

CHALLENGES OF IMPROVING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF SRI LANKAN LEARNERS IN A HETEROGENOUS SETTING WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE GAMES

M.D.C. Fernando^{1*}, S.M. Thenabadu²

¹Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

²Department of English Language Teaching, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
dilangifern@gmail.com

Student heterogeneity is a major concern in Sri Lankan English classrooms. Due to this factor, both the teacher and the student face difficulties in English language development as a Second Language (ESL). Language games have been helpful in English classrooms in developing student interest. However, student heterogeneity has not yet been considered when addressing the challenges of using English language games in Sri Lankan ESL classrooms. This study evaluated the challenges both the students and teachers encounter in developing English language proficiency in a heterogeneous classroom in an underprivileged setting. The researcher (as part of a PhD study) conducted semi-structured interviews with five teachers. These teachers interviewed were involved in teaching English to 250 students from Grade 6, using a task-based game approach. The study sample was selected from an educational zone in the Colombo district. The data was analyzed by the researcher, using Thematic analysis. The researcher identified seven themes as findings: (1). Language processing difficulties of the students (2). Time constraint (3). Technology (4). Use of English in the classroom (5). Inconsistency in student participation (6). Individual student heterogeneity (7). Teachers' knowledge in lesson preparation related to task-based games. The findings revealed that the students in this area have an "above average" level of heterogeneity, which makes it challenging for the English language teachers to teach them using a task-based approach. It was also observed that early exposure to the English language from the Primary level is essential to minimize this problem. Similarly, the other challenges also have a significant impact on the English language development process of the students. It is also recommended that the content taught in the syllabus be reduced in these types of schools. Further assistance from all governmental and non-governmental well-wishers is needed to address the gravity of these challenges.

Keywords: Challenges, task-based learning, language games, ESL, heterogeneity