some studies and researches confirm that there are some factors mitigate and or even delay the process of teaching English as the Second Language (ESL) to the students in Jaffna District in Sri Lanka. The current paper reviews different studies on the issue to provide the whole picture of what may play a role in influencing teaching and learning English and what are the innovative approaches to teach English. Three groups of factors are discussed including students-related factors, teacher-related factors and context-related factors. The paper also implies what different stakeholders can do to maximize and optimize learners' gain and progress in English language learning.

Keywords: Innovative Approaches, English Language Learning, ELLS- English Language Learning Students, Influencing Factors, progress)

INTRODUCTION

Jaffna District is situated in Northern Part of Sri Lanka and majority of people speak Tamil as their first language (L1). It is one of the 25 districts of Sri Lanka. It has 5 Educational Zones and all together 504 schools are there (edudept.np.gov.lk). English Language is taught as a Second Language in Sri Lankan school curriculum since 1956. But most of the Tamil Students show their lack of interest to learn English not only in G.C.E.O/L Examinations but also in General English in G.C.E.A/L Examinations. They give more prominence to other main subjects than English. Although English is a compulsory subject from grade 3 – 11 in the school curriculum, To continue General Certification of Education (G.C.E) Advanced Level (A/L), (Grade 12 – 13), English is not considered as mandatory requirement in G.C.E Ordinary Level (O/L), (Grade 11) results. Because of this reason students do not give much priority to English and they fail to show real interest to learn English as their second Language. The following authors support the above statement. Suntharesan (2013) quote despite the efforts taken by the governments with regard to the school ESL programmes, the overall unsatisfactory performance of students in English in the G.C.E.(O/L) and (A/L) examinations and the poor performance of youths in job interviews are evidence of the inefficiency of the Teaching English as the Second language(TESL).

As Seefa (2017) explained Even though, many efforts have been taken to facilitate English language learning, failure on the part of students to achieve the desired level of proficiency, substantiate the fact that there are many challenges that hinder the process of learning English. Perera (2010), says that after more than half a century of teaching English in Sri Lanka and assuming that all students have learnt English for at least eight years of learning, the results are not satisfactory and Wijeskera (2011/2012) asserts that English Language Teaching (ELT) in Sri Lanka has not been able to achieve its intended

objectives and however, as emphasized by the Presidential Task Force, it is also an undeniable truth that even after completing nearly ten years of English language learning, students cannot use the language in a proficient level. Therefore in this article we are going to observe three factors such as students -related factors, teacher -related factors, context-related factors and how they influence in learning and teaching English among Tamil Students in Jaffna and what are the innovative ways can be suggested to improve the language proficiency among students.

STUDENTS'- RELATED FACTORS

These factors include Students' Learning Autonomy, English Language Learning and Students' Anxiety and Students' Motivation and Attitudes to English language Learning . The following part will deal with the major issues related to such four factors.

STUDENT'S LEARNING AUTONOMY

Students' learning autonomy can be considered as one of the crucial factors affecting their level of proficiency in English language. As Hedge (2000,p.410) explained, autonomy is "*the ability of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning, and to plan, organize, monitor the learning process independently of the teacher*". Accepting the same concern, Little (2007) emphasizes that autonomous learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, so they are motivated to be responsible for their own learning. The author further implies that the more the level of learner autonomy is enhanced, the more the growth of learners' target language proficiency is achieved.

But students of Jaffna use their mother tongue (Tamil) mostly and they feel that English is not necessary for their day to day life. Because everything is in Tamil not only their education but also all Government offices and Non-Government offices also use Tamil for their communication. When speaks about the usage of English in Jaffna, Suntharesan, V. (2013), says that a predominantly Tamil monolingual situation in Jaffna today leads to the lesser extent of the use of English in this region and also in the government departments and state corporations, the verbal communication among the employees, pertaining to both officials and unofficial dealings is entirely in Tamil. Thirumalai,(2002) says that Sinhala and Tamil be the languages of administration of all the provinces in Sri Lanka, otherthan the Northern and eastern provinces where Tamil shall be so used, etc.

