



AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY ON THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE POOR PERFORMANCE IN SPEAKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITH REFERENCE TO POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS IN SRI JAYAWARDENAPURA EDUCATIONAL ZONE

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English is a widely spoken language, and its proficiency is crucial in today's globalized world. This research identifies the challenges faced by students and recommends remedial measures to enhance their speaking abilities. Utilizing a phenomenological approach and qualitative research design, the study surveyed 50 students and 10 teachers from five different 1 AB type schools in the Sri Jayawardenapura educational zone. Purposive sampling ensured a thorough examination of the subject. Structured interviews were conducted to gather primary data, with questions aimed at understanding the methods used to teach speaking skills, the difficulties encountered by learners, and potential corrective actions. Thematic coding and content analysis revealed that factors such as students' ability to practice English outside the classroom was limited and that lack of sufficient vocabulary hindered effective communication and fear of speaking English emerged as a significant barrier. Teachers utilized strategies such as role-plays, interactive games and group discussions to enhance speaking skills but faced challenges like large class sizes and limited practice sessions. Additionally, students' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes were identified as major issues. The study recommends prioritizing communicative and interactive teaching strategies, increasing exposure to authentic English materials and implementing supportive measures to reduce language anxiety. Comprehensive teacher training programmes and the provision of resources such as language labs and multimedia technologies are essential. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions and linguists can further develop effective assessment tools. In conclusion, addressing the identified factors can significantly improve post-secondary students' English-speaking performance, enabling them to communicate confidently and competently. This research highlights the importance of enhancing oral competence to expand educational and career opportunities.

Keywords: oral competence, ESL students, post-secondary students

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a widely spoken language that has become one of the most used languages in the world. Billions of people use it as either a first language or a second language (Rao, 2019). In Sri Lanka, there is a growing recognition of the importance of oral competence in the teaching context, particularly in the context of English language teaching. The Sri Lankan Government has emphasized the need to improve English language proficiency among students, and this includes developing oral competence as well. The National Institute of Education (NIE) in Sri Lanka has developed a curriculum for teaching English as a second language, which includes a focus on developing oral competence. One of the most essential skills to develop and enhance active communication is speaking. Speaking is one of the most challenging mechanisms of learning a language.

The objectives of this research are to investigate the techniques used by teachers to develop oral competence in English, identify the difficulties encountered by learners in this process, and recommend remedial measures to facilitate the development of oral competence. The research aims to address the following questions: What methods do educators employ to help pupils become more fluent speakers of English? What challenges do students face as they work to become proficient speakers? What corrective actions can help someone become more proficient in speaking in English?

2. METHODOLOGY

One of the most popular methods used in qualitative research is the phenomenological approach (Dragan & Sondaite, 2003). This study employed a phenomenological research philosophy to research and a qualitative research design in accordance with scientific principles. It aimed to get an in-depth understanding of why post-secondary students perform poorly when speaking in English. Utilizing a cross-sectional approach, the research technique involved conducting a survey to acquire primary data. Purposive sampling was done in order to ensure that research aims and objectives were achieved.

2.2 Sample Design

The sample design for this research study involved selecting a sample size of 50 students and 10 teachers, with the students' age specified as 16 or 17 from 05 different 1 AB type schools in Sri Jayawardenapura educational zone. The selection of this sample size, age group and the use of purposive selection for student and teacher interviews was based on several considerations, including feasibility, representativeness and specific research objectives.



2.3 Sampling method

Purposive sampling is the sampling technique chosen simply because it is a personalised approach to research that targets desirable attributes and corresponds with specific aims. While preserving resources and viability, it effectively chooses unique or exceptional situations. This approach guarantees depth and relevance in data gathering, improving the accuracy and usefulness of the study. Purposive sampling is a strategic technique for targeted investigations because it allows researchers to gain important insights by purposefully picking people or items that fulfil specified requirements (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

2.4 Data collection method

Data collection for this research has been done through structured interviews. From each individual, 10 questions have been asked. Firstly, the researcher identified the purpose of the interviews and formulated interview questions to guide the conversation by considering the target population and determining the appropriate sample size and selection method. Then, the researcher reached out to potential interviewees, explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining their consent to participate by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, if required. Most importantly, researcher selected an appropriate setting for the interviews, such as a quiet room where the interviewees would feel comfortable and be able to express themselves freely. The researcher introduced the purpose of the interview and reassured the interviewees about the confidentiality of their responses and encouraged them to be open and honest.

