

Topic

The impact of student heterogeneity in implementation of Activity Based Oral English

Author

R. M. D. Rohan

Degree

Master of Education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other languages.

The Kannangara report in 1943 which suggested to make vernacular languages the medium of instruction, introduced a new subject to Sri lankan education system i.e. English as a second language. Since the introduction, it started to be one of the subjects that attracted the attention of education researchers. Still, there is a problem about the age level at which English should be introduced as a second language. Throughout the history of Sri lankan education after the independence, English has been tried to be introduced at different levels. The most recent attempt is introducing communicative English in ABOE as a part of Environment Related Activities in grade 1.

It is an accepted fact that from grade 1, students begin to show their individual differences and begin to build up as independent personalities acquiring their culture. These individual differences are referred to as student heterogeneity and it is concerned in the research with ABOE. The research pays its attention on how the teachers can make use of ABOE to minimize the student heterogeneity and its effects on learning teaching process.

The research is based on the following objectives;

1. Explain the concept of student heterogeneity.
2. Identify the theoretical basis of Activity Based Oral English.
3. Examine how ABOE is being implemented in the classroom.
4. Analyze how the problem of student heterogeneity is addressed in relation to how Activity Based Oral English is practiced.

5. Suggest ways of minimizing student heterogeneity through ABOE.

Theoretical foundation of ABOE and student heterogeneity were identified the review of literature in chapter 2.

To achieve the above mentioned objectives the research was conducted with the help of the following instruments.

1. A questionnaire to 100 teachers of grade 1 and 2 classes.
2. Observation of 15 era lessons in three schools.
3. Informal interviews/discussions.

The questionnaire and the observation schedule were designed so that the objectives are achieved. They were tested in advance and necessary adjustments were made.

Fifteen ERA lessons were observed going by the observation schedule. Simultaneously, data was gathered through informal discussions and interviews. Then the questionnaire was administered among 125 teachers.

The results of 100 answered questionnaires were analyzed and discussed in relation to the data gathered through observation and informal interviews. Through the analysis the following findings were made.

ABOE as a new subject area some teachers think it to be an extra burden whereas some feel it as an interesting way of introducing English subject to the students. Anyway it was understood that the students practice it to different levels in the classroom. In practicing ABOE teachers' knowledge of English knowledge appeared to affect the quality of teaching. It was further revealed that majority of the teachers did not have a clear understanding about what ABOE is.

In relation to teacher training of ABOE several problems were revealed. A major problem found in relation to teacher training was that those programmes did not have uniformity in the duration at different areas where the research was conducted. It was

further revealed that although these programmes provided the teachers with some kind of knowledge it was not what they expected. Instead, they wanted practical solutions to the problems they face in the classroom.

When student heterogeneity is considered it was revealed that some teachers do not accept student heterogeneity to be the natural situation of the classroom. Some of the teachers who accept that it is the natural situation do not perceive it to be a problem. Those who identify student heterogeneity to be a problem do not have any idea about the techniques to handle it effectively in the classroom or how to minimize it using new techniques. Although the teachers say that they use different techniques to handle student heterogeneity, observations of the lessons proved that they just followed routine classroom activities. Some teachers tried to solve the above problem by dividing the students into equal ability groups whereas majority of them divided the students into mixed ability groups.

As solutions to the above problems, following recommendations were made. Suggesting a flexible list of words to be introduced during the lessons would help the teachers to adapt easily to the new situation. To compensate the lack of knowledge of English of the primary teachers, the work of ISAs is suggested to extend to the ABOE also. If it is not possible a new set of mentors for ABOE can be appointed.

There should be an experienced body of officials to regulate the teacher training programmes. Teacher training should be revised to meet the demands of the teachers.

To minimize the student heterogeneity in the class three types of activities are suggested. They are whole class activities, group activities and pair activities. Whole class activities are further divided into two sub parts as;

Start-up activities that are followed by group work and

Whole class activities performed at different levels.

They are further described in chapter five.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is a research conducted in Giriulla education zone of the Kurunegala district taking ABOE and student heterogeneity as the basic considerations. This chapter provides the background to the study and the significance of the study. Objectives of the study are also mentioned in this chapter. Methodology of the study is briefly mentioned paying attention to the limitations of the study also. Definitions and technical terms that are used in the following chapters are defined.

1.1 *Background to the Study*

Teaching of English has been an issue in the Sri Lankan education system for decades. There was a period when English was the medium of instruction. There is a belief that the deterioration of the standard of English education began since it was made a second language.

The problem of English language teaching to primary grades arose when the system, which used English as the medium of instruction, was changed into vernacular instruction. At the beginning, nobody had a clear idea as to when to begin and how to begin teaching English as a second language. The committee appointed to advise on the curricula, which are most suitable for primary and junior secondary schools suggested an integrated approach to learning through environmental activities as the most suitable method. Yet, there is no evidence to show that such kind of teaching continued for a long time in Sri Lanka's education system. Is it because primary education and English education were neglected from the beginning?

A number of new programmes have been suggested, planned and launched in order to uplift the achievement levels of English language skills of the students. But most of them have proved to be unsuccessful. One of the latest measures taken to develop the English language skills of the students is introduction of oral English at primary level. The programme is named "ABOE"; Activity Based Oral English.

Activity Based Oral English (of which the pilot project was conducted in 1988 in Gampaha district) was introduced to schools in 1999. ABOE was designed in order to provide English for communication to students of Grade 1 and 2. Although ABOE has been in progress for more than half a decade, only a few national level researches have been conducted on ABOE.

The programme was introduced to grade 1 and 2 of the schools to develop the students' oral skills in English. Students were advocated to familiarize themselves with the nouns and the verbs that are commonly used in the immediate environment. Teachers are expected to let students learn words as much as possible when they engage in fun activities. ABOE is included as a part of the subject environmental studies. Given below are the objectives of ABOE.

- Provide opportunities for students to get familiarize with simple words in English that are necessary for day-to-day activities.
- Provide an environment that is conducive for the use of simple English both in and out of the classroom.
- Diminish the reluctance in students to use English
- Create an environment of enthusiasm to learn English

The teacher is advised to include ABOE during a period of six hours that is allocated for Environment Related Activities. The teacher's guide of grade 1 and 2 include exemplar vocabulary lists I and II respectively. However, the teacher has the freedom to reduce or include new words if necessary.

ABOE is expected to be implemented in the following way.

Grade 1 – ABOE is introduced in single words

Grade 2 – proceed to use short phrases

Grade 3 – students would develop a communication flow in simple expressions. (Formal teaching of English language begins at this level) A.B.O.E. continues along with formal English language lessons up to grade 5.

Student heterogeneity is another major concern that prevails in almost every class. Although heterogeneity is the natural situation of a classroom, almost every teacher finds it to be the most critical problem to handle in the ESL classroom. When students come with

different ability levels, different achievement levels as well as different attitudes it creates a series of problems to the teacher since she is expected to make them achieve the same level at the end of a lesson or at the end of the year. Since the students are different personalities, their desires differ and the problems they create in the classroom also differ. Since the teachers have to tackle all these situations they find student heterogeneity to be the most critical problem to handle in the classroom.

Through ABOE apparently, conversational English was supposed to be provided to students in key stage 1, while they are engaged in guided play activities under Environmental related activities. This is expected to be carried out by the class teacher, not by a special teacher. Further, no separate periods have been allocated for teaching of ABOE.

But the practical situation is far more different than what is suggested. There is evidence to prove that most of the schools have started teaching English to key stage 1 using English teachers under the name ABOE. It is doubtful under these circumstances whether the students learn through guided play activities. If it is not happening in the way suggested, will the objectives of ABOE be achieved? Key stage 1 is the period during which students are still preparing to learn. If they are burdened with a heavy load of knowledge, students who are not prepared will be confused and it may broaden student heterogeneity.

In ABOE, no summative assessments are suggested. Informal assessments like observation, oral questioning and listening to children are expected to give more emphasis. They should be done for diagnostic purposes. Necessary remedial measures should be taken for learning difficulties. No written question papers are expected to be given to the students in the first two terms. If the teachers feel that it is necessary to give written question papers in the third term it should be prepared by the class teacher. Teachers are requested not to use question papers prepared by external institutions. But, the majority of the schools buy question papers from external institutions (appendix 1), as it is time saving and less costly. There is no guarantee that these question papers are prepared by experts in the field. Teachers have no idea about the suitability of those question papers to the level of the students. These question papers often create more learning problems, making remedial work more difficult rather than providing feedback on teaching learning process.

Another area of major concern in ABOE is its Teacher Training. Sunil Atugoda, the Director of English in the National Institute of Education, writing to Daily News on 15. 03. 2005 complained that the teachers have not got enough training to introduce a second language to key stage 1 students. Although they get a short-term training on how to teach ABOE, it is doubtful whether they get enough language practice. Some teachers may be sufficiently fluent in the language but do they have knowledge about special methodology in teaching a second language to beginners.

When the above facts are taken into consideration, it is obvious that ABOE has created a number of practical problems during the relatively shorter period in which it has been in practice. Yet, the national level researches conducted on ABOE have not paid much attention to the above problems. They have mainly aimed at investigating how ABOE is practised in the classroom thus wasting the opportunity of investigating into how ABOE could be utilized to find solutions to at least a few of the problems that prevail in the English language teaching context.

Hence, this study aims at finding out how ABOE is implemented in the classrooms. Further, it aims at probing into the teacher training provided to the teachers. By analyzing the above two procedures the study finally aims at suggesting some measures to handle student heterogeneity and to reduce it in the English language classroom.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Although ABOE has been introduced in 1999, only a few researches have been conducted regarding its effectiveness. Among them, few researches were conducted island wide. Although this research does not cover the whole island, it aims at studying ABOE in deep.

When the aspect of student heterogeneity is concerned it is depressing to note that majority of the teachers do not know what it means. The minority who knows what it means still is unable to identify the heterogeneous situation in the class. Although they are aware of the heterogeneity, they do not perceive it as a major factor that results in most of the critical problems in the class. Even though they are aware of all the problems that have

arisen due to heterogeneity and have become aware that this problem is seriously in need of solutions, very little hands on solutions are there for the problem.

A number of researches have been done on student heterogeneity in both local and foreign contexts. But majority of them have rarely gone beyond analyzing what heterogeneity is and the causes of heterogeneity. Very little researches have suggested measures on how to handle heterogeneity in the classroom.

This research brings ABOE and student heterogeneity together, thus trying to fill the vacuum of research in ABOE. As it aims at finding out how ABOE is practised in the classroom, teachers as well as officials will be able to get an idea on how it is actually practised in the classroom.

Those who are interested in the practical use of ABOE [especially, the teachers who teach in key stage one classes] will at the end get an idea about how to handle ABOE lessons effectively and minimize student heterogeneity in primary classes. On the other hand, the teachers who are trying to find out methods to handle student heterogeneity will be benefited by the findings of the research. Eventually, this research will give at least a few solutions to the problem of student heterogeneity paving way to another series of researches on ABOE and student heterogeneity.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

As discussed in 1.1, student heterogeneity has been a major problem in a classroom that any teacher irrespective of the subject they teach, has to handle although some educationists claim that it is and must be the natural situation in a class. As given at the end of 1.1, the aims of this study are, studying the classroom procedure of ABOE, its teacher training and finally suggesting ways as to how ABOE could be used to minimize the problem of student heterogeneity. Based on the above aims the researcher decided on the following objectives of the study.

6. Explain the concept of student heterogeneity.

7. Identify the theoretical basis of Activity Based Oral English.
8. Examine how ABOE is being implemented in the classroom.
9. Analyze how the problem of student heterogeneity is addressed in relation to how Activity Based Oral English is practiced.
10. Suggest ways of minimizing student heterogeneity through ABOE.

1.4 Methodology of the Study

To achieve the objectives mentioned in 1.2 the following methodology will be followed.

The first two objectives (explaining the concept of student heterogeneity and identifying the theoretical basis of ABOE.) will be achieved through the “Theoretical Background and the Review of Related Literature” (Chapter Two). Cognitive development theories and second language theories will be analyzed to find out the theoretical basis of ABOE. Further, “The Monitor Model, The Good Language Learner Model, The Carol Model and Cognitive development theories will be discussed to supply the theoretical background to the concept of student heterogeneity. Related literature will be discussed to provide the significance of the study.

To examine how the ABOE programme is implemented in the classroom, observation of 30 lessons will be done. 30 lessons will consist of 15 lessons in grade 1 and 15 lessons in grade 2 classes. Three schools will be selected for the observations. They will be selected to represent type3, type 2 and 1 C schools.

A teacher training programme on ABOE too will be observed to find out whether the training supplies any knowledge to teachers on how to handle student heterogeneity through ABOE. A questionnaire will be given to a sample of 200 teachers who teach in grade 1 and 2. 100 questionnaires are expected to analyze in order to find out whether the teachers have a clear understanding about student heterogeneity and know how to handle

heterogeneity. Further, the questionnaire aims at finding out the problems the teachers of ABOE face while classroom practice. Finding out whether the teachers actually got knowledge on how to handle student heterogeneity through ABOE during the teacher training programme and whether they use that knowledge practically in the classroom are also aimed through the questionnaire. The effectiveness of those techniques used by teachers to handle student heterogeneity will be assessed when the questionnaire is analyzed.

The gathered data from observations and questionnaires will be analyzed in relation to the theories discussed in chapter two to achieve the objective number 4. Subsequently to the analysis of data, the researcher would be able to draw out the conclusions on how ABOE is used to address student heterogeneity in the classroom and further, the researcher would be able to make suggestions to use ABOE more effectively to minimize the problem of student heterogeneity in the class.

1.5 Limitations Of The Study

One of the major limitations of the study is the inability to get the views of the target group of ABOE. As ABOE is conducted in grade 1 and 2, it was very difficult to get the ideas of the students. The only information that can be gathered about the target group is whether they like this programme or not. This can be found out during observations. Yet, their responses to the lessons too depend on the performance of the teacher.

The research is conducted in Giriulla Education Zone. Three schools situated close to each other were selected for convenience of access.. They belong to three types of schools. As only three schools are observed, a 1 AB school is not included in the sample. It is because; very rarely one finds a 1 AB school with grade 1 and 2 classes in the area. This could be one of the major limitations in the study.

As the major concern of the study is student heterogeneity, different types of heterogeneity would have been studied, had the research been conducted in all four types of the schools. As 1 AB schools are considered to be rich with facilities, it would have

been important to study how the teachers of these schools practise ABOE in the classroom and how they handle student heterogeneity.

1.6 *Definitions and Technical Terms*

The following definitions, technical terms and abbreviations are constantly used in the thesis. They are described in detail for the readers who are not familiar with those terms.

ABOE: Activity Based Oral English.

Key Stage 1:

Grades 1 and 2 are named as key stage 1. Students aged 5-7 years are included in this stage. They are in the intuitive phase of the pre-operational stage of cognitive development. Learners of this age show unique characteristics. Taking into consideration the nature of learners in this phase, education guidelines are drawn out for the learners in this phase.

Peiris K. G. (1973), in her paper submitted for the “Bulletins of UNESCO regional office for education in Asia” in June 1973 presented the following guidelines as identified by the planners and designers of primary education in Sri Lanka.

- Children learn willingly and responsively when they are offered meaningful experiences in a natural setting, making abundant use of the environment familiar to them. Consequently, the compartmentalized subject curriculum at the primary level should give way to a set of integrated activities, which children may pursue freely according to their interests and inclinations.
- Children pass through pre-operational and concrete operational stages during the period when they are in the primary school. They will therefore learn actively through all their senses. Challenging and activity based

teaching, promoting guided and discovery learning to catch the imagination and attention of young children are necessary.

- In addition to planned physical exercises geared to gain healthy physical growth, free movement, role-playing, improvised music and drama and devices for thought stimulation should be used for nurturing and developing creativity in children.

The environment influences education a lot. The primary child is a constructive thinker. The concepts he forms and the training he gets for abstract thought are dependent upon the extent and the variety of his active experience.

Heterogeneity:

One of the major concerns of the research is heterogeneity; to be exact 'student heterogeneity'. Heterogeneity means the state of being made up of different kinds or the state of being varied in composition. Here, the research is almost completely concerned about student heterogeneity as always heterogeneity has a broad meaning inclusive of differences of physical facilities, school type, location of the school and the medium of instruction.

When we talk about student heterogeneity it also carries a broad meaning. Students come from various social backgrounds and their socio cultural factors differ. They may belong to various ethnic groups and religions. Racial and religious beliefs powerfully affect learning as they begin to perceive everything through the knowledge provided to them by their culture since birth. In rural areas, there can be students of various age levels in a single classroom (Researcher's personal experience is that it is a common feature in rural schools). Distinctively, there are two big groups in a classroom; male and female unless it is a single gender school (a boys' school or a girls' school). There is heterogeneity in physical appearance of the students. Basically, girls and boys differ in appearance. Then there are differences of height, weight and complexion. Personality levels, feelings, desires and attitudes differ from child to child. Keeping in mind that the teacher has to tackle all these individual differences in a single classroom in less than an hour, the researcher pays his attention on variety of ability levels of the students when the word heterogeneity is mentioned.

“All classes are of course, mixed ability.”

(Prodromou, 1994)

PELP: Primary English Language Programme.

It is the new English language-teaching programme introduced to key stage 2 (grade 2 and 3) and key stage 3 (grade 5) under general education reforms 1997. Its pilot project was conducted in Gampaha district in 1998 and started island wide in 1999. “Let’s Learn English” textbook series was introduced under this programme.

RESC;

Regional English Support Centres. At least there is one centre in each district whose aim is supporting the development of English language knowledge of the students of the area and developing the knowledge of teaching methodology of the English teachers in the region as suggested by its name. These centres are headed by the NIE.

NIE;

National Institute of Education. It is the responsible body of teacher training and curriculum management of all the subjects taught in national schools. They also have an interest in offering courses for the teacher development in different subjects.

ERA:

Environment Related Activities. A subject in which key stage one students are given education about natural elements of our surrounding and different people who live around us.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 *Introduction*

Chapter one provided the background to the study. “Student Heterogeneity”, Activity Based Oral English programme” and how it is practised in the classroom were briefly described in the same chapter. Explanation of research problems and objectives of the study brought out the significance of the study. The area of the research and the target population had to be decided taking several factors into consideration. Those delimitations were also discussed in the first chapter.

Second chapter will deal with the theoretical basis and research history relating to the study. Theories behind Activity based Oral English programme will be identified through analysis of second language acquisition theories. Theoretical basis of “student heterogeneity” will be analyzed to examine whether the two theoretical backgrounds support each other to minimize the problems in practical situations. Past researches done in both international arena and local setting regarding primary education and Activity Based Oral English will be analyzed to rationalize the significance and the need for the study.

2.2 *Theoretical basis*

2.2.1 *Second language acquisition theories*

Mentalist’s views of second language learning.

Eric Lenneberg (1967) and Bickerton (1981) argued on a critical period after which certain language abilities cannot be acquired. This critical period for second language acquisition generally occurs around puberty. After the critical period, a learner is incapable of acquiring native like pronunciation. This may be due to lack of plasticity of their muscles of oral organs. Phonologically speaking, there are differences between sounds of various languages. Some sounds that are found in one language are not found in another. As well as, there are differences in pronunciation. Children's muscles of the face and mouth shape according to the pronunciation of the first language they acquire. Most of the psychologists and linguists seem to be unanimous on the fact that lower order processes such as pronunciation are determined in the early maturing stages.

