

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP AWARDS

A Collection of Research Papers from the Sri Lankan Context

Edited by Martin Froggett and Sreemali Herath

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INTRODUCTION

The British Council has been working in Sri Lanka since 1949 in a wide variety of capacities from English to exams to the arts. A large focus of that work has involved working with local teaching professionals and teacher educators, particularly with staff of the ever-important Regional English Support Centres (RESC). Over recent years, however, it has become apparent that there is a lack of documented, practical and shareable research, especially from the perspective of classroom teachers.

Researchers and academics have time and again stated the importance of reflective practice and action research as methods for engendering professional growth as well as the not inconsiderable personal growth which often follows. The British Council shares this view as to the importance of academic research, and through this partnership with local academics, aspiring academics and classroom practitioners, we hope to enable those interested in following a process of enquiry and growth to pursue these goals and share their findings and experiences with others in their field.

Reflective practice has been called many things by many people, as we will see in introductory chapter, but of the many things I have read on the topic this quote by McNiff (1995) echoes what I believe to be the single most important value underpinning the process of reflection, in that “it is a strategy to help you live in a way that you feel is a good way. It helps you live out the things you believe in, and it enables you to give good reasons every step of the way (p. 6)”. This simple point gets to the heart of the matter and helps strip away the sometimes frightening layers of academic stricture synonymous with words like “research”.

As teachers, educators and professionals, who are widely accepted as being altruistically motivated for the most part, we often face a number of barriers, be them institutional, cultural, environmental or attitudinal. Reflective practice can give us the professional courage to surmount these barriers and live in a way that not only makes us feel good but achieves more. Often this means doing things a little differently through finding out what isn't working and making changes for the better, sometimes independently but often collaboratively, before sharing these successes with colleagues. This process of shaping our futures

and that of those around us for the better is what this project hoped to achieve and what many of the researchers in this volume have shown to have done.

The researchers have worked diligently, often taking large professional and personal risks, and have all had to navigate and overcome challenges, but what has been produced is quite unique and we only hope that it goes to inspire their colleagues in Sri Lanka as well as inspiring the next cohort of researchers. We hope you get a lot from reading this volume.

Martin Froggett

British Council, Sri Lanka

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McNiff, J. (1995) Action research for professional development.
Available at <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp>

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Action research is a powerful tool for professional development – it helps teachers and other educators build on their skills and knowledge, reflect on their classroom practices and ultimately improve students' learning outcomes.

The ELTReP Awards are for small scale research projects based in the Sri Lankan classroom context. Their purpose is to:

- Promote Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Sri Lankan educators and enhance their pedagogical practices and research skills.
- Encourage high quality research and action research from Sri Lanka educators that is relevant to the country's English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Medium Instruction (EMI) communities.
- Improve access, research links and knowledge sharing between ELT and EMI professionals and policy makers in Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and other countries.

In May 2015 educators from government schools and English Language Teaching Units (ELTU) at universities as well as teacher trainers from Regional English Support Centres (RESC), National Colleges of Education (NCOE) and Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) were invited by the British Council to apply for a research grant to undertake small scale research projects.

Successful applicants were selected against a number of criteria before going on to attend a series of introductory and developmental workshops delivered by the British Council. Researchers then went away and conducted their research with ongoing support and guidance before submitting their final reports for editing in January 2016. These edited reports make up the content of this volume.

If you are interested in taking part in the 2016/17 ELTReP awards please check our website www.britishcouncil.lk in May 2016.

Key members of the team

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABOE - Activity Based Oral English
ADE - Additional Director of Education
BC - British Council
BE - Bilingual Education
BM - Bi-medium
CALL - Computer Assisted Language Learning
CBL - Content Based Learning
CE - Conversational English
CLIL - Content and Language Integrated Learning
CUP - Common Underlying Proficiency
EAP - English for Academic Purposes
ELTU - English Language Teaching Unit
ESL - English as a Second Language
FSSL - Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages
GBT - Grammar Based Teaching
GCE/AL - General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level
GCE/OL - General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level
ICT - Information and communication technology
ISA - In-service Advisor
L1 - First language
L2 - Second language
LMS - Learner Management System
ME - Monolingual Education
MoE - Ministry of Education
NCOE - National College of Education
NIE - National Institute of Education
RESC - Regional English Support Centre
SLA - Second Language Acquisition
SUSL - Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka
TSE - To some extent

REFLECTION TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION

Sreemali Herath

Over the last couple of decades, research done on the professional learning processes that language teachers are engaged in, such as research on teacher cognition (Freeman & Richards, 1996; Woods, 1996), has uncovered the “complexities of teachers’ mental lives” (Freeman, 2002). Teachers are now viewed as “rational professionals who make judgements and decisions in an uncertain and complex environment” (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, p. 456). Those researching the field of second language teacher learning have realized that in order to understand how teachers learn to teach and how their professional lives evolve, inquiry into teachers’ cognitive worlds, teaching practices, interpretations, beliefs, reactions, previous language learning experiences and, the contexts in which those experiences have taken place is crucial (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Freeman, 2002; Borg, 2003, 2006; Johnson, 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

Richards (2004) calls the particular configuration of strategies a teacher uses his or her “teaching style”. A teacher’s teaching style can either assist them to cope with the many demands that couple teaching, or it can hinder a teacher’s professional growth. He argues that in order for teachers to move beyond automatic and routinized responses to classroom situations and achieve higher levels of awareness, teachers need to become reflective practitioners.

The papers in this publication are examples of how fifteen reflective language educators took measures to transform their teaching-learning contexts.

WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection or reflective practice has been a buzzword in the field of education for over 20 years. The origin of these terms can be traced back to the work of the American educator John Dewey in the 1930s and later in the work of his student Donald Schön (see Schön, 1983,

1987). To this date much of the work on reflection in education is shaped by the work of these two scholars.

Richards (2004) states that reflection is,

an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and valued, usually in relation to broader purposes. It is a response to a past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning action (p. 2)

Bartlett (1990) points out that becoming a reflective practitioner involves moving beyond primary concerns related to instructional techniques and asking 'how to' questions, to starting to ask 'what' and 'why' questions. The focus is on broader educational purposes.

Asking "what and why" questions give us a certain power over our teaching. We could claim that the degree of autonomy and responsibility we have in our work as teachers is determined by the level of control we can exercise over our actions. In reflecting on the above kind of questions, we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life (p.267)

According to Farrell (2015), reflection means "conscious thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it (p. 8). Within the field of education, different terms have been used to refer to reflection and reflective practices. These include; *a process of recognizing, examining, deliberating over the impact, implications of ones beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge and values on classroom practices* (Farrell, 2015). Jay and Johnson (2002) suggest that,

reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others (p. 76).

However, it is important to note that classroom teaching does not occur

in a vacuum, nor is it a neutral activity. This calls for reflection to include a critical dimension which includes the examination of cultural, social and political factors where the teaching takes place (Smith, 2011). According to Brookfield (1995), the purposes of critical reflection are two-fold:

1. To understand how considerations of power undergird, frame and distort educational processes and interactions,
2. To question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best long term interests (p. 8).

HOW DOES REFLECTION TAKE PLACE?

Richards (2004) presents a three stage approach to becoming a critically reflective teacher:

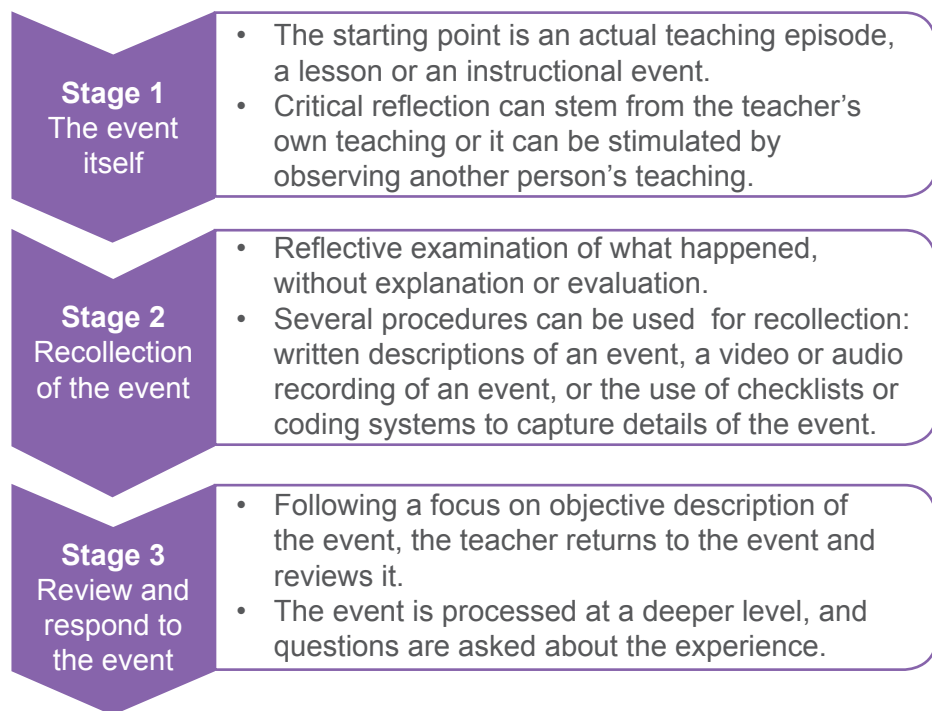


Figure 1: Stages of critical reflection (Richards, 2004)

APPROACHES TO CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection can be documented using different tools. Richards (2004) identifies the following tools:

1. Peer observations
2. Written accounts of experiences
3. Self-reports
4. Autobiographies
5. Journal writing
6. Collaborative diary keeping
7. Recording lessons

THE THEMATIC ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The fifteen chapters in this book are examples of how language educators and teacher trainers reflected on and took action to transform their teaching. The contributions to this book come from classroom teachers, teacher educators and academics from universities, representing many different parts of Sri Lanka. Each chapter highlights how the researchers took initiative to change and improve their teaching and its impact on their learners as well as themselves. The authors highlight the difficulties they had to encounter in their attempts to introduce interventions. What is also commendable is how the researchers carried out their research work while doing their regular duties.

Theme one - Adapting materials

The four papers in this section focus on how language learning materials can be adapted and exploited to enhance teaching as well as to make the material more accessible to learners. **Pushpa Senanayake** writes about how the RESCs can play a bigger role in helping teachers to exploit existing material to enhance grammar teaching. She makes a strong case for maximizing the potential of existing materials. **Amarasiri Gamage's** focus is on how textbooks can be a great resource to teach speaking. He points out that the current textbook used in Grade 9 seems to overlook speaking; however, he discusses how the Grade 9 textbook can in fact be exploited to teach speaking effectively. The following two papers focus on the use of visuals to teach vocabulary

and grammar respectively. **Bopage Madhavee** discusses how she brought in visuals to supplement the available material as a means of teaching vocabulary. She highlights how the students started to enjoy the lessons which resulted in greater engagement and language learning. Finally in this section, **Ruvina Fernando** talks about teaching grammar to Grade 10 students. She shows how grammar teaching and picture descriptions can be incorporated for effective language learning.

Theme two - Empowering teachers and learners

The chapters in this section focus on different measures that were taken to empower language learners and teachers. Grounded on the understanding that Sri Lankan learners lack sufficient autonomy in the language classroom, these papers look at multiple ways of making language learners autonomous. **Madhuri Kannangara** focuses on how students can be made self-directed independent language learners by giving them more freedom and responsibilities in the language classroom. She points out how such initiatives can at first receive resistance, but with time and the right kind of instruction can be very beneficial to learners and teachers alike.

Indika Jayakody discusses how she changed her students' attitudes towards writing in English and introduced activities to make them confident creative writers. The data she gathered through her questionnaire show how her students' attitudes toward writing stories changed after introducing a careful, scaffolded story writing process. The next paper shifts our focus to academic language learning at the University of Visual and Performing Arts. **Sumudu Embogama** uses technology to empower her learners. She discusses how she introduced technology to teach grammar and motivate her learners. Next, we look at the field of teacher education as **Hashini Abeysena** and her colleagues write about how teacher educators and teachers can be empowered through the cascade model of information dissemination. They provide an example of the cascade model in action and how workshop content needs to get adapted to suit its audience.

Theme three - Teaching in bilingual and multilingual contexts

This section focuses on teaching in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

Nilani Karunaarachchi's focus is on Bilingual Education, and more specifically to teaching Science in Grade 6. She identifies the challenges in teaching Science in English medium and discusses the role of the English language teacher in facilitating this process. **Dishani Senaratne** shares her experiences of teaching academic English at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. In her chapter she makes a case for code switching in academic English classes, and she highlights the benefits of code switching in university classes. However, she argues for the need for teachers to control and be conscious of their code-switching.

Theme four - Effective teaching and learning in challenging circumstances

The first two authors in this section focus on introducing remedial work to enhance language teaching. These chapters make a case for the use of remedial work especially in contexts where the learners have little exposure to the English language. **Abeyrathne Dharmakeerthi** shows how marks for formative assessments can be used to plan remedial work for Grade 10 students. He argues that very often, formative assessments are done for the sake of doing them, but they can be used as a spring board to work on areas learners need more help with. **M. F. M Faus** discusses how he introduced remedial lessons to get his students to speak freely in English. His chapter is a good example of the benefits of remedial work. Next, **Rohini Kulatunga** focuses on how language and skills can be integrated to enhance language teaching.

Focusing on an academic language learning context, **A. M. M. Navaz** introduces the measures he took to help lower level university students to improve their writing. Building on his previous research, he identifies learners' weaknesses and introduces an intervention to remedy those areas. He highlights how one intervention per se might not remedy learners' weaknesses. However, teachers need to be persistent and continue their efforts. Finally **Padmini de Silva** talks about an intervention that involved using pop songs to teach grammar to the teacher candidates in her programme. Her intervention, which involved getting primary teacher candidates to sing pop songs, illustrates how unconventional methods can help language learners to overcome their inhibitions.

CONCLUSION

As the chapters in this book highlight, a reflective approach to teaching involves a lot of hard work. Moreover, it involves changing the way we usually approach teaching and our roles and responsibilities towards language learners. As the fifteen authors illustrate through their work, teachers who reflect and question their teaching as well as the conditions they are most often forced to teach in, develop attitudinal changes and awareness that benefits their professional growth as language educators. This change results in them improving the nature of the support they provide for their students.

However, like any other form of self-inquiry, reflective teaching includes its own risks. Most often documenting reflections can be time consuming. Moreover, most teachers work in educational contexts that do not recognize or support reflection or classroom based research. In such situations, reflective teachers would be working on their own with no institutional support. However, all the contributors to this book reported how engaging in critical reflection proved to be a valuable tool for self-growth and professional development.

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ADAPTING MATERIALS

RESC'S ROLE IN HELPING TEACHERS TO EXPLOIT MATERIAL USED FOR GRAMMAR TEACHING IN GRADE 6

Pushpa Senanayake

ABSTRACT

This small scale action research focuses on finding out how a Regional English Support Centre (RESC) could contribute to enhancing grammar teaching in Grade 6. My aim is to look for ways and means of helping teachers to plan their lessons catering to their classroom situations. This study attempts to solve the challenges of identifying content for grammar teaching that matches students' competences. The data for this study was collected from 200 students from 5 schools in the Homagama Education Zone. Questionnaires were given to find the problems teachers encountered while teaching grammar. The material the teachers selected to teach grammar was taken from the records maintained in the classroom. Lesson plans were given to teachers to reteach the grammar elements using the materials in both the textbook and the workbook. My intension is to make the teachers aware of the feasibility of maximizing the use of the textbook and the workbook in the language classroom. Remedial measures which were introduced in the study will be disseminated to the teachers in the zone, so that they could utilize procedures which are practical and realistic enough to be used in their classroom.

PROBLEM

The Regional English Support Centres (RESCs) have been providing professional development support to primary, secondary and even tertiary level English language teachers. The content delivered at the workshops have been backed up with the input given by the National Institute of Education (NIE), Provincial Department of Education, the British Council and the Ministry of Education. Some workshops are planned according to the needs of particular groups of teachers.

The materials given at training sessions in RESCs are carefully planned taking into consideration the needs of the teachers, the mixed ability

levels of the students, textbooks and the syllabi. Among the workshops organized by the centre, topics such as preparing activities to suit the competency levels in different grades, handling textbooks in the classroom, and planning lessons to suit a mixed ability classroom are very common. Though RESCs provide a wide range of workshops, student performance at national examinations are not very satisfactory. In-service advisors and the officials visiting schools in the zone have noticed that the teachers are in a dire need of planning lessons using the materials available to suit the level of the students. Further, they have observed that the teachers do not teach to match the competencies of the students.

This study focuses on teaching grammar, which has been identified as one of the most challenging areas in Grade 6. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on one grammar point: the verb ‘be’ in affirmative and interrogative forms. Five schools in the Homagama Education Zone were chosen for the study.

INTERVENTION

After an initial discussion with the teachers of the selected schools, we decided to narrow down the scope of the study to one grammar point, the verb “be” in affirmative and interrogative forms as full verbs and as auxiliary verbs. A diagnostic test was planned to get one word answers to identify the common problems in using the verb ‘be’. The purpose of giving questions with one word answers was to avoid other grammar errors which students might make. It was administered to 200 students. Further, a questionnaire was given to the teachers to find out the content they use to teach the ‘be’ verbs and the problems they encountered.

Three lessons were planned and administered in the five participating schools, and the participating teachers were observed by their peers. In addition to the observations, the researcher interviewed the teachers soon after the lessons, and a post-test was held to find out the performance of the students. Finally, a short session was held to map out a feasible work plan to teach the ‘be’ verb using the content available in the textbook and the workbook. It is important to note that the findings of a study of this nature cannot be generalized.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are discussed under the following three headings:

- Diagnostic test
- Questionnaire for teachers
- Observations by the researcher

Diagnostic test

The diagnostics test was administered to 200 Grade 6 students to test their ability to use the ‘be’ verbs in affirmative and interrogative forms. Table 1 provides an overview of the question types and the number of students who answered each question correctly.

Table 1: Question types and the number of students who answered correctly

Question type	Number of students who answered correctly
Use am with subject pronoun I	30
Singular form of verb be with singular nouns in the present and the past	67
Plural from of verb ‘be’ with plural nouns	72
Forming questions: be verb as helping verb	32
Forming questions: be verb as full verb	36
Use of verb be in the past tense	15

According to the above chart, it is evident that students are familiar with the use of the verb be in plural forms. However, the students seem to have problems with forming questions as helping verb as they insert the ‘be’ verb before the sentences. For example, one students stated:
Is the bird is flying?

Questionnaire for teachers

The questionnaire was distributed among 10 English teachers. Five teachers in the sample had used seven activities both from the Pupil’s

Book and the Workbook to teach the verb 'be'. The techniques they used included filling blanks, picture descriptions and paragraph writing. Teachers had revealed the following reasons for the errors the students made:

- Lack of awareness of the singular and plural subjects
- Inability to identify the subjects of a sentence
- Inability to change the verb when forming questions

Only two teachers mentioned that they used reading texts for the reinforcement of verbs. They had used readings to show the singular and plural nouns. None of the teachers had done verb identification tasks involving word order.

Observations by the researcher

When observing lessons, it was apparent that all five teachers could not give clear explanations with examples that could help students to identify the 'be' verbs. There were also problems with concept checking questions. However, in the post it was revealed that, apart from the students' inability to use be verbs properly, vocabulary, spellings and content also hindered the sentence construction. One teacher emphasized the fact that they cannot expect 100% accuracy as various other factors affect sentence production.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

I found many useful and interesting insights as to how a teacher educator can help the teachers in choosing content that matches students' skills. Planning lessons, reordering the content, simplifying the content according to the needs of the students have shown positive results. Close observations and discussions after the lessons helped the teachers immensely to find ways and means to help their students to improve their language skills. Another noteworthy observation is that the teachers were demotivated as they have found it impractical to implement some of these suggestions in the classroom because the existing materials need a lot of changes in order to match the students' competencies.

As a teacher educator, I feel I have a big role to play in providing teachers necessary material and guidance to use the resources that are available to them in an effective manner. The study also revealed

that informal forums are useful for the teachers to share ideas and solve problems. Thus teacher educators need to conduct workshops to plan classroom teaching. What I have learned from this study is that it is more practical and beneficial to have classroom teaching sessions rather than conducting workshops in the center. In other words, we need to consider a shift from center based workshops to school based teacher training sessions that consider the needs of the students and the teachers in that particular school.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I had to face many challenges in implementing and carrying out this small scale action research. At the beginning, it was very difficult to narrow down the topic to a manageable one. Therefore, from time to time, I had to change the title. Selecting schools, meeting teachers, collecting data, preparing tools and materials that were needed were also challenging. I had to make numerous changes to the research plan, as the study unearthed unexpected findings. However, this research inspired me to find more information, and I sought the assistance from the internet and the initial workshop conducted by the British Council. I found it difficult to analyze certain findings as they showed other considerations. Moreover, I found some gaps in my research design, specially in preparing questionnaires and diagnostics tests.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ADAPTING TEXTBOOKS TO IMPROVE SPEAKING

P.G. Amarasiri

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effectiveness of teaching speaking by adapting the textbook in secondary classes in six government schools in the Bandarawela Education Zone. Data for this study was gathered through classroom observations, interviews and reflective notes. They were analyzed in relation to ten lesson plans that were provided to the participating teachers. It was observed that the textbook was the major resource used for teaching, and the teachers and the students depended on them excessively. Therefore, it was hypothesized that adapting the textbook would enhance speaking. It was also observed that textbook adaptation impacted student engagement and motivation in a positive manner during the English period. Moreover, the teachers were able to build their self-confidence to use more speaking activities and to organize more group and pair work. The findings of this study can be used to make recommendations for teacher training.

