

Challenges Needed to be Overcome When Utilizing Improvisation in an ESL Classroom, to Improve Speaking Skills of Young Learners

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Abstract – Improvisation activities are a popular technique to improve speaking skills, since it engages the students in the process of negotiation of meaning which facilitates SLA by practicing real-world transactions. Furthermore, several studies based on the effectiveness of the drama form improvisation in improving the speaking skills of ESL/EFL learners, have obtained positive results. Therefore, improvisation as a drama-based activity has theoretically and practically has proven the possibility of promoting the speaking skills of the learners. This paper presents a qualitative research on identifying the challenges when employing improvisation to develop the English-speaking skills of young learners. Moreover, the study investigates an area which has not been researched and thus, covers a lacuna in the field of ESL in Sri Lanka. Fifteen young ESL learners (from age ten to twelve), studying for the Cambridge Movers level examination and their teacher were the participants of the study. Prior to the intervention, a pre-interview session was held with the teacher. The research was conducted in five sessions; a two hours' session for a week for five weeks' time period. During the five weeks the sessions were handled by the Cambridge teacher while the researcher remained as an observer. At the end of the intervention, a post-interview session was held. The findings of the study (through the thematic analysis of the data) identify that designing and organizing a collaborative language-learning environment, improvisation tasks being time-consuming and understanding the role of the teacher in a learner-centred classroom as the major challenges needed to be overcome when utilizing improvisation in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: SLA, ESL, Improvisation, Learner-centred classroom, collaborative language learning environment.