

COMMON DRAWBACKS ENCOUNTERED IN LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG THE UNDERGRADUATES OF EASTERN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT: Learning a second language is never an easy task. Learning English as a second language is even less easy. For instance English is heard and used as a second language by majority of the SriLankans. Thus the particular study focuses on the common drawbacks encountered in learning English language among the undergraduates of Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. To be sure it was identified that learners are obviously facing numerous difficulties in developing their English proficiency. The research is conducted with the objective of finding out what are the reasons for this issue and what are the remedial measures to be taken to alleviate these problems. This paper critically evaluates the problems faced by the students in language classroom before they enter into the college environment. The overall objective of the research is to find out the various measures and steps to improve the students' English language proficiency. This research is based on descriptive analysis using quantitative and qualitative data. The necessary data were gathered using the methods of discussions, participatory informal interviews, observations and questionnaires by involving forty Eastern province students who study in South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: English, Language, Second language, Language Learners, Proficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

English is a language which is integrated with the four skills of language learning such as speaking, listening, reading and writing just like any other language in the world. When we examine the evolution of English language in Sri Lanka, it all started with the British colonization of the island. Hence English in our country is a social empowerment and knowing English is prestigious, people who are well fluent in English are considered to be more rational, intelligent and knowledgeable. Today English has got its place internationally amongst the nation as standard Sri Lankan English which is enjoyed by many language learners all over the island. Additionally there are well qualified and proficient English speakers in the country, despite the area of our focus where it is seen with lower level English knowledge excluding the exceptional people who have achieved in the field of English like many qualified lecturers and trained teachers. But still the problem exists among the learners as these proficient teaching resources are very few, especially among school levels. Therefore the reasons for these drawbacks in the overall performance level of English language are numerous in the specified location of Eastern province. In the study found out the most common drawbacks and issues encountered by students during their learning period despite their passion towards developing their English knowledge. None of the students involved in sampling were noted with less interest despite the fact that their attitude towards the subject that it's a hard language to learn. In later session of the research we would suggest recommendation in order to make changes in the contemporary teaching and learning approach. We believe this would be a positive approach towards improving the English language proficiency among the learners.

The overall objective of the research work lies in identifying the common reasons responsible for the drawback of the English language learners in the Eastern province who are undergraduates

while providing some of the best strategies and suggestion which would serve as a recommendation in order to make a change towards successful performance of learners in both rural and urban levels. It is considered from school as many studies of scholars have proved that small children are suitable in easily picking up the language. Therefore the study becomes valuable and significant for the second language learners of English as well as the teachers in finding out the weakness points and the reason for their drawbacks in order to engage in effective teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

“A language other than one’s mother tongue used for a special purpose e.g. for education, government is second language learning”. (Crystal, 1997:256). “Second language refers to situation in which students are studying the language of the country which they are living. Second language students have direct contact with language, the people and culture out of class”. (Chastain, 1988: 136).

Ellis (1997:51) defines “interference” as transfer, which he says “the influence that the learner’s first language exerts over the acquisition of second language”. He argues that transfer is governed by learner’s perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in second language learning.

In a similar research by Dr.Nawaz (2016),he stated “At SEUSL it is a mandatory requirement for all the faculties to offer credit English courses to under graduate for at least two years of their academic program. Despite the fact that they are taught English, nearly half of the students’ proficiency is not sufficient to reach a pass grade of forty marks. This could be partly due to the fact that most of these students language proficiency is limited when they enter university” (Nawaz, 2016). Many of the similar researches suggest the common problems Sri Lankan students face during their second language acquisition. This research too insists that students are not trained from their school level. Thus it’s from the school period that language should be given importance.

The errors made by the learners are numerous while our concern is basically focused on identifying the reasons for the challenges in acquiring English. Thus the whole research is undergone in a welfare motive of the students.

3. METHODOLOGY

Specifically during our study we adopted the following methodology. Generally the research is done under a qualitative and quantitative approach. Questionnaires were provided among the sample students of forty who study at SEUSL. In order to collect the quantitative data and to derive the statistical analysis of data, chart formation of MS Excel was used. Along with these, participatory informal interviews were conducted among peers through which we could collect a large amount of data about the real perception of the students and real drawbacks they face in learning English.

Sampling method adopted for the research was random sampling. For this purpose the undergraduate students from Eastern Province were involved into the sampling in a random method.

