The Impact of Using Audio Resources when Teaching English to Visually Challenged Students in Sri Lanka

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Abstract - This study explores the impact of heavy reliance on the audio resources when teaching English to visually challenged (VC) students in Sri Lanka. Research on the education of VC has focused on the appropriateness of segregated learning versus mixed learning, infrastructure facilities and the availability of other resources, creating a lacuna in the studies that concern the challenges such students face when learning specific subjects. Addressing this dearth in research, this study analyzes the impact of heavy reliance on audio resources when teaching English to VC students which becomes crucial in developing their language sub skills. Semi-structured interviews with three VC students who have learned English in their secondary level education and two teachers who have taught English to such students were conducted to gather data, which was analyzed using critical disability theories, theories on teaching reading to VC of Westwood and Pérez-Pereira and theories related to teaching vocabulary. Thus, this study examines the impact of audio resources upon the improvement of their orthographic skills, pronunciation skills, mastering of certain grammar elements such as prepositions and the retention of vocabulary items. It also explores the reasons that lead to the heavy use of audio resources when teaching English to VC such as easy access, low cost and the challenges in producing Braille materials while analyzing new assistive technologies which in the long run may become sustainable alternatives to traditionally produced Braille texts. Thus, this study concludes that it is important to use a blended approach which makes use of both audio and Braille materials.

Keywords: visually challenged, English language teaching, audio resources

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