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Factors Influencing The Performance of ESL Speaking Skills, and Vocal Rendering of Carnatic Music-A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to compare Factors influencing the performance of ESL speaking skills, and vocal rendering of carnatic music. This study compares the performances of the English as a second language speaking skill performances of the first year students and the first year music students from the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. It is found that the students' performance in speaking skills at the first year in the faculty of arts is very poor. Likewise the Carnatic music performance of the students from the Ramanathan Academy of Fine arts too is found to be very poor except for a few exceptional students. This study explored the common problems faced by the target groups in learning their respective subjects and obtaining proficiency in them. The study emerges as both qualitative and quantitative research. Thirty five students from the first year Arts and thirty five from the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts were selected randomly for the study. The participants' oral speaking skills and music performance were taken as data for the study. The marks obtained were analyzed along with the staffs' observation in the performance of both English language oral presentations and Carnatic music practical examination. From the analysis it is found that there are common as well as different Factors Influencing The Performance of ESL Speaking Skills, and Vocal Rendering of Carnatic Music. The study has an implication of exposing the learners' challenges in learning these subjects and to implement the recommendations and suggestion put forward as a solution for better and good performance in both the subjects.

Key words:ESL learners, Carnatic music learners, speaking skill performance,music performance.

1 Introduction

English as a second language (ESL) learning is introduced from the primary to tertiary levels in Sri Lanka. The ESL participants in this study are at the tertiary level. Their performance in ESL is found to be poor even though they have learned ESL from their primary levels. The participants who learn Carnatic music as their main subjects are found to be not up to the expected level in which they are following their degree.

1.1 ESL learners

English as a Second Language Learners who are the participants of the study are of various proficiency levels. They have entered the university from various parts of Sri Lanka. Except for a few exceptional learners, majority of them have problems in comprehending and performing productive tasks such as speaking and writing in English at the first year.

1.2 Carnatic Music Learners

"Carnatic music is a system of music commonly associated with the southern part of the Indian subcontinent. It is one of two main subgenres of Indian classical music that evolved from ancient Hindu traditions. The main emphasis in Carnatic music is on vocal music; most compositions are written to be sung, and even when played on instruments, they are meant to be performed in singing style".

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnatic_music).

The Carnatic music participants of this study come from different learning backgrounds. There are some exceptional students who have learned music from their childhood. Majority of the students have started to learn music at the G.C.E O/L and some who learned even later do not perform well in music.

1.3 ESL Speaking Skills

Speaking is a productive skill. Majority of the undergraduate students are unable to speak English confidently. They are not confident enough to pronounce words, utter sentences and interact with others meaningfully due to the low proficiency in English language speaking skills. In order to obtain proficiency in speaking, the basic speaking elements such as pronunciation, speed, fluency, accuracy, loudness, and meaning full utterances, speaking according to different situations and logical communication are indispensable. Most importantly they have to get exposed to the native speaker's English, even though they learn from the person who learnt it as a second language. The knowledge of English phonology is vital to pronounce words, understand conversations, and discourses.

1.4 Music performance

The performance in music is a deciding factor for the intake of music students. Yet the music performances of the learners in the first year Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts are found to be not up to the expected level. The knowledge of music and practicing it is indispensable to perform well in music.

2. Background of the study

The participants of the study perform poorly in ESL speaking skills and music performances. There are many factors which have an

effect on obtaining proficiency in both the subjects. Among these factors common problems faced by the participants are explored in this study.

3. Research problem

Students in the first year Arts degree program offering English as a second language and the students who offer music as a subject at the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts fail to obtain good grades in their subjects. Fifty percent of them get less than 'B' grades in their subjects. This study attempts to research on the common factors which influence in obtaining good grades in their respective subjects.

4. Research questions

1. What are the common factors which have an effect on obtaining good grades in ESL and music?
2. Would it be helpful if the participants study the sound elements such as phonological aspects for ESL, and increase listening to music and practicing music?

5. Methodology

Thirty five ESL first year students from the Faculty of Arts and thirty five music students from the Ramanathan Faculty of Fine Arts were taken as sample for the study. The factors which have an effect in obtaining the proficiency in speaking skills of the ESL learners and music were compared. The ESL oral presentations were utilized to identify the challenges the learners face in obtaining proficiency in speaking skills. The practical examination in music and the performance of the participants were taken as sample for the study. The observations on the performances of the participants' ESL oral tests and Music practical examinations were compared.