2.1 Quantitative Approach

a. Tool 1

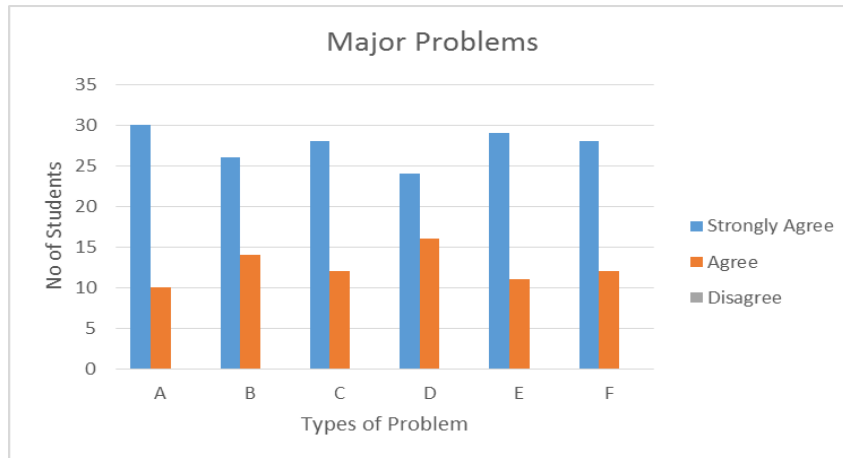


Figure 1. Amount of students who have agreed for the major problems in questionnaire

- A- Unavailability of multi lingual environment
- B- The realization of importance is felt only when their step into higher studies.
- C- Absence of practical English speaking atmosphere outside the classroom
- D- Usage of Tamil language in learning the context with translation of meaning
- E- Poor reading habit in English related materials
- F- Very less importance's given for oral communication in English

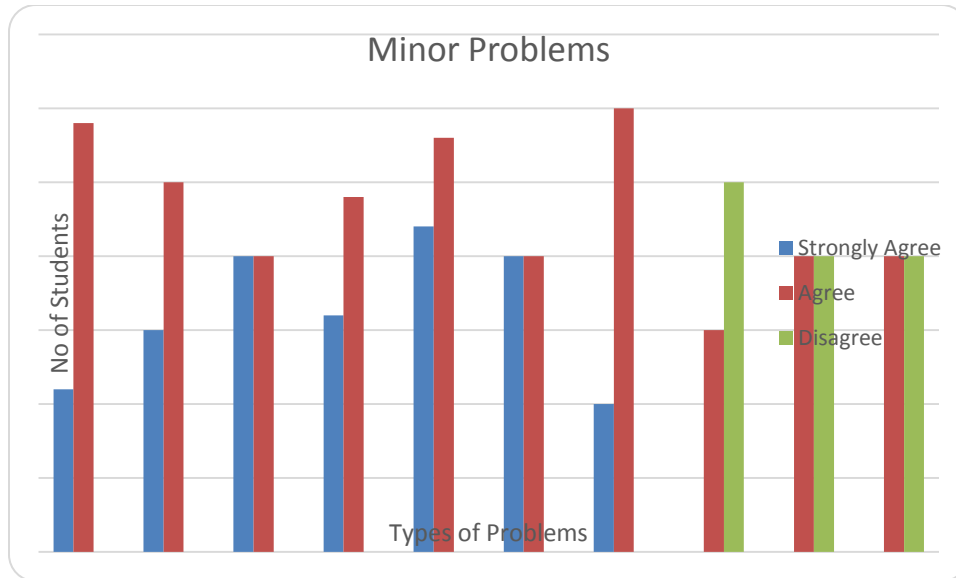


Figure 2. Amount of students who have agreed and disagreed the minor problems in questionnaire

- G- Limited number of leading International schools offering English medium
- H- Availability of few efficient English teaching resource persons
- I- Students' consideration is not a source of knowledge but a tool to get good jobs.
- J- Language learning is mostly targeting grammatical rules rather than contextual.
- K- Students approach learning most with memorizing habit
- L- Learning English only for paper qualification
- M- Self-oriented mentality which does not let them improve in their second language
- N- Less importance felt by students in learning English
- O- Presence of Tamil speaking classes
- P- Theoretical approach in teaching and learning

b. Tool 2

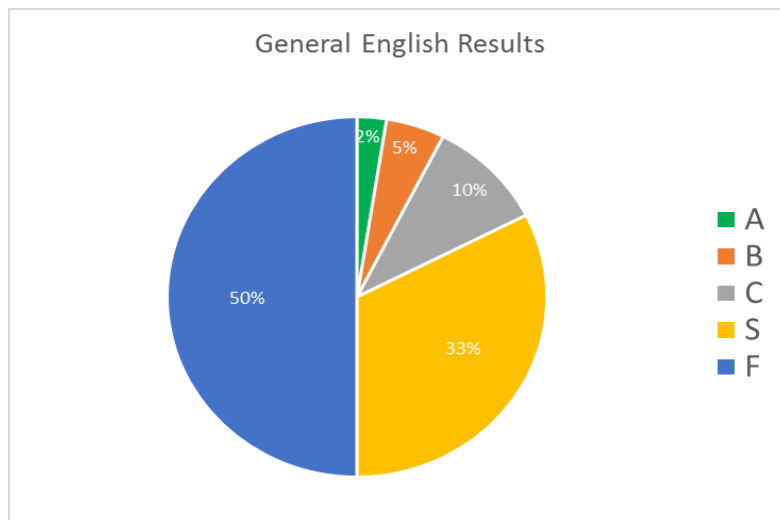


Figure 3. Percentage of the students in Advance Level General English Results in the year 2012