PROBLEM

This research primarily focuses on how the adaptation of textbooks can improve students' speaking skills. Further, the aims of the study are:

- to study whether teachers give opportunities for the students to practice speaking
- to identify whether the textbooks can be adapted to provide more opportunities for speaking
- to find out whether the adaptation of the textbook would encourage students to speak freely in class
- to find out if the integration of speaking in the lessons would support or hinder the learning of other skills

Speaking, in the Sri Lankan English curriculum, has thus far got little attention due to two reasons: firstly, speaking and listening are not tested at examinations. Therefore, the need to teach those skills is not seen as important. Secondly, in rural parts of the country, English is not

used on a day to day basis as people can manage all their work with the use of their mother tongue, Sinhala or Tamil. Therefore, in majority of the schools in Sri Lanka, most students do not speak in English. But as we all know, in the present society, a second language, especially English, is essential if one were to enter the job market or go into higher education. Hence it is the teachers' duty to find ways to enhance English speaking skills. One obstacle that stays in the way of teaching English is the textbooks. This study is based on the hypothesis that the existing textbook does not provide suitable and sufficient activities, and the available activities are boring or insufficient to improve speaking. Hence, this research focuses on understanding how the adaption of textbooks will improve students' speaking skills.

Although the absence of speaking in English in the class is a common problem in the entire country, my study is limited to six schools in the Bandarawela Education Zone. The six rural schools consist of four Type 2 schools and two 1C schools. Grade 9 classes were selected for the study.

Textbook-based teaching takes place in every school in Sri Lanka. The main function of a textbook is to provide guidance for teachers (Choudhury, 1998). A textbook suggests and provides materials to accomplish curricular goals (Ur, 1991). Teachers are expected to carry out their classroom activities and assessments according to the textbook. For the participating teachers, the textbook provided more than mere guidance. It was the sole resource for information and classroom activities. For teachers and the students, the textbook was the syllabus. Unfortunately, during the pre-observations it was observed that the teachers did not use the textbook to teach speaking. Therefore, it was obvious that the textbook needed to be adapted to enhance speaking in the English class.

INTERVENTION

This action research was implemented with the assistance of my colleagues. The research process involved planning, teaching, observing and conducting interviews with teachers. Table 1 presents an overview of the research sites and the participants. The participants consisted of six teachers with more than 10 years' experience teaching Grade 9. In this action research, three instruments were used to collect

data. They included classroom observations, interviews and reflection notes. Moreover, 10 reading, grammar and vocabulary lessons from the Grade 9 text were adapted to teach speaking.

Table 1: Research sites and participants

TYPE OF SCHOOL	NO. OF SCHOOLS	EDUCATION ZONE	PARTICIPANTS
Type 2	4	Bandarawela	6 teachers
1C	2	Education Zone	

The first phase of the study consisted of preliminary observations. The participating teachers were informed of the school visits and they were requested to teach their regular lessons. Four members of the Regional English Support Centre (RESC) visited the schools for observations. The observations were followed by a short interview to find out about the activities they liked and disliked. The second phase of the research included writing ten lesson plans adapting the textbook for speaking. The lessons were intended to give more opportunities for the students to use English in the class. More controlled practice activities were included as the students' speaking proficiency was very low. During the third phase, the six teachers were called in for a two day orientation workshop where the teachers were instructed on teaching the lessons in their schools. During the fourth phase, the teaching of 12 of the planned lessons was observed. In five of the participating schools I taught the lessons while the teachers observed me. My reflections were recorded.

FINDINGS

The data collected using observations, reflective notes and interviews are presented below in tables, graphs and pie charts to provide a visual representation of the findings.

Observations

Table 2 summarized the findings from the pre-observations. It is clear that the teachers did not pay much attention to speaking. A closer look at Figure 1 shows that only 17% of the lessons were focused on speaking skills, while 83% of the lessons focused on reading, writing and listening.

Table 2: Pre-observation findings

Criteria	Yes	No	TSE	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Vocabulary
The teacher had a lesson plan	4	2							
The main focus of the lesson				1	1	2	2		
There was an integration of skills	3	3							
Presented new language clearly	1		5						
Developed the lesson gradually focusing different skills			6						
Students were given opportunities to work in pairs and groups	3	3							
Students practiced the new language in different ways	1	5							
The skills students practiced were				3	1	4	4	1	1
The students engaged in the lesson actively and independently			6						
Used the activities as given in the textbook	3	3							
Teacher adapted the textbook and used extra materials	2	4							

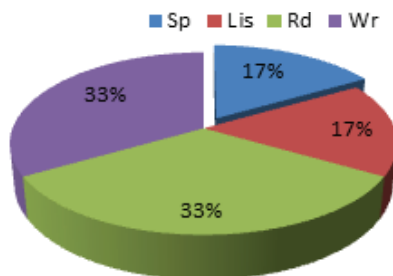


Figure 1: The focus on the four skills

Interview results

After each observation, there was a short interview with each teacher. Only two questions were asked:

1. What aspects of your lesson were you happy about?
2. What activities/stages would you change in your lesson to make it more interesting?

Some of the reasons the teachers were happy about their lessons include:

- Being able to achieve the objectives they had set for the lessons
- Student participation
- How they introduced their lessons
- Being able to complete the lesson in a timely manner

Some of the responses to the second question about what they would change in their lessons included:

- Simplifying the text/activities
- Eliciting vocabulary from the students more often
- Including additional stories
- Doing group work

These answers revealed that they wanted to make their lessons more student centered. However, none of the teachers stated they want to focus more on speaking.

Post-intervention observation

The intervention was designed to adapt the textbook in a manner that the students would get more opportunities to speak in English in

the class. The participating teachers were provided lesson plans that included more speaking activities. Table 3 presents the findings of the observations of these lessons. 12 observations were conducted in all the participating schools.

Table 3: Post-intervention lesson observation finding

Criteria		Excellent	V.good	Good	TSE	Poor
Teacher's preparedness to teach						
1	Had read and understood the lesson	9	2	1		
2	Had a thorough idea about the objectives of the lesson	7	5			
3	Knew the steps to be followed	7	3	2		
While teaching the lesson						
4	Built a good rapport with the students	5	6	1		
5	Built up the lesson in an interesting way	10	1	1		
6	Set up the activities clearly	6	3	1	2	
7	Sign posting/use of ICQs	4	6	2		
8	Gave enough time for activities	6	5	1		
9	Monitored and helped the students	6	5	1		
10	Controlled teacher talking	5	4	2	1	
11	Paid attention to all the students in the class	6	6			
12	Used the materials appropriately	9	2	1		
13	Got feedback and corrected students	4	5	3		
14	Completed the lesson managing the time	5	5	2		
15	Achieved the lesson objectives	7	4	1		
Students						
16	Could follow the instructions of the teacher	1	10	1		
17	Were interested in the lesson	4	7	1		
18	Participated in the activities willingly	7	1	3	1	
19	Showed self-motivation to learn	1	6	4	1	
20	Depended on the teacher a lot		5	1	6	
21	Worked co-operatively in groups and pairs	4	3	5		

According to Table 3, teacher preparation and performance was greater than before. Figure 2 below summarizes teachers' preparation.

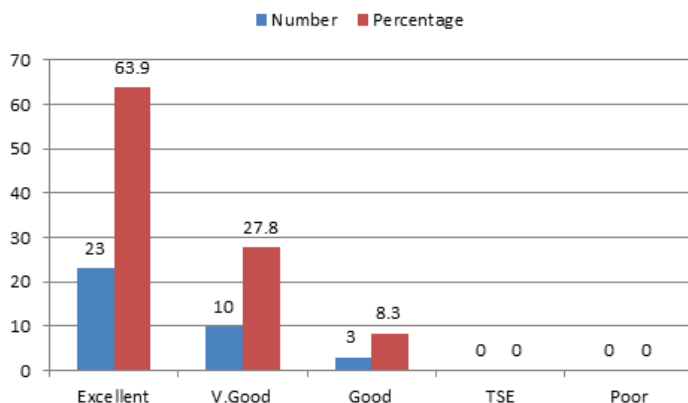


Figure 2: Teacher preparation to teach the lesson

According to Figure 2, teacher preparation was very good after the intervention. The observers either marked good, very good or excellent. This was because the teachers were provided with lesson plans. Also all the lessons were discussed in detail at the orientation session.

As our focus was to promote speaking, we focused on two criteria: whether the teachers were controlling teacher talking time, and whether they were achieving the lesson objectives for speaking and other skills. Figure 3 below illustrates how the teacher talk time was controlled.

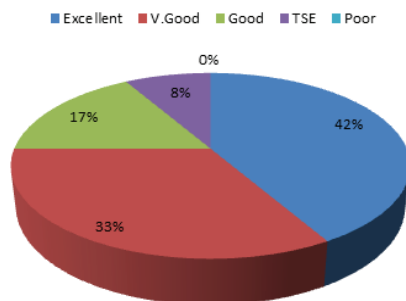


Figure 3: Ability to control teacher talk time

There was greater control of teacher talking time. But prior to the intervention, it was revealed that the teacher talking time was very high. After the intervention, when the textbook was adapted to include a variety of speaking activities, teacher talking time reduced. Moreover, we looked to see if the teachers were able to achieve the objectives they had set for the lesson. Figure 4 illustrates the findings.

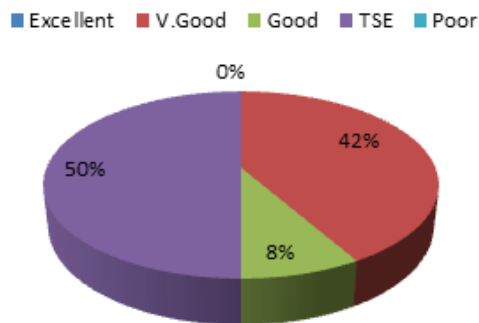


Figure 4: Ability of achieve the lesson objectives

The participants were able to achieve their objectives 92% of the time. This can be contributed to the intervention that allowed students greater opportunities to use English in the class.

As in any teaching learning context, the students' participation varied. But in most cases, it was very good. They were especially very good at following the teacher's instructions, and they depended less on the teacher. Observation records of teacher dependence are illustrated on Figure 5.

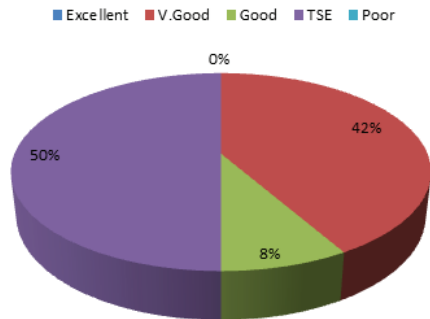


Figure 5: Dependence on the teacher

On 50% of the occasions, the students depended on the teacher to some extent (TSE), which meant dependence on the teacher was very little. Moreover 42% wanted the teacher's help. As these are rural schools, where the students have little exposure to language that is to be expected.

Reflective notes

The most important and insightful source of data was the teachers' reflective notes on each lesson. Teachers were expected to teach 10 lessons each. One area they had to remark was the things/activities they liked most in the lessons, and why they liked them. Table 4 summarized their responses.

Table 4: The activities the teachers liked and why

Activity	Reason
Practice speaking activities	The students were active and tried to speak a lot
	All the students participated
	Saw improvement in communication
	Very competitive
The warming up activity	Made them find vocabulary
	Arose curiosity
	Everyone wanted to participate
	Tried to speak and enjoyed
	They engaged
Presenting the new language	Spoke a lot
	Tried to construct sentences orally
	Worked in groups
Main speaking activity	The students were active and spoke a lot
	Asked a lot of questions
	Used the language well
	Everyone was happy
	Highly motivated
	Helped each other
	Everybody participated
	The lesson was challenging
All the activities	The students enjoyed the lesson a lot
	They participated willingly
	They engaged

According to Table 4, most of the teachers liked the speaking activities. Table 5 summarizes the activities the teachers did not like and their reasons for not liking them.

Table 5: The activities the teachers did not like and why

Activity	Reason
The textbook activity	Unfamiliar words
	Too challenging
	Less interesting
Arranging words	Too challenging
Practicing activity	Too challenging
Practicing new language	Allocated time was insufficient
Practicing writing	Unfamiliar with the vocabulary
	Boring
Reading activity	Boring
Practicing speaking	Some students depended on the teacher too much
	Students used mother tongue
Feedback activity	Too difficult

According to the reasons given, some activities were too challenging, uninteresting or were too advanced for the students. However, the overall feeling was that except for a few activities, the lessons were helpful for the students. Some of the comments on how the students engaged in the speaking activities included:

- Participated actively and willingly
- Did not show any interest due to poor language skills
- Reacted positively
- Enjoyed the lesson
- Spoke and asked questions
- Highly motivated
- Related to other activities
- Did not use the mother tongue

Moreover, majority of the teachers stated that speaking supported the teaching of other skills. The reasons the teachers gave were similar to those discussed. Figure 6 illustrates teachers' perceptions of how

speaking supported the teaching of other skills.

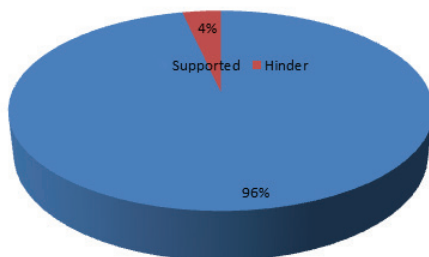


Figure 6: Teacher perceptions of how speaking supported other skills

While the focus of this action research was to study the advantages of adapting textbooks to teach speaking, most of the teachers saw the positive aspects of adapting textbooks. Table 6 maps out the responses the teachers provided.

Table 6: Advantages and disadvantages of adapting textbooks

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can integrate speaking with writing	Unable to reach the target
More opportunities to produce language	Doesn't develop reading and writing
Help students to learn grammar structures easily	
Interesting and motivates students	
Students like to learn through speaking	
Lessons do not get boring and uninteresting	
Difficult tasks can be simplified	
Help to improve speaking	
Increase students' engagement	

Table 6 reveals that there are more advantages of textbook adaptation for speaking rather than disadvantages. It shows that the teachers are very positive and ready to adapt the textbook for speaking. Five out of six teachers mentioned on 44 instances in their reflections that

speaking helps to create an interest in learning English, and it helps to motivate the students to learn the lessons.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

This research focused on whether the adaptation of textbooks could enhance the teaching of speaking English. Moreover, it attempted to find out whether the integration of speaking would support or hinder the learning of other skills. According to the findings of the study, we can conclude that the adaption of textbooks for speaking is very effective. In fact, speaking motivated students to learn English, and they enjoyed the lessons. It was also evident that the teachers built their own confidence to teach speaking. The pre-observation results showed that they did not use much group and pair work. But by teaching the given lessons, they started doing more group and pair work.

The findings of the study have implications for professional development of teachers. It was evident that teachers need further instructions on teaching techniques such as giving instructions, concept checking, questioning, setting up activities efficiently and controlling teacher talking time. Teachers also need further guidance on planning their lessons in a manner that the maximum amount of work can be done within the allocated time period. Rather than providing suggestions and guidelines in the teachers' manuals, providing sample lesson plans could be more productive. Finally, it is very important to test listening and speaking at examinations. This will boost the motivation of both the students and the teachers to focus on listening and speaking.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Conducting this study provided me the opportunity to see how material can be adapted to teach speaking. It was rewarding to see how the teachers selected for the study showed a remarkable change after the intervention. They accepted that speaking can be integrated in any lesson without hindering its main focus.

Moreover, it was very encouraging to see highly motivated student participation. However, it is important to note that adapting textbooks is challenging and time consuming. If we want our teachers to continue work of this nature, there should be a process to help them to prepare

their lessons. It should be understood that the teachers need be given a sound training on writing their own lesson plans so that the teacher autonomy is assured. Finally this study was an eye opener for me as a teacher trainer. I was made more aware of the need to help the teachers in teaching speaking in interesting and motivating ways.

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DEVELOPING GRADE 4 STUDENTS' VOCABULARY USING VISUAL ILLUSTRATIONS

Bopage Chathurika Madhavee

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the possibility of improving Grade 4 students' vocabulary with the use of visual illustrations. Vocabulary development is very important for language learning. Vocabulary is central to any language. Therefore, it is important to make an effort to develop students' vocabulary. In my Grade 4 English class, the students have a very limited vocabulary. It is common knowledge that children like colorful things. Therefore, I thought of using colourful illustrations to teach vocabulary. I used illustrations during each stage of the lesson: setting the scene, presentation, and practice stage. I selected three lessons from the Grade 4 Pupils' Book and taught it using more pictures and pictorial activities. This action research taught me the importance of using pictures to enhance the teaching of vocabulary. With the use of pictures, children can recall vocabulary with greater ease, and pictures have the ability to raise the interest of the learners.

PROBLEM

In 2014, I was appointed to teach in Ara / Suranimala Junior School in the Puttlam District in the North Western Province. It is in the Arachchikattuwa Education Division. This school is located in a rural village called Aththanganaya. Most of the people in this area are farmers or fishermen. They depend on the land to make a living. There are few people who work in factories near the village. The weather is dry and hot throughout the year. These people regularly face droughts, and getting water for cultivation and day to day usage is a very big problem. Most school children help their families in the cultivations.

There are about two hundred students in my school. The school has classes up to Grade 11. When I first visited this school and participated in their morning assembly, I realized that English was not used in

the school and the students had difficulty in speaking in English. I was assigned to teach English to classes from Grade 3 to Grade 8. There were twenty four students in my Grade 4 class. Although all the students have the government issued textbook, they do not follow their workbook properly. On the first day itself I understood that they could not understand even simple action verbs such as *stand up*, *sit down*, *clean the board*, and *close the books*. When I started to teach, I realized they could not follow me. I showed some pictures related to past lessons, and they were not able to name them in English. It was evident to me that my Grade 4 students lacked sufficient vocabulary. Most of the students in this class did not do their English homework. Their workbooks had many question marks and cross marks in red. When I looked at their term test marks, I realized that their English marks were very low.

With all these weaknesses, it was evident to me that the students would not be able to achieve the objectives set for Grade 4. Though the lessons were taught, the students could not engage in the activities. When they were inquired why they could not complete assignments, most students stated that they could not understand the vocabulary. Or, even if they did understand the vocabulary, they did not possess the vocabulary to answer the questions. Some students also stated that they did not have a special interest to learn English.

INTERVENTION

The students' inability to develop their vocabulary in the primary classes continues to affect them in secondary classes. As teachers, I believe that we have to develop students' vocabulary from the early years. To do this, I first had to find out the students' interests. As my students like visual illustrations, I selected them. Using illustrations is an easy way to attract the students' attention. I planned to teach three lessons from the Grade 4 Pupils' Book using visual illustrations in addition to what the book provided. Then, every Friday, I organized a vocabulary test. These vocabulary tests were integrated into other skill areas: receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking). Vocabulary development was measured through these skills.

I selected three units in the Grade 4 Pupil's Book. These units were *Transport*, *Weather* and *My Village*. The lesson on transport has

vocabulary related to vehicles, road signs and various professions related to the vehicles. Most of the male students like this lesson very much. The lesson weather includes vocabulary related to natural incidents like rain, thunder, natural things, clothes and different cities, and weather in Sri Lanka. The lesson, My Village, includes vocabulary on public places, directions, various professionals in the village and cultural aspect related to village life. This intervention was conducted every day during the English period and it took 30 minutes.

First, I grouped the students into six groups. Then I requested them to select their favorite cartoons as group names. Each group was also assigned a colour. Group activities are most often more successful than individual activities. In group activities, the students help each other and the slow learners can improve themselves. Pictures were chosen to suit the lesson that was taught. These pictures helped me to raise the students' interest in the lesson. They were very happy to see my pictures. I used pastels, water colours, and poster paint on my pictures. I also used printouts of pictures. I used colourful word cards as they are more effective than writing on the blackboard. Sometimes students got the chance to paste the word cards on the blackboard. Picture cards helped me to select the vocabulary. I also used handmade stick puppets to elicit the vocabulary.

When I used the blackboard, I used clear hand writing. This helped me to get the students' attention. If the teacher uses clear and attractive handwriting, the students become more attentive. Moreover, beautiful word cards help to increase the interest in vocabulary.

Using stick puppets, and technology also enhanced vocabulary acquisition. Though the technology is new to the learners, it did not hinder their acquisition. When I was teaching language structures, I asked the students to repeat as a class and in groups. With repetition and reading aloud, the students became more familiar with English words. As I used my pointer stick to introduce words, my students became more familiar with the spellings. When I revised vocabulary introduced during the previous lesson, I passed around a hand puppet to elicit vocabulary. As children love to play games, I carried out simple vocabulary games. During the intervention, I gave special attention to what the students did. Sometimes they brought the material from their homes. For example, when the students acted out a procession, they

brought their favorite parts in the procession (such as the elephant, dancers, and flag bearers) from home. Sometimes, I allowed my students to use their mother tongue during these lessons.

Although I was more involved in the introduction stage of the lessons, the students were on their own during the production stage. Moreover, during the production stage, I supplemented the workbook activities with additional activities. Some of these activities include vocabulary building games, puzzles, sentence construction activities, drawing pictures, and creating various things.

Moreover, I used a colourful progress chart to encourage the students on a daily basis. The students were eager to collect marks for their groups. The group performance can either increase or decrease their individual marks. Therefore, it was important for the students to get all their group members to collaborate. I assessed these students on a daily basis using the progress chart, by praising, giving stars and through gestures such as clapping. Moreover, I conducted a “weekly evaluation test” where vocabulary was tested through other skills. Every Friday, they were tested on the vocabulary they learnt during the week. The students were very enthusiastic about these tests.