If a certain second language-learning programme primarily aims at native like pronunciation the best option will be to start the same at the early stages of development. If ABOE aims at helping students achieve native like pronunciation, are effective and accurate models supplied to them? Can a primary teacher who has no training in teaching English or knowledge about phonology in English provide correct model to students? (This is further discussed under the objectives of ABOE programme).

Solution to the above problems lies in the input provided to the students. Hence, it is worthwhile paying attention to the theories of input.

The comprehensible Input Hypothesis.

Krashan's theory (1981) that speaks about comprehensible input, intake and acquisition rich environment comprises of 5 hypotheses. Although Krashan speaks about adult second language learners, it can be used to discuss second language learning of young learners as a major part of this theory discusses acquisition and affective considerations of second language learning.

1. Acquisition /Learning Hypothesis

Krashan explains that there are two ways in which adult second language learners learn English. They acquire the language through meaningful interaction with immediate target language groups or individuals. At the same time they learn the language, especially

in the formal language classroom paying attention to grammar (form) and error correction. What is needed in learning the language at this stage is the acquisition rich environment. Acquisition is facilitated if the environment is full of language learning opportunities. When the input available in the environment is comprehensible to the learner it creates an acquisition rich environment for the learner.

II. Monitor hypothesis.

The above mentioned acquired language comes in to action in spontaneous language production resulting in fluency whereas the learned system acts as an editor or a monitor which claims for accuracy in out-come. There are three conditions that are necessary for monitor use; sufficient time, focus on form and knowing the rules.

III. `Natural order Hypothesis.

There is a natural sequence according to which the learners acquire the rules of the language. The rules, which are easier to state, may not be the first to acquire. For example most of the teachers agree that the present progressive and the simple past tense are acquired by learners earlier and quicker than the third person singular “s”.

III. The input hypothesis.

Krashan argues that language is acquired by receiving “comprehensible input”. According to Krashan language input that is just beyond the current level of competence of the learner is called “comprehensible input”.

V. The affective Filter hypothesis.

Attitudes, needs, motives and emotional status of the learner act as a barrier, which prevents learners using input. A learner who is emotionally disturbed or whose basic needs are not satisfied may screen out input making acquisition more difficult.

Activity Based Oral English targets at making the students’ learning environment full of English terms. This may result in an acquisition rich environment. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make it a comprehensible input. In order to do this they must have a clear understanding about the current level of the knowledge of the students.

The heterogeneity factor comes in to action here. As all the students are not in the same level, for some of them it may be comprehensible input while for most of the students it may be incomprehensible. Further there can be several students for whom it can be input lower than their current level of language competency.

The other consideration here is the affective filter. If input becomes incomprehensible, the input itself might activate the affective filter. When affective filter is up it works to hinder input becoming intake. This in turn increases student heterogeneity as a result of several students taking the input whereas the rest remain unreceptive to the input.

The interaction hypothesis.

Long in interaction hypothesis acknowledges Krashan's input hypothesis. Further Long emphasizes the significance of interaction among learners, the learners with the teacher and the learners with more competent language users or native speakers. When more competent speakers communicate with less competent speakers the latter may ask questions from the former in order to get clarified what was incomprehensible to him. This "negotiation for meaning" would result in gaining comprehensible input.

The comprehensible output hypothesis.

Comprehensible input and interaction would not completely determine second language learning. Comprehensible output is necessary for meaningful and grammatically correct production of language. That is the basic argument of Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis. Thus, Swain emphasizes that language production in social interaction is important for students to incur semantic and syntactic processing. Students try their knowledge of language in comprehensible interaction with the society resulting in meaningful and accurate out-put. Social interaction is very important, as production in isolation (in a language laboratory or a classroom where a few students who are at the same level of language competency interact) will not provide opportunity for comprehensible out-put.

ABOE classroom is uncertain to be an environment, which provides opportunities for students to produce comprehensible out-put. When a teacher who is not specialized in

teaching English and a programme, which is meant to provide English input in mother tongue medium the scope for ABOE to create a successful learning environment for English seems to be limited. There can be several considerations for the above-mentioned problem.

“The draw-back that has been there up to now was that all these Grade 1 & 2 teachers have not undergone adequate training to learn methodologies to be used in introducing English to those grades.”

(Atugoda 2005, p 8-9)

Teacher Training seems to be a major consideration. ABOE is a second language-learning programme. To which extent are the primary teachers aware of second language learning conditions? Does the ongoing teacher-training programme on ABOE include special methodologies of teaching a second language? Does it give enough subject knowledge and knowledge about the amount of language input that should be given to the students? In the same article, the director of English in the National Institute of Education argues as follows.

“It is a belief of educationists that the child should not be burdened unnecessarily and confused by giving too much at this very young age. In fact, getting to know the intricacies of the mother tongue is a task in it self, and if more than what he can grasp are been pushed down forcibly, the child who is not prepared can become confused, which can do much harm than any good at all.”

(Atugoda 2005, p8-9)

It is evident that if teaching is done without taking into consideration the actual state of the learner it can lead to confusion in their mental development. Further, it can widen the student heterogeneity in the classroom. If the students are confused at the very beginning of their learning, it might lead to an increase in dropout rates making the situation more critical. Yet there can be instances that a skilled teacher can exploit to provide the opportunities claimed in the above-mentioned theories for second language learning. Those areas are still to be researched out.

2.2.2 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget identifies four major stages of intellectual development in an individual's childhood. The first two stages of cognitive development according to Piaget are;

1. Sensorimotor;

This stage covers ages from birth to two years. In this stage, children develop reflexive activities to highly organized activities like seeking stimulation by lights and sounds, regarding an object as constant despite changes in its location (object permanency).

2. Pre operational;

Piaget divides this stage into two phases; Preoperational and Intuitive. During the preoperational phase, which continues from 2 years to 4 years children develop a number of language abilities. During this phase, children are self-centered, unable to see the fact that objects alike in one aspect may differ in others, able to collect things according to a criterion, and able to arrange things in a series. A child in this phase who is in his preschool shows inability to handle multiple classifications.

The most important phase for this study is the intuitive phase in which the students that come under the study fall. This phase continues up to age 7 at which children study in grade 1 and 2. In this latter part of the pre-operational stage students slowly build up logical and rational understanding. They begin to think without symbolic mediation.

“Slowly, perhaps by age 7, children learn to react to symbol systems in a reliable manner and to over-ride their intuitive perceptual impressions. More important, by age 7 children can symbolically transform the contents of their minds. But this can happen only if they have had extensive experience with the world at large. Meanwhile, in this intuitive preoperational stage of development, children

- Become able to form categories of objects.

- Become able to understand logical relationships of increasing complexity.
- Become able to work with the idea of number.
- Acquire the principle of conservation, that is, the idea that the amount of something stays the same regardless of changes in its shape or the number of pieces in to which it is divided.”

(Piaget cited in Gage & Berliner-1984)

According to Piaget it is evident that during this stage they acquire an enormous amount of nouns. It is the stage in which Sri Lankan students pass their key stage one in the primary school. They are in grade 1 and 2 during which period they learn Activity Based Oral English. ABOE includes a lot of vocabulary that is suitable to their age. It is more justifiable to come to the conclusion that ABOE has been designed taking into consideration the cognitive development level of the intuitive period. Yet they need to have extensive experience to develop their skills. To provide them with extensive experience there should be ample time and extensive training to the teachers.

2.2.3

Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity means the state of being made up of different kinds or the state of being varied in composition. Most of the teachers believe heterogeneity to be a problem in the classroom. Perera, M.(2002) in her unpublished thesis on “The role of classroom interaction in second language acquisition in Sri Lanka “ identifies heterogeneity as a problem, she further claims that student’s prior knowledge is the major cause for heterogeneity.

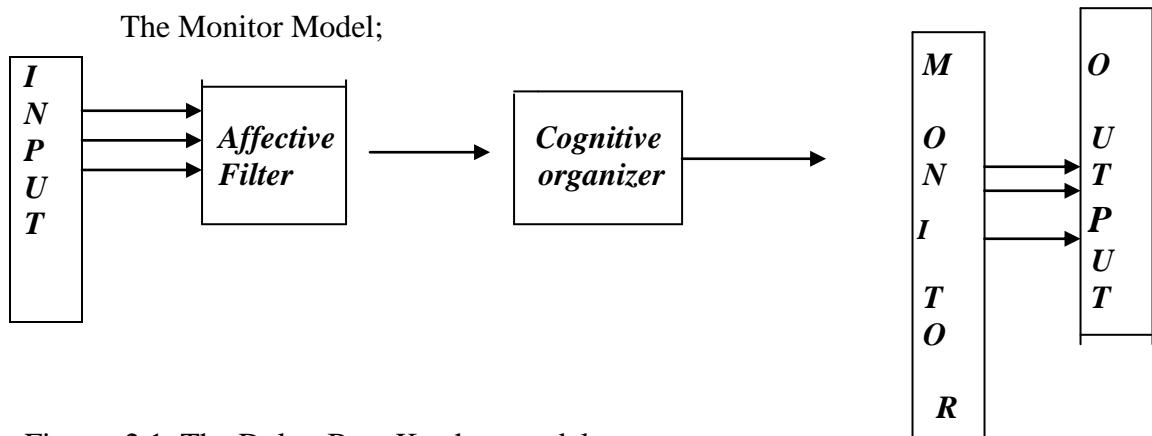
“Student heterogeneity is a problem the teachers face in most classrooms. However, in the Sri Lanka ESL classrooms this problem is compounded due to the student’s prior experience and inexperience in L₂. In the classroom in the study students’ prior knowledge and experience of L₂ beyond the school was extremely diverse. Some of the students came from English-speaking background homes and could easily converse in English. Some had no experience of English other than at school. These groups were

further differentiated by their access to English teaching in the primary school.”

(Perera, M. 2002, p.331)

Results in the same study give evidence to the fact that in the schools where student population was more homogeneous interaction in the class was livelier. Boys were more interactive than girls although most of girls were more competent than boys. The reason as suggested by Perera.2002 could be the effect of the culture of Sri Lanka where girls are expected to be docile and well behaved.

Not only the culture and prior knowledge of L₂ but also several other factors are responsible for student heterogeneity. These factors were extensively discussed in Peter Skehan’s book “Individual differences”. Three models of second language acquisition are discussed deeply in “Individual Differences”.



Figure; 2.1, The Dulay-Burt-Krashan model.

(Skehan, P. 1989, p105)

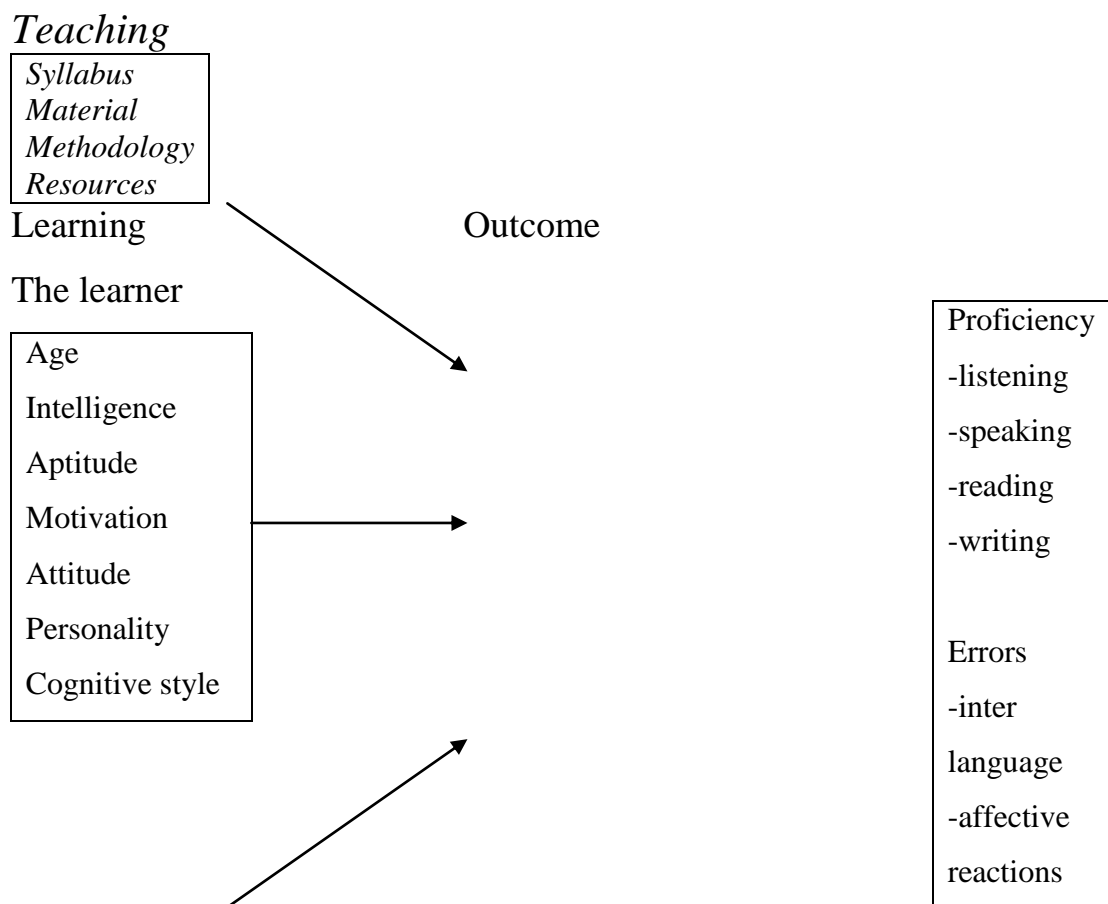
Building on this model, Krashan (1981) presented his “affective filter Hypothesis”. Outside factors of the environment markedly influence individual differences according to the above model. The amount of language input is environmentally determined. The learner’s openness or lack of anxiety may vary resulting in various levels of “Affective Filter, which influences how much “input”, is taken as intake.

When it comes to ‘Monitor’ use, over-use of ‘Monitor’; i.e. constant attempts for correctness may inhibit output. On the other hand, under-use of Monitor might result in less grammatically correct spontaneous language production. Different level of affective filter and monitor use result on drastic individual differences whereas the central component, cognitive organizer provides room for universal processes thus not affecting individual differences.

“The Good language learner model”;

Naimon , Frohlich , Todesco, and Stern (1978) proposed a taxonomy of considerations for individual differences (Skehan, P. 1989)

The model consists of three independent and two depended variables of language learning.



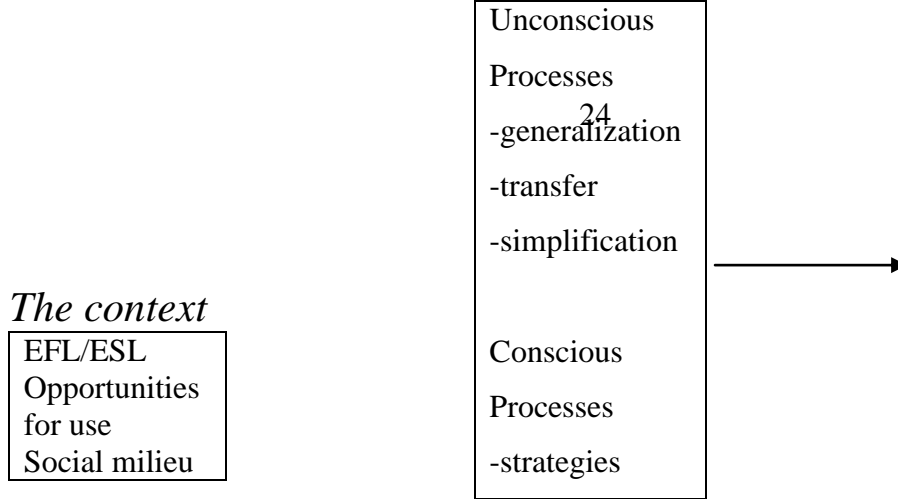


Figure 2.2

Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, Todeco, (1978)

The independent variables; teaching, the learner and the context are composites of many independent influences. Out of the above three variables, learner variable is very important. Age, intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitudes personality and cognitive styles are sub – divisors of the learner variable. They are the major characteristics of individual differences. Intelligence, Aptitudes, motivation, attitudes, personality of learners interact in various levels with methodology and class room organization and develop individuals to be unique beings thus, resulting the heterogeneity in the class.

The Carol model of school learning; (An interact ional model);

J. B. Carol (1979) put forward a school teaching model, which discusses two major classes of variables; instructional factors and individual differences.

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Instructional factors; | Individual differences |
| -Time | -General intelligences |
| -Instructional excellence | -Aptitude |
| -Motivation | |

Intelligence according to Carol is the learner’s capacity to understand instruction, and to understand what is required of him in the learning situation. It is a talent for not getting sidetracked or wasting one’s efforts. Aptitude (foreign language aptitude) is a generalized capacity to learn languages. Motivation is the individual’s need to study the languages in question and his willingness to persevere and overcome obstacles.

In criticism of Carol's model Skehan adds that it leaves altogether the context of learning, and learning strategies out.

The above three models intensely discuss the major factors of heterogeneity. Judging by what the above-mentioned three models discuss the conclusion can be arrived that heterogeneity is either widened or limited by internal factors of the individual and outside factors of the learning environment coming in to interaction. Hence, it is evident that heterogeneity is natural.

“All classes are of course, mixed ability”

(Prodromou. 1994, p12)

While some rural (unpopular) schools struggle to increase the number of students in a single class room (sometimes in the whole school) to double figures some urban schools (popular) are struggling with over crowded classes with over 50 students in a single class. No matter how hard all the teachers endeavor, these 50 students end up in almost 50 achievement levels. It is worth trying to understand several experiences from local as well as international situations where various teachers tried to solve the problem of mixed ability classes.

“Tamie Masters taught in Turkey, returned to London and said ‘even now you have to say the words-D class Mastemba- to strike terror in to my heart. But the A class in the same schools was a joy to teach.”

(Grifith. 1999, p115)

One method applied to solve the problem of student heterogeneity by most of the schools is grouping them in to same ability levels. In almost all the schools where there are more than 50 students in one grade the students are divided in to parallel classes. In most of the situations, class ‘A’ having the successful learners and class ‘D’ or ‘E’ with unsuccessful learners. In the schools all the teachers prefer to teach in class ‘A’ because ‘D’ or ‘E’ classes are well known as “undisciplined, trouble making, bulling and full of fools.” Most of the schools appoint the teachers who are known as “Good teachers” or the teachers with higher qualification and experience to class ‘A’ and most often “novice teachers” to class ‘D’ broadening the differences further.

Why do students become heterogeneous in their achievement when the same teacher teaches them in the same method using the same kind of facilities? Is it exclusively

due to their hereditary differences? The answer which can be given without any doubt is “no”.

There is no argument that children come from various backgrounds with individual differences. The first teacher who tackles them should have knowledge and ability to cater to those individual differences. If s/he can make a group with almost similar abilities, developing the less capable children up to the level of the students with higher capabilities, the teacher who takes over will not have to struggle with a mixed ability group. For this the primary teachers should have experience and practice to deal with the students’ desires, interests and various capabilities. Teachers should have an aptitude to get the attention of all the students and to give knowledge and skills to all of them at the same level.