If students of Jaffna want to improve in their English proficiency, they should have an intrinsic interest in English, trying hard to use English out of class, and being able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. These aspects are concluded as main contributors to students' success in English language achievement. But considering the Tamil Students they have another problem of the language anxiety which make them to hate or not to show real interest to learn English willingly.

STUDENT'S ANXIETY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

Most number of Tamil speaking students has the feelings of Anxiety when they learn English in their life. Horwitz (1986) Anxiety is a kind of troubled feeling in the mind. It is a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system. MacIntyre (1998) observed that language anxiety as "*the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language*". The primary sources of language anxiety, explicated by Horwitz et al. (1986), are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Awan et al. (2010) found that females are less anxious than males in learning English and the main cause of anxiety was speaking in front of other students in class. Students feel much shame and think what others will say when they speak English. It is found among Tamil Students. Because they used to speak Tamil

always and when they start to speak English they get fear and nervous. This kind of mentality should be removed from them.

STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

High levels of motivation of students regarding the ESL make them to learn sincerely. As Gardner and Lambert (1972) clarify, learners with high level of motivation grounded in positive attitudes towards the second language will be successful in second language learning while learners with negative attitudes are related to learners' anxiousness, making them unsuccessful in second language acquisition. Daskalovska *et al.* (2012) further add that a motivated language learner desires to achieve learning goals and willingly spends time and effort reaching that goal, so learners' motivation to learn the language can be considered as one of the most important factors enhancing their language proficiency.

Committee Appointed by the Honourable Minister of Education, 1971 says that "Lack of student motivation is a common explanation given by many writers for the unsuccessful results of the school English programme in Sri Lanka. They view the current O/L examination which does not require a compulsory pass in English, as largely responsible for this lack of student motivation and also the current school education system allows students to enter University even if they have failed the O/L English examination as long as they perform well in other academic subjects at the A/L examination. Consequently students pay very little attention to English.

In a study by Rupasinghe(1985), students considered attention paid to other academic subjects in school in order to pass examinations as a reason for their lack of English proficiency. This factor affects Jaffna Students also in a special way, because during the 30 years of ethnic war in Sri Lanka students did not get enough facilities and motivation to learn not only English but also their other Subjects. The war made them to lose their motivation in studies.

TEACHER-RELATED FACTORS

English Teaching Teachers' contribution is much essential in learning English among students. We can observe that some teachers do not have the correct technique to teach their subject which makes students to lose their hopes on their teachers as well as in English subject.

In English language teaching, the influencing factors related to the teacher include the quality of teachers, teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, teacher' teaching approaches, assessment and giving feedback. Teacher quality is considered to be the most important teacher-related factor that influences learners' learning outcomes (Punthumasen, 2007). Teevno's (2011) study focuses on the challenges faced by learners and teachers. Her findings show that lack of proper training to teachers, lack of facilities, deficiency in curriculum, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient allocation of time and no use of technology are the major challenges faced by learners and teachers.

Nagashibaevna (2019) there are some teachers who do not challenge their students, rarely give homework, are often behind on grading, and give "free" days on a regular basis. The teachers have the responsibility to create / arouse interest and curiosity among the students to learn English. According my opinion some teachers especially in Jaffna come from far away to schools and do not spend their full time in teaching. They feel tired and when the support is not given from schools' administration side and from students they fed-up and lose their interest in teaching. This kind of weakness of teachers makes students also to neglect their learning process.

TEACHERS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCY

Researchers on English language teaching have long been agreed on the importance of teacher's command of English as a fundamental factor influencing students' language development. Cullen(2002, p.220) asserts that the teacher's limited command of English influencing a number of aspects of teaching: *"A teacher with a poor or hesitant command of spoken English will have difficulty with essential classroom teaching procedures such as giving instructions, asking questions on text, explaining the meaning of a word or replying to a learner's question or remark ... A teacher without the requisite language skills will crucially lack authority and self-confidence in the classroom, and this will affect all aspects of his or her performance"*

Aguilar and Rodríguez (2012) assert that a teacher's insufficient level of English is considered one of the major concerns in today's language teaching. Therefore teachers who teach English should develop their knowledge and the students who study under them will shine in their English.

PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

A teacher who is mastering content knowledge, but lacks the ability to present her knowledge in a comprehensible way to her learners is a teacher who lacks pedagogical knowledge and ability (Andrews, 2001).

The study of Thanasoulas (2002) emphasizes the importance of teachers' skill in motivating students to learn, which subsequently influences the success of foreign language learning.

Uys *et al* (2007) pointed out five main reasons. Three among them are the teacher's (1) lack of the knowledge and skills for teaching the four language skills as well as insights into teaching strategies to promote effective instructions, (2) ignorance of the importance of applying pedagogical skills, and (3) lack of skills for teaching through the medium of English. Therefore the pedagogical knowledge of teachers is an important aspect of students learning.

TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS

Santhos (2014) says that language learning should be more fun and enjoyable for the students especially when it is not their mother tongue. For the students to get involved in learning the language better, the teachers should come out with some effective teaching strategies. Usually students become more enthusiastic when it comes to learning the language through some class room activities such as music, computer, audio-video tapes and games. Patil (2008), says English teachers themselves have to devise innovative ways to make their students climb the staircase easily. Games, role play activities, information gap tasks, brain storming activities, riddles, puzzles, cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, songs and other low-cost and easily available teaching materials become handy.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been given larger attention and wider implementation. Richards (2006) comments that CLT is the methodology of choice by the majority of language teachers today and has greatly influenced approaches to language teaching as well as language teaching practice worldwide.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK GIVING

Lack of proper assessment and not giving feedback to students regarding English knowledge lead them to fail in their subject. A large number of teachers still focus on summative assessment because they do not have enough knowledge and skill to implement (Akbari, 2015). Therefore, forms of assessment might be one of the reasons behind the failures of learners to acquire the expected level of proficiency in English.

Meaningful and positive feedback is crucial to learners' language learning process because it helped them achieve English accuracy and realize their own strengths and weaknesses. Giving feedback is an innovative step which clear the doubts of students and make them to study or concern more in learning process of English.

CONTEXT-RELATED FACTORS

There are some context-related factors which influence the performance or success of learning English Language among school students. Four influential contextual factors in foreign language learning are students' socio-economic background, input-output opportunities learning activities, and learning environment.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

There is a strong link between students' social background factors and their educational access and outcomes (Crawford, 2014). Students' social background includes their racial origin, family income, family structure, and the level of parental education. Ross and Wu (1995) made a generalization that once the social status and their family's income are increasing; students tend to progress better in their academic performance. Tanveer (2007) figures out that the differences in social status of the students are the factors that lead to their weakness of language learning in the United Kingdom. Baker (1988 b), points out that Poverty has been found to negatively affect the education of rural Sri Lankans, principally because such families expect children to engage in 'money earning' work rather than education. Baker (1988 a), further says that under such conditions children are either forced not to attend school or to drop out of school altogether in order to earn money or to help with household chores such as looking after younger siblings while parents are at work. This kind of situation makes students to lose their interest in education as well as in English Learning. In the same way we could see it in Jaffna District as well as in Sri Lanka. Jaffna is the place which has so many racial cultures which affect both teachers and students in the education field.

INPUT-OUTPUT OPPERTUNITIES

Regarding the language input, Housen *et al.* (2011) claim that "the more prominent the second language (L2) is in the learning context, and the less prominent the target language (L1), the more L2 acquisition will be promoted". The interest of Tamil students on English Learning is merely weak because Sunthareswaran (2004) observed that English magazines, journals or periodicals are not published in Jaffna since the English reading population is very small now. People in Jaffna do not take much interest in English programmes broadcast by SLBC. On the whole, the use of English in the family domain in Jaffna is very much restricted. It is a clear evident for the failures of students in English Learning in Jaffna District. Sunthareswaran (2004) further said that the day to day use of English in the Jaffna society was reduced and even among the older generation who had their education through English, the need for the use of English has declined considerably. They have given up using English in their conversations and writings as they did earlier because the younger generation is not in a position to respond in English. In fact, the percentage of people who read in English too has become very low. Because of all these reasons the younger generations are also losing the desire to learn English.