FINDINGS

My intervention proved to be very successful. I realized how important it was to raise the learners’ interest to learn the language. In order to make rural language learners like my students interested in an unfamiliar language like English, it was important to increase their curiosity of the language. Colourful illustrations have the ability to make learners more curious. The findings of my intervention revealed that grouping students is very important as it helps to develop interaction between students. They asked questions and answered questions. Sometimes they helped others to find answers.

As children like to play games, the language games I did were very helpful in teaching vocabulary. My students managed the classroom space, and they were very active during these games. Through the games they learnt a lot indirectly. Conducting weekly evaluations was also helpful. Moreover, getting students ready for short term evaluations

was easier than term tests. The students found the progress chart very interesting. This colourful progress chart helped to control the students indirectly.

The findings of the study taught me the importance of creating a colourful classroom environment using visual aids. I witnessed how my students loved the colourful environment I created. When teaching a lesson, teachers can display visual aids and word cards on the walls. It enables memorizing of vocabulary.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

As in many teaching contexts, time for me was always a challenge. In the primary grades only 30 minutes are allocated for English. Very often this time is not sufficient. Therefore, I had to get extra time from their class teacher to complete some of the activities I had designed. Classroom space was another challenge. The students did not have sufficient space to move around. Sometimes monkeys came to my class. On such occasions, I lost control of my students and lost time. Moreover, I found it exhausting to continuously organize visuals in different ways.

All the visual illustrations were made by me. But if the visual aids were arranged by the students, it would have been a good experience for them. Sometimes I could not use all the visual aids within one period. My students were particularly very happy with the lessons which were conducted outside of the classroom.

If I had time to introduce the intervention to all the lessons in the Pupils' Book, students would have had the opportunity to learn more vocabulary in different ways. I hope to use these visual illustrations again with my new Grade 4 class, and hope to create more visual aids for the other lessons. Moreover, I will start using visual illustrations in the secondary classes. The use of charts, graphs, pictures, and posters will help me to create a colourful learner friendly environment in my classrooms.

Overall, I am very happy to have conducted a study of this nature with my students. I got good feedback from the parents and the community. All my students contributed and collaborated well. Many students started to say “the most favorite time of the day, is the English period”.

HELPING STUDENTS TO CONSTRUCT SIMPLE SENTENCES TO DESCRIBE PICTURES

Ruvina Leoni Fernando

ABSTRACT

This action research focuses on facilitating Grade 10 English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' ability to construct simple sentences using present continuous tense to describe pictures. This research was carried out in a school in Negombo, for a period of 10 weeks. It was carried out following the action research cycle where the different steps of the action research process were repeated. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to draw conclusions. As the intervention, activities based on the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theories were introduced. These theories include: Krashen's (1982) 'Comprehensible Input Hypothesis', and 'The Natural Order Hypothesis'; and Vygotsky's (1986) socio cultural model of learning. 'Error Analysis' provided comprehensive information on teaching and was used to prepare remedial lessons. I was compelled to do this research because the picture description question is a compulsory question in the English language paper in the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (GCE, O/L) examination. Activities of varying degrees of complexity were designed as the intervention. Data analysis confirmed the success of my action research.

PROBLEM

While conducting workshops for the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (GCE/OL) students in a school in Negombo, I conducted seminars for Grades 10 and 11 students. The students were from different backgrounds. It was evident that they had very little exposure to the English language in their homes, the classrooms and in the school premises. Furthermore, the students were reluctant to use English in the classroom. When I taught my Grade 10 students, I observed their inability to construct simple sentences using the present continuous tense to describe pictures. If they knew the present continuous tense, they would have been able to describe pictures more

accurately. Therefore, this research focuses on developing the students' ability to construct simple sentences using the present continuous tense.

Allen (1983) pointed out that it is useful to provide the learners with words for 'classroom language' at the early stages of the course. Accordingly, my intervention includes a set of verbs the learners frequently need to construct sentences. This action research consists of a series of activities that range from simple to more complex ones. The goal of these activities is to enhance the ability of the students to construct simple present continuous tense sentences to describe pictures.

INTERVENTION

This research was implemented in the form of an action research. Action research is usually conducted in the natural classroom setting, and it helps to observe the behaviour and the responses of the students.

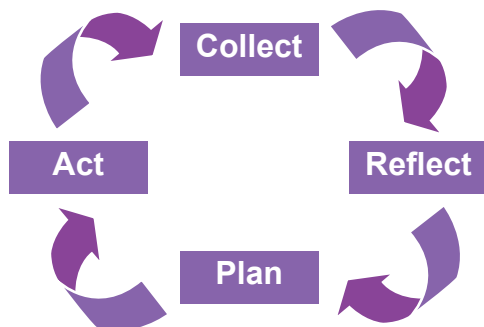


Figure 1: The action research cycle

Keeping the action research cycle in mind (see Figure 1), I gathered data using instruments, such as a pre-test and a post-test, interviews, monthly test marks, questionnaires, and entries from teachers' reflections. In order to address the problem, I designed an intervention that included a series of activities. These activities were implemented in the classroom. After reflecting on the results, the cycle was repeated with a refreshed intervention. Figure 2 maps out the research process.

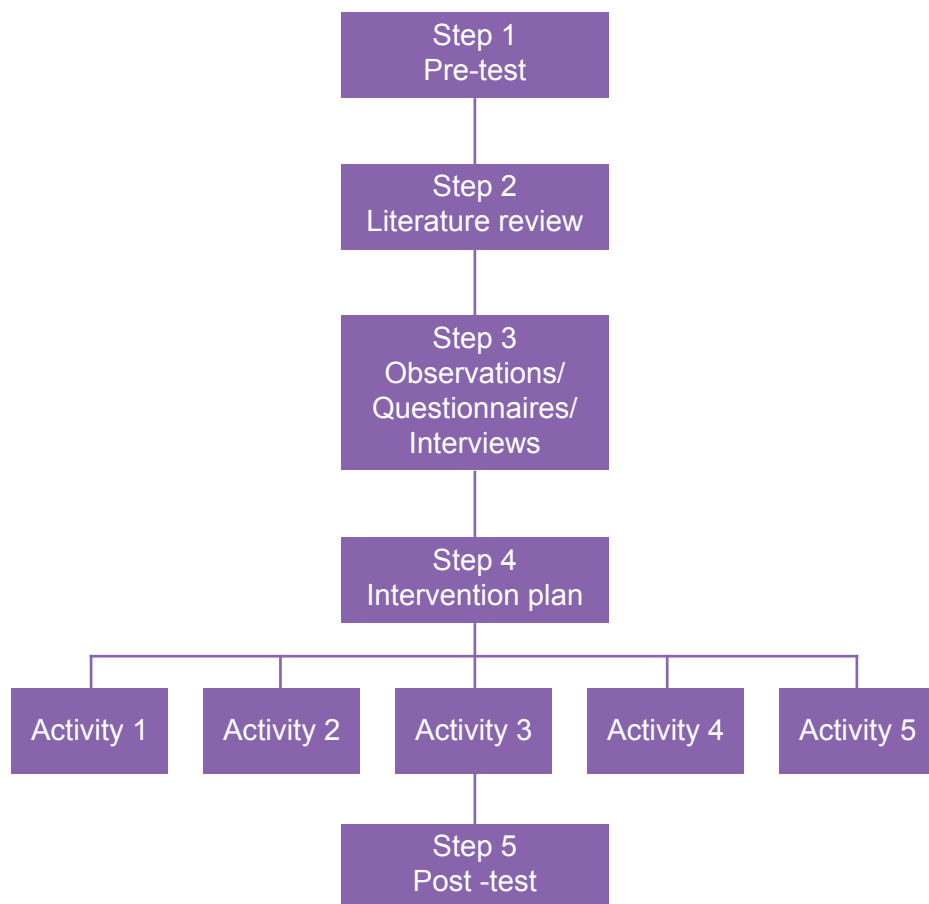


Figure 2: The research process

In order to identify the difficulties students had in describing pictures, a pre-test was administered. The pre-test results were analyzed to determine the problems the students had.

They were used to determine whether students possessed the knowledge to construct simple present continuous sentences to describe pictures. After the problems were identified, five task sheets were designed to help students to develop their knowledge of the present continuous tense.

The data collected through the students' task sheets were then

analyzed to better understand if the students had reached the “target” level and were able to construct present continuous sentences. The pre-test and the post-test marks were then compared. This comparison helped to determine whether the intervention brought about the desired results. The findings helped to identify and introduce suitable remedial work for improving the students’ ability to construct present continuous sentences to describe pictures.

The research site was a mixed 1AB school in the Negombo, where the students came from different areas. The selected student sample consisted of forty Grade 10 students. Some of the motives behind choosing this group were:

- The students are weak and are not up to the standard
- The informal interviews and the analysis of the pre – test highlighted their poor picture description skills
- Lack of knowledge in constructing the particular sentence structures
- There is ample time for the students to develop themselves before the G.C.E. O/L examination.

In order to better understand how students use present continuous simple sentences to describe pictures, the following tools were used:

- A pre-test and a post- test
- Informal interviews with the teachers and the students
- Monthly test marks
- Questionnaires for teachers and students
- Reflective log
- Informal observations
- Lessons plans

The following activities were implemented:

- Match pictures with the appropriate sentences
- Write sentences using the given words to describe a picture
- Complete sentences that describe a picture using the correct verbs
- Write 5 sentences that describe the pictures

The pre-test was administered to identify the problems the students had describing pictures using present continuous simple sentences. A task sheet with two questions was allocated for this purpose. The findings of the pre-test were used to design the tasks that were to be implemented in order to improve the students' ability to construct present continuous simple sentences in appropriate contexts. Each implemented activity was analyzed in order to make sure the students' performance levels improved. The post-test was administered to determine if the students had improved after the intervention. When the student performance in the pre and the-post tests was analyzed, the improvement level of the students was identified. Two significant methods are allocated in view of analyzing data.

FINDINGS

The data analysis revealed the following findings. At the initial stage of data analysis it was evident that the students possessed a fair knowledge of the structure of simple sentences. However, they were unable to apply that knowledge to construct sentences to describe pictures. Most of the students had problems selecting the appropriate verb on their own. Their inability to construct simple sentences affected their performance level. However, when the sentences were given, most of them were able to match the sentences with the appropriate pictures.

Data gathered from the pre-test and the students' questionnaire revealed the students' ability to make sentences using the present continuous tense to describe pictures. According to the pre-test, only 18 students could obtain 10-15 marks and all the others obtained below 10 marks. And only 3 could write 2 or more sentences using simple present continuous tense for pictures descriptions. Fifteen students could not write even one sentence to describe the picture. Thus the findings of the questionnaire and the pre-test marks confirmed that the students' ability to make present continuous sentences to describe pictures was very low.

The different data collection tools revealed the following findings:

The questionnaire given to the students:

1. Most of the students were not well-aware of the structure of present continuous tense
2. They have the knowledge of constructing a simple sentence
3. They need clear explanations and thorough practice in the use of the present continuous tense
4. Due to the lack of knowledge in using a variety of verbs in the appropriate context, they tend to make errors

The questionnaire given to the teachers:

1. Majority of the teachers are very experienced
2. Though the students get a lot of exposure to the language, the teachers found it difficult to work only in English
3. Most of the teachers are not interested in implementing new strategies and techniques
4. Most teacher are not aware of current techniques to help their learners

Findings from the questionnaires revealed the reasons that had affected the students' inability to make present continuous sentences to describe pictures. According to Wallace (1988), one principle of successful language learning is frequent exposure and repetition. The findings of the questionnaire confirmed the students' lack of exposure to the language.

Students' English books:

1. Students do not get involved in error correction
2. Most students had copied the teacher or a good student's work. They had not made the effort to do the tasks on their own
3. They were not provided opportunities to make their own sentences
4. Activities were not given in an organized manner: from simple to complex

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

In order to assist the teachers and researchers in the field of English language education, I would like to propose several recommendations:

- During the teaching learning process, the students' ability to construct present continuous sentences to describe pictures need to be evaluated. Activities need to be based on those findings.
- The relevant competency level should include ample activities and tasks with respect to the sentence structure, present continuous simple sentence.
- A variety of activities should be implemented using technology and new teaching / learning strategies and techniques. Interesting activities need to be designed by the teachers accordingly.
- The activities should be prepared in a sequential order from simple to complex as Krashen describes in the Natural Order Hypothesis. A certain period should be allocated to deal with the sentence structure. And also repetition is needed. Repetition of particular sentence structures helps learners to internalize them.
- Students need to be given opportunities to use the structures they learn in real life communication.
- Promote self-learning through extensive reading and listening.
- Students must be encouraged to do error corrections.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The results of the pre-test proved that the participants had trouble describing pictures using the present continuous simple tense. They always depended on the teacher or a peer. But they knew the simple sentence structure. However, there were some students who did not possess the knowledge of constructing present continuous simple sentences, but had a rich vocabulary.

Most of the students in the study sample were able to read and understand the sentences; therefore, almost all the students were able to score more marks for the first and the second questions of the pre-test. The ultimate result was, most of the students were able to obtain more marks in their post-test than in the pre-test.

I created a language rich environment in the classroom using, charts, posters, tables, oral presentations and formal and informal discussions. The final outcome was, the students were able to draw pictures and describe them using their own sentences using the present continuous tense.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' AUTONOMY AND CREATING A POSITIVE LEARNING ATMOSPHERE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Madhuri Kannangara

ABSTRACT

The average English language classroom provides very limited or no freedom for the learner to be responsible for their own learning. This action research was conducted to examine ways of developing learner autonomy. A sample set of teachers implemented four to six listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar activities in their language classes to increase learner independence. The data collection was done through questionnaires, interviews, observations, test marks and activities. The findings reveal that teachers and the students had changed their attitudes in an encouraging manner. The teachers provided the students freedom, and the students made the maximum use of their autonomy in a constructive manner to develop self-confidence.

PROBLEM

During the “English teachers in action” workshop series by the British Council, the participants were exposed to videos on giving sufficient freedom and independence to learners. When we, the participants reflected on the videos, most of us realized that we do not provide our students sufficient independence in the language classroom. Moreover, during most of my classroom observations and micro teaching sessions at the Regional English Support Centre (RESC), I have often come across teachers being very commanding and dominating. It is this eye opening experience that made me conduct an action research on learner autonomy.

Personally, as a teacher trainer I believe in providing plenty of freedom and autonomy to the participants. I am aware of the significance and the importance of changing the attitudes of the teachers about learner autonomy in the language classroom. In an ordinary classroom, the students get very limited or absolutely no freedom to be responsible for their own learning. The students hardly get an opportunity to elaborate their views and ideas. Therefore, this action research was conducted to discover ways of developing learner autonomy in the English language classroom.

INTERVENTION

The participants for the study were selected from five urban and rural 1AB and 1C schools in the Kandy District. The research was conducted in four skill based categories: listening and speaking, writing, reading, and grammar. The participants' ages ranged from eleven to fifteen, and the majority of them had studied English for a number of years. Their English language skills were very weak and they were very dependent on the teacher.

Table 1: Overview of the participants

Category	Name of the teacher	Name of the School	Type of school	Skill	Grade	No. of students
1	Teacher A	School A	1AB	Listening & Speaking	9	49
	Teacher B	School B	1C		8	15
2	Teacher C	School C	1C	Writing	8	20
3	Teacher D	School D	1C	Reading	7	12
4	Teacher E	School E	1AB	Grammar	6	37

The main focus of this study was to create students' autonomy. However, prior to that, the teachers' attitudes had to be changed. Hence, the participating teachers were invited for several discussions at the RESC, and they were introduced the idea of learner autonomy. The teachers were introduced to the importance of providing freedom and promoting learner autonomy in their classes.

In order to better understand teachers' and students' perspectives, two questionnaires were designed to collect data. The questionnaire for

the teachers mainly focused on the time allocated for student centred activities that promoted students' autonomy and interaction. The students were given questionnaires to find out how they were involved in the lessons and the interaction patterns they were more comfortable with.

During the workshops at the RESC, the teachers were made aware of the activities and the methods of providing greater freedom to the learners. A micro teaching session was conducted to demonstrate the idea of learner autonomy. The selected teachers were given the own freedom to plan and conduct the lesson ensuring learner autonomy. They were assisted with lesson planning, constant observations and regular feedback. The initial plan was to conduct six to eight lessons, but due to time constraints related to various year end tasks at the schools, the number of the lessons was reduced.

The teachers designed lessons that provided the students opportunities for guided discovery. These less controlled activities, handed the students the responsibility of their own learning. Almost all the lessons included activities and interaction patterns that encouraged learner autonomy. Moreover, the teachers functioned as facilitators who encouraged deep and independent learning through well designed questions and assessment. The students were encouraged to learn through trial and error. Observations were carried out to provide the teachers further feedback. Finally, the questionnaires were repeated to compare the data. The data was analyzed against the three stages of the lesson: presentation, practice and production.

FINDINGS

Table 2 provides an overview of the allocation of time for learner autonomy.

Table 2 - Time allocated for activities

Name	Time allocated (in minutes)									Skill
	Presentation 5-7 mins		Practice 10 -15 mins		Production 15 -20 mins		Total time allocation (out of 40 mins)			
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	After	
Teacher A	5	6	5-6	10	8	15	15-20	25-30	Listening & Speaking	
Teacher B	2-3	5	5	10	8	10	10-16	20-25		
Teacher C	2-3	6-7	5-7	12-15	5-6	10-15	13-15	30-35	Writing	
Teacher D	3	5	5	10	10	15	15-18	20-30	Reading	
Teacher E	3	6	7	12	10	15	15-20	25-33	Grammar	

Figure 1 shows the time allocated for activities that generate student autonomy before and after the intervention. As is evident, there is a considerable improvement in time allocation to activities that develop students' autonomy.

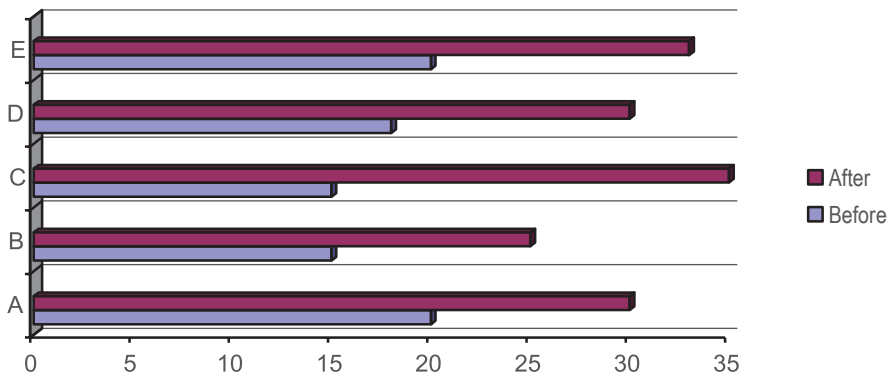


Figure 1: Total time allocated for activities to generate students' autonomy before and after the intervention

Table 3 provides an overview of the interaction patterns before and after the intervention. The interaction patterns of the students have changed in a favourable manner to develop student autonomy.

Table 3: Interaction patterns before and after the introduction of activities to promote student autonomy

	Presentation		Practice		Production		Skill
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	
Teacher A	Eliciting	Games Brainstorming Eliciting	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts St -St	Group Individual	Group Pair individual	Listening & Speaking
Teacher B	Eliciting	Brainstorming	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts	Sts – Sts St -St	Group	Group Pair individual	
Teacher C	Eliciting / Questioning	Brainstorming	Tr – Sts	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts	Individual	Group Pair individual	Writing
Teacher D	Eliciting / Questioning	Story telling / Games	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts St -St	Pair Individual	Group Pair individual	Reading
Teacher E	Eliciting	Games Brainstorming Eliciting	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts	Tr – Sts Sts – Sts St -St	Group Individual	Group Pair individual	Grammar

Teacher A stated,

I used to give my students a lot of assistance when I taught. Specially in speaking lessons, I used to give guiding structures for the students to practice. And at the end of the lesson, students learn only the structures I had given them. After I was introduced to student autonomy, I conducted several speaking lessons giving more freedom to the students to produce their own language. At the beginning, the students were reluctant to come up with their ideas. Gradually, they really liked to speak freely without the teacher interfering. They became self-confident. I was happy to see them speaking in English during other periods and outside the school. So I believe this method of providing students autonomy is a very effective technique.

In School B, a lesson on 'My favourite personalities' was observed. Famous and prominent figures were introduced and the students were encouraged to construct sentences on their own. Delayed corrections were done on the blackboard. Later, the groups were provided with an information card and a picture of a famous personality. The students worked in groups and prepared sentences and practiced them with each other. The teacher guided, corrected and supported when necessary. During the production stage, volunteers were invited to talk about their favourite famous personalities. Finally, each student spoke about their favourite person to their groups.

The other four teachers also echoed similar sentiments. Teacher C, who focused on writing stated,

Now my students are not scared of writing. They have shown an incredible improvement in term tests too, especially in writing essays. I never thought of giving my students freedom. But now I believe in giving learners autonomy, and I would continue this method with my other classes as well. The writing tasks which began with task sheets and sentence strips ended up with brainstorming activities done by the students in order to get started on essay writing.

There was a change in the teachers' attitudes which allowed the students to work on their own. Teacher D, who focused reading stated,

There was an improvement in student motivation and the enthusiasm when they worked on their own. This made me realize the value of student autonomy. My students were very poor in reading, and they didn't enjoy it. But I followed the instructions given to me by our RESC coordinator on developing students' autonomy. I was amazed with the improvement my students made. Very simple reading activities ended up in reading storybooks of their choice.

Prior to introducing the concept of student autonomy, almost all the teachers had given very limited amount of time for the students to work freely during the presentation, practice and production stages. Even the activities they did, had been fully controlled and guided by the teachers. After the intervention, they allocated 50% - 80% of time for the students to be responsible for their own learning. There was a considerable increase in pair and group work, and these activities provided greater individual freedom irrespective of the skills the lessons focused on.