“Each level and age group brings its own difficulties. Anyone who has no experience of dealing with young children may find it impossible to grab and hold their attention, let alone teaching them any English. A lack of inhibition is very useful for teaching young children who will enjoy sing-songs, nursery rhymes, simple puzzles and games.”

(Griffith. 1999, p11)

Teachers and school authorities that have no understanding on these individual differences make students more vulnerable and restless. Once a child becomes vulnerable s/he loses consciousness about discipline and virtues. Aine Fligg’s experience reveals these clearly. (Teaching English Abroad – p.114). She was bitten by a less receptive student on her ankle, when the headmaster came the child bit him on his nose.

Researchers have found out that, beginners of all ages progress more rapidly than intermediate learners. If what the teacher says is not understood, beginners quickly get bored and unresponsive. There, teachers have to use visual aides and sometimes even the mother tongue equivalent to teach some concept in a second language or a foreign language.

Grouping children homogeneously has proven not to be successful solution for the problem of heterogeneity Grouping children homogeneously targets at improving learning and contributing to student s’ mental, intellectual and physical growth; but reality is otherwise.

“Over the years attempts have been made to group children according to ability as a way of fostering progress in school achievement. Many research studies have been conducted to test the belief that children will succeed better if range in ability in a class could be reduced. However results indicate that this method of dealing with children’s learning has not been productive. Available evidence indicates that factors other than the particular grouping methods used account for differences in achievement gains between children grouped according to ability and those grouped heterogeneously.”

(Combs.1979, p10)

A homogeneous group in one subject may be proven to be heterogeneous in another subject. Some researchers show that homogeneous grouping results better in high achieving groups. In a high achieving group they perform better due to competition whereas students in low achieving groups lose company of high achieving students as learning models and helpers.

Arguing in favor of mixed ability groups Holden (1991) says that the high level of achievement in most of the schools is partly from the homogeneous nature of their classes.

In most of the institutions grouping of students is done as an administrative expedient. It is completely designed to help the teachers and the administrators. Grouping should be a devise for treating all students in common. Yet Combs (1979) says “No method can ever meet the individual needs of students.” This leads us to rethink about segregation of students on the basis of scholarship examination and popular (elite) schools.

There is a frequent complaint that it is the teachers who work to broaden the differences in mixed ability groups in their attempt to make the students equally achieved individuals. Teachers constantly think about the weakness of low achievers rather than their strengths. Thus the strengths, which could have been made use of are forgotten and wasted.

It seems that most of the teachers easily forget that they are teaching a heterogeneous class of students. Perera, M (2001) observed the following;

“The relationship observed in the classroom between the researchers, students and the learning materials was complex. The teachers

who themselves had a range of experience and preparations for teaching with EED used the same learning materials to teach a heterogeneous group of students. As a result, the relationship observed in the classrooms between the teacher, students and the learning materials were complex.”

p.332

May be due to lack of training or lack of experience most of the teachers try to teach what they find in the textbook as it is to the whole class. Beyond their consciousness a set of students whose learning styles and aptitudes differ become a set of low – achievers. Naturally the majority of teachers label them as bad learners.

“Bad learner is a ‘Myth’. Some learners either simply do not want to learn or are incapable of it.”

(Prodromou.1994, p116)

This shows us that at least some of those low achievers do want to learn. Provided that learning is a pleasurable experience they will succeed, because no one likes to fail. The following words of an individual who was believed to be an unsuccessful learner show us that they are willing to learn but unable to learn due to various factors both outside and within themselves

“I like English very much. I do my homework. I learn text and dialogues by hard. Study English difficult for me. It difficult to pronounce English words many words difficult spelling I make mistakes. Sometimes I can say no correct. It is difficult to understand English speech. I not understand grammar rules.” (Unedited)

(Millroad. 2002, p108)

Experts have mentioned a few suggestions to help teachers with teaching heterogeneous classes. Most of them suggest that different groups must be assigned with different tasks to suit their level of language. To do this the teacher should have a special ability to grade the tasks and provide the right stimuli. There should be scope for the successful learners to help the unsuccessful learners in group and pair work. Where the language of instruction differs from their native language, teaching materials should make the maximum use of numerical and graphical representation keeping written material to minimum to facilitate understanding.

If the materials developed in one country are adopted for use in another, this adaptation should be carefully made with due regard to local factors and illustrations should be drawn from the local environment.

The following ideas should be kept thoroughly in mind when mixed ability groups are handled.

“We do not teach a group, but thirty separate people. Because of this, the problem of mixed abilities in the same room seems absolutely natural, and it is the idea of teaching a unitary lesson that seems odd.”

(Rinvoluceri.1986, p80)

An individual teacher may take into consideration all the above mentioned and discussed problems and suggestions adjusting teaching in order to cater to every one of the individual learners in a mixed ability groups. Yet at zonal, provincial and national levels not only the students but also the teachers again face the following problems.

“At the end of each year, should all pupils in a mixed ability class be examined on the same subject at the same level?”

(Rinvoluceri.1986, p16)

2.2.4 Student Heterogeneity of Sri Lanka.

The research conducted by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre of the University of Colombo to assess the achievement of grade 4 students in mother tongue, second language [English] and mathematics states some interesting findings about heterogeneity that prevails in the Sri Lankan schools.

Giving the rationale of the study, the researchers give evidence to prove the fact that there have been lower achievement levels ever since free education began.

Citing an independent research done in 1957, they reveal that within the main city, Colombo there had been drastic differences in achievement levels.

The study was conducted with a sample of 300 students whose mean age was 14, drawn from English medium schools in Colombo. Arithmetic mean of the achievement scores for the ten schools taken differed from 52.94 – 27.62.

Citing researches further they quote Rupasinghe (1985) to show that there is relationship between low achievement level and school type.

“Rupasinghe (1985) investigating the factors associated with achievement at the grade 5 Scholarship Examination with a sample of 405 students found that there was a strong association between high achievement and school type. Rural schools and non-affluent urban schools in this sample failed to produce a single high achiever.”

Many steps have been taken by several governments to solve the problem of disparity among schools.

“There is conspicuous variation in levels of student achievement among schools irrespective of free tuition, free entry to public examinations at the first sitting, free material for school uniforms, subsidized bus and train transport and irregularly free mid day meals.”

(NEREC.2004, p10)

Irrespective of all these programmes launched, the problem of heterogeneity within schools and among schools prevails. Further, inter-regional and intra-regional disparities increased day by day.

2.3 Review of Related Literature

2.3.1 International Experience of teaching English in Primary classes

In section 2.2, student heterogeneity was discussed to a greater extent. When international experience of teaching English in primary classes is discussed, still we can see much concern over the problem of mixed ability groups. Another more critical problem in teaching English to primary classes is the level of understanding of teachers about how their students conceive what they are taught.

An interesting example can be quoted from a class of primary students in a Korean school. There the students were taught the structure “I like/ don’t you like?” using the topic of food; but the teacher was unaware of the fact that students got the idea that “I like” means “I eat”. Later the teacher used the names of their friends to teach, “Do you like? /

Don't you like?" Here it was evident that students were horrified with the idea of eating their friend. (Griffith. 1996)

This shows that children pay more attention in meaning, how it is used, and intention and in interaction rather than the system and form. They see the language 'form inside' rather than 'from out side'. Out of the four skills speaking skill can be easily taught to children as they go at speaking the foreign language with fewer inhibitions than older learners. Thus, it is evident that teaching a foreign language to young learners should be begun with teaching the oral skill.

Now arises the problem of the age level of starting to teach a foreign language to children. It seems that most of the parents think that 'earlier the best'. Furthermore, they are willing to pay for their children to have lessons even outside the formal school system.

"Both parent and policy makers often seem to be persuaded by the popular idea that, in learning a language, either meaning better."

(Griffith. 1999, p211)

Do they believe in this idea because there is evidence that young learners develop better accent and listening skills, or have they forgotten the struggle they went through in learning a second language or a foreign language?

Again, the problem of the teacher's ability and knowledge about the students and methods of teaching a second language comes to the front. If primary teaching leads students to achieve different language ability levels, the secondary class teachers will face the problem of heterogeneity. Then the secondary teacher has to plan remedial work. If students have become de-motivated due to past teaching, the secondary teacher has to re-motivate the students.

Not only the teacher's knowledge about the students and methods of teaching but also teacher's language proficiency is a major concern. In Korea, Japan and Taiwan where English education has been started recently researches show that teacher's proficiency level of productive skills is lower than that of their receptive skills.

(Butler. 2002, p211)

However Butler further mentions that to what extent teacher's language proficiency influences the student's performance is not yet clear due to lack of availability of data. Any way he has been able to find out that there is a gap between actual proficiency of the

teachers and the level they themselves expect to have. Butler in one of the case studies conducted in Korea identified that teachers feel that their language level is lower than that of expected by themselves.

“Examining the teacher’s perception of their English proficiency alongside the level of proficiency that they feel is needed to teach English reveals a gap between the two.”

(Butler. 2002, p212)

As a result of this lack of proficiency, especially in productive skills, teachers tend to pay more attention on what they can do from books. Consequently they teach more and more grammar making the language more complex to the students.

“In many Asian EFL contexts, language instruction focused so intently on grammar and translation that students often acquired insufficient communication skills.”

(Butler. 2002, p212)

Do the beginners have language Aptitude to conceive so much grammar at rudimentary levels?

Most of the young learners do not come to second language learning with established literacy skills like they do in their first language. They have the tendency to search for meaning and intention in second language utterances because that is what they are used to in first language learning. Do primary teachers have knowledge about second language learning theories to bring solutions to the above discussed problem?

2.3.2 *Experience of primary English Education in Sri Lanka*

Primary students who are in their middle childhood (from 5-9 years) are the most lively and rapidly changing group of learners in the school. During this stage they undergo a considerable progress in their physical, mental, social and intellectual development; in the classroom their physical, mental, emotional and social horizons are

widened. At this age they receive a firmly steady intellectual development. The ability to use vocabulary and to see relationships between words and concrete objects increase

Taking the above facts into consideration a new English programme was introduced to key stage 2 and 3 in general education reforms, 1997 which is called the Primary English Language Project (PELP). The pilot project was conducted in 1998 in the Gampaha district and started island wide in 1999.

Hywel Colman(2001) conducted a research on PELP and Regional English Support Centers in 2001 for the British council, Sri Lanka. In his study he discusses several issues in primary English education in Sri Lanka.

He reveals that although children are skilled at responding to questions they lack the ability for creative production of the language.

“Children are skilled at responding to questions and naming familiar objects. They have difficulty in asking questions. At the moment they are finally introduced to the language, they have already learned to respond but not to initiate. Even at grade 3 level a large amount of time is spent on marking. As they spend more time in the classroom to mark books, teachers face difficulties in classroom control. They use mother tongue in imposing discipline.

(Colman. 2001, p86)

He criticizes the teachers' tendency to spend more time for marking and shifting to L₁ at more authentic situation where they can exploit to teach English. At the same time he highlights the teachers understanding about the nature of students and their interests.

“Teachers themselves accept that rhymes and games are interesting.”

(Colman. 2001, p89)

Commenting on student performance Colman agrees that there is heterogeneity in their performance.

“Some students gave one word answers, some answered only if they were helped, some took time while some answered in L₁ and some well in English. Most of them are able to name objects and people. Some like to speak whereas another set of students who are hesitant to speak. As they are at the beginning of formal education, one cannot expect a high level of competency from them.”

(Colman.2001, p86)

Above findings and conclusions give evidence to the fact that no matter how much new methods and new programmes come into the field of education most of the teachers still stick to the old methods giving writing tasks, marking them and imposing discipline.

While all those problems still remain, the Ministry of Education tries out various strategies to uplift English education in primary classes. The following appeared in one of their advertisements.

“Action has been initiated to deliver supplementary English readers for Grade 3, 4 and 5. These are specially selected to suit the different grades. In all, there will be 69 titles. They will be sent to District Education Officers for distribution to schools the first set of 16 titles is being distributed, and the rest will be distributed in due course.”

(Daily News, March 28. 2005)

Media Unit of the Ministry of Education thus briefed those who are concerned with the field of education, publishing an advertisement in the Daily News on Monday 28th march 2005. Publishing another advertisement in the Daily News on Monday, the 05th of September 2005 they claim that the Ministry of Education has completed distributing supplementary reading materials to schools. The advertisement further says that Primary Education Co-ordinating Officers at provincial level and zonal level meet together monthly in the Ministry and discuss the progress and issues relating to primary education activities.

Yet it is a question whether every school has received the above-mentioned supplementary reading materials. Further, it is not clearly visible whether the outcomes and decisions taken at the monthly meetings of the co-ordinating officers come to grass root level.

2.3.3 English Language Achievement of Grade Four Pupils in Sri Lanka.

National Education Research and Evaluation Centre of the Faculty of Education in University of Colombo conducted an island wide research to assess the achievement of grade 4 students in mother tongue, second language (English) and mathematics. It reveals a

pathetic situation in English language education of the primary grades in the school system of Sri Lanka.

“Inter-regional and intra-regional disparities are there in the provision of facilities. The state school system is not an orderly collection of homogeneous units but mostly a hierarchy of heterogeneous units. Status and facilities vary according to the school type. Education reforms alone may not be sufficient to achieve equality of opportunity. Equitable resourcing and strengthening of the school types that consistently record poor learning achievement should be ensured.”

(NEREC. 2004, p11)

In the education reforms of 1996, there were suggestions to change primary education completely; even teaching methods and infrastructure were changed. Under these reforms, primary English teaching was changed as follows.

- Deskwor learning culture is changed in to a combination of play, activity and deskwor.
- An integrative approach to language learning which includes the development of all four language skills.
- Making the learning the content of the syllabus an enjoyable experience for the students.

(Syllabus for Grade 3, 4 and 5 NIE)

The syllabus is based on nine national goals and five basic competencies including competencies in communication. Competencies in communication are made up of three subjects; Literacy, Numeracy and Graphics.

Literacy includes; listen attentively, speak clearly, read for meaning and write accurately and lucidly.

Numeracy includes; use numbers for things, space and time, count, calculate and measure systematically.

Graphics include; make sense of line and form, express and record detail, instructions and ideas with line, form and colour.

(Syllabus for Grade 3, 4 and 5 NIE)

Aims and General Objectives of Teaching English as a Second Language given in the syllabus are as follows.

- Aims; – To lay the foundation for the gradual development of the students’ abilities to communicate effectively in English through speaking, reading, writing and listening.
- To enrich students’ participation in primary school learning through a positive, enjoyable foreign language learning experience
 - To develop a positive attitude in students that encourages them to learn English further in the secondary school.
 - To build the students’ confidence in their ability to succeed in learning the language.
 - to provide support to acquire the basic competencies related to the National Educational policy through an additional language-teaching programme.
 - To provide sufficient command of the language to enable the students to use English in real life situations, as and when the need arises.

General objectives;

The students,

- Listens to simple commands/instructions in English and responds verbally and nonverbally.
- Reads and understands simple words/expressions in English
- Gives expression orally to basic language functions in English.
- Distinguishes and identifies words, shapes and patterns of the letters of the English alphabet.
- Forms the letters of the English alphabet on paper legibly using correct hand movements.
- Writes simple sentences with accuracy
- Acquires a sufficient vocabulary related to his/her immediate environment and communication needs.

The syllabus does not suggest a particular methodology for teaching. A methodology based on the appropriacy to the teaching context and to the level of ability of the students is advocated in the syllabus.

A variety of activities such as matching, sorting and arranging, sequencing, identifying, noticing, comparing, seeing relationships, guessing, solving

problems/puzzles/riddles, testing hypotheses are suggested as teaching strategies. Further exploitation of the stock of English words the students have already acquired informally in their environment is suggested in the syllabus.

It is evident that the topic based English syllabus tries to give full scope for exploitation of the vocabulary they have acquired through ABOE and the Activity Based Learning is to be continued in key stage 2 and 3 also.

The study done by NEREC reveals that the Activity Based Primary English Language Programme has not been able to generate the expected development in student achievement.

Objectives of the study have been;

- ◆ Construction of tests in L₁, English and mathematics to be used at the end of Grade 4.
- ◆ Assessment of achievement levels of pupils completing the key stage 2.
- ◆ Analysis of achievement on the basis of gender, medium of instructions, school type, location, province and district.
- ◆ Determination of the association of factors related to teachers, schools and parents with pupils.

In analysis of data in relation to the last mentioned objective, factors related to teachers, schools and parents with pupils can be taken into consideration as causes of heterogeneity that led to differences in achievement.

Overall achievement in English language is 41.9% in the country while Western province overtaking with 54.3%. The same result is visible in mastery of English (students who scored more than 80% were treated as those who achieved mastery level) 9.6 in the island achieving mastery level whereas the value is 19.6% in Western province.

When overall English performance in English language is analyzed, the following situation is visible. There are 20.7% students in 20 – 29 class interval and 19.2% between 30 –39 marks. While there are only 2.3% above 80 marks, 14.6% students score below 20. There are 75% students who have scored below 50 marks.

Even in western province there are two groups of non achievers and achievers. This pattern is similarly evident in other provinces also. Performance in comprehension and writing are lower, island-wide. Eastern and Northern provinces show the lowest

achievement levels. While 1AB schools mark the highest achievement levels type 2 schools mark the lowest achievement levels.

Compared to the other subjects English language recorded the lowest achievement. 78.4% of the students in urban areas are among non-achievers of English language while 93.3% of the students in rural areas fall into the group of non achievers. English subject marks the highest non mastery among the subjects studied.

(NEREC. 2003, p13)

It is evident that PELP has not been able to uplift the English language competency of the students to the expected level. There can be potentialities in ABOE that can be exploited to increase performance of students in key stage 2. The study will attempt to seek such answers that help reduce heterogeneity in key stage 1 and lead the result to improve the achievement in key stage 2.

(The above research evidence shows that there is heterogeneity in English language achievement. This could be the final outcome of the unresolved problem of student heterogeneity in the classroom). When the results of the above research are considered in relation to North Western province, which is the ground for this research, the following conclusions can be arrived at regarding the education in the Northwestern province.

- In comparison to the other eight provinces the North western province is placed above the other 6 provinces. In mean value, it is in the second place while in the achievement it is placed third in the island.
- In comparison to the other districts, Kurunagala shows higher achievement levels where as Puttalam shows lower achievement in comparison to the Kurunagala district. In achievement, Kurunagala district is higher than the national level while Puttalam district is lower.
- English achievement level in the North Western province is 8.5% and proficiency in writing is only 1.5%.
- The proficiency in the three tested competencies range from 18% - 43%. Thus revealing that the majority of the students do not reach the achievement level that is necessary to move on to the next grade.

In that case, dedication of teachers, mentors, officials and education authorities of the province is a must.

From the two districts of the province, Puttalam has critical problems regarding achievement. The limitations that hinder education in Puttalam were discussed in chapter one.

2.3.4

What is ABOE

Activity Based Oral English was introduced to provide opportunities for all children in grade 1 and 2 to use simple English for communication. ABOE is confined to speech and listening, not meant for reading and writing. Incidental reading is accepted where necessary especially when pictures are used.