LEARNING ENVIORNMENT

An important environment for students' learning is the classroom. Researchers such as Bahous *et al.* (2011) and Dörnyei (2007) claim that a positive and motivating classroom climate is considered a factor contributing to the attainment of a successful language learning outcome. It should be considered in Sri Lankan Education system. There are no equal facilities in all schools. Some are private schools and they have more facilities and suitable environment than Government schools. Among Government schools also

we can see many differences such as The National schools have more and enough facilities than the Provincial Schools. This kind of differences makes students and teachers to a mental agony. Indeed, a comfortable, motivating, and tension-free classroom environment can help creating a low affective filter as in “Affective Filter Hypothesis”, which allows students to learn the language faster and better (Krashen, 1982, cited in VanPatten and Williams, 2007).

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The students do not like traditional classroom setting like blackboard, chalk and textbook and traditional teaching methodology like Grammar translation Method. Many schools in Jaffna do not have separate language unit and modern classroom facilities. These are the factors which contribute to the students’ lack of interest in learning English and obtaining lower results in English) examination. In order to facilitate students it is important to introduce some Innovative ways to learn English willingly. The following ways are considered as suitable:

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SKILL

English teachers have to remain extra cautious of developing in their students the ability of four language skills namely—Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). Hence, the teaching of English as a skill and not only as a subject becomes indispensable. Teachers are advised to use recording gazettes when they pronounce words or poems and it is advisable method that they may record when students speak on a topic, describe a picture or a person and later their grammar mistakes and pronunciations will be corrected by playing again their voices. It will be an attractive innovative method.

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH RADIO, T.V AND SMART BOARD

It is still an easily affordable device and English teachers can also benefit much from this device. To begin with, they can listen to English News on All India Radio regularly. As they get interested and accustomed, they can also switchover to BBC News, Voice of America etc. This will create around them an atmosphere of English and help them sharpen their listening ability. T.V beautifully exploits audio and video facilities and can offer learners numberless opportunities of learning language with its proper manifestation. Teachers are advised to use T.V or Smart Board in a proper way to teach.

The advice of Susan Stempleski in this regard is quite relevant: *“It is your job as the a teacher to get students to focus their eyes, ears and minds on the video in ways that will increase both comprehension and recall and add to the satisfaction they gain from viewing. The video will still remain entertaining, but the students will also come to recognition of how the medium can be used for learning”* (Stempleski, 2010).

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH MOBILE AND PROJECTORS

Binod (2015) quoted that the primary purpose of English teaching today is to convert pupils into products and hence an effective communication skill comes into picture. Mobile phones which have become common even in rural areas can work as a panacea to many challenges of teaching English. True, that all students cannot afford cell phones, teachers can use their own mobile phones for the purpose of teaching provided the school provides them with a projector. One cannot deny the fact that visuals speak more than words. Therefore a sincere teacher may use his mobile phone also to teach English in an attractive way.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

First and foremost, students themselves must be aware that they are the main agent in their own learning process. If they want to gain better English proficiency, they have to be autonomous in their learning, find ways to increase their own learning motivation and positive attitude toward the process, as well as accumulate different learning strategies. Regarding TESL teachers, they should continue learning and

improving in their teaching career to be able to provide their learners with the best teaching quality, pedagogical knowledge and skills, teaching approaches and methods, using innovative ways especially the new technology and multimedia projects and assessment and feedback giving.

Teachers should be sent to in-service training courses, seminars or conferences where they can update and learn new knowledge and skills in teaching English. They should learn the innovative ways to teach students. By doing all these we may create a better opportunity to our students to learn English successfully.

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