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

As the first two authors are students of this study we could identify some of the common drawbacks that of the students of Eastern province faced when they engaged in learning English. As we put forward twenty major causes or reasons responsible for the situation. Among that after the data analysis we found out six causes as major reasons responsible for the drawback of the student in the particular area. As per the figure one by one we can witness that the highest number of students strongly agreed and agreed for the mentioned six points. According to the research it gave the result that the reason B is an important cause for the drawback. Furthermore, the system of realizing the seriousness of having less English knowledge is felt by these students only when they enter higher studies or seek for jobs instead of caring in improving their English since at an early age. Many undergraduates worried that they could have given importance for this subject at least during their secondary stages of the studies. Through the interviews we came to know many students follow professional English courses in recognized institutions simultaneously to their degree. According to many language scholars they put forward the idea that it is during childhood a student is acceptable to acquire a second language easily.

Afterwards is the usage of Tamil language in the learning context with the help of translation of the meanings which is also identified as one of the major drawback. For example, students were mostly identified with the habit of highly depending on their mother tongue in order to know the meanings, remember the spellings as well as remember the pronunciation by means of writing the English word in Tamil without trying to approach the language in English itself. This ultimately causes the students failed in acquiring Standard English which is also a reason why we found many of the students lacking in their quality of pronunciation. The people of Eastern province are identified with many pronunciation errors which are not correlating to standard Sri Lankan accent. Thus we can come to the conclusion that most students approach English language learning with the Tamil language. In relation to the data obtained we found very less importance is given for the oral communication. In informal interviews among peers we came to know that the poor concentration has been given to the oral knowledge and they use English language orally only for the formal purposes, such as presentations, interviews and formal class room discussions. Thus a daily usage of English was mostly absent among the students. It's obvious that a language can be polished only when they speak in day to day life.

Unavailability of multi lingual environment becomes a major reason for the drawback while we compare the other provinces where there is a majority of Sinhala speaking people and Tamil speaking people and Tamil speakers they tend to communicate mostly in English as a medium where as in Eastern province Tamil is the dominant language. It lets for the absence of practical English speaking atmosphere outside the classroom. Therefore, once the students step out from the classroom they find no opportunity to have any oral interaction in the medium of English especially through the influence of the mother tongue.

Other reasons found out for the drawbacks are poor reading habit of English related resources and materials, availability of few efficient English teaching resources, language learning is mostly targeting grammar rules and syntax rather than given significance for the contemporary context, students approach English learning mostly with the habit of memorizing, most importantly the students learn English only for paper qualification and not for life. All in all the self-oriented mentality too becomes a reason. In other words people think in a self-oriented perspective as they are living a self-sufficient life style where Tamil language is dominant in each and every sector.

One example for this drawback is the absence of multi-national companies in the region (companies under English only policy).

Moreover in some of the other reasons put forward for the research purpose which are mostly disagreed by students are less importance felt by students in learning English and theoretical approach in teaching and learning, presence of Tamil speaking English classrooms. Through this we can derive at the assumption that students do feel the importance of English language at the same time they are interested in learning it and also teaching approach too is undertaken in practical approach rather than theoretical one.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the research we can derive at a conclusion that most English learners of Eastern province are identified with a lower level performance and the above mentioned common drawbacks are the reasons for their less proficiency in the language.

In this regard the learners as well as the teachers should target in an active learning process where the students will get maximum benefits and output. English should be approached among the students with easy strategies that will change the mindset of the students that it's an easy language. It is the responsibility from the part of the families, teachers and the society in making the students realize that English is important at an early age which would serve helpful in their future prospects such as carrying out their higher studies in English medium and seeking best profession. The students also realize the need of English as most of today's resource materials, websites and social media are run in International English language. That would be helpful in creating networks of people of different categories when we know an International language.

Students should listen to the native speaker through pronunciation laboratory, and visual aids in order to reinforce their ability at phonological aspects. Students should be motivated to develop their ability through practicing the English language outside the classroom. Students must be extra careful to be sure to use correct materials recommended by a reliable teacher of English. They must make a deliberate and conscious effort to learn with or without a class teacher.

Awareness programs can be conducted especially for the parents of the beginners and the significance of English as a second language can be insisted among the society. Schools should take appropriate measures in order to increase reading habit of the students by conducting e.g. review writing, creative writing competitions, composing other works in English language and awarding them.

Implications

The research would be helpful for the policy makers as well as teachers of English in handling the challenges faced by the students through their perception in designing out their curriculum and syllabus according to the student requirement. Also the research would help the future researchers as a basic material who wishes to carry out further broad researchers under this topic.

Limitation

The short time duration was insufficient in order to make the research broader. The sampling population too included a less amount of only forty samples if the sampling had been in higher amount we could have derived into many other ideas and conclusions.

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