ABOE is expected to be practised in the key stage 1, which is taught by a single teacher for two years. The same teacher is expected to use simple English expressions while teaching Environment Related Activities although they are not specially trained. The Department of English and Foreign Language Unit of Ministry of Education has initiated a training programme in January 2005, to train 1500 teachers of grade 1 and 2. This programme is to be completed by July 2005.

This training programme was extended to provincial level through trainers, trained at NIE. At provincial level teachers are supposed to summon in groups of about 25, for a three-day residential training programme.

Two modules for each grade and an Enrichment Activity Book were prepared to use in each class. Soon an audiocassette, which will include the songs and rhymes to be used in teaching ABOE, will be made available provincially by the NIE. The modules supplied by the Department of English in the NIE consist of two or three games, songs, and nursery rhymes for each theme in grade 1 and 2. Finger puppets, zigzag books, and glove puppets have been recommended to be used to facilitate enrichment activities.

New grade 1 and 2 curricula were designed under new primary education reforms programme and it was first implemented in the Gampaha district in 1998 and is expected to be introduced island-wide from 1999. ABOE is one special design, which came out in these reforms. While children are engaged in guided play activity, they are expected to use

communicational English. No special teacher is supposed to be teaching English in these classes. Neither allocation of special periods to teach ABOE is expected.

“Spoken English was introduced as oral communication through the activity based curriculum.

Provision for opportunities for all children in the country to use simple conversation is a new feature that has been introduced. This feature is referred to as ‘Activity Based Oral English.’ As the name suggests, the emphasis here is on the use of English in conversation while children are engaged in guided play and activity; especially under the subject ‘Environment Related Activities’ to be carried out by the class teacher and not by a special teacher. Further, no separate periods have been allocated for this programme.”

(NEC & NIE 1999)

During the key stage 1 guided play and activities receive greater emphasis than Deskwork. In the process of assessing these children informal assessments like observation, oral questioning, listening to children are recommended to be used. Teachers are expected to use assessments in their classes solely with the purpose of diagnosing. Teachers can take remedial actions using these assessments as much as possible.

No written question papers are expected to be used in the first two terms. If they are given one test paper in the last term, those question papers should be prepared by the respective teachers. Teachers are thoroughly advised to refrain from using question papers prepared by outside organizations.

For the enhancement of ABOE programme group work with Grade 6 children is suggested. Principals are expected to take necessary steps to prepare the timetable in such a way that it allows Grade 6 students to engage in group work with Grade 1 and 2 students. If it is a primary school where there are no Grade 6 classes functioning, grade 5 students are suggested to get engaged in group work with grade 1 and 2 students as an alternative way.

For the first time in the history of the Sri Lankan education system, primary teachers have been made to initiate the students into the English language. The Media Unit of Ministry of Education publishing two advertisements in ‘Daily News’ on 05/09/2005

and 12/09/2005 reveals that from 1997 ABOE will be expanded to the teaching of Mathematics and teaching of English as a subject will be introduced from Grade 1. It is not clearly mentioned whether formal teaching of English is introduced to Grade 1 through primary teachers or teachers of English. Although responsibility of teaching of English to Grade 1 formally is given to teachers of English, primary teachers will have to take the responsibility of teaching ABOE through Mathematics. This will demand for extensive teacher training programmes, which has already become a problem.

In the same way most of the educational reform programmes had in the past, ABOE too is having problems in implementation and many accuse that it is not properly practiced in schools. To find out whether these accusations are true some of the research studies done on ABOE have to be analyzed.

2.3.5 *How ABOE Is Practised in the Classroom.*

The teachers' guides of Grades 1 and 2 respectively include exemplar vocabulary lists I and II to be utilized by teachers to introduce simple words, short phrases or simple sentences; when addressing students, giving instructions, greetings and during "free time". To make the teacher's task easier, English Unit of NIE has prepared a syllabus outline of ABOE. The syllabus is prepared under 16 themes for each class with objectives, vocabulary items, language structures and activities for each theme.

(See appendix I)

Teachers are advised to acquire proper pronunciation skills to provide students with perfect models. Eric J. D. Silva in his article to "Daily News" 12,09,2005 sighting a NEC. Report in criticism against the decision to extend ABOE to Mathematics comments negatively on teacher's proficiency.

"The demands made on primary school teachers who lacked proficiency in English could hardly be met by providing a list of words

related to the themes in the environment related activities syllabus in Grade 1 and a list of phrases in Grade 2. In-service training programmes were not commensurate with the demand for training and offered limited opportunity for the interactive learning that was required to ensure that teachers acquired fluency and confidence in the use of English classroom activities.” (De Silva, 1995)

A pilot programme on ABOE was initiated in the Gampaha district in 1998. The following year it was implemented throughout the island.

National Education Commission conducted a research in 2004 to assess how ABOE is implemented island wide. All the provinces had supported their work, unfortunately except North Western Province (Kurunegala and Puttalam districts), which includes a vast segment of rural areas. Some of the findings of the research are as follows.

Most of the principals appeared to be aware of the programme to a satisfactory level while the principals of Badulla district complained that they were not briefed enough. In some districts, most of the principals had mentioned that they were not sufficiently aware of the programme to make it a success.

When considering the teachers’ competency to teach ABOE principals of schools in Western and Sabaragamuwa provinces seemed to be satisfied whereas the principals in Nuwara Eliya district dissatisfied. Majority of the principals in other provinces had mentioned that they needed teachers who are more competent.

Some districts had appointed English language teachers to assist the primary teachers as the programme suggested while some districts including Colombo and Hambantota allocated special time for English lessons going against the recommendations of the programme. Teachers of Trincomalee, Matale, Gampaha, Kalutara and Kandy were satisfied with the training provided to them whereas most of the teachers of the other districts were not satisfied.

To solve the problem of teacher training the NEC suggests the following;

“To provide the necessary training through seminars and workshops for teachers of Grade 1 and 2 the training should be continued over a specific period. It should also be provided through in-service training programmes.

Young children say what they hear others say. They also pick up the accent of those around them. During training seminars therefore, teachers should be encouraged to engage in many activities that would provide the students with such an environment. Activities such as;

Care talk, Greetings, Checking attendance, ways of starting the environment related activities, asking/raising questions and giving instructions, recalling routines, listening and identifying and practising total physical response could be included. Songs, rhymes charts, poetry, stories are other resources that could create such an environment.”

(NEC 2004)

Yet, the ongoing three-day residential teacher-training programme does not seem to meet the above recommendations. (It is evident that in many parts of the country it is not conducted as a residential course.)

Except in three districts, according to the NEC there was no satisfactory department supervision into the programme. What is most important is the attitudes of the target group i.e. students. Interestingly enough in almost all the districts majority of the students were positive about the programme. Doubtlessly it is a motivation for the reform designers.

The NEC research further points out that all the parents were in favour of ABOE although they were in the view that it is not being implemented with commitment the NEC identifies clear differences between parents in urban areas and rural areas.

“Parents in urban areas had become active partners in this process. They showed interest in ABOE but were dissatisfied with the knowledge of English their children acquired in class. They provide outside support to enhance the oral English ability of their children. Though enthusiastic, parents in rural areas do not have the opportunity to provide support outside the school due to various constraints.”

(NEC p.46)

“If parents in rural areas too could be provided with some provision to acquire the ability of oral English, it would create the much needed environment for their children.”

Including the above, the NEC report makes many recommendations such as;

- Conducting residential training programmes to provide ‘total immersion’ in English for teachers (duration of which at least 4 days)
- Preparation of audio cassettes
- A suitable Teacher Guide Book
- Suitable television and radio programmes for both teachers and students
- Holiday camps for students

The immersion programme suggested for teachers has come out in the shape of a three residential seminar although the recommendation says “at least 4 days”. When it comes to zonal level the seminar has changed into a non-residential training programme due to various practical difficulties. The audiocassettes for the programme are still being prepared.

In 1954 the committee appointed by the minister of education to advice on the curricular most suitable for pupils in the primary and junior secondary schools suggested on integrated approach to learning through environmental activities. There is no evidence to show that this lasted long. More attention should be paid to avoid the same thing happening to ABOE. More research is needed to evaluate the programme and to suggest measures of development. Unfortunately, only a handful of national level researches have been conducted on ABOE. Most of them aim at studying how ABOE is being implemented in classrooms. More research is needed to find out how ABOE could be used to facilitate classroom teaching and students performance.

When giving deep thoughts into the ABOE primary teaching of English both in local and foreign contexts and student heterogeneity; following questions arose in the researcher’s mind. The major concern of the research is student heterogeneity. As it was discussed at the beginning, irrespective of the fact that the school principals and teachers tried to handle student heterogeneity, grouping the students according to equal ability levels the problem continues. Why is it difficult to eliminate – to be realistic – or reduce heterogeneity (to get all the students to the same achievement level) keeping students of various ability levels in the same class? Is there a dearth of educationists who are capable of designing such education programmes?

It is evident that although we started teaching to students at the very beginning paying the same amount of attention to each individual student, they would begin to develop into individuals with different ability levels. There should be a way of reducing this gap; in other words, there should be a way of helping the low achieving students to reach higher achieving skills.

Taking the above questions in to consideration this study aims at finding out whether ABOE has any such quality to help student heterogeneity; if so, suggesting ways to improve such qualities and if not, probing some ways to make use of ABOE to reduce student heterogeneity.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology of the study

Chapter two discussed the theoretical basis and the related literature of the study. Cognitive development theories and second language learning theories were discussed to identify the theoretical foundation of ABOE. Good Learner Model and cognitive development theories were discussed in order to identify the theories behind heterogeneity. Related literature was discussed to supply the background of the study.

Chapter three discusses the methodology followed in the study. It explains how the target population was selected and the way the sample was decided. Preparation of the instruments is analyzed in relation to their objectives. Further, the difficulties faced by the researcher in launching the study are discussed explaining the limitations of the study.

The two major concerns of the study are ABOE and student heterogeneity. Therefore, identification of the concept “student heterogeneity” was a must in the study. When ABOE is concerned, it would be important to find out on what second language learning theories and cognitive development theories it is based on. Handling student

heterogeneity and teaching ABOE are practical aspects of the classroom teaching. To examine how the above two aspects were handled classroom observation was necessary. After the classroom procedure was examined, the researcher analyzed the way the teachers handled student heterogeneity through ABOE. With the help of the analysis, the researcher was able to draw suggestions to facilitate the methods of handling student heterogeneity through ABOE.

3.1 *Population And The Sample*

3.1.1 *Population of the study*

Population under study is the teachers of grade 1 and 2 classes and the students of grade 1 and 2 classes.

3.1.2 *Sample of the study*

The two major methods of data gathering were non-participatory observation and questionnaires. Three schools from Giriulla education zone were selected for observation to represent three types of schools and questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 200 teachers who work in the key stage one classes of the schools in Giriulla education zone.

Three schools that are situated in close vicinity were selected for easy access in observations. Three schools were selected from Pannala Education division of Giriulla education zone.

Type 3 – Ku/Giri/ Napokuna Primary School

Type 2 – Ku/Giri/ Gonulla Vidya Deepthi Kanista Vidyalaya

1 C - Ku/Giri/ Nalawalana Maha Vidyalaya.

No 1 AB school was selected because almost all the 1 AB schools in the division are central schools that have no primary classes.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed among 200 randomly selected grade 1 and 2 teachers from the Giriulla Education zone. The sample was stratified in order that it consists of 100 grade 1 teachers and 100 grade 2 teachers.

3.2 *Data Collecting Instruments*

3.2.1 *Classroom observation schedule*

As the major method of data gathering was observation, an observation schedule was prepared in order that observation is done effectively.

First, four of the Environmental Related Activities lessons were observed in two schools without a set observation schedule. The words introduced during the lesson, whether the introduced words were relevant to the theme, techniques used for introduction of the word and to clarify the meaning were identified as the areas of major concern during these four lessons and the classroom observation schedule was prepared taking those areas into consideration. It was modified with necessary changes after consulting the supervisor.

(Appendix III)

3.2.2 *The questionnaire*

A questionnaire was prepared to gather information on how teachers practice ABOE in the classroom, whether they have knowledge about student heterogeneity, whether they handle student heterogeneity successfully, if so how they do it and the type of teacher training they have got on ABOE. Further, the questionnaire was aimed at gathering information on how the teachers use ABOE to handle student heterogeneity and the suggestions they can make to use ABOE to handle student heterogeneity.

First, the questionnaire, which consisted of 27 questions, was given to 5 grade 1 teachers and 5 grade 2 teachers. The responses on the questionnaire were taken into consideration and the questionnaire was changed taking advice from the supervisor. The questionnaire distributed to the sample carried 30 questions out of which 6 questions were open ended. There were 2 multiple-choice questions and 1 question that needed a short written answer while the other 21 questions needed yes/no answers.

Question numbers 1, 2 and 10 were set in order to gather information on how ABOE is practiced in the classroom. To find out whether the teachers have understanding about student heterogeneity the questions numbers 3, 4, 5, 9, 15, and 16 were included in the questionnaire. Information on how the teachers handle student heterogeneity was targeted to find out from the question numbers 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 22 and 23. The question numbers 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 were set in order to gather information about the nature of the teacher training that the teachers have received on ABOE question numbers 24,25 and 26 aimed at finding out the results the teachers have gained applying the knowledge they got during the teacher training programmes. Question numbers 27, 28, 29 and 30 aimed at getting information on what the teachers feel and think about ABOE and what changes they expect in the programme.

No. of the question	What is intended to find out
01	information on how ABOE is practiced in the classroom
02	information on how ABOE is practiced in the classroom
03	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
04	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
05	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
06	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
07	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
08	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
09	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
10	information on how ABOE is practiced in the classroom
11	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
12	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
13	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
14	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
15	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
16	understanding of teachers about student heterogeneity
17	nature of the training that the teachers have received on ABOE

18	nature of the training that the teachers have received on ABOE
19	nature of the training that the teachers have received on ABOE
20	nature of the training that the teachers have received on ABOE
21	nature of the training that the teachers have received on ABOE
22	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
23	how the teachers handle student heterogeneity
24	what the teachers gained applying what they learned at training
25	what the teachers gained applying what they learned at training
26	what the teachers gained applying what they learned at training
27	what the teachers feel and think about ABOE
28	what the teachers feel and think about ABOE
29	what the teachers feel and think about ABOE
30	what the teachers feel and think about ABOE

Table 3.1 - Question numbers of the questionnaire and what they aimed at finding out

3.2.3 *How the Objectives of the Study Are Achieved*

The first two objectives of the study; explaining the concept of the student heterogeneity and identifying the theoretical basis of Activity Based Oral English are achieved in the second chapter by analyzing theory related to the field and the research conducted previously on student heterogeneity and ABOE.

Through the observations of Environment Related Activities lessons the third objective of the study i.e. examining how ABOE is being implemented in the classroom is expected to be achieved.

Chapter four of the study is dedicated to the analysis of data gathered through observation of lessons, questionnaires and informal interviews. Analyzing these data would support in analyzing how the problem of student heterogeneity is addressed in relation to how Activity Based Oral English is practiced, which is the fourth objective of the study.

Once the above four objectives are achieved it will lead to the achievement of the fifth objective i.e. suggesting ways of minimizing student heterogeneity through ABOE.

3.4 *Limitations of the Study*

The research at the beginning was intended to be conducted in Puttalam Education zone. Because it is one of the most rural Education zones in Sri Lanka Puttalam is an area that receives less attention from the education researchers. The researcher who has had around 10 years teaching experience in the zone first decided to take Puttalam education zone as the sample of the study.

After discussing with the deputy director of English in the zone arrangements were made to observe a teacher-training programme which was due to be conducted from the 14th to 16th of July in 2005 in Anamaduwa Divisional Education office. The researcher went to Anamaduwa Divisional Education office only to find that there were only 13 teachers and 6 resource persons for the teacher-training seminar. According to the information the researcher got, the training programme, which was originally designed to be a residential training programme had changed into a non-residential programme as most of the teachers found it difficult to stay away from home due to various difficulties. The primary education unit of the zone was responsible in organizing the seminar while the members of the English unit participate as resource persons. Primary education unit had sent letters to the teachers mentioning that it was a residential programme. Only 13 teachers turned up although they expected over 35. Eventually the programme was cancelled due to lack of participants. After this, it appeared that the zone was having problems regarding teacher-training programmes. Hence, the researcher, after consulting the supervisor decided to select Giriulla education zone where he was serving.

There were several minor problems regarding classroom observation. There was not a single 1 AB school, which has primary classes. As a result, classroom observation had to be limited to 3 types of schools. In one school, where observation was done three lessons were done taking grade 1 and 2 together. In another school, three of the lessons in grade 2 were done as separate English lessons where they taught the students only songs. This reduced the number of originally observed Environmental Related Activities lessons into 24.

Although 200 questionnaires were sent to grade 1 and 2 teachers more than 25 questionnaires were not received by the respective teachers, as the researcher did not have direct contact with them. Only 127 answered questionnaires were returned. As 31 of the

received questionnaires had not been properly filled, they were not considered in the analysis. Eventually only 96 questionnaires were analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1

Introduction

Chapter three discussed the methodology of the study. Under the methodology data gathering instruments and the sample were discussed in detail. How the data gathering instruments were prepared, standardized and used in data gathering were presented in chapter three. The difficulties and constraints the researcher had to face while launching the research, also were mentioned in chapter three. The data gathered using the methods and instruments discussed in chapter three are presented and analyzed in detail in chapter four.

Chapter four aims at presenting and analyzing the data gathered during the research. Data gathered using the questionnaire, observation and informal discussions are presented and analyzed in relation to the objectives of the study. As the first two objectives have been achieved in chapter two, data analysis is done in relation to objective three and four. Objective five will be achieved in chapter five. Important findings of the study are

also presented in chapter four. Charts and graphs are used for presentation and analysis of data.

4.2 *How ABOE Is Implemented In The Classroom.*

The first two objectives (explaining the concept of student heterogeneity and identifying the theoretical basis of ABOE) were achieved through chapter two. Objective three and four are expected to be achieved in chapter four. The first part of chapter four is related to objective three; i.e. examining how ABOE is being implemented in the classroom and the rest of the chapter is meant to discuss objective four: Analyzing how the problem of student heterogeneity is handled in relation to ABOE.

4.2.1 *ABOE and ERA;*

Several questions were included in the questionnaire to get information on how teachers practise ABOE in classroom. The first question of the questionnaire was prepared in order that it finds out whether the teachers practice ABOE in the classroom. In the particular question asked ¹“ Do you teach ABOE during environmental related activities (ERA) lessons?” a greater majority of the teachers have answered in affirmative (96%) whereas only a few teachers have said that they do not teach ABOE (only 4%) (Table 4.1.)

Question number	Percentage of “yes”	Percentage of “no”
01	96	4
02	15	85
03	97	03
04	74	26
05	89	11
06	63	37
08	85	15
09	73	27
10	26	74

¹ The questionnaire was given in Sinhala medium as almost all the teachers that work in grade 1 and 2 know only Sinhala language. The questions are translated in to English by the researcher when they are discussed in the thesis.