In School E, the teacher dealt with grammar which is traditionally perceived as boring by many students. Once they were made more autonomous, I witnessed the manner in which the students noticed the grammar rules and analysed and defined them on their own. One of the students from Grade 8 stated,

I really didn't like it (autonomy) at first. We had to think. We had to find out what the grammar rules were. It took a long time to do these activities. But gradually I began to understand the rules better. I enjoyed identifying the grammar point and define and learning on my own by engaging in some activities. My friends were doing the same. We all were really busy. Actually we forgot that we were learning grammar. We were working and learning on our own.

I observed a grammar lesson on adjectives in School E, and it was one of the best lessons that I observed during this study. The students were given some word cards (nouns and adjectives), and they had to

divide the words into two categories and explain the rule behind their choice. After checking their answers, the students were encouraged to work in groups and define the two categories on their own and record the definitions on the board. Later the students were given a paragraph to be filled with the adjectives which were previously introduced. Next, they had to select a passage from the textbook and record the adjectives. Finally, the students had to form new sentences using the adjectives they had noticed in the text and share it with the rest of the group members. The teacher was being a facilitator. She introduced the tasks, guided and monitored the students throughout the lesson.

The data presented above, reflect a positive attitudinal change in the teachers. They were willing to provide their students autonomy. Moreover, the students themselves took the maximum benefit of learner autonomy. The new concept helped them to build up their confidence and maximize their learning. Positive ways of evaluation and methods of encouragement like delayed correction helped to build up students' confidence.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

Students in our average language classrooms are entirely or partially dependent on their teachers, and they prefer to be spoon fed. In order to change the students' behaviour, the teachers' attitudes need to be changed. The lessons need to be presented in a manner that provides the learners with more freedom. First, the teachers had to change their commanding and dominating behaviours and agree to facilitate learner autonomy. Activities which could direct the students to identify their own strengths, capabilities and their own ways of learning were to be selected. The motivating and enjoyable working atmosphere provided the students with more opportunities for sharing, collaborating and maximizing their learning.

The suggestive feedback, positive methods of evaluation and encouraging methods of error correction paved the way to deep learning and confidence building of the students. Finally, the confidence they gained through the freedom they got, made them become more responsible for their own learning. Teachers need to use effective and constructive methods to maximize students' learning. A study of this

nature is useful to educators because it addresses both teachers' and students' needs. The teachers changed their classroom behaviours and became less dominating in the class. The next important fact is, irrespective of the skill that is being taught, a teacher can provide learner autonomy to maximize learning.

As a next step, the results of this study need to be shared within the professional community. The five teachers would share their experiences with each other in mid January. They will get together and plan a workshop or a seminar to be conducted at the RESC to share the findings with a selected set of teachers and administrators from the six zones we cater in the Central Province.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The main challenge I faced was time constraints posed by the workload during the end of the school year. Sometimes I had to explain and discuss the matters and guide the teachers over the phone. I thought it would be really challenging for me to accept their roles as change agents. Actually, they were all very positive, and they wanted to try out this novel idea. For all of them, this was the first major occasion they were facilitating learner autonomy. Though I was initially planning to do this with ten teachers, the time factor limited my number to five teachers. If I had more time, I would have repeated the cycles.

WAVES BEYOND IMAGINATION: AN ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS OF GRADE 6 STUDENTS

Indika H. Jayakody

ABSTRACT

This article reviews the impact of an action research on improving the creative writing ability of thirty nine students in a Grade 6 class in New Central School who learn English as a Second Language (ESL). It examines the students' attitudes towards writing stories in English. Data was collected through the findings of two different questionnaires given to the students in the selected Grade 6 class and 10 English teachers in the school. The items in the questionnaires were focused on finding the attitudes of the target group towards writing stories in English. The theoretical framework of this paper is drawn in from Krashen's (1984) notions about second language acquisition. He argues that the development of writing and of second language proficiency occurs in the same way via comprehensible input with a low affective filter. I also draw in from Stotsky's (1983) findings of correlations between reading achievement and writing ability along with the correlation of stories the students listened to and different stories they created in the class. The concluding argument of the paper is that creative writing can be improved through writing simple stories that motivate the students to overcome the fears of writing in English.

PROBLEM

The students, who follow the local syllabus in Sri Lanka, learn English as a second language. It is introduced in Grade 1 as Activity Based Oral English (ABOE) to expose the students to the target language and to develop their receptive skills: listening and speaking. From Grade 3 onwards, there is a focus on both the receptive and productive skills. Although students are taught English for 11 years, by the time they

reach General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level Examination (GCE/OL), students are reluctant to attempt the written items in the examination paper. The major writing activity which weighs 15 marks is a free writing activity, which is often not attempted by many students. This free writing activity requires the students to complete a story using the given prompts. The students are introduced to this type of writing when they are in Grade 6.

According to the findings of the questionnaire distributed among the target group, even when the students are in Grade 6, they are reluctant to write stories. This is mainly due to their lack of confidence in their own writing. They are particularly concerned about vocabulary, grammar and overall mistakes they make in writing.

According to the questionnaire, all the thirty nine students in the class were interested in listening to stories. However, many did not like to even attempt to write their own stories even in their mother tongue. Although more than half of the target group had attempted to create stories in their mother tongue, only six students had tried to write a story in English. Therefore, motivating the students to write stories and building up their confidence to achieve their potentials was challenging. According to the questionnaire given to the teachers, it was identified that the majority of students are not interested in writing tasks. They stated that the students' lack of exposure to the target language was catering to the problem. They had also identified that mother tongue interference hinders their writing as they tend to think in their mother tongue and then translate it into English.

INTERVENTION

Though stories are a resource that supports in lowering the affective filter in a second language learning classroom, when it comes to creating their own stories in the target language, it becomes a boring task. Students tend to consider it another embarrassing writing task. Therefore as Krashen (1984) states, "it is reading that gives the writer the 'feel' for the look and texture of reader-based prose" (p.20), I read some stories in the class. Later, I got the students in groups and appointed a story teller for each group. As the students stated that they were interested in listening to stories, they participated very

enthusiastically in these sessions. They answered my questions, drew pictures, acted out scenes they were interested in, imitated characters and suggested alternative endings to the stories. The activities were aimed at expanding their vocabulary and exposing them to basic elements of a story which would help them later when they attempt to write their own stories.

Then, the students engaged in some picture description activities. They described characters and places they were familiar with in their day to day lives. Through this activity, the students were expected to improve their descriptive writing skills of introducing various salient features of a story such as character and setting.

Finally, the students engaged in creating stories of their own in groups and individually. It was obvious that they participated more enthusiastically when working in groups, and they were able to create stories with very interesting and unusual endings. The activities were introduced from the simple to the complex to motivate the students to continue writing. Some planned activities were changed to be done in groups to encourage greater student participation. These activities were done in small groups and as whole class activities to make writing an enjoyable experience. The students were encouraged to work collaboratively and to share their efforts with their peers. Here the process of writing was considered more important than producing a good piece of writing. Therefore, not much emphasis was given to correcting grammar.

The questionnaire given prior to the intervention was repeated at the end to find out whether the intervention was effective in making any changes to students' attitudes. A token of appreciation was given to all the students in the class to motivate and appreciate their participation and hard work.

FINDINGS

During intervention, two different questionnaires were implemented to collect data. One was distributed among all the students in the participating Grade 6 class prior to the intervention, and the same questionnaire was repeated after the intervention to identify the impact of the intervention.

Table 1: Responses to the questionnaire before and after the intervention

Question No:	Question	Before the intervention	After the intervention
1	My parents/grandparents told me stories when I was very small	26	26
2	I still like to listen to stories	39	39
3	I like to read stories	36	39
4	I like to write stories in Sinhala/Tamil	28	32
5	I have written stories in Sinhala/Tamil	20	20
6	I have tried to write stories in English	06	39
7	I can write stories in English	02	27
8	I can't create stories	35	04
9	I don't know many English words	37	27
10	I can't write sentences correctly	37	18
11	I think I make a lot of mistakes	36	27
12	I think only grownups can write stories in English	24	00

As presented in Table 1, the findings of the questionnaire administered at the end of the intervention revealed that twenty seven students believed that they can write stories in English, whereas only two students said so before the intervention.

This clearly shows that there were changes in students' attitudes towards writing stories in English. The results show that the intervention has been able to build the students' confidence in creative writing. After the intervention, all the students stated in the questionnaire that they are interested in reading stories, though three students stated that they were not interested in it prior to the intervention. According to the findings of the post-intervention questionnaire, all the students identified their own attempts to write stories during the intervention as they accepted confidently that they tried to write their own stories in English. Only six students believed in their potential before the intervention. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the changes before and after the intervention.

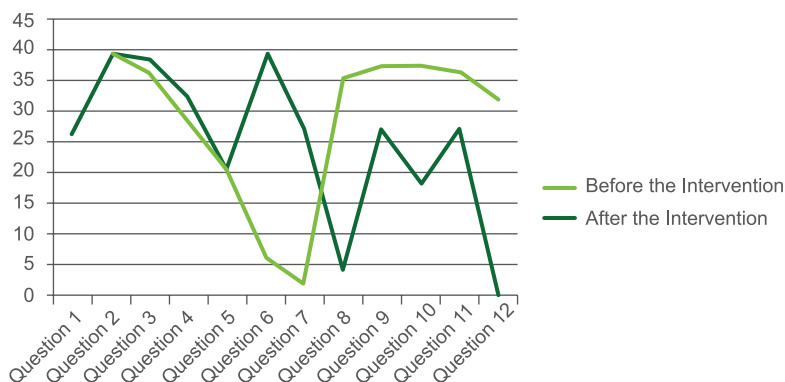


Figure 1: Students' responses before and after the intervention

A slight attitudinal change is visible in the reasons the students had identified as their 'inability' to write in English. In the questionnaire given before the intervention, almost all the students reported that they lacked the vocabulary to write stories. After the intervention, twenty seven students still believed that they cannot write in English because of their poor vocabulary. The number of students who thought that they were unable to write correct sentences also reduced as only eighteen students believed so after the intervention.

Another questionnaire was distributed among the teachers of English in the school who have experience teaching in Grades 1-5 and are currently teaching in Grade 6-13. According to the findings of this questionnaire, the teachers felt that the majority of their students are not interested in writing in English. Most of them identified the reasons for this problem as the students' lack of exposure to the target language and the students' lack of confidence in producing their own writing. Additionally, almost all the teachers believed that the students' limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar affect in their writing. A few teachers stated that their students are weak in writing even in their mother tongue. They implied that those students lack creativity. However, many teachers identified story writing as a means to improving students' writing in English.

When implementing the tasks, it was found that students' participation increased when they worked in groups where they tried their best to

cooperate with their peers. In one activity, a picture of a person in a hole was displayed, and the students in groups of six were asked to develop the story. They listened to the other groups attentively and enthusiastically and there was a competitive environment among the groups. All the groups tried to make their part of the story more interesting and adventurous. They brought ideas they had heard of and had read in other stories, and some students also brought in cartoons to make their stories more attractive.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

According to the data collected through the questionnaires distributed among the teachers and the students, the necessity for improving the students' active vocabulary is emphasized. Both the teachers and the students identified the negative impact of poor vocabulary on writing. Majority of students believed that they do not possess sufficient vocabulary to write in English. Therefore, more activities on acquiring vocabulary have to be planned.

During the research, some writing tasks such as describing picture stories, creating whole class stories, describing people, objects and places was introduced. When observing the students' work, common grammar mistakes were identified. When monitoring the students' work, it was obvious that the students were reluctant to participate individually, but in groups there was greater participation. It was observed that when they worked in groups, they got the confidence to express their ideas and they became more enthusiastic when they were appreciated by their peers.

The findings also revealed the need to plan more writing activities in addition to the textbook activities. The students' participation can be increased by planning picture stories, and it was observed that they were very interested in adding some adventure to their stories. These insights are helpful in directing English teachers to plan extended writing activities. It would be beneficial if all the English teachers in the school are able to get together and plan a variety of creative writing activities which can effectively lower the affective filter. Referring to the findings of the questionnaire, it is revealed that students have changed their attitudes positively towards writing stories in English. Therefore,

the need to continue this process is a necessity because the students will lack motivation if they are not exposed to more interesting writing tasks.

The study also revealed that telling stories and reading stories even in the first language lend support to story writing in English. Students try to imitate certain characters and in some instances they tend to bring that background knowledge to the stories they create. During the intervention, some story books were brought and read in the class. Students maintained a class library. The learners' interest created in reading and writing must be reinforced continually.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Referring back to the research process, I had some difficulties in deciding when and where to correct the students' grammar mistakes. If they were corrected continuously, it would have inhibited their interest in writing. Therefore, the mistakes were pointed out randomly and the most common mistakes were corrected through different language activities done in the class. When dealing with the data collected through the questionnaire before the intervention, I was rather disappointed as the whole class shared negative attitudes towards their inability to write stories in English. Providing positive reinforcement to make them write a few lines was somewhat a challenge. I referred to Wright's (1997) sample activities and adapted them to suit the context. In relation to the process and the procedures followed in the research, I observed that students need more time and the teacher must be patient enough to encourage their writing even if they scribbled some incomplete sentences. This is not usually done in our second language classrooms as the teachers are struggling to cover a fixed syllabus before the evaluations at the end of each term.

Forming groups in overcrowded classrooms was another problem I had to face. Monitoring the groups was also difficult. Sometimes the class was taken outside to form groups without disturbing the neighboring classes. Some individual writing tasks were adapted as group work to encourage student participation and to create a stress free environment. One very important lesson I learned is that the activities

implemented in class have to be interesting and challenging enough to promote greater students participation.

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THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED LEARNING ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' MOTIVATION

R. M. Sumudu Nisala Embogama

ABSTRACT

The omnipresence of information and communication technology (ICT) during the past few decades has paved the way for unlimited modes of knowledge dissemination and acquisition. This action research considers the feasibility and productivity of implementing Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in an English as a Second Language (ESL) learning context. The key focus is on how computer mediated language learning activities would promote motivation to learn academic English. The study investigates the impact of a custom-designed short-term online course on the English present tenses. It analyzes how students' desire to learn the target language increases subsequent to the introduction of CALL practices. The study evaluates motivation levels of Music undergraduates in terms of: intrinsic vs. extrinsic and integrative vs. instrumental motivation. The primary data was collected through the piloting of a questionnaire adapted from Dornei and You (2013). The findings of this study are consistent with other studies of this nature, as it demonstrates a statistically significant increase in the level of interest to learn English following the implementation of technology-enhanced learning practices. Based on the findings of the study, several pedagogical implications are presented to encourage the use of CALL for teaching purposes.

PROBLEM

There is no denying the fact that technology is indubitably dominating the world today and that its usages have spread like wild fire amongst the Millennials and Post-Millennials. As language educators, we have to embrace these changes in order to devise new and innovative techniques for teaching. The aim of this action research was two-fold. The first part involved the “action” taken in terms of strategizing

a means of enhancing learner motivation for acquiring the English language through the introduction of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This was followed by the evaluation process which involved the triangulation of data to better understand the impact generated by the intervention, i.e. the introduction of a short-term online English course.

The integration of CALL into academic English courses is not a new phenomenon. Many studies have been conducted on the use of technology-enhanced learning techniques for teaching a second language (L2). Almost all of them suggest that there is positive improvement in the acquisition skills and interest levels of the learners exposed to CALL practices. Nevertheless, the implementation of such practices has still not gained momentum in Sri Lanka. Two of the main reasons for this are the lack of resources in educational institutions and the teachers' lack of ICT skills to introduce it in their classes. I am hoping that by sharing the findings of an action project such as this, other language educators will witness the benefits of CALL and use it as a tool for developing their students' English language skills.

Bax (2003) documenting the history of the use of CALL refers to a behavioral stage of CALL (which took place around the 1960s). During this phase, learning activities were mostly restricted to one-way interactions with the student working on the computer in isolation. However, at present, especially with the emergence of Web 2.0 technology that emerged with the turn of this century, CALL has evolved drastically. It is now in a position to enable L2 learners to interact with other members of the learning community and their teachers through synchronous and asynchronous means. This kind of interactive learning is regarded as extremely productive for second language acquisition to successfully take place.

The reason for focusing on how the introduction of CALL for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) as a strategy to increase learner motivation was due to the fact that at the University of the Visual & Performing Arts where I teach, majority of the students lack motivation to learn English. This is mainly due to the lack of usage of the English language. Most students in my university learn traditional Indian or Sri Lankan music, and the medium of instruction is almost exclusively in Sinhala. Therefore, even most of their reference materials are not in

English. It is unfortunate that once these students graduate, they are unemployed or underemployed due to their poor English proficiency. Therefore, this contradictory situation, where the students need to learn English in order to access the lucrative job market but are not motivated to do so because of its highly limited usage within the program, has led to poor student participation in class and a reduced interest to learn English. Keeping this situation in mind, the intension of this action research was to introduce a custom-designed Learner Management System (LMS) for the Performing Arts undergraduates of the University of the Visual & Performing Arts, Colombo, to increase learner motivation and to empower them to discover ways of getting more exposure to the English language through a computer mediated language learning processes.

Many ESL motivation researchers, starting from its pioneers such as Gardner and Lambert (1959) have stated that motivation is a key factor for successful language learning. Keeping this in mind, the following research questions were used as the basis for conducting this study that is intended to promote an interest to learn English:

1. What categorization of motivation is most prevalent among the target population?
2. Will the introduction of CALL enhance learners' motivation to develop their English language skills?

INTERVENTION

The first step of this action research was to decide what type of online course had to be designed. Because this was a preliminary intervention, I decided to focus on one particular aspect of the English language. Based on my experience as a CALL researcher, I adapted the Grammar Based Teaching (GBT) approach for teaching English since “it uses grammar as the base, the starting point and foundation, for the development of all language skills--speaking, listening, writing, and reading” (Azar, 2007, p.6). Moreover, GBT makes available explicit linguistic information about the structure of the English language in order to help speed and otherwise facilitate the development of the students' interlanguage (Azar, 2007, p.7).

Using this approach, the present tense was selected as it is obviously the most frequently used tense in English. Three modules covering the simple present tense, present continuous tense and one which contained both tenses in mixed contexts were introduced to the students. The modules contained materials, exercises, reading comprehensions, discussion forums, chat sessions, Power Point presentations, audio recordings, video clips, and also links to other language learning websites offering additional resources and exercises. The students who registered for the course had the opportunity to grasp key grammar points through engaging in tasks that integrated language skills such as writing, reading and listening. Apart from the development of authentic lessons and exercises, the audio and video clips of myself as the teacher explaining various aspects of these tenses in the learners' first language, Sinhala, was intended to make complex abstract grammatical concepts much easier for the students to grasp.

This short-term online English course was developed on the learning platform, Moodle. Due to the fact that most existing language learning websites are often seeped in Eurocentric values, I decided to develop my own course for these undergraduates using as much authentic material as possible. Even most of the material taken from the internet were localized to suite the context and the learners.

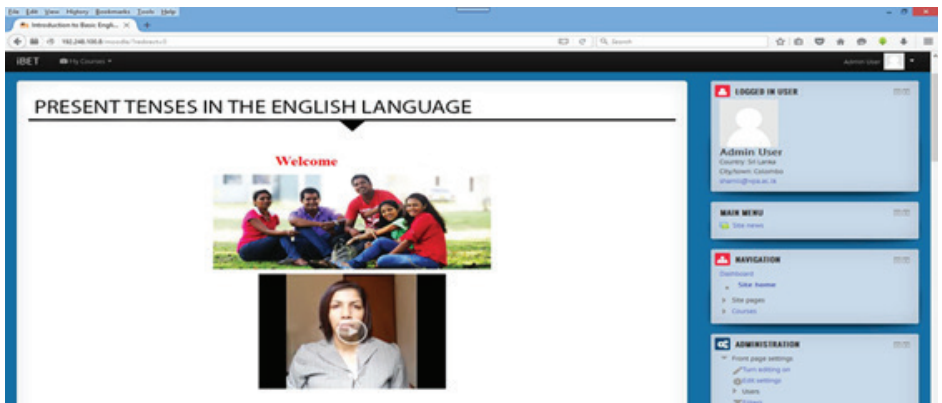


Figure 1: Screen shot of the home page of the online English course

Once the course was designed, second year undergraduates

specializing in Music were informed about it and a total of 36 participants out of a class of 85 volunteered to register for it. Prior to the commencement of the course, the Sinhala translation of a questionnaire adapted from Dornei and You (2013) was administered to measure the sample groups' initial level of motivation. Once the three modules were completed, the same questionnaire was re-administered so that a comparative analysis could reveal the differences between the initial levels of motivation and the level of motivation after the completion of the course.

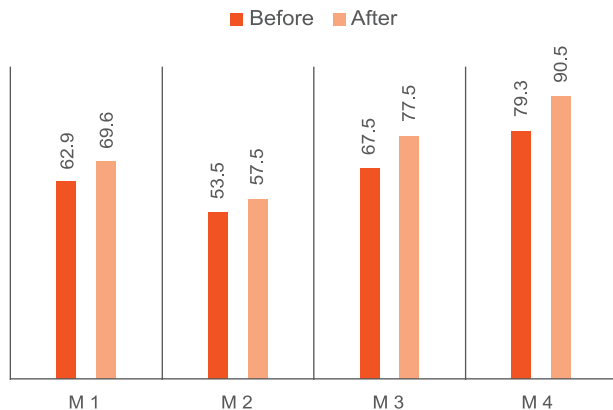
FINDINGS

Following this action phase, triangulation of primary and secondary data took place. Based on the comparative analysis of the collected data from the motivation questionnaire, which was piloted twice, the claims made by other motivational researchers that there is a significant correlation between the implementation of technology-enhanced practices for second language learning purposes and the increase in L2 learner motivation were reinforced (Liu, Liao & Pratt, 2009; Ushida, 2005).