Analysis

Performances of ESL and music rendering

Out of the thirty five students who did the oral presentations twenty five participants were found to have obtained less than 45 marks. They had failed to pronounce the words including 'english' which they pronounced as 'englis'. Majority of them could not continue to speak on the topic given to them even though they were given time to prepare the speech. The accuracy and loudness in presenting were poor. The participants were reluctant to continue their presentations. Apart

from the content of the speech the researcher observed that the important linguistic elements needed for speaking were lacking in their performances. The researcher could observe the fact that the participants performances were monotonous (-lack of changing tones) and did not follow the correct pitch .on the whole the ESL participants’ fluency in oral presentation was very low.

The performance of the participants, in the vocal rendering of the Carnatic music in the practical examination, was analysed. Twenty one participants obtained less than the pass marks. The observations of the music judges indicated their dissatisfaction in the performances of the participants. They stated that many of them could not continue in the given raga. The participants got confused of the raga they were singing in the middle of their performances. Some of the participants did not correctly

pronounce the words and swaras. When they sang they could not sing along with the sruthi which is a basic requisition for a Carnatic music rendering. The observations of the music teachers reveal the fact that the participants are do not listen and practice different compositions/urupaddigal with different ragas. They further stated that the participants have lack of memory. They expressed that to sing flawlessly the participants need lot of preparation in singing various compositions and practice them regularly.

6. Findings and Discussions

The following grid derived from the data collected from the observations of the participants’ performances in ESL oral tests and Music practical tests display the core and common factors which have an effect in obtaining the proficiency in ESL and music.

Factors determining proficiency in the two subjects	Music	English as a second language
	Seventy two ragas and seven talas and seven Swaras	Vowels, diphthongs, consonants(phonological aspects)
Exposure	Listen to and participate in music recitals	Listen to and take part in conversations
Memory	Memorize Seventy two ragas and seven talas and compositions in Tamil and telugu	Have in memory the phonological morphological syntax ,semantic features of English language
Sound perception	Listen and Recognize appropriate sound elements such as pitch, duration, loudness, spatial location ,	Listen and recognize appropriate sound elements, Pitch ,intonation hesitation , loudness the situation of interaction and spatial location
Sound discrimination	Identify ragas ,talas compositions and the types of compositions	Understand various discourses identify the speakers andsituation where the speech is made.
Proficiency depends on individual efforts	Self learning through listening and practicing and performing	Self learning through listening and practicespeaking and delivering speeches
Apply knowledge	Duration of performance	Duration of speaking
Creativity	Create new compositions	Creative in interaction
Motivation	Interest and involvement in music	Interest and involvement in speaking the second language

6.1 Findings from ESL learners

There are number of factors related to the effective performance in music and ESL at the first

year. Due to the limitation of the study some important factors are selected for the study. As shown in the above grid, familiarization with the

sound patterns, sound perception, and sound discrimination of the target language is found to be a deciding factor in developing proficiency in speaking skills. Even though there are five vowels (a,e,i,o,u) in English the pronunciation varies when they are combined with other letters. Therefore the learners face difficulties in pronouncing words. In English language some words do not have final sound such as the final /b/ sound in the word 'bomb'. In certain words there are differences in pronouncing /z /and/ s/sounds. The consonants/k/ and /g/are not correctly pronounced by second language learners. Words for example 'go' is pronounced as 'ko', 'get' as 'ket' and 'gate' as 'kate'. The word 'has' is pronounced as 'kas'. Likewise it is also found that the learners' mother tongue influence interferes in their spoken English. The learners have to learn correct vowel and consonant sounds. The words such as coat and court are pronounced without any difference which also cause draw back in obtaining correct meaning and spelling of the words. There are various examples such as these which indicate that the phonological and phonetic knowledge is essential for the teachers and learners of English language. Another factor that acts as a drawback for not acquiring native speakers' accents is the influence of the mother tongue. The mother tongue influences the acquisition of second language. Therefore the learners need to differentiate not only the letters and alphabets but also different places of articulation and learn how to articulate the words in the target language. The learner needs exposure to the target language either by listening through media and other electronic devices or by getting exposed to the native English speaking environment. It is also essential for the learner to grasp the correct pronunciation, intonation, pitch, and meaning of words and utterances in different situations. The learners have to continuously be in touch with learning ESL to use language in a flexible manner and especially the speaking skills in order to develop proficiency in speaking skills.