11	85	15
13	05	95
14	44	56
15	49	51
16	70	30
17	85	15
20	15	85
22	42	58
24	87	13
25	07	93
27	93	07
29	89	11

Table 4.1 Percentages of answers – questionnaire.

Observation of the lessons also proved the above results. In fact, 100% of the observed ERA lessons included ABOE. Presence of the observer might have had some influence on the teachers to include ABOE in their lessons since the teachers knew that the particular lessons were going to be observed by the researcher. It is one of the deficiencies that could not be overcome as the researcher had to get permission from the principal and the teachers concerned and also had to inform them what lessons, during what periods were going to be observed. This must have persuaded the teachers to include ABOE in their lessons. When they were questioned orally in informal discussions, it was evident that every teacher practiced ABOE at least for a shorter period during their lessons. They did not have a clear idea as to how much time should be allocated for ABOE. Their major concern was the theme in the ERA lesson. It is further proved when one teacher said thus.

²“I don’t know whether it is a must to teach ABOE. Sometimes I suddenly remember that I am supposed to teach them English also during ABOE. At such times, if I know the English words I teach one or two. It is

² As majority of the grade 1 and 2 teachers speak only Sinhala the discussions were held in Sinhala. When their answers are quoted in the theses, they were translated to English by the researcher.

very difficult to concentrate on English when we pay our attention on the theme.”

Majority of the teachers gave more or less the same answer. Only the words they used slightly differed.

The researcher asked from the teachers whether they include in the lesson plans the English words that they are going to teach the students. Only about 50% of the teachers answered in affirmative. Some teachers said that although they include English words in the lesson plans, sometimes they forget to teach them in the course of the lesson, whereas some teachers said “I do not write English words in my lesson plans, but I teach English words to students if I know any English word that is relevant to the theme.”

When the researcher requested the teachers to allow him read their lesson plans, most of the teachers appeared to be reluctant to show them. They gave various excuses for not allowing the researcher read their lesson plans. Some of those were;

- “I forgot to bring them today”
- “My lesson plans are still with the principal”
- “My hand writing is very bad, you won’t be able to read them”
- “I do not write them in a particular format, they are only sketches”

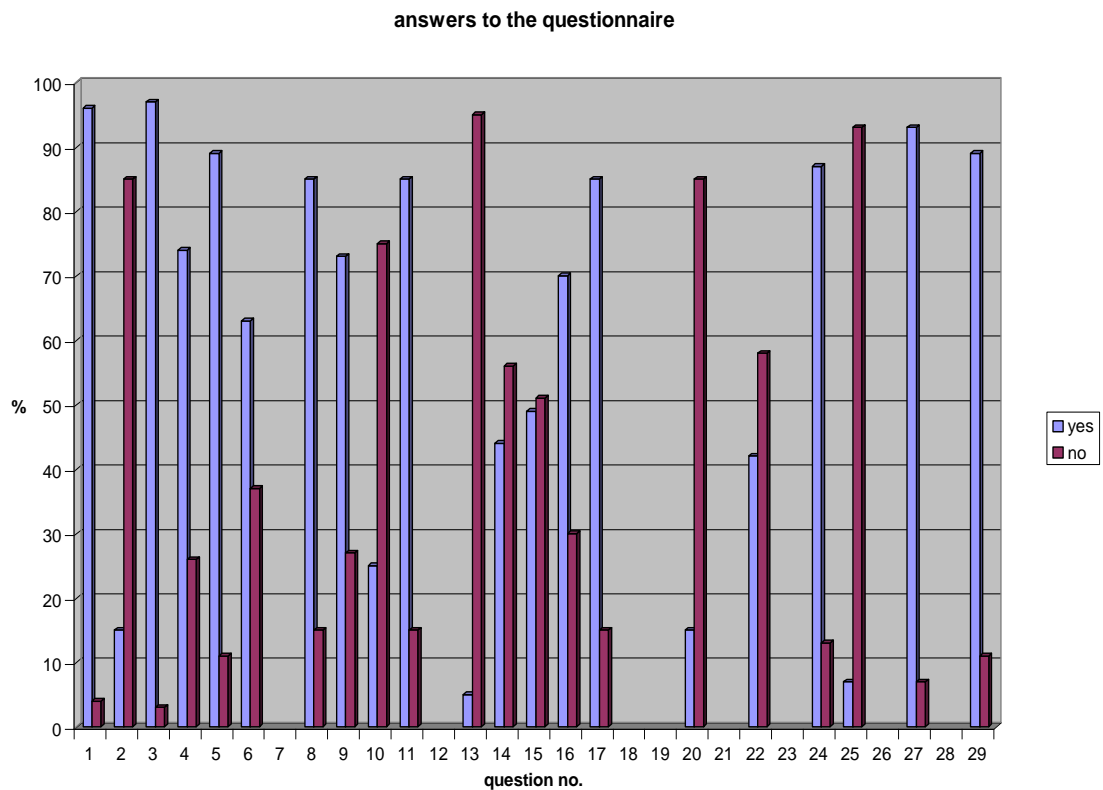


Figure 4.1 - Percentages of the answers

Only a small number of the teachers allowed the researcher to read their lesson plans. Six teachers gave their lesson plans to the researcher. Out of those six teachers five teachers' lesson plans had English words. There were one or two English words in only a few of the lesson plans of the other teacher. The above data verified that a majority of the primary teachers practice ABOE in ERA lessons at least to a certain extent. One of the complaints most of the teachers made was that they did not have enough English knowledge to teach English words to the students. This was clearly visible in the observed lessons.

Twenty six lessons were observed in three selected schools. The lessons were conducted by seven teachers. Gonulla Kanista Vidyalaya had only one parallel class in each grade. Although Napokuna primary school had two parallel classes for both grade 1 and 2 only one class from each grade was observed. In Nalawalana Maha Vidyalaya there

were two parallel classes in grade 1 and only one grade 2-class out of which all the three classes were observed.

For data analysis, schools and the teachers are numbered and named as follows.

school 1;

Grade 1 teacher – teacher A

Grade 2 teacher – teacher B

school 2;

Grade 1 teacher – teacher C

Grade 2 teacher – teacher D

school 3;

Grade 1 A teacher – teacher E

Grade 1 B teacher – teacher F

Grade 2 teacher – teacher G

Teacher A had problems in pronouncing ‘f’. In place of ‘f’, she pronounced ‘p’. Instead of ‘father’, she pronounced ‘pather’. Although she mispronounced the words, students who already knew the word pronounced the word correctly. But, the teacher did not understand her mistake. Had she been aware that she had a problem in pronouncing ‘f’ she could have used the students who pronounced the word correctly as a model.

Some of the students who did not know the word followed the students who pronounced the word correctly and caught the correct pronunciation. Most of the students who were sitting closer to the teacher’s table and those who were more dependant on the teacher followed the teacher and caught the wrong pronunciation of the teacher.

There were numerous other occasions where the teachers mispronounced the words. In some occasions, it was evident that the teacher did not know some words that should have been used in the lessons.

In one occasion teacher pronounced ‘wrong’ as ‘rong’. In another lesson, the teacher pronounced ‘paddy field’ as ‘faddy field’, which was in the same way followed by the students. Given below are some more examples where teachers mispronounced several words.

- Bathe → bath

- Dustbin → duspın
- Sickle → sickly
- Teacher was using pictures to introduce words. She showed a picture of a python and said 'python'. One student asked "Teacher what is a python?" the teacher answered in mother tongue "serpent"
- There was a teacher who did not know the difference between 'house' and 'home'.

E.g. The farmer is coming back house.

Two of the teachers in two schools were teachers of English teaching in primary classes. Both were teaching in grade 1. They with compared to the other teachers used more words more frequently than the other teachers did. Their pronunciation was accurate and used a number of successful techniques to teach ABOE.

4.2.2 The Amount of English That Can Be Used With Key Stage One Students.

Theme; places where people work.

Grade 1	Words used by the teacher	Words given in the teacher's guide
School 1 Teacher A	Work, circle, farmer, tractor, teach, teacher, hospital, doctor, nurse, machine	<u>Paddy field</u> <u>building site</u> Paddy, seed, building, brick, Grain, mammoty, cement, bucket, Sickle, tractor, uniform, gloves, Farmer hats
School 2 Teacher C	Picture, paddy field, buffalo, farmer, bobbin, plastic, bull, mason, shirt, police, tractor, current, bag, sow, doctor, teacher, black board, book, driver, post office, postman, bucket, elephant, hut, mango tree	Driver, doctor Teacher, nurse, postman
Grade 2		
School 1 Teacher A	Paddy field, farmer, boys, teacher, student, principal police, policeman, bank, office, post office, postman, nurse, doctor, hospital, treat, patient, work place, school	Paddy field, paddy, seed, grain, mammoty, sickle, knife, hammer, saw, bucket, drill, building, work place, team, carpenter, farmer, tailor
School 2 Teacher D	Teacher, farmer, doctor, nurse, school, paddy field, hospital, mammoty, seeds	

Table 4.2 Words used by the teachers in the classroom in comparison to the words suggested in the teacher's guide.

The second question of the questionnaire asked, "Do you use only the words given in the teacher's guide?" To this question 14% said 'yes' while 86% said 'no'. According to the above results the conclusion can be arrived that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the teachers use words beyond the teacher's guide. Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the teachers confine themselves to the teacher's guide. Reliability of the answers given by the teachers can be evaluated by the following

data gathered during observation. Words used by teachers during their lessons in one of the themes are listed in table 4.2 against the words given in the teacher's guide.

When table 4.2 is analyzed, it is clear that although more than $\frac{3}{4}$ teachers say in their answers that they use words outside the list of the words suggested in teacher's guide, majority of them confine themselves to the words given in the teacher's guide. Out of the above four teachers, only one teacher has used a number of words going beyond the teacher's guide. Yet, most of these words were not relevant to the theme or they were words learnt in the previous lessons.

The fact that limiting the vocabulary under such broad themes is very difficult is acceptable. But, one of the most prominent features of the above lessons was that teachers had paid attention only on the words related to the "paddy field, hospital, school and post office". Every teacher has neglected the words related to building site. The teachers being females they might not have experience related to these fields. This shows that culture and teacher's personal experience too affect the teaching learning process.

4.2.3 Teacher Training on ABOE;

Question number 17 of the questionnaire was set to find out whether the teachers have got any training on how to teach ABOE in the classroom.

	No. of teachers	percentage
Answered question no. 17	88	91%
Not answered question no.17	08	09%
Got training on ABOE	76	87%
Not got training on ABOE	12	13%

Table 4.3; answers to question no. 17

No reason could be found as to why 8 teachers from the 96 those who answered the questionnaire avoided answering the question no. 17. If those teachers who did not answer the question had had the training, they might have purposely avoided answering the question just to avoid answering the questions that follow.

One of the above teachers who had not answered the question had avoided all the questions that were asked about the training (question numbers 17 – 23). One teacher has

mentioned that she received training on ABOE, but does not provide further information about the training. Another teacher has said that she is satisfied to a certain extent with the training given to them although she has not given an answer to question no. 17 which asked whether the teachers had received training on ABOE. There is another teacher who has not given an answer to question no. 17 yet has said that she has got knowledge on how to handle student heterogeneity from the training.

. If it is assumed that the teachers who did not answer the question too have not received any training on ABOE, the percentage of untrained teachers on ABOE [13%] increases to 20%.

Most of the training sessions conducted in the North Western province were 3-day seminars. Although they meant to be conducted as residential courses the organizers of the seminars had come to an understanding with the teachers that the seminars would be conducted as non-residential courses provided the teachers agree to be present for the seminar by 8.00 a.m. and stay till 5.00 p.m. If this agreement had not been there most of the training sessions would have proved unsuccessful due to lack of participants, as a greater majority of the primary teachers being female teachers they have a number of personal problems in staying away from their families for three days.

All of the training sessions conducted in Puttalam education zone were 3- day seminars while other zones conducted 5-day, 3-day, 2-day seminars. 3-day and 2-day seminars were arranged as an alternative to 5-day seminars. Therefore, all the teachers who participated in a 3-day seminar were supposed to participate in a 2-day seminar also. But, every one of the teachers who answered the questionnaire or was interviewed had participated in only one of the above-mentioned seminars. In Puttalam education zone as every seminar was conducted for three days every teacher who was trained had the same duration of training periods. In other education zones there are three groups of trained teachers on ABOE who have got training for five days, three days and two days. This results in chaos when ABOE is practised in schools. Various teachers teach ABOE in different ways depending on the amount of training they received.

When the teachers were questioned in the questionnaire about the duration of the training they received only 62 teachers answered out of the 71 teachers who had got training. When one of the teachers who did not mention the duration of the training she received was questioned as to why she did not provide a reply to the particular question,

the answer she gave was that she did not remember the number of days of the seminar. This reveals a pathetic situation that prevails in Sri Lankan education system. If the teachers who participate in a seminar cannot remember the number of days, will there be any assurance that the teachers remember what they learned or experienced in the seminar? Can there be an assertion that the knowledge and experience discussed and shared in the seminar are consequently used in the classroom? What is revealed in the above information is that the teachers participate in seminars as mere observers and do not actively take part in activities. As a result, at the end of the seminar they carry nothing in their memory and go back to the classroom with the same old methods.

Out of those who had mentioned the duration of the training, 46% have participated in 3 day seminars, 33% in 5 day seminars and 21% in two day seminars. This clearly gives evidence to the fact that there is no uniformity in teacher training and there is no national level or provincial level supervision to the teacher training aspect.

Question no. 18 aimed at getting information about the attitudes of the teachers towards the training they received. The question asked “are you satisfied with the training you received?” and five choices were given for teachers to underline the answers that best match to what they think about the training. Five choices given were *very much satisfied/ satisfied/ to a certain extent/ not satisfied/ not at all satisfied*.

Majority of the teachers appeared to be indifferent about the training. Out of the teachers who answered the question 73% say that they are satisfied with the training to a certain extent while 7% each have gone with the extremes; very much satisfied and not at all satisfied. Only 4% have said that they were satisfied with the training whereas 9% have said that they were not at all satisfied with the training. This makes the proportion of teachers who are not satisfied with the training 16% whereas only 11% of the teachers directly say that they are satisfied with the training. This is a situation into which the authorities must pay their attention on since only 10% of the teachers out of those who participated in the teacher training seminars say that they are satisfied with the training they received. When discussed with the teachers, their responses too reflected the result that came out through the questionnaire. Almost every one of the teachers started positively and had something to add with “good but...”

It is clear that the expectations of the majority of the teachers are not met in the seminars. Further analysis of their answers revealed that the seminars were planned taking into consideration what the organizers wanted to give to the teachers not what the teachers wanted to learn.

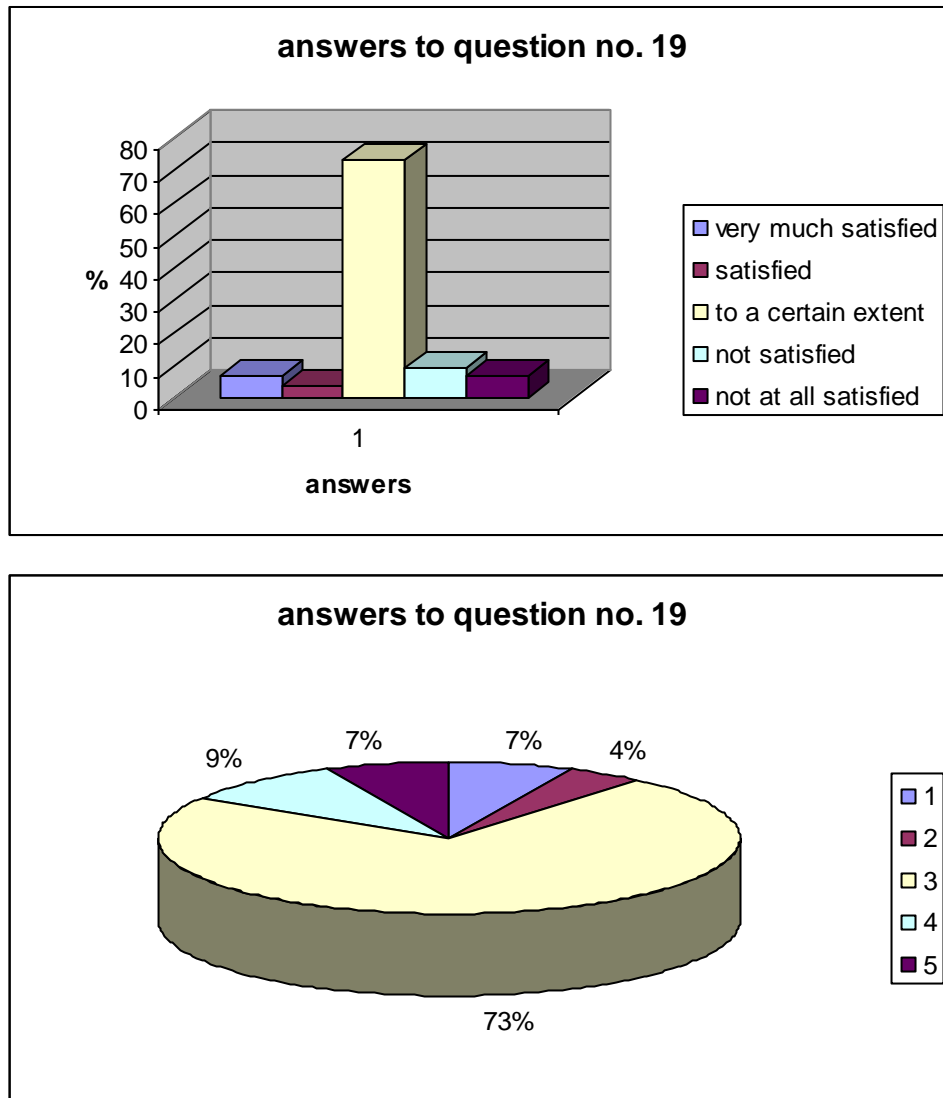


Figure 4.2 – percentages of answers to question no. 19

When their answers are analyzed, the conclusion can be arrived at that they enjoyed the seminar to a greater extent. The way the seminar was conducted and the knowledge given were highly appreciated. But, most of the teachers complained that no solutions were given to the problems that they face in the classroom. They further complained that what they were asked to do in the classroom were impractical. Some of the responses given by the teachers are quoted below.

“We did not feel lazy as we felt in other seminars. The activities were very interesting.”

“We could learn a number of new English words, but I personally feel that is not enough to teach in a class.”

“The activities, games and songs were interesting; but I don’t think we can do everything in the classroom.”

“The visual aids made were very useful but we don’t know how to use them to teach English in the classroom.”

“Those activities are too much for the level of the students. How can we do everything in a short period? First, we have to teach them the ERA lesson, then English.”

Question no. 20 was set to find out whether the teacher-training programme supplied knowledge to teachers on how to handle students of different ability levels. To the question, which asked, “Did you get training on how to handle students of different ability levels?” a greater majority of the teachers i.e. 85% answered in negative. Only 15% have mentioned that they got training from the seminar on how to handle student heterogeneity.