Since the most frequently adapted motivational constructs have been presented in the form of a dichotomous relationship; i.e. intrinsic motivation vs. extrinsic motivation and integrative motivation vs. instrumental motivation, I selected these particular categories as the foci of the analysis. Pintrich & Schunk (2002) define intrinsic motivation as “motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake” (p. 245) and extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as “motivation to engage in an activity as a means to end” (p. 245). The concepts instrumental and integrative motivation can be succinctly explained as embodying career or academic related reasons for learning the target language and socially or culturally driven needs for the acquisition of the second language respectively (Gardner & Lambert, 1970). Brown (2000) further categorizes these dichotomies into four areas: intrinsic-integrative, intrinsic-instrumental, extrinsic-integrative, and extrinsic-instrumental.

Using Brown's four classifications, I categorized the relevant items in the questionnaire into the above four domains in order to identify the main orientating factors for L2 motivation in the sample population.

Then using the 5-likert scale, (strongly agree=5, agree=4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, disagree= 2, strongly disagree= 1), the respondents' responses were scored to the values given above and the total marks for each item was calculated and the average of this total was converted to percentages. This process was repeated for the same questionnaire submitted after the completion of the online course. Finally, the percentages generated were evaluated to identify whether there was an increase in motivation levels and also to understand what category of motivation was the most significant one for the learners under study.



Note: M1= Integrative-intrinsic, M2= integrative-extrinsic, M3=instrumental-intrinsic, M4=instrumental extrinsic

Figure 2: Motivation percentages for each motivation category

The findings revealed that instrumental-extrinsic motivation was the highest motivating category as it received a percentage of 79.3% before the course which further increased to 90.5% after it. These statistics highlight the learners' need to attain various set objectives as a means to an end through gaining proficiency in the English language. For example, under this rubric, the extrinsic reward of gaining lucrative employment was high in their need to acquire English with a percentage of 94.4% agreeing that it was important to know English to be well employed.

The least impact made on the motivation levels of the target group was the integrative-extrinsic domain receiving a little more than fifty percent in agreement with its importance both before and after the course. This

is not surprising given that a vast majority of these undergraduates have no expectation of migrating to or studying in an English speaking country. In fact, they wish to learn English for improving their future prospects rather than for pure pleasure or for the love of the target language. The reason why there was little increase in the level of integrative motivation could be because the target population is learning the language mainly for instrumental purposes such as for improving their career prospects or to pursue their academic studies with only a very low percentage expressing their need to learn it as a means of integrating with the English culture or its community. For instance, as can be seen in Table 1, less than a fifth of them stated that they learn it since they plan on moving to English-speaking countries in the future.

Table 1: Students’ intension to migrate to an English-speaking country

Plan on migrating to an English speaking country	Strongly agree	Agree	Total percentage
Before the course	5.8%	9.5%	15.3%
After the course	5.8%	12.6%	18.4%

A major objective of the study was to find out if exposure to CALL inspired students to learn English. Looking at Figure 2, we can see a notable increase in motivation with regard to all four categories. Moreover, as can be perceived from Figure 3, the overall desire to learn English has improved by 7.6%.

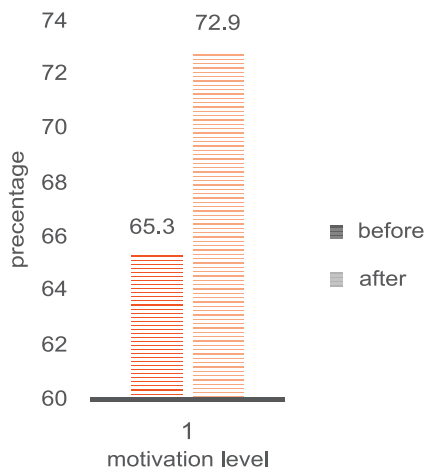


Figure 3: Motivation to learn English

In comparison to the 65.3% who were in agreement to learning the L2 prior to the online English course, 72.9% indicated that they were motivated to do so after its completion. These results are a clear indication that even the Sri Lankan undergraduates who follow their degree courses in their mother tongue can be encouraged to learn the English language through the implementation of technology-enhanced learning practices.

As sources for secondary data, informal interviews with selected participants were conducted to get a deeper understanding of their attitude towards learning English using CALL techniques and their desire to acquire the language. The following responses are a representative sample of the majority of student responses obtained. They synthesis the general positive attitude towards the introduction of CALL activities. Here, students explain how the introduction of e-learning contributed to a significant rise in their overall desire to learn English and substantiate the claims made using the primary data that instrumental-extrinsic motivation is their main driving force for wanting to learn it:

I don't like that much English but it important for me. Because I can get a good job with no problem. Also, in this society we get better respect if we know English, I think. That is why I am saying learning English is very important [...].

We don't have lot of time for English, so this kind of course is very good for us. Now, I know some ways I can try the internet to learn [English] . It is so interesting. I like it.

Like or not, we need English to get a good job [...]. Whatever class we get (for the degree), what they (prospective employers) want is English. This kinds of lesson help us. We have facebook and use it. Same way we can use the internet and learn English.

This is great idea. We can move for our target. Even for study or jobs. Computers, I think can help. I am happy do this course.

As can be noted from these student responses, the students' L2 motivation appears to stem from instrumental reasons such as their studies and career objectives. In addition, they show a marked liking for CALL practices and indicated their interest in developing English has increased as a result of knowing how technology can be used for language learning.

Considering the findings of this study, there is clear evidence that these language learners' motivation to learn ESL has increased after the introduction of CALL. These findings are in line with those of Sivin-Kachala and Biola's (2000) research which demonstrated the effectiveness of the use of technology in education and Ushida's (2005) study that reinforced the assertion that technology-enhanced learning can promote better attitudes and a positive increase in students' motivation with regard to learning a second language. Therefore, this meaningful increase in the experimental groups' motivation to learn the English language following the intervention points positively towards the integration of CALL into the existing English program at the university. Although, one needs to be wary of overgeneralizations, I believe that further studies would reveal similar findings even in other Sri Lankan higher education institutions.

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

What can be concluded from this research is that there is a correlation between the level of increase in motivation and the use of technology-enhanced learning practices for developing academic language learning. As can be observed from the statistics presented, there is an increase in the desire to learn English after using CALL when compared to the initial levels of interest to learn it. Therefore, this is a clear indication of the need to amalgamate these kinds of technologies for teaching ESL especially in cases where there is very little motivation to learn it.

This increase in enthusiasm to develop their English language skills will defiantly pave the way for successful acquisition on the part of the learners in addition to making language teaching more enjoyable and less frustrating for the teachers. In fact, the findings of this research demonstrate how even students who have a low motivation to learn a language can be motivated to do so with the introduction of technology-

enhanced learning practices. The familiarity with technology, its novelty, attractiveness and flexibility, in addition to its varied user-friendly features can be manipulated to reduce the monotony and unidirectional nature of the traditional language learning classroom. Furthermore, CALL has the potential of empowering students who have little exposure to the L2 to discover learner autonomy through a multiple array of avenues for language learning made available by Information Communication Technologies.

Although the limitations of the study include the fact that it was conducted using second year Music undergraduates following their subjects in the first language (Sinhala), I believe we can make generalizations while remaining cautious about the fact that further research on learner motivation and CALL in other academic settings, with different participants, using alternative contexts need to be done. These studies can further substantiate the claims already made regarding its benefits while shedding light on untapped other areas of study in this field.

Personally for me, the use of e-learning for teaching a language is not an end in itself, but is the beginning of a journey into a world of unlimited, exciting possibilities for teaching/learning. Students may encounter danger zones in the form of false, useless, misleading instruction on the computers; however, there will be ample opportunities to obtain limitless language input that would have the capacity of further stimulating them to continue their quest for proficiency in the target language. In order to facilitate this process, we, as educators, need to change existing conventions and take our students beyond the boundaries of the classroom space and guide them to the world of education through technology.

Indeed, as suggested by Prensky (2000), the usage of computer technology has become ubiquitous to such an extent that this young generation of digital natives has reached the point where for them, a world *sans* computers, digital media and the internet is seemingly unfathomable. Therefore, unless we change according to the times and needs of our students, we will be left behind by them for someone who will.

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THE CASCADE MODEL IN ACTION

Hashini Abeysena, Ros Philips and Gilian Poppit

ABSTRACT

This action research project aims to examine the process and effectiveness of the cascade model of teacher training used by the Regional English Language Centres (RESCs) in Sri Lanka. This paper focuses on one level of cascading from a workshop held at the National Institute of Education (NIE) to the Gampaha RESC in the Western Province. The NIE workshop was observed by one of the Gampaha RESC trainers and was later adapted for local use and needs. The Gampaha RESC conducted workshops for regional teachers. These workshops were observed by the researchers. Data collection tools also included handouts from both workshops, reflective journal notes, and an interview with the Gampaha RESC trainer who conducted the workshops. The two workshops were compared. It was revealed that the RESC trainer from Gampaha used the activities of the original workshop in different formats to suit the Gampaha audience. A limitation of this study lies in the fact that the next level of the cascade model (school level) could not be observed due to time constraints. However, the study shows how the cascade model of training can be a success.

PROBLEM

This research was undertaken primarily to capture the cascade model in action and to observe the issues that arise. The researchers did not venture into the research with preconceived ideas of the drawbacks in the system. On the contrary, we were more concerned about how effective this model has proved to be over the years. The cascade model is expected to support a significant flow of information through several levels, and such a model is vital for the success of programs offered at Regional English Support Centres (RESC).

The cascade model relies on people to pass on their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Cascade models are unique in that they rely on teachers and trainers at different levels to change not only their practices, but also to change their roles while receiving and delivering training. They are both the subjects and agents of change

(Gilpin, 1997). If this is done ineffectively, then the system fails and the training is wasted. Change is not situated in a vacuum, but in a socially constructed context (Fullan, 2007; Hoban, 2002; Wedell, 2009) comprising of a complex system of interrelated layers of social, cultural, economic, educational, political and institutional elements (Kennedy, 1988, 1999). Such a model is important in the Sri Lankan context, as often, only one teacher from a school or a RESC attends workshops and these people are expected to pass on what they have learnt. If it is done poorly (or not at all), the cascade model fails. In this paper, we decided to look at just two of the steps in this model: information flow from a workshop presenter to the teacher trainer, and then from the teacher trainer to teachers.

When analyzing current professional development practices, it was evident that professional learning is currently communicated via the cascade model. This is a top down model of professional learning. In the cascade model, the teacher trainers receive initial training and skills via a workshop delivered by an 'expert', either from a local authority such as the National Institute for English (NIE), a local university, or an internationally affiliated partner such as the British Council, or the American Centre. The RESC trainers in turn conduct workshops for their 'receiving' teachers and other teacher trainers. Depending on the context, it may be repeated once again to another group. In most situations, the initial workshop participants receive the content via lectures, activities, videos and handouts. As the content is 'handed on' via various presenters, there may be adaptations and amendments made to suit the audience.

INTERVENTION

The cascade model was the main motif for the intervention. The key factor for the reinterpretation of the training experience (from NIE to the RESC to the school teachers) could be discussed in terms of the factors found via the intervention process. The researchers chose to work with a RESC that is within a day's commute to from Colombo. The plan was to observe a workshop delivered at the NIE, and then observe the RESC teacher trainer deliver this workshop to a group of invited teachers at the RESC. Decisions about observations and recording were made in consultation with all the research participants. The decision regarding which workshop to be cascaded and used for

observation was made solely by the RESC teacher trainer. She then delivered an adaptation of this workshop to a group of teachers from her local RESC. They were informed of the topic and were invited over the phone and letters of invitation. This workshop, which took place on the 18th November, 2015, was observed and recorded.

The primary focus of the research included: the content chosen for delivery and its adaptation. The two workshops were then compared. The workshop chosen for this study was one delivered as a part of a series of workshops by the NIE exclusively for the RESC staff. The focus of the workshop series was on teacher skills and knowledge for the English language classroom. They were delivered by the National RESC Coordinator at the NIE and four foreign English as a Second Language (ESL) advisors currently working in the English Department of the NIE.

It is important to note that reflection is central to adapting and applying knowledge to a local situation. Ownership is needed for sustainability of a program. Moreover, professional development needs to be classroom centered, practical and of direct relevance to local needs (Hayes, 2000). Another set of significant mutual factors that need to be considered to measure the rapport between the trainer and the teacher include: motivation, active engagement, context and clear purpose, the need to help teachers develop strategies for active and engaged involved learning, and respecting all individuals (Hayes, 2000). Figure 1 illustrates the different layers of the cascade model in Sri Lanka.

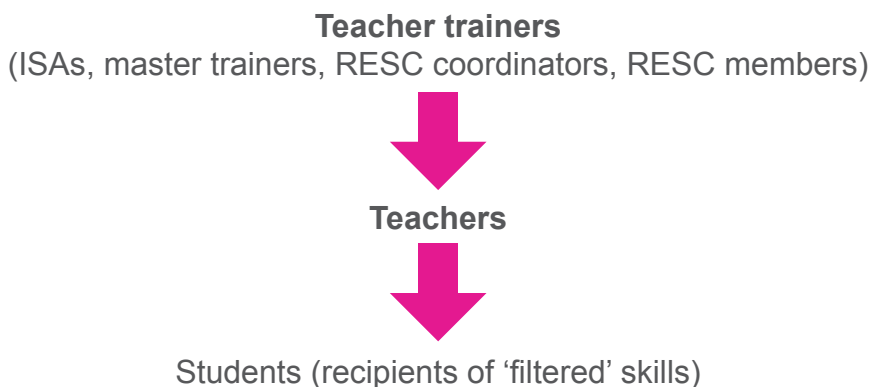


Figure 1: Different layers of the Sri Lankan cascade model

FINDINGS

The initial workshop which was delivered on 10th, October, 2015 at NIE was on 'Integrating skills in the English language classroom'. A cascading workshop was held on 18th November, 2015, at the Gampaha RESC. 20 participants, who were practicing teachers from local schools took part. The teachers had all chosen to go to the workshop willingly. One participant stated,

I wanted to go, so that I could learn something new.

It shows the teachers' interest for their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The workshop was video recorded, so that it could be shared with the other researchers and examined in more detail. The RESC teacher trainer at the Gampaha RESC had prepared handouts for all participants, and she was very well organized. The workshop began on time and contributed to the effective and complete delivery of the workshop.

The preliminary workshop at the NIE was delivered by a foreign advisor currently working at the NIE. She had planned the workshop content after discussions with local teachers, RESC members and the NIE staff. However, she has never visited the Gampaha District, so her knowledge of the area and its needs were limited to generalities. But, her enriched knowledge and skills in the planning and presentation of the workshop was commendable.

During the cascading workshop, the RESC teacher trainer adapted her workshop to suit the needs of her audience who consisted of classroom teachers from the Gampaha District. In her role as the RESC coordinator, she visits the schools and delivers workshops to local teachers. Given the fact that she knows the area well, she was able to choose and adapt various aspects of the original workshop that were pertinent to her present audience.

She was able and willing to manipulate the original workshop content to suit her audience. Moreover, she was able to give a lovely twist and impeded the effectiveness of the delivery process. The RESC trainer also included several of her own activities. At the beginning of the workshop, she specifically looked at lesson planning: this is a need she had perceived as important and had included in her plan. She also included some activities on lesson learning preferences. We were impressed by the RESC trainer's willingness to make the workshop her own. Her presentation style was friendly but also professional. We were impressed with her organization skills and her knowledge of each of the participants. This knowledge helped her to plan the workshop in a very effective manner.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

The cascading model is used at RESCs to transfer knowledge and skills to the grass root levels. This study is evidence of its success. In this process, there were factors that were mutually beneficial to both parties: the NIE trainers and the RESC trainers, were satisfied with this top down method, and the intended message was delivered to grass root levels. But due to time constraints the teacher participants could not be observed at their respective schools. The next step of the cascade model is the intervention phase. We are certainly going to look into this aspect in the near future.

The survey was helpful in collecting valuable information about the whole process of teaching and learning English. This was stated in the feedback sheets we received from the RESC trainers and the participating teachers. One of the problems we observed were the barriers to teachers had to obtain permission to attend professional development workshops. A better dialogue between the relevant bodies should be encouraged as a form of encouragement and to support teachers to access professional learning.

We think it is important to monitor as many workshops as possible so that we can better cater to the primary and secondary education systems through the RESCs. Moreover, the cascading model can be extended to other outreach programmes. Though many argue that this cascade model has its own weaknesses, it was apparent to us that it suited the needs of the local RESCs. For that, RESCs need to be given clear targets to cover in their respective zones.

The findings also reveal that there should be more dialogues among the relevant bodies such as the NIE, the Ministry of Education, and the RESCs along with the Zonal Educational Offices and the schools and their management. Also, a cascade model evaluation mechanism and feedback should be continuously carried out in a transparent manner to ensure its efficiency. During the study a request was made to increase the number of RESCs in the zones and to fill the existing vacancies in the RESCs. We felt that it could minimize the issues pertaining to the cascade model of facilitation across the country. For instance, at least one more RESC should be established in the Gampaha District to better cater to the needs of the teachers from the Kelaniya Zone.

Moreover, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2007) Evaluation Model, devised originally in the 1970s to evaluate the impact of corporate training on a company's performance, can also be positively used as it focuses on the various stages of change through four distinct levels. The following figures illustrate the four levels.

React --- → Learn - → Change - → Impact

Figure 1: Level 1 of Donald Kirkpatrick's (2007) model for evaluating training

Level 1 refers to reactions after a training program, whereas Level 2 refers to the learning (knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior) that the participants should have gained.

React --- → Learn → Change → Impact ----→ Identify

Figure 2: Level 2 - Adaptation of Kirkpatrick's model (Barrett, 2010)

Level 3 refers to whether the participants have changed as a result of the training, and Level 4 includes the results of performance. We believe that this is a cyclical process that facilitates change and learning.

To the same levels of operation, 'Identify' was added Level 0. It reflects the importance of identifying the foundations of a cascade model which is essential for a successful initiation phase. This can be done through discussion and consultation, as a needs analysis and a baseline study and should address issues such as: training needs of key stakeholders, (attitudes, beliefs, skills, behaviours, knowledge), relevance to the classroom context (what's feasible, appropriate), course content and approach, venues and facilities, language proficiency, cascade model structure, timing, communication channels and risks (Barnette, 2010).

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The challenges faced by us as researchers were mainly tied the time constraints which were unavoidable due to our personal workloads. The study was carried out during a state examination which posed challenges in organizing the particular workshop at the Gampaha RESC. Also, we felt a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation could help all of us, as stakeholders in the education.

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TEACHING IN BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

ROLE OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER IN IMPROVING LANGUAGE IN THE CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) BI- MEDIUM CLASSROOM

Nilani Deepika Karunaarachchi

ABSTRACT

Bilingual Education (BE) refers to educational programmes in which both a native language and a second language are taught as subject matter and is used as a medium of instruction of academic subjects. BE has been practiced in Sri Lanka since 2002 from Grade 6 onwards to teach five subjects in the second language (L2) and the rest in the first language (L1). This action research involves an intervention on the findings of the Bilingual Education and Trilingual Programmes Branch at the Ministry of Education. According to the recent findings it has been identified that there are problems in teaching CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) lessons in teaching learning process. This study was able to identify the problems in relation to teaching Science in English in Grade 6, and how to overcome them with sustainable ways.

PROBLEM

One school was selected to implement this action research for students in Grade 6. The sample consisted of both bilingual education (BE) and monolingual education (ME) students. The following problems were identified after administering a questionnaire in the learners' first language (L1). Difficulty in understanding instructions, vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, writing, taking down notes and communicating in English were the main problems the students seem to be facing. Understanding instructions in the Science textbook was identified as one of the most crucial problems the students identified. The remedial measures introduced in this study will help to promote bi-medium (BM) education in schools in Sri Lanka.

INTERVENTION

The process was implemented according to an action plan that involved various steps. Table 1 maps out the action plan for this study.

Table 1: Action plan

Action Plan				
Activity	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Introducing the research to selected school	X			
Preparing the questionnaire	X			
Administering the questionnaire to students	X			
Analysing the questionnaire	X			
Preparing the pre-test	X			
Administering the pre-test to students		X		
Analysing the test items in the pre-test		X		
Preparing teaching lessons		X		
Implementing lessons in the classroom		X		
Recording data, having on-going discussions & writing reflections		X	X	
Administering the post-test to students			X	
Discriminating the marks of the tests			X	X

The steps in the action plan were divided into two cycles. Cycle 1 consisted of steps 1-7.

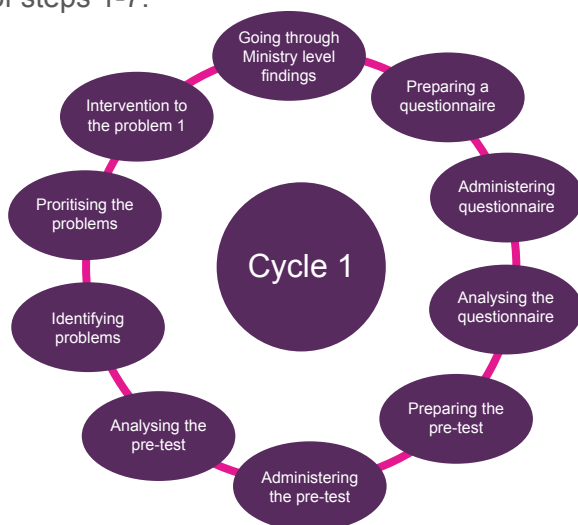


Figure 1: Cycle 1 (Intervention 1)

The rationale for administering the questionnaire was to find the techniques that the students are interested in and the problems they face when they are learning. Table 2 shows students' problems that were identified through the questionnaire.