6.2 Findings from Music learners

It is found that the learner of music has to learn the 'swara varisai' and seventy two melakartha ragas and their corresponding janya ragas and

'talas'. The seven 'swaras' are used in various ways to indicate the types of ragas. The main feature of carnatic music is melody. The sound patterns, the sound perception and sound discrimination are found to be important factors for learning music. The observations of practical performances of the participants indicate that the various ragas should be differentiated by developing the wide knowledge of carnatic music. A poor listener or a non practitioner cannot proceed further as each raga has a different arogana, avaroganam. The learner has to have regular practice of the basic and essential music notes to have perfect and thorough knowledge of it. The learner should be familiar to the compositions in order to sing them and apply their knowledge to create new compositions. In an advanced stage the learner has to be fit to sing various compositions and should be able to compose his own compositions. The proficiency in music therefore depends very much in individual efforts. Once the nuances of carnatic music are grasped and flexibility in using them is obtained, the practitioner can give recitals and show his creativity in his music compositions and recitals. One has to be motivated from the child hood or early years in order to be a good musician. The learner has to be instrumentally and intrinsically motivated to get the music knowledge through parents, teachers, and listening to great musicians' recitals and participate in recitals. A musician like a second language learner has to work hard to improve proficiency in the subject mainly through his own search and hard work.

The findings clearly reveal the fact that lot of factors influence obtaining proficiency in ESL as well as in Music. At the same time the study, due to limitation has presented the core factors which are found to be common factors which influence mastering ESL and Music proficiency. The study reveals the fact that sound patterns, perception, familiarity, sound discrimination, effort, motivation, creativity, practice and application of the subject knowledge are found to be the common factors which have an effect in obtaining good grades in ESL and Music. The study reveals the fact that it would be more effective if the participants are aware of the above discussed and other factors which play an

important role in improving their proficiency in ESL and Carnatic Music. The study has an implication for giving emphasis to the above discussed aspect for teaching both English and Carnatic Music.

7. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the performances of the English as a second language speaking skills of the first year Arts students and the first year music students from the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, reveal the fact that there are common factors influencing the proficiency of ESL and Carnatic music. The study by analyzing the observations of the speaking and music performances has found the reason for poor performance in both the subject is due to the many factors and most importantly not listening or getting exposed to the ESL speaking and music performances or recordings. The phonology and phonetics knowledge is found to be essential for ESL learners as well as for the teachers. The study implies the fact that the participants from the Ramanathan Fine Arts need to learn the basic elements of music and Seventy two melakartha ragas and talas should be kept in memory. For both the participants memorizing practicing and performing are found to be indispensable to improve proficiency in the relevant subjects.

8. Suggestions and Recommendations

Learning ESL and music at the primary levels could be encouraged-according to the psychologists as the long term memory could be easily stored -at an early age. The organs involved in speech are flexible in the early ages. Likewise the musicians who learn at an early age get the flexibility to sing. It is essential to have the capability to sing in low, middle and high pitches in music. Learning from a good teacher or guru is also essential to learn the complex compositions. The child should be encouraged and motivated by all the people around him at an early age to learn ESL and music. The school teachers and peers also should support the education of the child. The study materials, tools and environments play a major role in learning ESL and Carnatic music. The learning of these two subjects if neglected at any level will cause damage to the learners' motivation to learn. The learners of both the subjects should be able to

perform well in both the subjects at secondary and tertiary levels. They should then be able learn on their own and go on developing the essential skills in the subjects through self study. The learners of these subjects very much depend on listening to the second language speakers and music performances of experts. At this stage the learners should be able to correct their mistakes and observe their deficiencies in speaking the language and in their music performances. Today one can learn and practice both ESL speaking skills and Music through various e- learning and other sources and develop his or her proficiency in the relevant subject.

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