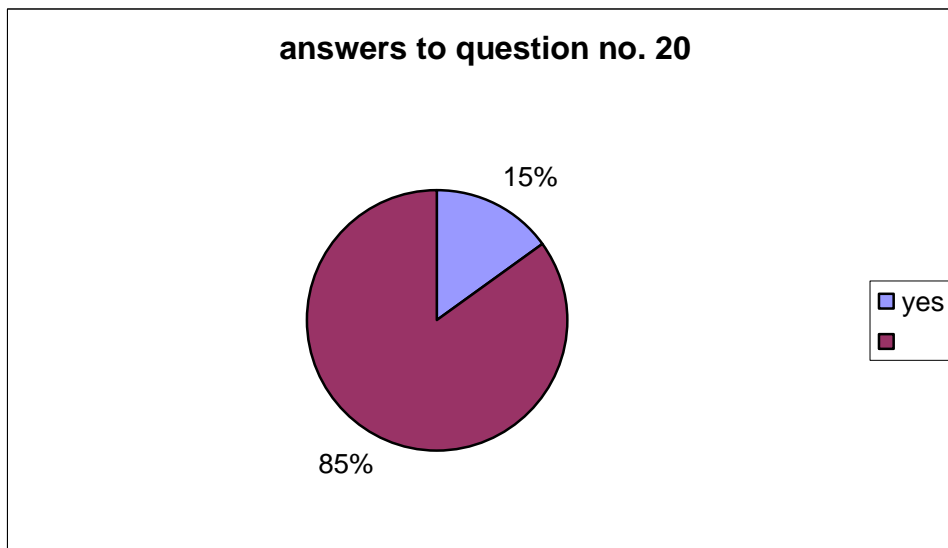


Figure 4.3 – percentages of answers to question no. 20

Out of those teachers who have answered in affirmative to question no. 20 only 50% have given an answer to question that followed. Question number 21, which requested teachers to mention the techniques they learned to handle student heterogeneity in the classroom by participating in the seminars, was set in order to get an idea about the techniques the teachers learned, use in the classroom and can be made use of to handle

student heterogeneity in any classroom. This proves that although they have learned some new techniques in the seminars, they do not know how to use them to handle student heterogeneity.

Out of 96 teachers 14 had said that they received knowledge from the seminars on how to handle student heterogeneity. But, only 8 of those who answered ‘yes’ to question no. 20 have mentioned what they learned in the seminar. Following are what they have written;

- New activities
- Assignments
- Songs
- Telling stories using pictures
- Games
- Aesthetic activities

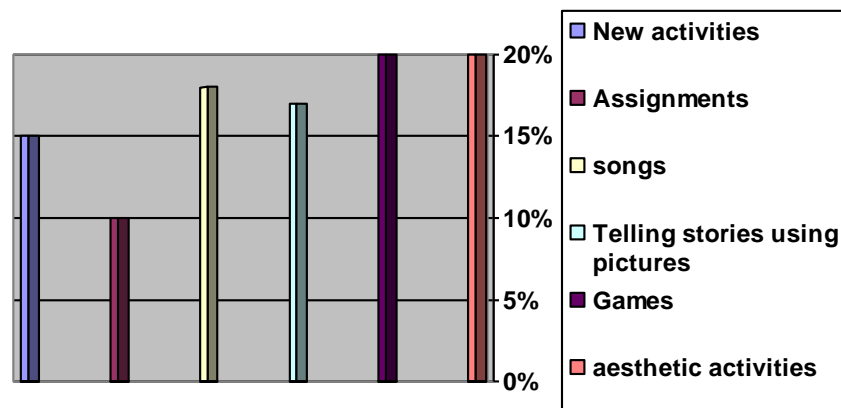


Figure 4.4; Answers and their percentages to question no. 21

Although the teachers call the above-mentioned, “new activities” they clearly appear to be the same old methods the teachers had been using for a long time. When the observed lessons were analyzed it was understandable that what take place in the classroom is quite different to what the teachers say.

A seminar was observed to find out the techniques given to the teachers to teach ABOE. It was evident that many techniques were introduced to the teachers during this seminar. Although they were not clearly defined as techniques to handle student heterogeneity most of those activities could be used to handle student heterogeneity in the

classroom. To find out whether the teachers have understood the value of those techniques as tools to handle student heterogeneity and whether they use them actually in the classroom as they have mentioned in the questionnaire, several lessons were observed. Following are the data gathered during the observations.

Almost every teacher used pictures in their lessons as they mentioned in the questionnaire. But, almost every one of them used pictures as visual aid in introducing vocabulary. It is acceptable that more students got the meanings of the words when the teachers used pictures than when the words were merely presented orally. But, teachers used them as routine visual aid with no attention on student heterogeneity.

Some pictures used by teachers were not clear enough. As a result they led to misconception. For example, one teacher used a picture to introduce the word 'nurse'. Some instruments that looked like a basket was visible behind the nurse in the particular picture. When the students saw the picture, at once they asked from the teacher "is it a tea plucker?" (In mother tongue)

It was evident that though some of the teachers used pictures for the lesson, they were ignorant to the fact that the way the pictures were used might have increased the problem of student heterogeneity. In one of the lessons teacher E did she used a panel board to stick the pictures of the family members. Teacher got several students forward and asked them to stick the pictures as she called out the names of the family members. She got a group of students forward who had some knowledge in English.

Some of them still needed help from the teacher. While the students were engaged in the activity teacher paid her attention completely to the student at the board. The activity did not help the weaker students learn a single word as they were completely neglected because the teacher was trying to help the student at the board. Situation turned worse when the rest of the students started shouting. Then the teacher had to yell at the class to silence them. The activity at the end neither was able to provide help to the students who had some knowledge nor did it help reduce student heterogeneity.

In another lesson the teacher used some pictures to introduce kitchen utensils. There was a picture of a coconut scraper, which was not clear enough. When the students saw it some of them asked whether it was a telephone. Further, the teacher mispronounced several words and when the students mispronounced some other words they were not corrected.

After introducing the words the teacher showed some pictures to the students and read out incorrect names. Although the teacher wanted the students to give the correct word, they could not do it since the English words were not familiar and they were not practiced enough with the students.

In contrast to this situation teacher F who is a teacher of the same school used picture cards very effectively in her lesson. Teacher used large and clear enough picture cards that were visible to every student in the class. She introduced the family members using both English and MT at the end of the lesson she asked students to paste pictures of family members in a book and to write their names in both mother tongue and English. It appeared to be successful since there already were several other picture cards made by weaker students on various other topics.

The above experience give proof to the fact that pictures can be used to handle student heterogeneity in the classroom and they can be used effectively in helping the weaker students to learn the vocabulary easily provided they are handled carefully and tactfully. For this, the teachers need a proper training with attention to the problem of student heterogeneity. Although several techniques including picture cards, puppets, muppets were introduced in the observed seminar not a single time the word heterogeneity was mentioned. Neither a single teacher came up with the problem student heterogeneity during the seminar. The seminar being conducted in English medium and the teachers were asked several times to speak in English, it was evident that majority of the teachers were reluctant to speak.

When the situation of using pictures to handle student heterogeneity is thus, there was very little evidence to prove that the teachers used the other mentioned techniques to handle or reduce student heterogeneity. Although most of the teachers have mentioned that they use new activities to handle student heterogeneity every one of them stuck to the given in the handbooks with very little alterations or modifications.

The reason for the above situation may be because almost every activity practiced in the seminar was given just as an activity to be used during the lesson either as an enrichment activity or as an activity to present vocabulary. No any way of adaptation of those activities to suit the ability levels of the students was introduced. As a result the teachers also tend to use the activities as they were first introduced. Awareness about the

way in which those activities were practised during the seminar would be helpful in further analysis of classroom practice.

When the teacher-training programme was observed, it was clear that a number of activities that are similar to what the teachers have mentioned were introduced to the teachers. But they were merely introduced as tools to facilitate teaching, not as instruments to handle student heterogeneity.

On the first day of the seminar, after the introduction of objectives of the seminar and ABOE, there was a game, which they called a 'warmer'. There, the teachers introduced themselves using their first names and they made a description about the things they like. Under theme 1, grade 1 the song "Good morning to you" was practiced, for grade 2 the song "Here we go round the mango tree" and a game was introduced. The game was called "Swapping places" during which the teachers were given pictures of parts of a tree while they stood in a circle. The questions "where are the fruits/leaves?" etc. were asked and the teachers were supposed to make separate circles shouting out "Here are the leaves/fruits" and so on.

After the lunch interval another warmer called running dictation was presented. Then activities and songs of themes 2, 3, and 4 were demonstrated.

³"Row row row your boat, I see a big dog, Bits of paper, Good morning dear father" were the songs demonstrated and the games presented were "Simon says (using actions related to water), changing seats (with family members), jump up (things that float on water)".

Towards the end of the first day there was a session, which demonstrated ways of making visual aid. Various ways of making finger puppets, hand puppets and glove puppets were demonstrated.

The second day also was started with a warmer. The games "Pass the bag (bean bag) and Fruit salad" were demonstrated. The songs "I like curry, I hear thunder and This is the way we paint the door" were sung under the themes 8, 9 and 10. The songs "If you are happy and you know it and Bits of paper" were sung. A guessing game: "Find and run" too was practiced.

³ Methodology of presentation of songs, games and other activities – appendix III

Towards the end of the day under the themes 11, 12 and 13 the song “Bus ride and This is the way the sun shines” were sung and the games “Slap the pictures, Roll the ball” and a memory game were practiced.

On the third day also some more visual aids were prepared. Although they were made nicely, very little knowledge on how to use them in ERA lessons was provided.

More songs and activities were practiced under the themes 14, 15 and 16. The song “The farmer sows the seeds” and the games “True or false and Roll the ball” were among them. All of the above mentioned activities were introduced in interesting ways. But they were very rarely introduced as activities that can be used to motivate weaker students. They were merely introduced as instruments that can be used to establish the theme and teach the vocabulary. No technique was given to adopt these activities to suit the different levels of the students.

When these games, activities and songs were studied thoroughly it is understood that they can be easily adopted to suit the different levels of the students. Therefore it is encouraging to notice that the teachers see these activities as tools that can be used to handle student heterogeneity. But when the observed lessons were analyzed, an occasion in which the above-mentioned activities were used as tools of handling student heterogeneity was very rarely seen.

There were only a handful of activities that can be categorized as ‘new activities’ mentioned by the teachers. Under the theme “Animals that come into the garden” in grade one, teacher A used the sounds made by animals successfully to motivate the students. Teacher, at the beginning of the lesson asked the students to name the animals that come to their garden. When the students gave the names in MT the teacher gave the English names. Then the teacher asked the students to make the sound of the animals as she gave the name of the animals in English. Students were very much interested in the activity and every student participated in the lesson actively.

The next day the teacher continued the lesson under the same theme. She started the lesson with a reminder of what they learned the previous day. Then the teacher got the students to imitate the walking style of the animals. When the teacher said the name of the animal, the students mimed how the animal walks/jumps/flies or swims. Then the teacher divided the students into several groups and assigned a name of an animal to each group. When the teacher called out the name of an animal, students walked out in groups,

imitating the walking style of the animal. Students engaged in this activity too with enthusiasm and interest.

Teacher D did the same activity with a slight alteration and it was even more successful. She got the help of the English teacher and gave the correct English word for the movement of every animal.

E.g. Fish – swim	bird – fly
Rabbit – hop	snake – glide
Horse – run	monkey – jump
Frog – jump	elephant – amble
Bee – fly	butterfly - fly

Later, the teacher assigned children with a name of an animal and asked them to form circles separately when the teacher called out the names of the animals. Students did the activity with interest.

Although some of the teachers have mentioned that they tell stories using pictures and give assignments to handle student heterogeneity, not a single occasion could be seen in the observed lessons where students were given assignments or stories been told using pictures. There was only one teacher who asked students to paste pictures in a book at home. But, it was given to the whole class as homework with no special attention or instructions to the weaker students. Not one of the teachers related a story during observed ERA lessons. There were neither dramas nor recitation of poems. Not a single song outside the handbook was practiced. The assistance of the music and dancing teachers was never sought.

Quite contrary to this many songs and games were practiced during the lessons. Although it was evident that most of the weaker students took part in these activities more enthusiastically, the teachers did not pay special attention to them. Thus, several opportunities of motivating them to learn were wasted.

Some of the songs and games were used as enrichment activities and some were taught as separate lessons. Among the songs frequently used were “Row row row your boat, I hear thunder, Farmer sows the seed, Bits of paper, I see a big dog” etc.

(How songs and games were used during the lessons will be further discussed when the answers given by teachers to question no.23 are analyzed.)

4.3 How The Problem Of Student Heterogeneity Is Addressed In Relation To How ABOE Is Practiced In The Classroom.

The first part of chapter 4 discussed how teachers practice ABOE in the classroom, the training they received, the elements of theory regarding student heterogeneity discussed during the teacher training and how that knowledge is related to their lessons in the classroom. The way the teachers handle student heterogeneity in relation to ABOE is further discussed under chapter 4.3.

Data gathered from the questionnaire and observations are analyzed in relation to each other to find out how the teachers have understood and handled the problem of student heterogeneity.

Question numbers 3, 4, 5 of the questionnaire were set to find out whether the teachers have understood that there are heterogeneous groups of students in the class. The questions were prepared particularly in relation to English language ability. As the students in key stage one are virtually beginners to the language, heterogeneity could be easily understood if there is difference among the students in relation to the existing knowledge of English.

Question no. 3 asked “Are there students in your class who cannot understand English words and songs?” almost everyone of the teachers agree to the fact that there are students who cannot understand English words, only 3% saying ‘no’. Only 2 teachers have left the boxes empty in which they were supposed to put a tick. To verify the above information, question no. 4 asked from the teachers whether there were students who could easily understand English words. The result expected was the direct opposite to that of question no. 3. But, there was a slight deviation with 74% saying ‘yes’ and 26% saying ‘no’. Four teachers have refrained from giving any answer to this question.

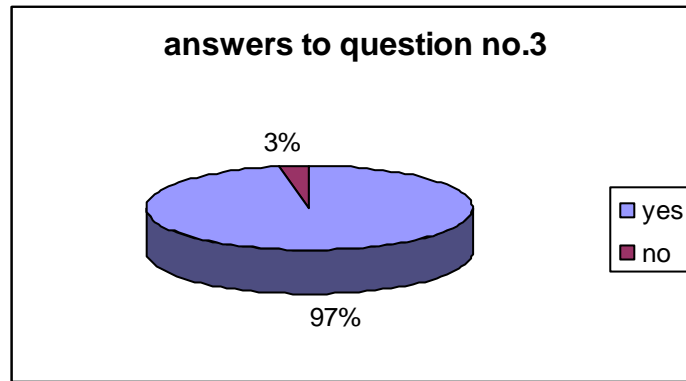


Figure 4.5 – Percentages of answers to question number 3

When only 3% of the teachers say there are no students in their classes who cannot understand English words and songs (in other words only 3% of the teachers say that all the students in their classes understand English easily) 74% in the following question say that there are students who can understand English words well.

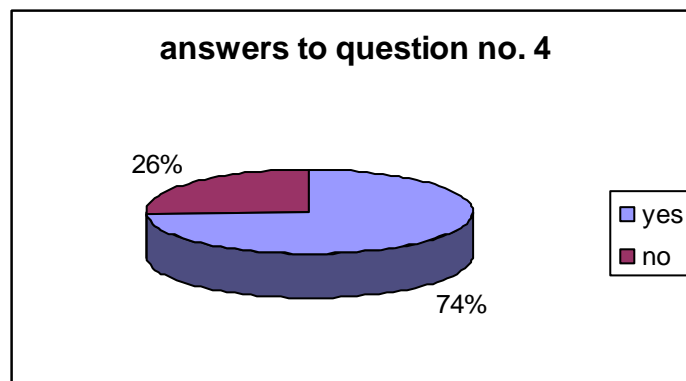
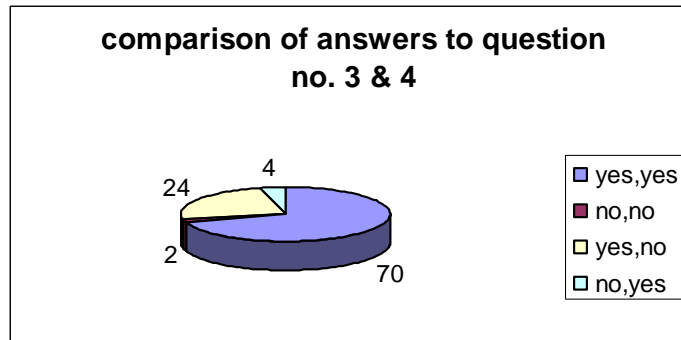


Figure 4.6 – Percentages of answers to question number 4

When the answers were further analyzed following results were seen. Out of 96 teachers 70 have given the answer “yes” to both question no. 3 and 4 accepting that there are students in their classes who do not understand English as well as there are students who understand English. From the rest of the teachers 24 have given the answer “yes” to question no.3 and “no” to question no. 4. It is felt that they have gone to an extreme saying that there are no students in their classes who can understand English. There are two teachers who have given “no” as the answer to question no. 3 and “yes” to question no.4. It is quite unbelievable that there are grade 1 and 2 classes in Northwestern province (NWP)

where all the students learn English equally well. Results of the observations and informal interviews with the teachers reveal that this situation is practically far from truth.

Figure 4.7 – Comparison of answers to question number 3 and 4



When the above results are examined it is clear that majority of the teachers accept that there are students who cannot understand English well. Although 71% of the teachers admit that there are students of different ability levels, around 27% do not accept that there is student heterogeneity in their classes in relation to the knowledge of English.

Question no. 5 asked “Are there students in your class who find it difficult to answer in English although they understand English?” Question no. 3 and 4 were set in order to verify the fact whether there are two groups of students who know English and who do not know English whereas question no. 5 aimed at finding out whether there is a middle group too. Answers to this question shows that majority of the teachers accept that there is such a group of students also. The teachers who say that there are no students in their classes who cannot understand English say “no” to this question also. It is evident that they firmly declare that all the students in their classes learn English equally well.

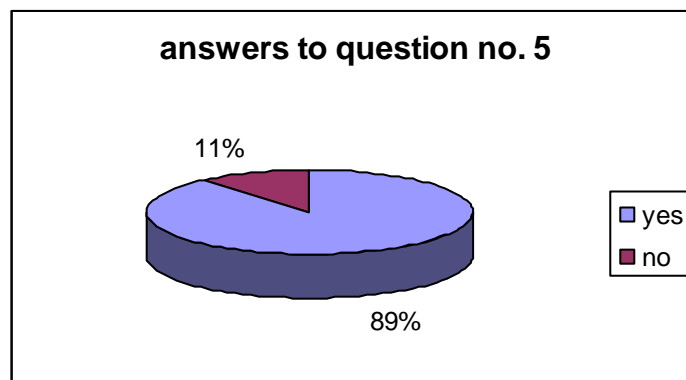


Figure 4.8 – Percentages of answers to question number 5

A greater majority of the teachers who say that there are no students who understand English have given the answer ‘yes’ to this question. Only 3 teachers out of 24 still say that there are no students in their classes who can understand English. With this result the percentage of those who understand and accept that there are groups of students in different ability levels in a class increases to 95% and the answers given by 27% of the teachers who said that there were no students in their classes who can understand English come to an acceptable level since in most of the village schools it is very difficult to find students who come to grade one with at least a very little knowledge of English. If the teachers understand that there is student heterogeneity among students and it is the natural situation of any class, it will be easy to handle this situation in the classroom.