Next, the interviewer asked the 10 questions which had been prepared beforehand, ensuring clarity and avoiding leading or biased questions. The interviewer listened actively, allowing the interviewees to fully express their thoughts fully. The interviewer recorded the interviews with the interviewees' permission. In some instances, depending on the interviewees' responses, additional exploratory questions have been asked to explore their perspectives, clarify their answers, or delve deeper into specific areas of interest. Interviewer concluded the interview by summarizing the main points discussed and giving the interviewees an opportunity to add any final comments or ask questions.

After the interviews, researcher transcribed the recordings and reviewed the notes. The researcher carefully analysed the data, looking for patterns, themes or key insights related to the research objectives. Afterwards, the researcher cross-checked the findings with other data sources and interviewees review to ensure accuracy and validity. Then, the researcher interpreted the data into the research objectives and contextual factors. Finally, the researcher documented the findings from the interviews in the thesis, highlighting the key themes, quotes or insights derived from the interviews.

2.5 Data analysis method

The interview data was analysed using thematic coding and content analysis, which made it possible to identify recurring themes, patterns and deeper meanings. The validity and reliability of the findings were improved by this methodical and thorough study. The researcher was able to develop theoretical ideas, obtain a greater grasp of the research phenomena and unearth significant insights through the application of these qualitative data analysis tools.



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study produced important findings through the analysis of the independent factors. It turned out that students' capacity to improve their speaking abilities was hindered by the inability to practice English outside of the classroom. Additionally, it was discovered that insufficient English vocabulary interfered with efficient communication. Also, one of the biggest obstacles to students' performance was their fear of communicating in English. These findings opened the way for establishing important conclusions and creating focused solutions. According to the results of the study, there is a gap in receiving chances for speaking for students during school.

Teachers were interviewed, and the results showed that a variety of strategies and activities such as role-plays, interactive games and group discussions were used in the classroom to enhance the speaking skills of students. However, issues that prevent efficient practice have been identified, such as limited sessions and large class populations. Teachers also mentioned difficulties like young children's lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. Other elements affecting students' lack of motivation to communicate in English outside of the classroom were a lack of interest and insufficient exposure to the language.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Recommendations

Educational institutions should prioritize communicative and interactive teaching strategies to solve the issue of limited opportunities for English practice. Vocabulary growth can be improved by including language practice activities and increasing exposure to authentic English language materials. Additionally, implementing supportive strategies to reduce students' fear, like fostering a positive learning atmosphere and giving them friendly speaking practice, can help them perform better.

Multiple-level remedies are required to resolve the limitations. It is essential to offer thorough teacher training programmes that emphasize improving teaching methods for speaking abilities. Additionally, it's essential to establish a positive learning environment that fosters students' confidence and lessens their language anxiety. To improve students' oral competence, access to resources including language labs, multimedia technologies and real-world speaking chances should be given priority. Additionally, partnerships between educational institutions and linguists can be very helpful in creating appropriate assessment tools and monitoring techniques to evaluate students' growth in speaking abilities.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the causes of poor performance in English speaking among post-secondary students in the Sri Jayawardenapura educational zone have illuminated the significance of English-speaking abilities. In today's globalized world, the capacity to communicate effectively in English is increasingly acknowledged as being essential.



English speaking proficiency has to be improved for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it expands opportunities for success in school and in the job market. Speaking in English fluently opens doors to universities, job opportunities, and international partnerships. Effective communication abilities also make it easier to integrate into society, understand other cultures and take part in international discussions. The results of this study make it clear that a variety of reasons affect post-secondary students in the Sri Jayawardenapura educational zone poor English-speaking performance. These variables include both personal traits like motivation, self-assurance and language anxiety as well as environmental variables like approaches to learning, resource availability and sociocultural impacts.

Lastly, this investigative study offers insightful information about the causes impacting post-secondary students in the Sri Jayawardenapura educational zone's poor performance in English speaking. Educational institutions can improve students' speaking abilities by addressing the highlighted independent variables which will ultimately allow them to communicate confidently and competently in the English language.

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