Table 2: Difficulties BE and ME students faced

	Problem	Yes		No	
		BE	ME	BE	ME
01	Taking down notes	7	62	83	24
02	Writing answers	22	76	68	10
03	Listening & Understanding	11	66	79	20
04	Reading & Understanding	12	77	78	9
05	Communicating in English	32	67	58	19
06	Understanding Vocabulary	31	68	59	18
07	Grammar	48	74	42	12
08	Understanding Instructions	12	68	78	18

A pre-test was administered to test Problems number 02, 04, 06, 07 and 08 in Table2. The rationale behind this was to test the problems mentioned in the questionnaire, collect data with evidence and discriminate marks by having a post-test to see the progress. Table 3 shows the marks obtained by both BE and ME students in the pre-test.

Table 3: Marks obtained by BE and ME students

Question	No of Students / Mark											
	0 Marks/NA		1-2 Marks		3-4 Marks		5-6 Marks		7-8 Marks		9-10 Marks	
	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME
1 & 2 - Instructions	14	18	33	28	30	26	9	9	0	0	4	5
3 - Vocabulary	8	26	23	38	39	23	16	8	4	1	0	0
4 - Grammar	5	8	33	21	48	53	2	3	2	0	0	1
5 - Reading	18	53	26	12	34	17	9	2	3	2	0	0
6 - Writing	10	14	18	31	28	26	21	10	8	4	5	1

According to the analysis of the test marks, problems were prioritized from less to more difficult. Figure 2 depicts the problems that were identified.

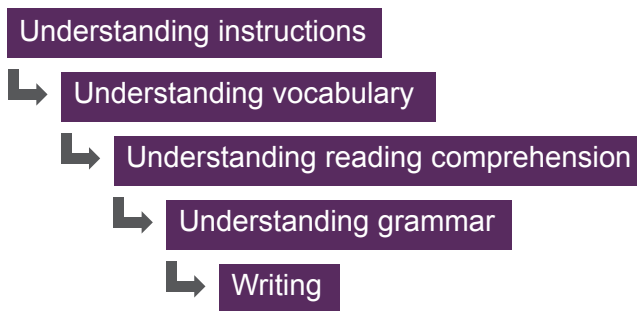


Figure 2: Prioritization of problems

Firstly, understanding instructions was addressed. Figure 3 shows the number of students who said that the given problem is not a problematic area for them and the number of students who said that it is a problematic area for them.

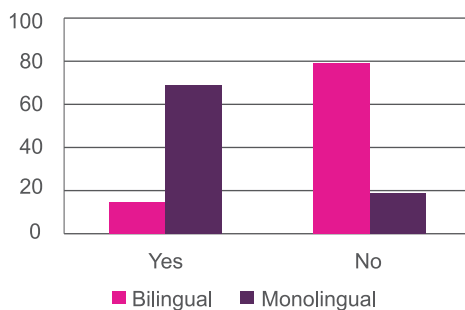


Figure 3: Pre-test result for difficulties in understanding instructions

Figure 4 shows the marks the BE and ME students received at the pre-test.

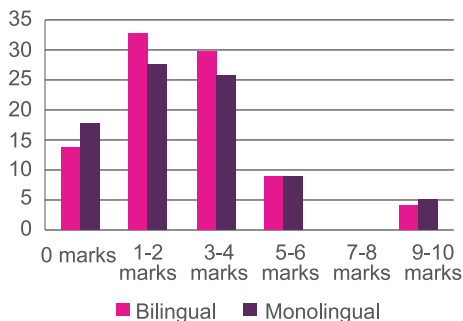


Figure 4: BE and ME students' marks at the pre-test

The problem ‘Understanding instructions’ was specified and selected. Next, ‘Understanding action words in instructions ‘ was identified as the next problem to be addressed. The steps taken in Cycle 2 given below shows the intervention to the specific problem identified in the study.

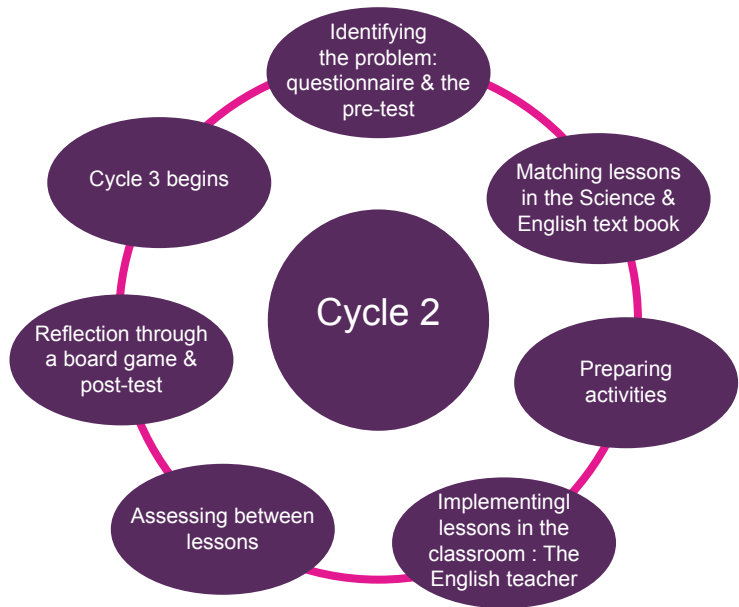


Figure 5: Cycle 2 (Intervention 2)

The English teacher and the subject teacher in the BM classes prepared the lessons by matching the English language competencies with the subject competencies in Science. Lessons were designed from simple to complex, using interesting activities using a range of methods. The implementation of lessons was done by the English teachers during English periods. The progress was checked through assessment activities in between. Students were engaged in many activities such as producing posters, playing board games, doing matching activities and referring to dictionaries to find meanings of words. At the end of the lessons, the post-test was administered.

FINDINGS

Motivating students through exposure to interesting activities, building rapport between the teachers and students, collaboration between the language teachers and subject teachers and understanding of

interesting methods by Science teachers to make students active were the other outcomes of the process. Both the BE and ME students benefitted from this action research as they all learnt the language together in one class. Table 4 presents the performance of the students at the post-test.

Figure 4: Students' marks for the post-test

Question	No of Students/Mark											
	0 Marks		1-2 Marks		3-4 Marks		5-6 Marks		7-8 Marks		9-10 Marks	
	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME	BE	ME
1 & 2 - Instructions	0	0	2	4	4	9	27	32	29	19	28	22

The analysis of the pre and post-test marks are given in Figures 6 and 7 respectively. The achievement of the objective of the specific problem is clearly shown in two graphs.

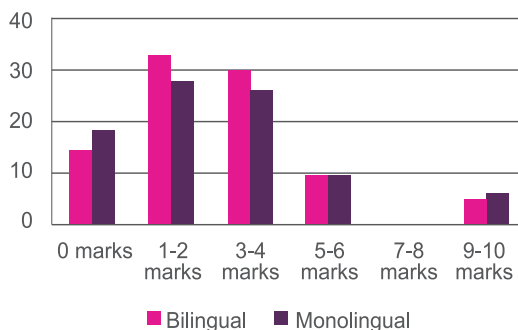


Figure 6: Performance in the pre-test

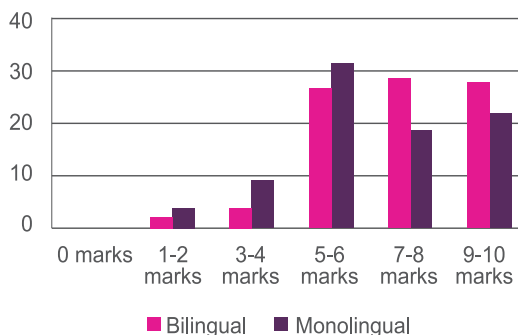


Figure 7: Performance in the post-test

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

This action research showed how the collaboration between the language teachers and the subject teachers is useful. The awareness of preparing lessons using interesting methods is important. The study also revealed how the language teachers can help the teaching and learning process in the BM classroom.

The continuation of the action research addressing the other problematic areas identified will be done in 2016 in selected school. Six schools in Gampaha, seven schools in Minuwangoda and five schools in Kelaniya will be selected to implement this action research in year 2016.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

It was hard to convince teachers to engage in this as they found it an extra burden. Getting both the English teacher and the subject teacher to be in the classroom when implementing lessons was also a problem. Analysing the data, preparing items for the pre and post-tests, marking pre and post-tests and assessment sheets and analysing and interpreting data were some of the problems I faced. I benefitted by doing this study, and it helped my own development.

CODE-SWITCHING IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) CLASSES: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Dishani Senaratne

ABSTRACT

The current study purports to gauge how teachers and students view code-switching in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages (FSSL) of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL). Data for this study was collected from recording twenty teaching hours from five randomly selected classrooms, conducting semi-structured interviews with the respective teachers and administering a questionnaire to fifty undergraduates. Moreover, a selected group of students were interviewed to ascertain their attitudes towards code-switching. It was disclosed that the teachers engaged in code-switching for the following purposes: explaining the lesson, sounding cordial to students and as a form of digression. Conversely, the students' stance on code-switching implied that the teachers should code-switch "sporadically," whilst being receptive to the preferences of the learners. Accordingly, even though speakers in their daily discourse have the propensity to diffuse code-switching arbitrarily, teachers' code-switching in the EAP classrooms should be controlled and/or conscious.

PROBLEM

Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages in the context of a single conversation. In earlier times, language mixing was shunned owing to the pervasive belief that proficiency in two languages caused bewilderment. Nonetheless, code-switching is a common phenomenon in today's linguistic landscape (Fromkin et al. 2007). Crystal (2005) speculated that 'mixed languages' will be the main linguistic trend in the future. Canagarajah (2011) coined the term 'code-meshing,' with a view to reconceptualise language switching as a recursive linguistic practice, devoid of its "negative baggage."

Two types of code-switching have been identified: inter-sentential and intra-sentential. The former occurs at clause or sentence boundaries while the latter occurs within clauses or sentences. Gumperz (1982) explicated that conversational code-switching occurs with the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech, belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems. Furthermore, he illustrated a number of conversational functions of code-switching: quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification and personalization versus objectivization. Botztepe (2003) partly concurs with Gumperz's point of view owing to its obscure definitions of quotations, interjections and message qualification. Conversely, Auer (1998) proposed two functions of code-switching: discourse-related and participant-related. Martin-Jones (1995) contended that the former is speaker-oriented whereas the latter is hearer-oriented.

Merritt et al. (1992) argued that four types of English-Swahili code-switching occurred in Kenyan primary classes: reformulation, content of the activity, translation, interactional particles. Canagarajah (1995) pointed out that there were micro- and macro- functions of code-switching in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He subdivided micro-functions as classroom management and content transmission. The former centred on the employment of code-switching to facilitate teachers as well as students to regulate classroom interactions in an effective manner. The latter focused on using code-switching to aid effective communication of the lesson content. In addition, Canagarajah (1995) linked macro-functions of code-switching with socio-educational implications, with the intention of solving the issues which existed outside the English classroom. Canagarajah (2001) pronounced that code-switching was used by both teachers and students to construct 'hybrid identities,' in lieu of communicating exclusively in one language. Guthrie (1984) observed that teachers engaged in code-switching to create solidarity with students; this phenomenon, which was termed 'we-code,' resulted in rapport building, which is a pre-requisite to a positive classroom environment.

In spite of the plethora of research on bilingualism, there is a scarcity of research on attitudes towards code-switching in tertiary-level EAP classrooms in Sri Lanka. The present study, therefore, is an endeavour to fill this lacuna.

INTERVENTION

The current study purports to explore how teachers and students view code-switching in EAP classrooms at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages (FSSL) at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL). In order to gather data for this research, twenty teaching hours were recorded from five randomly selected classrooms which comprised of second-year students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respective teachers who possessed three to eleven years experience teaching. Apart from this, a questionnaire was administered to fifty second-year undergraduates. A few of them were interviewed to ascertain their attitudes towards code-switching. Therefore, this study employed both primary data (audio recordings, questionnaires and interviews) and secondary data (books and journal articles) to arrive at the overall findings. It should also be noted that the findings of this research cannot be generalized owing to the limited size of the sample chosen. The overall observations are limited in terms of time and methodology, since this study was conducted in August, 2015 using selected instruments.

FINDINGS

The most significant finding of the study was that teachers used code-switching primarily to explain the lessons, which invariably saved their time, particularly in heterogeneous classes. This echoes Macaro's (2009) view that code-switching 'lightens up the burden' of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners whose knowledge of English is rudimentary. Likewise, the lecturers who were interviewed unanimously reiterated that the clarifications made in the First Language (L1) were indispensable for many students to grasp the lesson. In addition, there were occurrences of teachers' code-switching to sound affable to students. Two teachers had the extra-linguistic notion that speaking exclusively in English would augment the gap between the students and the teacher. In university contexts, the English language is termed *kaduwa* (sword), implying the colossal power of this language to

hamper personal and academic progress of individuals, bringing about their “virtual death.” Intended on making students feel less inhibited, the teachers inclined to code-switch in their classroom discourse. In addition, it was observed that code-switching was made use of as a form of digression. A participating teacher reiterated that humour is pivotal to diminish the monotony of the lesson. She narrated anecdotes in the learners’ L1 with the intention of “waking up” the students who seemed lethargic, especially during the lectures conducted after the lunch break. Accordingly, this study unraveled that code-switching was practiced in EAP classrooms to achieve the following goals: explaining lessons, sounding friendly to students and as a form of digression.

Moreover, nearly all the undergraduates, especially those who had low competence in English, looked at teachers’ code-switching favourably. None perceived teachers’ code-switching as an “illicit practice”, as they viewed using English as the sole medium of communication is not beneficial for those who are struggling to master the English language, despite having learnt it for many years. In addition, the students who are minimally proficient in English claimed that the “excessive” use of English in the classroom was “intimidating.” The students’ “fervour” for the L1 seemingly stemmed from their “aloofness” to English. Code-switching supposedly brought the students back to their comfort zone, making them feel at ease in the classroom. On the whole, the undergraduates held the view that using the L1 was instrumental in creating an optimal teaching-learning process.

In spite of the “general consensus” for code-switching, the native speakers of Tamil possessed ambivalent attitudes towards it. Initially, they did not endorse English-Sinhala code-switching on account of their limited knowledge of Sinhala. However, they did not object to code-switching when their competency in Sinhala expanded due to the profound exposure in the university. Hence, it is imperative to be receptive to learners’ L1, prior to code-switching in EAP classrooms. Switching over to a language which is unfamiliar to a student would result in him/her being excluded in the classroom.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

The findings of this study revealed that code-switching is an inevitable occurrence in EAP classrooms. Nonetheless, it is vital to adopt a strategic approach to practise it as an integral component in classroom pedagogy. In daily discourse, diffused code-switching is widespread partly owing to the commonly held belief that mixing of languages is “pardonable.” On the contrary, the teachers should engage in controlled and/or conscious code-switching, *sans* resorting to arbitrary/haphazard code-switching whilst ensuring that students’ exposure to the English language is not impeded in the classroom. For instance, the undergraduates who follow the degree programmes in Sinhala and Tamil added that they have limited opportunities to use English beyond the English classroom. In such a context, the students cannot be “deprived” of their limited access to English due to dense code-switching. In light of this, the teachers can engage in parallel translation in lieu of heavy code-switching. Or, if possible, they can explain the lesson using simple English terms. This strategy can be employed to “sanitize over code-switching” as well as to optimize teachers’ use of English in the classroom. Therefore, the teachers should code-switch “sporadically,” whilst taking into consideration the preferences of the learners.

In conclusion, the students should neither be left out nor demotivated due to teachers’ code-switching in the classroom. Ideally, the teachers should use code-switching as an effective communicative tool in a versatile fashion to facilitate the teaching-learning process. In this manner, the perennial conundrum for teachers to outlaw code-switching in EAP classrooms would be diluted.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Initially, I intended to engage in classroom observations but later opted to record the lectures owing to the fact that my presence would affect classroom dynamics. The participants' consent was sought to record the lectures, and they were informed that absolute anonymity would be maintained. Nonetheless, I had to collect my data before the end of the semester to avoid any potential delay in conducting the study. Initially, the undergraduates were not only reserved but also contrived; afterwards they realized the nature of academic research, they expressed their opinions frankly. Moreover, I had to spend a considerable amount of time to “look for” students to be interviewed. My endless questions may have propelled them to evade me. Accordingly, this research made me understand that code-switching should be tailored by teachers whilst considering the L1 of the learners. If code-switching is ineffectually used, the teaching-learning process would probably be jeopardized. Therefore, I intend to engage in a discussion with the respective stakeholders of this research to enlighten them on the aforementioned observations of the study.

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**EFFECTIVE
TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN
CHALLENGING
CIRCUMSTANCES**

HELPING GRADE 10 TEACHERS PLAN REMEDIAL WORK TO ENHANCE LANGUAGE TEACHING

D. M. Abeyratne

ABSTRACT

The aim of this action research is to help Grade 10 English teachers to plan remedial teaching taking formative assessment into consideration. I first identified the problem during my classroom observations. As an action researcher, I tried to address this problem by implementing an intervention with 4 Grade 10 teachers from 3 different schools. As data collection tools I used questioners and interviews for the teachers and students and classroom observations. Moreover, I analyzed lesson plans and students' formative assessment marks. After analyzing the data, I discussed, instructed and planned the necessary remedial work through formative assessments for the weaker students. In this paper I discuss how the students first performed at their formative assessments and how they performed after the remedial work was introduced. The teachers' new teaching strategies helped the students to perform better. Moreover, I discuss how and for whom this action research is important and useful. I conclude by reflecting on the research process while pointing out the challenges I encountered doing action research.

PROBLEM

When I conduct teacher inspections and observations in Grade 10 classes, it is often evident that many English teachers work hard to plan effective lessons. But when they give formative assessments to their students, only a few students are able to perform well. Many teachers do not have a clear idea about how they can guide the weaker students who are unable to complete the work within the allocated time. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers have a good understanding of how and when to plan remedial work for these students. After introducing the remedial work, more activities should be planned for the areas where the students need further help.

With reference to this problem in some schools, I decided to conduct an action research that focused on how Grade 10 teachers can be assisted to plan remedial work. The findings of the intervention could be shared with other teachers who are interested in planning remedial work to improve their Grade 10 students' language skills. The lessons learned from the study can also be used to design remedial work for other grades and maybe even other subjects. Grade 10 students were chosen for this action research as they have a year before they sit for the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (G.C.E./O.L) examination. Therefore, I believe they have sufficient time to benefit from the remedial work and improve and upgrade their language skills before this competitive high stakes state examination.

INTERVENTION

The basic factors that were taken into consideration when doing this action research were formative assessment and planning, and conducting remedial lessons. As many of the teachers do not use formative assessment results when planning remedial teaching, I planned to address this situation. My participants included 4 Grade 10 teachers and their students. They belonged to 3 schools in the Hanguranketa Zone.

As data collection tools, I used questionnaires with the students. They were used to identify information about how the students perform and the problems they encountered when doing formative assessments. My intention was to find the causes for low performance in formative assessments. Also I interviewed a few randomly selected students from these schools to get a deeper understanding of the problems they encountered when they completed formative assessments. Interviews and questionnaires were used with teachers to collect data on what problems they encountered when preparing assessments.

After reviewing some literature on action research, I gained a clear understanding of the process of doing action research. It is evident that in order to enhance teaching and learning, teaching strategies need to be changed. I came to the conclusion that teaching strategies that work best in particular situations could be planned as remedial teaching. The Table 1 provides an overview of the schools and the formative assessments that were introduced.

Table 1: The formative assessments done in the selected schools

	Teacher	Skill	Formative assessment	What went wrong
School A	Teacher 1	Listening	Listening comprehension	The text was too long for the students to comprehend and answer questions
School B	Teacher 2	Speaking & writing	Picture description	The students did not possess sufficient vocabulary
	Teacher 3	Grammar – Conditionals	Write main clause for the first conditionals	The students could not identify the main clause
School C	Teacher 4	Reading	Reading comprehension	Students could not answer the comprehension questions

Taking into consideration the formative assessment results, I discussed with the teachers how to plan remedial work to fill the lapses. I instructed the teachers to include a variety of activities to improve the same language skills in their lessons so that they would provide more opportunities for their students to have more practices. Moreover, we discussed the importance of the need to do remedial work taking into consideration the students' performance in formative assessment. In turn I visited the three schools to help the four teachers further. I did a demonstration in School A, where the listening activity was given for a formative assessment. As a first step I helped the teachers to plan the lessons to suit the students' level and the pace. At the end, I allowed them to plan their remedial work independently.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that some teachers do not provide sufficient practice activities for the students, and as a result the students just do what is given to them. As teachers are unaware of the immediate need for remedial teaching, students do not get the opportunity to develop their weaker skills. Of the 4 teachers who participated in the study, only two teachers knew what remedial teaching is. Through the questionnaire and the individual interviews, it was evident how useful it was to make them aware of the importance and usefulness of planning remedial teaching to upgrade their teaching skills. They were made aware of how remedial work can help them

when the aims of lessons are not achieved effectively.

In the questionnaire distributed to the students, 41% of the students stated that they do not get extra activities to develop their weak skills. So, it is very evident that remedial teaching does not take place. 30% of the students stated that the activities used in the formative assessments are unfamiliar to them. Therefore, we can assume that they cannot complete the assessments well. As a result, I suggested different teaching strategies and activities to upgrade students' English language skills.

Students' performance in various activities showed us that after formative assessment, planning simplified and different activities as remedial work to master weaker skills is essential. With the introduction of remedial work, the percentage of completing the given activities became qualitatively higher. An assessment on listening in School A revealed that none of the students were able to complete the task where the students were expected to write 4 sentences after listening to a long text the teacher read. In the picture description assessment in School B, 62% of the students were not able to construct simple sentences. In the reading comprehension assessment at School C, 52% of students were not able to complete the given task.