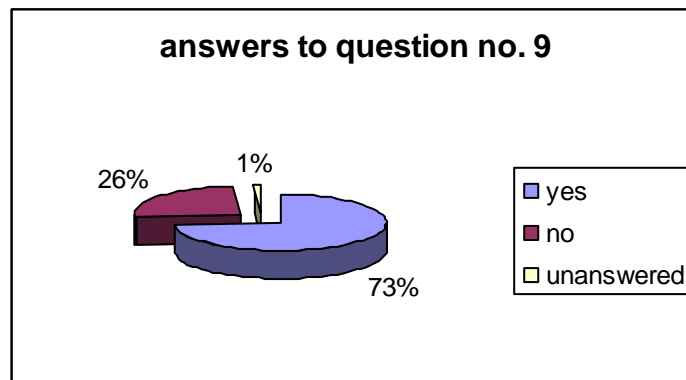


Figure 4.9 - Percentages of answers to question number 9

To find out whether the teachers perceive student heterogeneity as a problem that should be paid special attention to, question no. 8 and 9 were included in the questionnaire. Question no. 9 asked whether the teachers had noticed that the weaker students always get distracted from the lesson with the assumption that to notice whether the weaker students do not pay attention to the lesson the teacher must have paid more attention to them. The answers revealed that majority understand that the weaker students continuously lose their attention to the lesson. Question no. 8 asked “Do you pay special attention on weaker students?” When the answers to this question were analysed, it is revealed that the teachers pay special attention on weaker students. But the results of the observed lessons proved this to be otherwise. Although majority of the teachers say that weaker students always lose

their attention to the lesson, it was observed in the classroom that most of the teachers were not conscious about this problem and did not try to find a genuine solution.

As a result opportunities to reduce student heterogeneity were wasted and their individual differences were broadened.

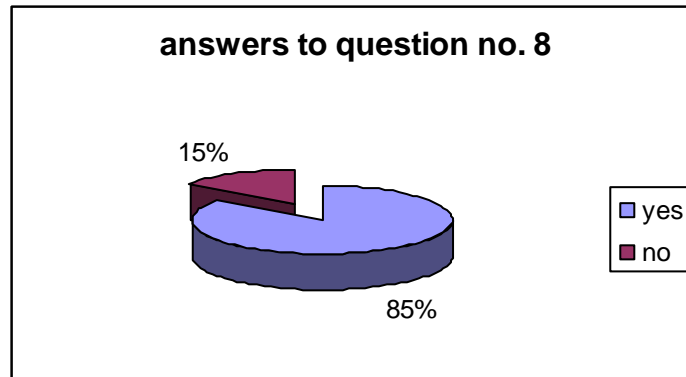


Figure 4.10 – percentages of answers to question number 8

Majority of the teachers during their lessons tend to use whole class questions without posing questions to individual students. Hence, only the clever students involved in the lesson while weaker students were idling. In a lesson conducted by teacher D under the theme “Animals that come to our garden” in grade 2, the teacher used an A4 size card on which pictures of several birds were pasted. It was visible only to the students who were sitting closer to the teacher. Although the card could be seen at the back, the students were not able to make out the pictures of the birds. Several students complained saying “We can’t see”. Nevertheless, the teacher seemed not to hear them. With this observation it is clear that the teachers when they prepare lesson plans and visual materials do not take into consideration the fact that there are heterogeneous groups of students in the class.

While the situation of helping the weaker students is thus, the situation of handling the gifted students was not very much different. It was clear that most of the teachers considered the gifted to be troublemakers. In a grade one class of school 1 there was a student who continuously kept on answering each question the teacher asked. Not only that but also she had a lot of information to add to everything the teacher said. Sitting in the middle of the classroom (student no. 18, appendix IV – seating arrangement) she became the center attraction to other students. The only solution the teacher had was to neglect her.

In one occasion the teacher showed a picture of a postman and asked, “who is this?” the student kept on saying “postman, he brings us letters, he comes by bicycle...”

when she understood that the teacher was not listening she stood up and said it aloud and the teacher had to accept her answer.

During another grade one lesson in school 3 the teacher was teaching the names of family members. Just as the teacher started the lesson a student began to say, “mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle....” repeatedly. The teacher responded and reinforced him quickly saying “very good” with what the student became silent for a moment. When another student made a mistake he at once gave the correct answer and the teacher appreciated him. As the lesson progressed this child became a nuisance forcing the teacher to ask him to be silent. But, this also seemed not to be a long lasting solution since in a few minutes the student resumed his disturbances.

A very common problem every teacher had to face frequently with the clever students was that those students always came out with words and information that were irrelevant to the lesson. Some teachers appreciated the students and told them that those words and information were not necessary for the lesson they were doing that particular day. Some teachers just neglected what those students said and sometimes had to speak harshly to the students in order to keep them silent. Therefore it is evident that having students of different ability levels in the class really makes problems to the teacher.

When directly questioned whether they find the presence of students of different ability levels in the class to be a problem, in question no 16, 70% say ‘yes’ and 30% say ‘no’. It is further proved that the presence of the students of different ability levels causes problems to teachers as witnessed during observations.

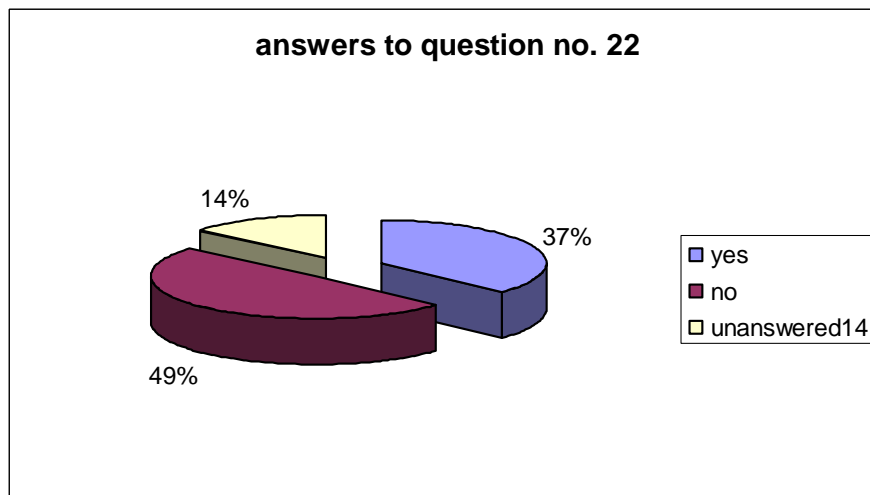
When the answers to the above three questions were deeply analyzed it was noticed that majority of the teachers have answered in the same pattern. Only two teachers have said that they do not pay attention to weaker students often and they have also mentioned that their students do not lose attention often. There may not be very weak students in the above two teachers’ class and sometimes the teachers might not have noticed that the weaker students are out of the lesson because they do not pay special attention to weaker students.

Out of those teachers who have said that, they pay special attention to weaker students 2 have not given an answer to question no. 9. Interestingly 24 teachers who have said that they pay special attention to weaker students have further said that those weaker students do not lose their attention during the lesson.

Several questions were set in order to find out whether the teachers use special techniques to handle student heterogeneity and if they do so to get an idea about the techniques used by the teachers.

Question number 22 was set in order to find out whether the teachers actually use special techniques to handle student heterogeneity during ERA lessons. The answers show that $\frac{1}{2}$ of the teachers use special techniques to handle student heterogeneity. At the first view, it is seen as if $\frac{1}{2}$ of the teachers use special techniques to handle student heterogeneity. But, when the answers were analyzed in deep, the picture becomes more and more repulsive. Although 49% of the teachers have said that they use special techniques to handle student heterogeneity, there were about 14% of the teachers who have not given an answer to this question.

Figure 4.11 – percentages of answers to question number 22



A teacher, who has said that she does not use any new technique to handle student heterogeneity, gives answers to question number 23 which requested the teachers to mention the techniques they use. She must have by mistake marked “no” to question number 22 instead of “yes”. Nevertheless, her answers were considered as they were given.

Out of the teachers who have mentioned that they use new techniques to handle student heterogeneity 15% have not mentioned the techniques they use. To question number 23 which requested the teachers to mention the special techniques they use to handle student heterogeneity in the class, almost every teacher repeatedly has mentioned

the everyday activities most of the teachers use in their day today lessons as routine activities.

Among the techniques they have mentioned, most frequent are the followings;

- Games
- Songs
- Group activities
- Individual discussions
- Stories
- Drama
- More challenging activities to clever students
- Using the activities that are mostly preferred by the weaker students.
- Using more simple words
- Making students engaged in the same activity repeatedly
- Using more simple activities for weaker students (questioning and commands)
- Introducing different things
- Keeping them occupied in some work always
- Taking help from clever students.

Observations of lessons again prove that what the teachers practice in the classroom was quite contrasting to what they have mentioned in the questionnaire. One of the most frequent answers given by the teachers has been that they use songs and games to handle student heterogeneity. Following were the situations that could be noticed when several of the observed lessons were analyzed.

Some teachers used songs as enrichment activities while some teachers taught them separately as complete lessons. The songs “I see a big dog, Farmer sows the seeds, “Row row row your boat” were used as enrichment activities. They were sung at the end of the lessons. First teachers introduced the vocabulary and the themes of the lessons. The above songs were used as enrichment activities after practicing the vocabulary.

The songs “Bits of paper and I hear thunder” were taught as separate lessons. At the beginning the teachers told the students that they were going to learn songs that day. Then

the teacher reminded the previous day's lesson to the students and sang the song several times. Then she got the students to sing after her. Later, the teacher got the students to sing with her and finally the students to sing alone.

Although several weaker students joined singing as the song was practised several times at a stretch, it seemed that the clever students lost interest and paid their attention on something else.

The situation about the games was very similar to that of songs. Games also were used both as enrichment activities and separate lessons. The most commonly used game, as an enrichment activity was "Simon says". It was used in several lessons to practice "Things we do using water, Activities of a farmer in a paddy field, How animals move". A "Yes/No" game was done in a lesson to practice the nouns the students learned during several lessons.

In this particular lesson, the teacher made students stand in two queues. Teacher showed a picture and read a name. If the name was correct students were supposed to run to the "Yes" chair and sit. If the name was wrong, they were supposed to run to the "No" chair and sit. The student who sat first was the winner.

Majority of the students were not able to follow the teacher's instructions even though the instructions were given in MT. Only 3 pairs did the game correctly whereas all the other pairs ran to two different chairs and sat.

Another game practiced was "What's the time Mr. Bear? It was done with the help of the English teacher. The English teacher first taught the students how to tell the time and practiced them well. Then the teacher selected a student and gave him the mask of the bear. Instructions were given in Sinhala. But, as the game continued the following problems arose.

The students were always ready to run and they ran everywhere in the ground. They kept on asking the time without allowing Mr. Bear answering the questions. Mr. Bear sometimes forgot the time and the teacher had to interfere and remind the time. Sometimes the students were too noisy that they could not hear Mr. Bear's answers. This game was done taking both grade one and two together. Although grade two students actively participated in the game, grade one students were not much interested. May be because majority of them could not understand what was happening. They found it very difficult to

run with the grade two students and several of them were knocked own by grade two students when they ran.

Only the game “Simon says” help handle student heterogeneity to a certain extent concerning the particular vocabulary used each time the game was practiced. Students were sitting in a circle and when the teacher gave a command clever students responded quickly. Weaker stunts followed them and in a few seconds joined the action. The teacher gave students plenty of time to change their action without penalizing them at once.

The other two activities commonly used were questioning and commands. Questioning was most often used to draw the attention of the weaker students to the lesson. But, commands were rarely used for the same purpose.

Teachers asked questions both in L₁ an L₂. Sometimes half of the question was in MT and the other part was in English. All these questions helped teachers in various ways during the lesson.

Almost every teacher used questions as a way of introducing words. Most of the questions were asked from the whole class. When questions were asked from the whole class, students answered in chorus. Since the students who knew the answer always shouted out aloud, inappropriate answers given by some of the stunts were missed by the teacher. Although teachers sometimes heard these inappropriate answers, they preferred to neglect them and continue with the correct answer given even though the mistake was critical.

In school 2 during a lesson the teacher C conducted she showed a picture of a farmer and said “Farmer”. Then asked, “Who is a farmer?” in MT. a student at once said, “Farmer is an uncle” in MT. The teacher neglected the answer but the student kept on repeating “farmer – uncle”.

In a lesson done by teacher B in school 1, the teacher asked from the whole class, “Who works in a bank?” to which several students gave the correct answer. She neglected the answers and kept on asking the same question from the students who appeared to be drawn away from the lesson, but, not one of those students could give the answer whereas the students in front were shouting out the correct answer. Finally, a student stood up and said the answer aloud forcing the teacher to accept it as the right answer.

This shows that although questioning from the weaker students is a good technique to keep them in the lesson, paying sufficient attention on the behavior of the clever students is also necessary.

All the other teachers went round the class during the lessons and asked questions from individual students and provided plenty of reinforcement. It was evident that reinforcement helps a lot to encourage the weaker students to pay more attention on the lesson and to give answers at later occasions. Teachers help those students when they found it difficult to give the answers. As a whole, most of the teachers used questioning effectively in presenting vocabulary as well as in handling students of various ability levels. Furthermore, some of the teachers used questioning effectively to help the weaker students to learn more words.

Commands too were used to handle students in the class. Almost every student appeared to be familiar with the commands and every one of them obeyed the commands often. Yet, most often general and common commands were used repeatedly during the lessons. The teachers were not able to alter commands to match the particular theme expected during the game “Simon says...” Further, there were ambiguous and complex commands too. Being not conscious about the physical development of the students, some teachers made them tired by continuously giving commands that included a lot of physical responses.

In one occasion when the teacher wanted to change the subject she asked the students to close and keep aside the books in which they were doing an activity. Then she gave commands like “stand up, sit down, hands up and hands down...” several times. Finally, she said “hands up” followed by “sit down” and all the students sat with raised hands. This shows that the teachers must be careful when they give commands as these students are still very small and tend to follow whatever the teacher says as it is.

“Taking help from clever students and using more simple words for weaker students” were another two techniques mentioned by the teachers. Although these two techniques could have been easily used during the lessons they were used only once or twice by the teachers. Help from the clever students could have been easily taken in questioning. But, most of the times the teacher herself provided the answers when the weaker students failed to give answers. Had the teachers taken help from the clever students in questions they could have easily controlled the class too.

In almost all the occasions it was the same list of words that was introduced and practiced. Separate lists of easy words given were prepared for weaker students; even the simple words present in the target lessons were not practiced more with the weaker students. It is evident that most of the ways of providing more opportunities of learning to weaker students were carelessly neglected.

The other techniques mentioned by the teachers;

- More challenging activities to clever students
- Using the activities that are mostly preferred by the weaker students.
- Introducing different things
- Keeping them occupied in some work always

were not visible in practice at least a single time during the lessons. It is clear that the above-mentioned techniques are very rarely used in the classroom.

One of the traditional and most commonly applied solutions to the problem of student heterogeneity is dividing the students into homogeneous groups. To find out whether the teachers still prefer this easy solution, question no. 13 asked whether the teachers have grouped the students according to their English language ability. Only a few teachers say that they divide their students into equal ability groups. With this result, it is clear that the majority of the teachers have changed their attitudes. This may be a result of the fact that the principals do not allow the teachers to divide the students into homogenous groups as it is against the circulars and the principles of the ministry of education.

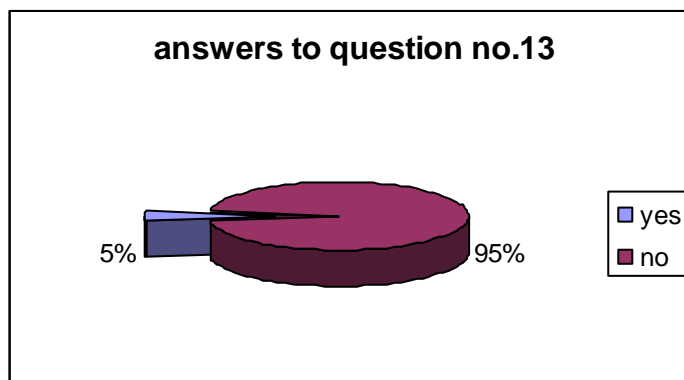


Figure 4.12 - Percentages of answers to question number 13

Question no. 10 of the questionnaire asked from the teachers whether they use the same method to teach ABOE to all the students. According to the answers received to this question majority of the teachers use different methods to teach students of different ability

levels. When they were questioned, as to whether they give different activities to different groups 56% have said 'no'. Although majority of the teachers have said that they use different methods to teach students of different levels only 56% have said that they use different activities with students of different ability levels. It is obvious that 26% of the teachers do not pay enough attention on the students of different ability levels. Furthermore, it is not clear how 17% of the teachers approach this problem since they accept that they do not use varied activities with different groups, which is one of the mostly accepted methods of handling students of different ability levels.

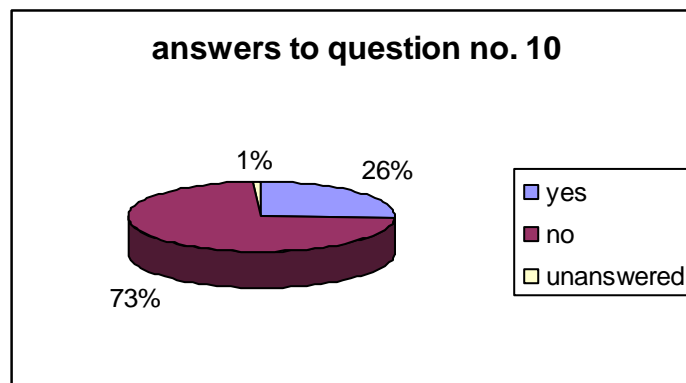


Figure 4.13 – Percentages of answers to question number 10

In order to get this situation further clarified question no. 11 asked from the teachers whether they vary the activities to suit the levels of the different students and question no.12 requested them to mention how they adopt the activities if they do so. In question no. 11, a greater majority of the teachers say that they adopt the activities to suit the level of the students. There is a little deviation from the result received to question no. 10. Out of the analyzed 96 questionnaires, there were 6 questionnaires that no answer has been marked to question no. 11. But, the situation drastically changes when it comes to question no. 12 because only 54 teachers out of those who have said 'yes' to question no. 11 have answered this question. Those who have answered this question is just 63% as a percentage of the teachers who said 'yes' to question no 11. The rest have just said 'yes' when they were asked as to whether they change the activities to suit the ability levels of the students and avoid answering the next question, which requested them to mention how they did it.