After classroom observations with the 4 teachers, I had discussions about remedial teaching. After identifying students' weaknesses, we planned ways to help them. Table 2 provides an overview of the remedial work introduced to the 4 teachers.

Table 2: Remedial work introduced

	School	Formative assessment	Intervention: Remedial work
School A	Teacher 1	Listening comprehension	Simplifying the text Fill in the blanks activity Numbering a process
School B	Teacher 2	Picture description	To use a table for drilling with “There is a” and “There are” <u>Whole class</u> : elicit nouns, verbs, prepositions, articles and the structure from the students based on the displayed picture Construct meaningful sentences using the elicited vocabulary to describe the picture <u>Group</u> : each group was given a picture. They followed the same procedure as before <u>Individual</u> : Same activity for home work
	Teacher 3	Write main clause for the first conditionals	Introducing the structure for the first conditional Practicing activity Jumbled activity to reconstruct the sentences with the first conditional Group activity to identify the main clause of the first conditional
School C	Teacher 4	Reading comprehension	Teach them scanning and skimming skills Activities to elicit answers based on the reading Comprehension questions

Intervention 1: Adapting and simplifying listening comprehension

42% of the students were able to complete an activity similar to what they had first done, after it was simplified and adapted to suit their needs. Instead of asking students to give main clause as the end product, simplifying and scaffolding the learning process, proved to be helpful.

Intervention 2: Picture description

At the end of this remedial teaching, 31 out of 35 students, wrote grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. This remedial work increased students’ performances up to 89%.

Intervention 3: Teaching conditionals

In School C, the students were guided to write the main clause for the first conditional. Though at first they were unable to construct the main clause, after remedial teaching, the students were able to construct the main clause. After the intervention, the students' success levels increased by 29%.

Intervention 4: Reading comprehension

The students' performance increased by 12% after the intervention. This time many of the students answered the comprehension questions. Out of 40 students, 6 students got all the answers correct. The findings reveal that careful planning of relevant remedial teaching can enhance language teaching and learning. As positive results cannot be gained overnight, remedial teaching should be made a continuous process. Teaching and learning of any subject can be made effective and beneficial with the introduction of the relevant remedial teaching.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

This action research has shown that we should plan suitable remedial work if the students' performance in formative assessments is weak. Remedial work can improve the teaching and learning. If remedial teaching is done at the correct time and at the correct place, using accurate and effective methods, learners would be able to grasp the lessons better. The teachers should be made aware of how and when to plan and do remedial teaching. Therefore, proper guidance for teachers is important. Formative assessment marks should be used by teachers to plan remedial teaching by adapting and simplifying textbook activities to fill lapses. Sometimes teachers fail to reach the expected goals using the lessons they had prepared, so teachers have to deviate, prepare extra activities and re-plan.

For the textbook writers and teacher trainers, students' low performance at formative assessments are an indication of areas the students need additional help with. They need to guide teachers to do remedial teaching as it is based on recurrent and persistent mistakes in English language learning. Moreover, learners would benefit by engaging in a variety of activities which could help them to enhance their language skills.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

At the beginning I felt the work I undertook would not be easy because I had to find the time, select schools, and meet teachers and students. Moreover, I had to prepare tools for data collection. During the data collection process, two of teachers got very late to return the completed questionnaires. Very often I felt I was behind time in getting the work done. However, I was able to make arrangements to meet them and continue the research. Moreover, I had difficulty accessing the internet to review relevant literature. However, material from the British Council and the National Institute for Education (NIE) web sites proved to be very insightful.

Coming up with a range of remedial activities was another challenge I had. Moreover, the selected schools were in remote areas that were far from where I lived and worked. Reaching the schools and staying connected with the teachers proved to be challenging. I had to ensure that I got the best of my visits. Anyhow I had the confidence and the knowledge to complete this action research within the expected time frame, and I got more ideas to plan remedial work after the completion of the study. At the same time, I gained the knowledge to conduct action research in English language teaching.

REMEDIAL MEASURES TO ASSIST GRADE 9 STUDENTS TO SPEAK IN ENGLISH FREELY

M. F. M Faus

ABSTRACT

My students learn English as a Second Language (ESL) and often seem passive in the classroom. Furthermore, they lack exposure and opportunities to practice English both at school and at home. This study was primarily conducted to provide remedial measures to overcome difficulties students had in speaking English and to increase the students' confidence in speaking. The secondary aim was to find out the benefits of doing action research in second language learning contexts. This study was done systematically by collecting data during a ten week period. 15 Grade 9 students participated in this intervention. Motivational strategies such as building fluency, focusing on individual needs, providing high-interest engagement, rewarding, praising and creating a good atmosphere and rapport were applied to overcome the problems and to promote the real use of English. The findings indicated that the students' confidence increased through collaboration with peers and the additional speaking activities that were incorporated. Moreover, this study showed that action research has great potential to help second language teachers.

PROBLEM

I am an English teacher who has taught for about nine years in a rural Tamil medium government school that has classes from Grade 1 to 11. It has around 300 students and 15 teachers. Students in my school face many challenges in learning English. My students lack confidence, opportunities to practice English and they have no access to English material other than their textbooks. Most of the students are very shy and are unable to express their ideas confidently in English as they lack exposure and opportunities both at school and at home. In other words, they want to speak, but they lack the confidence to speak. As a result when they are given opportunities to speak, they make mistakes.

Though there are some private institutions in our area that provide additional support, not all the students can access those services. These factors led me to conduct this research.

INTERVENTION

In this action research I acted as a discussion leader and tried to create a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged my students to speak freely. Most importantly, I wanted to prevent the prevailing situation getting any worse. I was dedicated to improving my students' speaking skills. After my initial discussions with my students, I discovered that most of them had problems speaking in English. In order to better understand what skill they needed most help with, I asked them, "Which skill do you want to improve the most?" I found most of them wanted to improve speaking. However, I felt that the informal conversation I had was not sufficient as the students lacked the language skills to express their ideas clearly. Therefore I collected additional data using a needs analysis questionnaire. It revealed that most of the students were really interested in speaking, but they had low confidence in speaking. Further, it showed that the students attributed their inability to speak English confidently to the lack of opportunities to speak inside and outside the classroom. This action research was classroom-based and teacher-initiated.

The intervention was carried out for two hours per week over a period of 10 weeks. Then the data was analyzed in order to draw conclusions and to provide recommendations to improve the existing situation. First, to identify difficulties and problems, I conducted an interview using a needs analysis questionnaire. The findings were used to plan the intervention and observe the process and then re-plan. Data was collected through observations, students' performances, and a post-questionnaire. Data collected from each session was used to improve for the following session. I maintained a researcher's journal to jot down my observations and designed a feedback form to elicit feedback from students and my colleagues on the activities and my teaching. At the end of each activity, students completed a feedback form. During the first week I used the lecture method, and then I moved to the communicative approach. Pair work, group work and other non-threatening activities were used to motivate students to speak. Authentic materials such as the internet, magazines, English

newspapers, CDs, leaflets and texts too were applied to motivate students. Furthermore, I had informal dialogues with students to elicit comments. I requested one of my fellow teachers to monitor my teaching. At the end of the data collection, a post-questionnaire containing 13 statements that focused on the effect of study was administered.

FINDINGS

My findings are mixed. I found, the main reason for poor speaking skills of students was their reluctance to communicate. Some of the reasons for this reluctance include the fear of making mistakes, shyness and emotional discomfort. In addition, when students presented their work, I noticed that these students mixed English with their L1. However, when the students worked in a group, I noticed only one group made a continuous effort to speak in English with their peers.

Data collected from observations revealed, after the introduction of innovative activities, students began to enjoy the lessons and showed greater willingness to learn. Fluency and vocabulary were two areas students showed little improvement in. The post-questionnaire revealed that more than 90% of the students enjoyed the activities. The rise in the percentage implies that the students have developed a positive attitude towards speaking. They began to believe that learning could take place in relaxing and enjoyable sessions. Students who were previously worried about changes I introduced to the lessons, soon realized that speaking in English could also be fun. Compared with the numbers from the beginning of the study, at the end of the study there was an increase in the number of people who provided positive responses about speaking in English.

The learners improved their communicative competence and pronunciation after they were given sufficient practice. It was hard for learners who do not have an English background, but at the end, they all showed some improvement. Video usage was also helpful as it paved the way for self-reflection. In the classroom, learners participated by helping and correcting each other and practicing together to improve themselves.

The observation revealed that the students always took some time to prepare for their presentation. They indicated they were working under stress. Almost all the students stated that they always try hard to speak with their friends and others in English. Some students expressed their concerns about the changes that were introduced. They were not very comfortable about the new ways of speaking which they had never experienced before. They were not confident that they will be able to get satisfactory results.

According to the responses received from the students, over 95% were satisfied and enjoyed the activities while 87% gained the ability to use the language confidently. About 85% felt comfortable using the language in their day to day life, and more than 95% got rid of the shyness to speak with others and in front of the class. All the students agreed that they would like to access the English language out of the usual setting and to have more activities.

In short, learning a foreign language is a time-consuming experience and the learners need to have a lot of motivation to achieve their target language goals. Therefore, I and the other teachers in the school must keep on helping the students to improve their English further. We need to be able to utilize a variety of teaching approaches and techniques to create a lively learning atmosphere that support student learning.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

I cannot say my attempt to help students to develop language competence was 100% successful. The quality of the students' work did not show 100% improvement after finishing the research. But I strongly believe the techniques and strategies I introduced were valuable and beneficial. Students understood the need to familiarize themselves with new techniques, ideas and teaching styles. This intervention provided an opportunity that required them to adjust to a new teaching situation.

The findings of the study also revealed additional areas for improvement, revisions, and next steps. Instead of using just a single teaching approach, I must be flexible and apply a variety of teaching techniques and styles to encourage students to learn and develop themselves further. The study also encouraged me to work more rigorously and reflectively which is essential for my development as a

teacher. As a result of this research, I can identify additional questions raised by the data and plan for additional improvements, revisions, and next steps. Instead of using just a single teaching approach, I must be flexible and apply a variety of teaching techniques and styles to encourage students to learn and develop themselves. Also undertaking the study encouraged me to work more rigorously and reflectively which was very useful for my development as a teacher. I learned to use the reflective data from the previous lesson for adjusting and developing my teaching arrangements in the next lesson which I had never done before.

I hope to share the findings of my study with my In Service Advisor (ISA), Additional Director of Education-English (ADE) and Provincial Director. They can use the recommendations from this study to make decisions and to encourage the teachers to provide more support for their students to develop their oral skills. Furthermore, I hope to share my experiences with my fellow teachers in upcoming workshops, professional meetings and with colleagues around the world (via social media). I also intend to publish my work.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Personally, the most difficult step in action research is designing the tools because this step requires creativity. Further, I noticed, each student had different strengths to learn a foreign language. Some students performed well, and they could learn quicker and performed better than others while some took a longer time to conceive and apply the knowledge. Further, I noticed, the topics determined by the students' learning preferences could foster a more active classroom atmosphere. The students' short attention span still occurred regularly and needed to be improved further. In addition, this research gave me a chance to reflect on my own practices with an eye toward what works and what does not. This research has contributed to the development of my knowledge and skills about teaching and learning. However, doing action research still seems to be challenging. Therefore, I believe the most appropriate teaching arrangement for schools like the one I teach is to be flexible.

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND SKILLS (L PLUS S) TO ENHANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING

K. T. Rohini Kulatunga

ABSTRACT

I have discovered several reasons why most of the students in my area fail English at state examinations. Based on my years of teaching experiences, I have found a method of combining language and skills as a means of solving the problems students face. This study is an attempt to analyze the use of this method using a sample of 40 students who are learning English in an environment where they have little exposure to the target language. The intervention was conducted over a period of ten weeks.

PROBLEM

In spite of learning grammar and vocabulary for a number of years, many students are unable to use them correctly in skill based activities such as speaking and writing where the grammar and language are used in a very natural form. There are many basic mistakes in their written work as well as their speaking. When grammar is taught and tested in isolation, many students are quite good in using the language correctly. However, when the students need to produce language in more realistic situations, in the form of dialogues or role plays, their performance is not good.

In my opinion, the English language course books used in public schools and the methodology that I used to teach are the reasons the students have less language exposure. Some of the common issues that I have encountered in teaching English include:

- Grammar and vocabulary are practiced in a few activities that are available in the textbooks or are assigned by the teacher. This is done in a very artificial manner. No follow-up activities or enrichment activities are given.
- However the grammar and vocabulary that they learn are repeatedly used in other lessons in their textbook.

- Most of the lessons in the textbook are focused on reading. So the students are only expected to answer comprehension questions given after the reading.

I personally feel language input should be meaningful because the language and its skills should not be separated from each other in order for the students to learn the language well.

INTERVENTION

The main reason for the above problem is the students' lack of exposure to English. Therefore, my effort is to introduce activities integrating language and skills by adapting textbook. The teacher can focus on one or two grammar points or vocabulary items that they come across in the lesson and simply organize a skill based activity integrating the identified area (grammar/vocabulary). The purpose is to create situations for the students to produce the language in a natural manner. There by, the teacher can use the lessons given in the text not as a reading text, but as a rich source of material which provides room to practice language meaningfully. Therefore in my research, I integrated three language areas that are present in different lessons in the Grade 10 textbook with skill based activities. I followed the following procedure:

- Integrated (language and skills) activities were done with the Grade 10 students in a school where the proficiency of the learners is low (Many of the schools in my area fall into this category)
- A pre-test was done. It was based on three language areas they have done over a number of years
- The questions in the pre-test tested their knowledge of grammar. This was integrated with other skills.
For example: Writing a post card to a friend describing what is happening around you. (This written activity is integrated with the present continuous tense in both the active and passive forms).
- The results were recorded.
- Several written and spoken activities were done during the ten week intervention period based on the three selected grammar areas from the textbook.
- The progress was recorded in different ways.

Table 1 consists of the action plan for the study that I used.

Table 1: Action plan

Action	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Identifying a class	■			
Preparing a pre-test	■			
Conducting the test and recording marks	■			
Implementing the intervention	■			
Classroom teaching	■	■	■	
Planning a post-test			■	
Conducting the post-test			■	
Analyzing the results			■	
Contrast pre and post-test marks			■	
Preparing the research report				■
Sending report				■

FINDINGS

The results before and after implementing the L and S method in the classroom proved to be satisfactory. Figure 1 below shows the students’ marks for the activity on Conditionals.

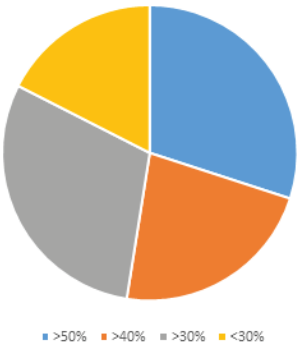


Figure 1: Students’ marks for conditionals

The result was contrasted with 5 students who were not a part of the study. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the marks students obtained for the pre and post-tests.

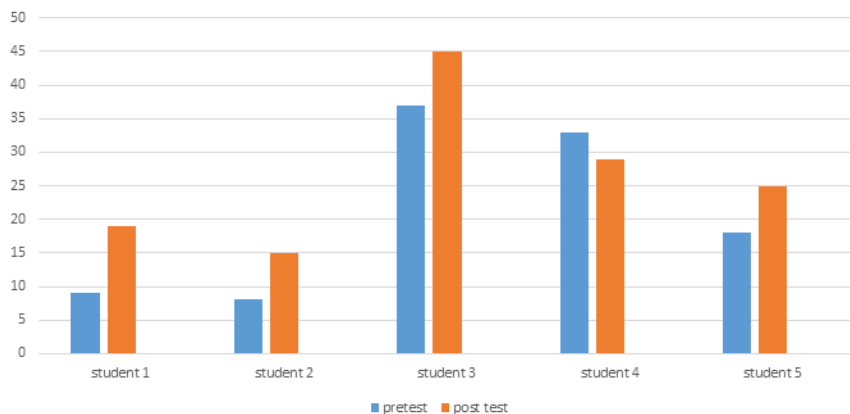


Figure 2: Pre and post-test marks of the students who were a part of the intervention

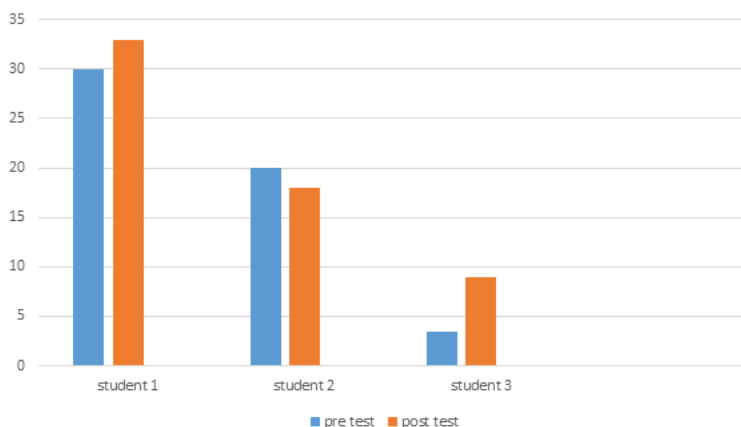


Figure 3: Pre and post-test marks for students who were not a part of the intervention.

Out of 40 students, half of them showed a visible progress at the end of the intervention, while the rest showed little progress or no progress at all. Despite receiving low marks, they were somewhat confident about their knowledge of the grammar they learnt. The practice they gained on language areas through the activities they engaged in contributed a lot to increasing their interest in the subject. The big change I observed was in their willingness to take part in the speaking activities. Many of them actively took part in them although they were unable to use the language correctly.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTIONS

The success of language learning depends entirely on the use of meaningful teaching methods. Language learning is really effective if there is a purpose for learning them. Practicing language (grammar and vocabulary) in isolation does not make much sense to the learner. Moreover, such learning is very artificial.

Also, the learner is provided an opportunity to be creative when combining the language they learn with the activities associated with the skills. I selected only productive skills which are considered to be more challenging, but the method works equally well with receptive skills. I strongly believe this method is useful to present to learners who are often spoon fed and therefore never gain a chance to think by themselves.

This method allows the learners to use their imagination and be creative. This is especially useful for English teachers who often claim that the performance of the students is not satisfactory although they try their best to make them understand the language. If they try to integrate language with skills through meaningful activities, the students will learn the language meaningfully with confidence.

REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

For the above research, I took a random sample of students from a school in my area. This was a school where the students faced numerous challenges when learning English. When taking time slots, it was very difficult to interact with some of the teachers as they were not supportive in doing something outside of the regular schedule. It was so hard to manage my research work with them. Moreover, the students in my area have no exposure to the English language outside of the English class and that has lead them to have no interest in learning the language. This also made my work harder. Anyway I was able to conduct my research in a very satisfactory manner with some very enthusiastic teachers.

ENHANCING THE WRITING SKILLS OF WEAK UNDERGRADUATES: AN ACTION RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT THE SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

A. M. M. Navaz

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken as an action research to find the types of errors the weak students at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka make in their writing. 30 students were involved in the study. In order to identify students' errors, they were given a baseline test with two writing tasks to complete. The wrong usage of tenses was the most prevalent error in their writing. It was evident that using simple past and simple present tenses was difficult for the students. The students were then exposed to an intervention which included remedial teaching that covered grammar lessons, translation activities and additional take-home worksheets. After 10 lessons, students were given another test with two writing tasks that warranted students' knowledge of the grammar they were taught. Only 20 out of the initial 30 students sat for the assessment test. The analysis of the assessment test revealed that only one fifth of the students have improved their writing. They were able to use simple present and simple past tenses with reduced errors compared to their baseline test. Some of the limitations of the study include the small sample size and students' irregular attendance.

PROBLEM

Research on writing difficulties of students has been widely undertaken in various contexts. For example, a small scale study I conducted (Navaz, 2001) identified the writing difficulties of students at the Faculty of Arts in the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The study revealed the types of errors as such as, punctuation, missing words/ verbs, and noun verb agreement. Nevertheless, an intervention was not implemented. Several studies have been conducted overseas to identify the errors English as a Second Language (ESL) students make

in their academic writing (e.g. Al Badi, 2015; Nozadze, 2012; Salabi, 2004) in foreign universities. However, within the Sri Lankan context, studies that investigate ESL students' writing difficulties are rare.

It is common knowledge that poor writing does not only affect students' performance in English language examinations which are mandatory to pass in order to obtain their degrees, but also affects various academic activities the students engage in. At examinations, students face difficulty in answering essay type questions. Therefore, possessing good writing skills is necessary for undergraduates to perform well in university and later on when they pursue a career after graduation.

At the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, it is a mandatory requirement for all the faculties to offer credit English language courses to undergraduates for at-least two years of their academic programme. Despite the fact that they are taught English, nearly half of the students' proficiency is not sufficient to reach a pass grade of 40 marks. This could be partly due to the fact that most of these students' language proficiency is limited when they enter the university.

As I have personally observed for more than 15 years in this university, writing is the most problematic area for majority of the students. Even those students who manage to speak in English make errors in writing. This study was carried out with the following objectives:

1. to find the kinds of errors students make in their writing
2. to find if an intervention could address this problem
3. to find out students' perceptions of their errors and the intervention

INTERVENTION

This study was conducted at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. A group of weak students from the Faculty of Arts & Culture was selected for the study. Usually the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) conducts remedial classes for the weaker students. Thirty students agreed to be a part of the intervention. They were explained the objectives of the study and other ethical considerations. Classes were conducted on Wednesday afternoons when all the participating student were free. Initially students were given a baseline test which

contained two writing tasks: 1. A picture description (using present simple/ present progressive), and 2. A creative writing task that required them to use the past tense.

Following the baseline test, students' writings were analyzed to find out the types of errors and the frequency those errors were made. Based on the findings, the most frequent and common errors were identified to be included in the intervention.

INTERVENTION

Students were taught the grammar structures connected to the identified errors. This was followed by translation practices, from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2) that covered the same areas. The next step included the students completing a worksheet on the same topic at the end of every class. The students were requested to return the completed worksheets before the following class. These worksheets were take-home activities.

After 20 hours of teaching (10 classes) another assessment, similar to the baseline test, was conducted. Although the areas covered were the same, the questions were different. Subsequently, types of students' errors were identified and analyzed for improving writing. A comparison was made to see if there was any reduction in the occurrence of most frequent errors that were the focus of the intervention. In addition to the tabulation of errors, students' perceptions on the kinds of errors they make, their needs and effectiveness of the intervention were also taken into consideration.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are discussed below.

Baseline test:

Students were given two tasks for the baseline test. In Task 1, students were asked to write about a trip they went on during their last vacation. Task 2 was a picture description. The baseline test revealed that students made several errors in their writing, and the most prevalent error was the tense usage: incorrect use of present and past tenses. The example below illustrates the kinds of errors the students made.

Task 1: Write about a trip you went on during your last vacation (Use around 15 sentences).

The following examples are extracts of four students' writings. These four students were purposely selected, and the reasons for choosing them are given in the sub section 'assessment test after the intervention.'

Student A: I went to trip kandy on last vacation
I enjoied the trip

Student B: we are meet many people on the trip
we are bought many flowers and plants

Student C: I will go to Jaffna on July 22
my family members Arenge in small van

Student D: we are going to Nallur temble
we are going to Jaffna university and meet my friends

Task 2 –Write 10 sentences describing the following picture

Examples of the four focal students' writings are given below. Student B's writing does not contain a verb.

Student A: This picture is garden
There' re two girls and two boys in the picture

Student B: four people in this picture
Two girls and two boys in this picture

Student C: There is a dog in tha picture
There are four children in the picture

Student D: There are Two girls and Two boys in the picture
There is train in the picture
There is a girl use the umbrella in the picture

In addition to the errors related to verb tenses, the students also made errors in punctuation, missing prepositions, and spelling errors. Next to the wrong tense usage the spelling errors were the most common error in their writings. This was followed by punctuation errors. The details of the errors are given below in Figure 1.

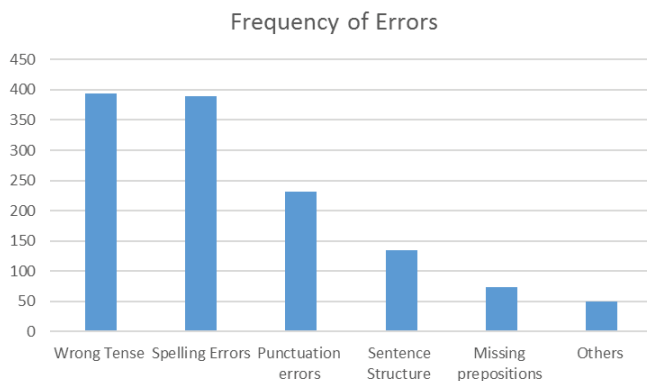


Figure 1: Types of students' errors and their frequency in the baseline test

Assessment test after the intervention:

The intervention focused on the following areas: simple present, simple past and present continuous tenses; prepositions; adjectives; and adverbs. Students were taught the lessons for one hour. In addition to that, they were given handouts which contained translation activities. Each lesson lasted for 2 hours.

At the end of intervention, students were given an assessment test that contained two writing activities that focused on the same areas the intervention focused on. At the end of assessment test, the number of errors was not calculated as only 20 students sat for the final assessment test, while 30 students had sat for the baseline test. Students' scripts were analyzed in order to identify the improvements. Six students were identified to have improved. Thus, their writings at the assessment test were found to contain fewer errors compared to others. Of them, four students who attended classes for a minimum of 90% of classes were selected to compare the pre and post writings. The other two students declared that they were following a weekend English course at a private institute. They were not included in the analysis, as their performance at the assessment test may not only be the result of the intervention.

Assessment test contained two tasks. The tasks and the students' writings are given below.

Task 1: Write about “an unforgettable experience you had” or “an incident that occurred recently”. Write about 15 sentences using the past tense.

Student A: *I was went to read last month
I was saw the incident
The incident was the child cried the bus stop*

Student B:

*I always get up early in the morning but I got up very late yesterday.
Because I slept late. My mother shouted me. So I argued with my
mother because I was upset. I did not get ready on time and I missed
service bus. I did not eat brake fast.*

Student C: *I got up 6 30 am early morning. Than took our tea.
Than 7.00 I had bath. Than I took our break first.
Than I went to university by the bus.*

Student D: *My parents gave me a chain
We played some game in the beach*

Task 2 - Write 10 sentences describing the following picture. Use simple present and present continuous tenses.

The focal participants’ responses are below:

Student A: *The picture shows the children’s going to the school.
There are many children in this picture.
There are three girls and three boys in this picture.*

Student B: *This picture show some school children go to school
There are many children in the picture*

Student C: *There is a building in this picture.
There are students wearing school uniform.*

Student D: *This is a black and white picture
There are three girls wearing skirts and blouse*

When the students’ writing samples before and after the intervention were compared, there was an improvement. Students B and D have

started to use the past tense correctly. For example, Student B used 'we are meet' instead of "we met". After the intervention, the student used "I got up" and "I slept". In addition, Student B started to use sentences cohesively. Similarly, Student D wrote "we went" instead of "we are going". Now the student D uses 'My parents gave' and 'We played.....' There are improvements in the use of present simple tense as well. Student B tried to use 'be' forms and the main verb in writing to a certain extent.

There was another interesting finding in Student A's work. New errors that were not in the previous writing were found. Before the intervention, the correct use of past tense (e.g. I went, I watched) was present. However, after the intervention, "I was went" and "I was saw" was used. When the student was asked about this, he could not provide any explanations. It is possible that the student developed the idea that 'was' should be used for past tense. It is also possible that the student became confused with the use of the 'be' form in the past. Student C seems to have improved in certain areas of language (e.g. noun verb agreement, punctuation).

DISCUSSION

As in any academic language learning context, my students made errors in their writing. Although an intervention was introduced, it did not bring the desired results. The baseline test indicated that students made a lot of errors in using the verb tenses correctly. In a similar study, Nozadze (2012) also found that the correct use of the tenses was a problem among Georgian students of English. But unlike Nozadze's study which focused on the perceptions of English teachers, this study directly investigated the students' errors.

Although the students tried to improve their writing by attending the classes regularly and paying close attention over the period of the intervention, this study did not necessarily bring any conclusive results. Even the four students who attended 90% of the classes, did not develop their writing skills satisfactorily. In contrast to the expectation, a student who used the past tense form satisfactorily started to use a wrong form of past tense.

It is important to note that the participants, who have very limited language proficiency, start to learn the language at a stage when they are under various other stresses connected to their studies and personal lives. This could be a reason that they are unable to pay attention to lessons or comprehend the lessons well. The students reported that they understood the lessons immediately after they were taught, but as times passed, they forgot the grammar rules and got confused.

Another reason, the students continuously made the same errors, is due to the fact they study their main stream courses in their mother tongue. Therefore, their exposure to the English language is limited to the few hours they attend the language class. The lack of exposure may limit their language development. In a similar study in Spain, Basterrechea and Garcia Mayo (2012) compared mainstream students and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) students for the production of third person singular. The study revealed that CLIL learners produced more accurate forms of the third person singular compared to others. The researchers predicted that the exposure to the target language by the CLIL learners provided them a greater advantage compared to mainstream learners who study their courses in their mother tongue.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND FUTURE ACTION

This intervention was planned as a remedial class. Making students attend all the classes was a challenge. Due to several reasons, only about 7 students attended the classes regularly. Of those, only 4 sat for the final assessment test. Further, only a few of them submitted their take-home work sheets on a regular basis. In addition to the remedial classes, these students were exposed to their regular English classes. However, those classes focused on different skills. Therefore, there was a mismatch between what was done in the core class and the remedial class. Despite these measures, the students were unable to reach the desired level of fluency particularly in the use of simple present and past tenses even after the intervention. Students reported that it is difficult for them to use the tenses correctly in writing. Such student statements reveal the importance of focusing on students' reflections.

Salabi (2004) who studies Saudi ESL undergraduates' reflections reveals that differences between L1 and L2 structures should be explicitly taught to the students. In my study also it was evident that students tend to use 'are' whenever they write a sentence in the present tense, and similarly 'was' for the past tense. The students did not give any conclusive reasons for these kinds of errors, but it can be assumed that these rules would have been fossilised in them. In the light of the above factors, it can be suggested that a study with a limited number of students conducted as a case study would bring some nuanced insight into this area of study. The proposed study will investigate whether exposure to grammatical structures and the students' reflection on their own errors would enhance the writing skills.

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THE IMPACT OF LISTENING TO SONGS ON DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS AMONG TEACHER-TRAINEES AT THE HAPITIGAMA NATIONAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (NCOE)

M. K. Padmini de Silva

ABSTRACT

Hapitigama National College of Education conducts the Primary Education course which produces teachers for the primary classrooms in Sri Lankan government schools. Primary teachers are supposed to conduct simple English activities in the classroom. Therefore, English is one of the compulsory subjects at their final examination in order to be appointed as a primary teacher. As the majority of students face the difficulty in writing grammatically accurate sentences, this action research was an attempt to develop the students' writing skills. In this action research, I have paid attention to three key areas: the difficulties students face in relation to writing grammatically accurate sentences; student expectations during the English lessons; and the impact of using popular songs in developing writing skills. The instruments used to collect data were, a questionnaire, a pre-test, an intervention that consisted of a series of writing activities, and a post-test. There was a significant improvement in students' writing and participation in English lessons. After completion of this action research, I strongly felt that the use of carefully selected songs and appropriate writing activities is one of the most influential strategies that a teacher should utilise in developing writing skills in the English language classroom.

PROBLEM

Hapitigama National College of Education conducts the Primary Education course which produces teachers for primary classrooms. English is a compulsory subjects in the primary curriculum, and the teachers are expected to conduct Activity Based Oral English (ABOE) and Conversational English (CE) programmes in collaboration with the subject, Environment Related Activities. It is expected that the primary teachers have an adequate knowledge of the English

language to conduct these activities in the primary classroom. With these requirements, the students of the National Colleges of Education (NCOE), have to get through the final examination which includes English language as a subject in order to be appointed as a primary teacher. They have to face a three-hour written test at the final examination and complete six assignments during their teacher education programme. Therefore, I have to pay attention to developing my students' writing skills.

According to my experience and observations as a lecturer in English in this college for more than five years, the majority of students lack confidence with regard to English as a subject as they are not proficient in English. Moreover, they fear the final examination and the assignments they are expected to complete in order to graduate from the programme. Furthermore, the majority of students do not possess sufficient knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary, and spellings. As a result, they have difficulty in writing grammatically accurate sentences. This influences their ability to answer questions in classroom activities and examination questions on, 'Wh' questions, writing answers, essays, and letters. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the students' writing skills in order to increase their confidence in facing the final examination and real life situations.

Finally, after reflecting on students' performance at in-class activities and my observations, I decided to focus on developing writing skills as the main focus of this action research

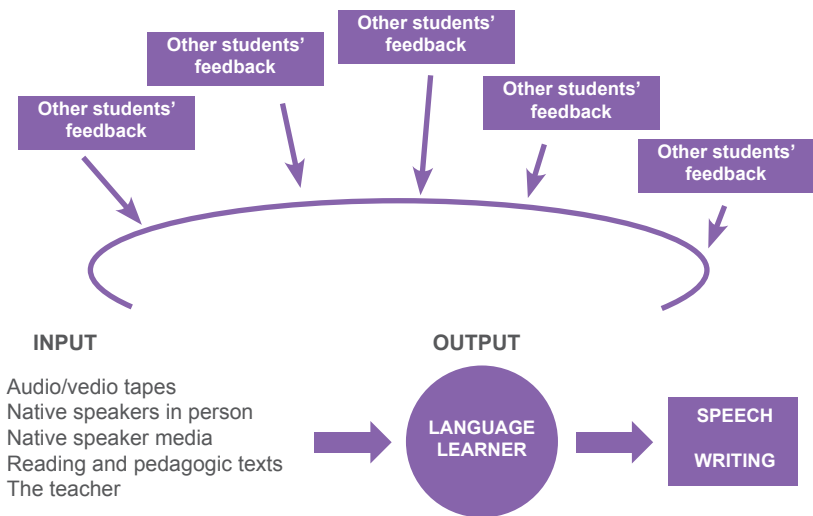
INTERVENTION

The purpose of this study was to identify students' needs and difficulties in writing grammatically correct sentences, their expectations towards learning English in the classroom and most importantly, to seek the possibility of using popular songs to develop writing skills among them. In particular, I address the following questions in this research project:

1. What are the difficulties student face when writing grammatically accurate sentences?
2. What do the students expect during the English lessons?
3. How effective is the use of popular songs in developing teacher candidates' writing skills?

A questionnaire was administered among the students to collect data about the difficulties the students faced when writing grammatically accurate sentences, their attitudes and expectations towards learning English as a subject in the college. A pre-test on writing was held before implementing the intervention of this action research. The students had to construct sentences using the given vocabulary, construct ‘Wh’ questions and write an essay. These are compulsory questions in the question paper at the final examination.

This action research was implemented through a series of activities that focused on developing writing skills via incorporating songs into a variety of writing activities. My intervention plan was to design and implement writing tasks in order to improve students’ writing skills. The main aim was to incorporate popular songs as the base for writing activities. I strongly believe in the theory that there is a great impact of receptive skills (listening /reading – songs) on developing the productive skills (speaking/writing- grammatically correct sentences, ‘wh’ questions) of the language. Harmer (2002) states, “The teaching of productive skills is closely bound up with receptive skill work. The two feed on each other in a number of ways” (p. 250). Figure 1 illustrates this.



The relationship between input and output (Harmer, 2002)

Moreover, according to my own experience in learning and teaching English as a second language, if you read a text ‘intensively’, you will

be able to use that language structure and vocabulary of your interest in your writing and speaking. You can grasp some of the sentences and use the same structure in other contexts. Also, once you use songs and rhymes in the English language classroom, you can easily motivate students and get the whole-class to actively participate in the lesson.

As I am interested in listening to English songs, I usually think of the meaning while enjoying them. Gradually I noticed that in most songs the same language structure is repeated. I realised that with the exposure to new technologies such as computers, the internet, smart phones, pen drives and CDs, everybody can learn a lot of English if he or she downloads the songs with lyrics and listen to it and sing. The language in most songs is simple and conveys themes relevant to young adults.

I selected four popular songs and got the students to listen to each song. Lyrics of the songs were displayed using a multi-media projector to make the task more meaningful as only listening to a song will not give them the idea of the song; most importantly, they cannot follow the pronunciation of singers though they want to learn and sing the songs. Once students are asked to sing the song without lyrics displayed, around 90% of them could not sing it. However, when the lyrics were displayed, the whole group started singing. Also, it was very convenient for me to discuss and point out the language structures, vocabulary, parts of speech and the story/theme of them.

Furthermore, I divided them into small groups and instructed them to surf the internet, download songs and rhymes of their choice and analyze them. Each group had to present the song/s and prepare a simple activity on repeated sentence structure/s in order to teach them to the class.

Also, I designed and implemented activities for the students to analyze and study. These focused on the vocabulary, word classes, and sentence structures repeated in the songs which they could remember easily. Finally, the plot and characters of the song were discussed. The students wrote sentences describing them. In one of the sessions, I used a collection of nursery rhymes along with lyrics and the videos which made the group really enthusiastic to learn, sing and discuss the

language. During the period of the intervention, I discussed with the students what they thought about the intervention. Almost everybody was positive towards it.

A competition was held where opportunities were provided for groups to present the songs that they practiced, and to present the language structures they had learnt from the song. In addition, volunteers were given the opportunity to participate in the competition where they had to listen to the song with lyrics displayed and write answers to a set of questions based on the songs which were not discussed in the sessions.

Finally, a post-test was held in order to evaluate the impact of the intervention and a mini-questionnaire was administered to get feedback, especially to inquire students' attitudes towards listening to songs in the English language class.

FINDINGS

Students' responses to the questionnaire administered at the inception revealed very important facts about how they learnt English in the teacher education programme. It was given in the students' mother tongue (Sinhala) and they had revealed their ideas freely. All the participants stated that they must learn English in order to get through the exam, conduct the ABOE programme in the primary classrooms, and for their day-to-day activities. 60% of the respondents felt that English should be taught from simple to complex. When inquired about the teaching strategies which should be adopted to teach English, 68% stated that English should be taught through fun activities. Only 10% stated that they need explanations in the mother tongue. The reasons that some of them have mentioned were that they have forgotten the basic grammar, they cannot decide on the correct/appropriate vocabulary to construct sentences and they had not learnt much English when they studied for the General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level (GCE/AL) examination.

A Pre-test was the key point where I could identify students' difficulties in writing sentences. When analysing their written answers I noticed many different grammar mistakes which exhibited the problems they had mentioned when responding to the questionnaire. For example,

*Our teacher is said / My sister is study at / When you come
our house? / I think my valuable life time college. / Who is your friends? /
She is a carefully girl.*

The outcomes of my intervention are of immense importance for teaching English in an effective manner. I could identify students' needs and barriers in writing, students' attitudes towards learning English, and strategies to be used in the language classroom especially through students' feedback. Most importantly the task sheets, competitions at classroom level, the final competition, and the post-test revealed that the students' writing improved to a certain extent.

I observed a change in students' participation in classroom activities which led to the improvement in writing. However, there are instances where they found it difficult to produce the same structures and made mistakes. I observed the students' performance during each session and as I selected simple (easy to remember - easy to sing - easy to understand) songs. The students participated in the activities well. They could produce language (sentences and questions) to express their own ideas by following the sentence structures used in the songs. It was evident during the sessions that the students could grasp the ideas conveyed by the songs with little help from me. Another important thing that I noticed was how the students enjoyed and gained confidence in singing and listening to songs. That influenced them in including English verses in Christmas carols (where students usually sing in the mother tongue) at the end of the term.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTION

In this action research I paid attention to three key areas: the students' difficulties in relation to writing grammatically accurate sentences, what the students expect during the English lessons, and the impact of using popular songs in developing writing skills among students. The findings of the study revealed that all the students had realised the importance of learning English at a professional and personal level. As far as learning difficulties related to writing were concerned, majority had difficulties in verb tenses, and active/passive voice. Even though both these areas have been taught several times in the classroom, students needed more examples and practice. As they get four English language lessons a week, if one lesson is based on a popular song I

think students will be able to remember the grammar in it and use them as model sentences. However, I have to make an effort to select and guide them to use the accurate structures.

Another aspect of the problem was the fear of the English language and the need for more simple explanations. It should be mentioned that I never imagined that a few students (04%) were really afraid of being asked to read what they wrote in front of the class. I could speak to some of them personally and make them understand that we should not hesitate to learn from each other and as second language learners, it is natural that we make mistakes. This made me realize that I need to address this problem. I needed to make my lessons more learner-friendly, simple and slow. Moreover, I had to create a stress – free classroom environment. In addition, there should be a lot of repetition as they cannot easily construct the same correct sentence twice.

Through my experience as a teacher of English and a lecturer, I had noticed that students always like songs. Since I wanted to incorporate songs in my lessons, not only for entertainment but also to teach, I wanted my students to analyse the sentence structures within them. Consequently, they learnt a lot of vocabulary and sentence structures from the songs while having a lot of fun in the class. I think that I could get active participation of students through the use of songs. As they are young adults (between 21 to 25 years), they could easily grasp the ideas and feelings expressed by the songs. Finally, the students used the structures they learnt in their writing. Once they were asked to check them, they tried to sing the song for that.

As most human beings are interested in listening to songs, if the teacher can incorporate a song in to a lesson it would be more meaningful to students' learning. Moreover, as the students are exposed to a variety of English accents, their listening skills will also improve. In conclusion, I think that I would plan my lessons in the future using songs not only to improve writing skills, but also to develop listening and speaking skills and to share my experiences with my colleagues.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

After the completion of this action research, I strongly believe that the use of songs in the language classroom is one of the most influential strategies that a teacher should utilise in English language teaching. I was really impressed by the students' feedback and enthusiasm about the special sessions where I introduced songs.

As students liked songs, they remembered what is said in songs and learnt a lot from them. However, I strongly felt that the students faced difficulties with regard to learning English. One reason is that they study 11 subjects through the Sinhala medium. Their day's routine starts at 6.00 o'clock in the morning and ends at 6.00 o'clock in the evening. Therefore, they can spend very little time for each subject including English.

However, I discovered that my teaching should be more learner-friendly, simple and slow, and that I should create a stress-free classroom environment. It is obvious that every teacher should add variety to his/her lessons, and especially make use of modern technology to make the lessons enjoyable. Once the students saw the music videos, I got them to bring a song, prepare a booklet on the song and sing the song and analyse their language structures. Everybody in the class was really enthusiastic and participated well. Once modern technology is used in the classroom, a vast difference in the students' responses could be noticed. In conclusion, I am determined to add a variety of songs to teaching grammar and writing as students are keen on learning grammar through songs.

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Sreemali Herath is a Senior Consultant at the Postgraduate Institute for English (PGIE) at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Prior to that, she taught at the York University English Language Institute, in Toronto, Canada. Sreemali possess a doctorate in Language and Literacies Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. Her doctoral work focused in how language teachers can be agents on change in post-conflict reconciliation.

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