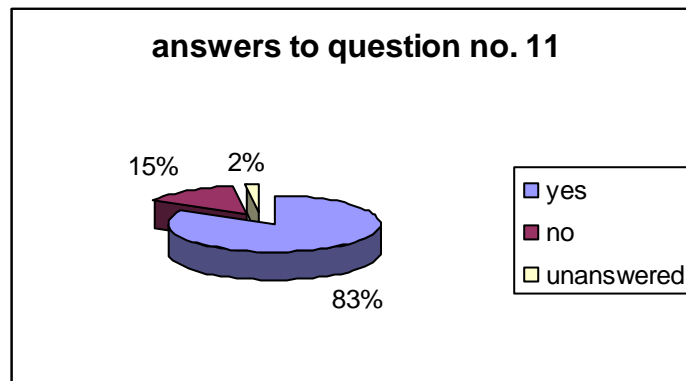


Figure 4.14 - Percentages of answers to question number 11

There are two teachers who have said that they do not change activities to suit the levels of the students but in question no. 12 they have mentioned how they could change activities to suit the students. The technique they have mentioned is that a picture should be used for each word that is introduced and it should be placed in the classroom so that every child sees it continuously in the classroom. Following are the techniques mentioned by the other teachers.

- Use songs
- Use games
- Use different activities
- Use English in the occasions like marking the register, playing and during the interval
- Use only the words that can be used in ERA lessons
- Insert English words when speaking about things they love to do.
- Use pictures
- Use simple words continuously
- Use competitions
- Start with simple activities and gradually increase the level of difficulty so that the objectives of the lessons are achieved
- Prepare fun activities
- Use group activities
- Use posters
- Make simple activities for weaker students

- Use activities in order that clever students get more practice while weaker students reach the accepted level.
- Teach words to weaker students when other students are engaged in activities.

How teachers use songs, games and assignments was discussed under question no 21 and 23. The use of other techniques the teachers have mentioned can be evaluated by analyzing the data gathered from the observed lessons.

One technique the teachers have mentioned is that they use English in every possible situation in the classroom as well as outside the classroom; for example, in situations like marking the register, during the interval and while doing cleaning. It was very difficult to observe those situations as only the ERA lessons were observed. Nevertheless, it was seen that most of the students used English in asking permission.

E.g., May I go to the toilet?

May I drink some water?

There were two teachers who continuously gave commands in English during the lessons. It was later learnt that both of them were (teacher A in school 1 and teacher F in school 3) teachers of English, teaching to primary grades. Although they used English in every possible occasion with the students, it was not clear how it could be an answer to the question “How do you adopt your activities to suit the students of different ability levels.

Although some teachers have mentioned that they alter the activities in order that the clever students get more practice while the weaker students reach the accepted ability level, it was not noticed practically in use during the lessons. Altering the activities was not seen during a single lesson. At least the instructions were not simplified in any occasion. Instead, most of the teachers preferred to give instructions completely in MT. It was felt that majority of the teachers were not competent enough to give instructions in English.

Another group of teachers have said that they use only the words that can be used in ERA lessons. This is an interesting answer because 86% of the teachers have said ‘no’ to the second question, which asked whether they use only the words given in the TG during ERA lessons. But, the results of the observed lessons show that the teachers practice the opposite to what they said; i.e. they confine themselves most often to the list of the words given in TG.

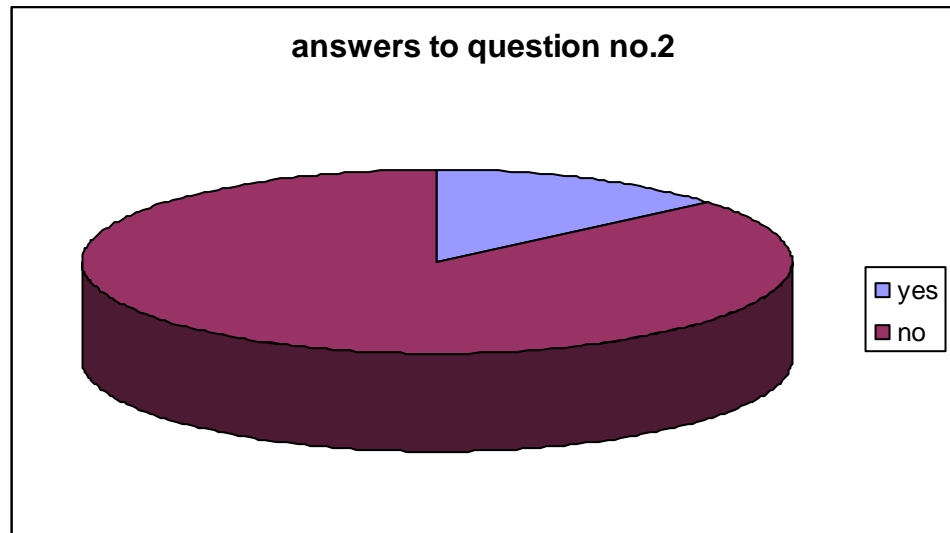


Figure 4.15 – Percentages of answers to question no. 2

Although the teachers who have said that they use only the words that can be used during ERA lessons had told the truth it was not clear enough how it helped handle student heterogeneity. It is understandable that the lesser the number of words used the lesser the number of problems created in the classroom (especially among the weaker students). But, the fact is clear that it disturbs the objectives of ABOE.

Another technique mentioned by the teachers was that they always insert English words when they speak about things that the students loved to do. This was also noticed during the lessons; yet, almost in every occasion it was the teacher who practiced the word not the students. Table 4.3 shows that in most of the occasions the teachers have used the words many more times that the students did.

Table 4.3 gives evidence to the fact that the teachers use the words more than the students do. During the observations it was noticed that majority of the teachers do not give sufficient amount of opportunities to the students to use the learned words in the classroom.

Another common answer given by the teachers was that they use pictures to teach students of different ability levels. During several of the observed lessons teachers were seen using pictures.

In school 2 teacher C used an enlarged picture of a paddy field to introduce the words under the theme “Places where people work”. Teacher D used pictures to introduce the names of family members.

In school 3, teacher E also used pictures to introduce the names of family members. Teacher F used pictures to introduce words that come under the theme “Tools used at home”. Although teachers used pictures in every one of the above situations each time the pictures were used as visual aids to introduce words not as instruments to adopt activities.

Following situations were identified as the occasions in which pictures were used as tools in activities.

In the game “Yes/No” played in school 1 the teacher used a number of pictures of parts of buildings, family members and animals. Most of the students were puzzled during the game and gave incorrect responses. The pictures helped neither the weaker students nor the clever students. In fact they did not help the lesson at all.

In the game “What’s the time Mr. Bear?” the face of the bear acted as an instrument to stimulate motivation. Every child wanted to wear the face and even the weakest students tried to be the bear although they could not tell the time accurately. The same teacher used picture cards of family members in an activity very effectively. In that particular activity she distributed the picture cards among the students. Then she asked the students to show the picture as the teacher called out the names of the family members. Teacher helped the weaker students when they found it difficult to respond. Above situations show that pictures help teachers to get the weaker students more involved in activities. Yet, the above examples do not show how they adopt the activities to suit the levels of the students. In fact no adaptation was done; instead pictures were used only to make the activities attractive to more students.

School	Teacher	Word	No. of times the teacher used	No. of times the students used
1	A	Farmer	5	1
		Teacher	5	2
		Doctor	4	2
	B	Farm	5	0
		Farmer	5	2
2	D	Paddy field	10	5
		mammoty	10	7

3	E	Birds	6	5
		Rabbits	5	3
	F	Ring	5	0
		Knife	5	9
		Mammoty	6	8
		Coconut scraper	7	3
		Plates	5	5
	G	Monkey	5	3

Table 4.3 – Frequency of the words used by teachers and students.

Some teachers have mentioned that they use simple words continuously during their lessons. That was acceptable as very rarely it was noticed that a word, which, could not be easily understood by the students, was used during the observed lessons. Almost every word used by the teachers were quickly understood and learned by the majority of the students. Only the words like “pigeon, squirrel, sickle, plough” were found difficult to pronounce by the students. Some of the teachers too mispronounced several English words during the lessons.

Although some teachers have said that they use competitions, the only competition seen during observations was the “Yes/No” game, which proved to be unsuccessful. Another common answer given by the teachers is that they start with simple activities and gradually increase the level of difficulty so that the objectives are achieved. It was observed that majority of the teachers rigidly follow that routine from simple to complex. On the other hand the teachers did not use many activities during one lesson. Majority of them used only two or three activities during a lesson and there was not much difference among them in relation to complexity.

Preparation of fun activities is another technique mentioned by the teachers. “Making the sounds of the animals”, “Simon says” were among the fun activities used by the teachers. “Simon says” is not an activity prepared by the teachers. It is a game that has been used by the teachers for a long time. Another answer mentioned by a few of the teachers is that they use group activities. Many of the fun activities were group activities. Teachers used more group activities than individual activities. How teachers used songs, games and assignments were discussed under question no. 21. Although the teachers have

said that they use posters and assignments neither a poster nor an assignment was used at least by a single teacher during the observed lessons.

Although the teachers have mentioned a number of techniques as what they use to adopt activities to suit the different ability levels of the students, not in a single situation it was clear how they adopt the activities. Many of those activities were observed in use during the lessons. But, most often those techniques were used in activities that were practiced as whole class activities. Thus, it is evident that although the teachers try to make the activities as simple as possible they do not use the above techniques to adopt the activities to suit different ability levels of the students.

Although not a single occasion during which different activities were used with different groups was observed in the lessons; 43% of the teachers have said “yes” to question no.14 that asked whether they use different activities for different groups of students. Among the answered questionnaires there are 7 questionnaires that do not carry an answer to question no.14 making the percentage of the teachers that say “no” to question no. 14, 50%. A teacher who has said, “yes” to this question has written alongside the answer that she uses this technique in teaching other subjects only and it is also very rarely done.

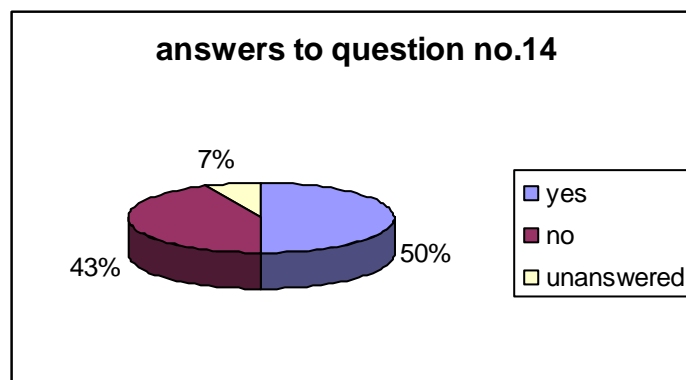


Figure 4.16 – percentages of answers to question number 14.

One of the highly accepted techniques to support the weaker students is getting help of the clever students, as the commonly found human resource in the classroom in abundance is the students. This could be the most practical and the easiest solution. To find out whether the teachers use this resource efficiently, question no. 6 was included in the

questionnaire. It asked from the teachers whether they took help from the clever students to teach English to weaker students. Majority of the teachers say that they do so. There are 5 teachers who have not given an answer.

Question number 7 asked teachers to mention how they use clever students to help the weaker students if they use clever students to help the weaker students. To this question one of the teachers who have not given an answer to question number 6 gives an interesting answer. Following is the translation of the answer.

“Weaker students can get practical experience about English when they are mixed up with the students who can understand English and use English. ABOE does not mean to teach English words purposely and directly to the students. It aims to use English words naturally and spontaneously among the students.”

This answer seemed to be the only answer provided with almost accurate understanding about ABOE. Yet, the observations revealed that majority of the teachers do not have confident in using English words naturally and spontaneously. A number of occasions can be quoted as examples for this.

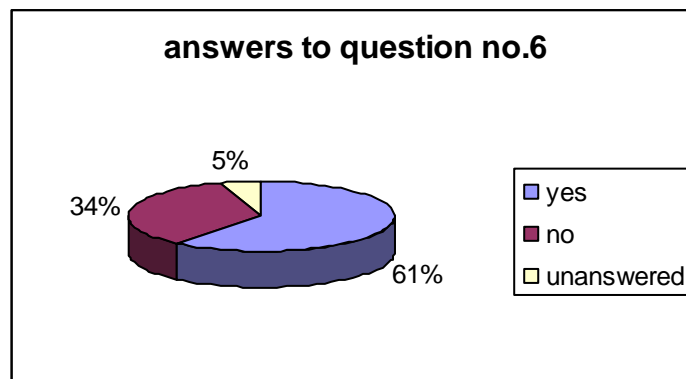


Figure 4.17 – percentages of answers to question number 6

In school 2 during a lesson of teacher C, she was teaching the lesson “Places where people work”. In this lesson the teacher showed a picture of a teacher and asked several questions about the teacher. When she asked, “What is there in the teacher’s hand?” (The answer she expected was ‘book’) the students answered, “Clock”. It was evident that the students were referring to the wristwatch the teacher was wearing. It seemed that the teacher too did not know the difference between the ‘watch’ and the ‘clock’. Hence, she did not correct the mistake.

Teacher D in the same school too was not confident in English. When she was teaching the rhyme “The farmer sows the seeds” there were breaks in the rhyme and it was clear that she was not competent in teaching English rhymes. Again, during the same lesson she mispronounced the word ‘sickle’ as ‘sickly’. She was not aware that she was doing mistakes and got the students to repeat the same wrong pronunciation.

In school 1 when teacher A was doing a lesson on “Places where people work” one student asked for the name of the person who works in a pharmacy. It appeared that the teacher did not know the English word and just neglected the question. Teacher E of school 3 had problems in pronouncing /f/. The above observations prove that majority of the primary teachers are not confident enough in English to use English words naturally and spontaneously in the classroom.

Several teachers who have said “no” to question number 6 still give answers to question number 7. Two teachers have said that getting the clever students to repeat the same word several times and encouraging them to help the weaker students in the group can be used as techniques to take help from the clever students.

They further say that games too can be used to help the weaker students. The above answers have not been given as techniques they practice, but they sound more like suggestions.

Another two teachers provide answers to question number 7 without giving an answer to question number 6. They have said, “it is not advisable to make children more burdened who still do not know even their MT”. Thus, it is evident that there are teachers who believe that second language learning should come after mastering the MT. in the questionnaire this particular teacher says that she has got the training on ABOE. It is obvious that the teachers were not made aware about first language and second language acquisition in the seminars. This teacher further says that though they were taught how to teach a lesson, do an activity or a game in English, the knowledge provided was not enough to teach to the students in the classroom.

It is not much encouraging to notice that among the 61% of the teachers who have said “yes” to question no. 6, there are 12 teachers (more than 20%) who do not provide answers to question number 7. among the answers provided by the teachers to question number 7, most prominent were the followings.

- Mixed ability grouping
- Mixing up weaker students with clever students
- Engage weaker students in activities together with clever students
- Giving group activities
- Games
- Through clever students
- Getting clever students to repeat
- Getting clever students to read aloud
- Modeling of clever students
- Giving leadership of groups to students who are good in English
- Giving opportunities to the weaker students to listen to conversations of clever students
- Allowing clever students to use more English so that the weaker students get more practice by listening to them
- The words given in the TG are too difficult for rural students. Therefore simpler words and commands are used in the classroom
- Allowing students to listen to the difficult words continuously
- Repetition of activities
- Getting weaker students to ask questions from the clever students
- Getting clever students to teach weaker students

The most common answer repeated by majority of the teachers is that they divide students into mixed ability groups. Since in each group, there were one or two students who always responded in the lesson as well as there were students who kept silence throughout the lesson, it was proved during the observations that the teachers used mixed ability groups. Still, in some classes it was noticed that there were several groups that were totally out of the lesson. For example, there were two groups in grade 1-A of school 3 who were completely out of the lesson and those were the groups farthest from the teacher's table. In grade 1-B also there were two groups similar to them. But, the teacher went to those groups several times and helped the students.

Similarly frequent answer given by the teachers was "giving group activities". As discussed under question no 12 no group activities were observed during the lessons.

Another answer given by the teachers is that they use games. Among the games observed it was evident that the clever students took the leadership in the games. In “Simon says” the clever students quickly responded to the teacher’s commands and the weaker students followed the clever students. In “What’s the time Mr. Bear?” also it was the clever students who became Mr. Bear first and then the weaker students too were given the opportunity.

“Making weaker students engaged in activities together with clever students” is another answer given by the teachers. It was seen in mixed ability groups that most of the clever students were always willing to help the weaker students.

Some teachers have merely said that they take help from the clever students whereas some say that they get clever students to repeat, to read aloud and use them as models. Above were seen several times during the lessons. Although the teachers got clever students to repeat and read aloud the words, they did not ask the weaker students to follow the clever students.

The teachers have said that they give leadership to the students who are good in English. It was evident that although the teachers did not give leadership to the students who knew English, they always took over the weaker students. On the other hand the weaker students were always willing to give leadership to the students who knew English. The weaker students often accepted the leadership of the clever students and followed them

When some teachers say that they give weaker students opportunity to listen to the dialogues of clever students, another group of teachers give the same answer in different words. They say that they allow clever students to use more English so that the weaker students get more practice by listening to them.

Dialogues in English were very rarely observed during the lessons. Not many opportunities were provided to students to use English in dialogues; neither the teachers tried to carry on a conversation in English with the clever students so that the weaker students listen and learn. The only dialogue seen was done in grade 1, school 1, under the theme “We and the school”. There, the students had to ask from each other for some object. The structure practiced was;

“Can I have..... please?

Yes, here you are!”

This dialogue was practiced aloud by the clever students first, later the weaker students too were able to produce the dialogue with the help of the teacher. In other situations although the clever students practiced English often, it was not used as an opportunity to provide a model or practice to weaker students.

A teacher who works in a rural school has said that as the words given in the TG are too difficult for her students, she uses simpler words in the classroom. It was revealed under question 2 that majority of the teachers go beyond the list of the words provided in the TG.

Another answer given by the teachers is that they allow students to listen to the difficult words continuously. Although it is an agreeable fact that they allow students to listen to the words regularly, they were not very difficult words. It was noticed during most of the observed lessons the teachers pronounced words repeatedly, but they were very much careful not to use the words that could have caused difficulties to them. Almost every word used by the teachers continuously was a simple word.

E.g.; teacher, farmer, doctor
bird, rabbit, rat, monkey
broom, plate, pot

A group of teachers has mentioned that they use activities repeatedly. An activity used during one lesson was never seen repeated in another lesson; but the same activity was repeated several times during the same lesson. This, at the end of the lesson gave more chance to the weaker students to engage in some sort of an activity.

E.g. – Simon says,
Can I have.....?
What's the time Mr. Bear?
Imitating the sounds and the movements of the animals.

Some teachers said that they got clever students to teach the weaker students and the weaker students to ask questions from clever students. The above two actions were noticed several times during the lessons but they were not mediated by the teacher. They were performed by the students at their wish, not in the way a teacher would expect the students to follow. When weaker students found it difficult to pronounce a word or they seem not to know the meaning of something the clever students directly helped them with the pronunciation or the meaning. On the other hand when weaker students found something difficult they were quite ready to ask it from a more able peer than asking from the teacher. This, without the mediation of the teacher could be detrimental to the knowledge of the weaker students because it might lead to misconceptualization and establishment of wrong pronunciations.

In order to find out whether the teachers have a way of evaluating the knowledge of English in the students and whether they think that they have made a successful effort throughout the year, question number 24 asked whether they have noticed an improvement in the vocabulary of the students. As the questionnaire was given to teachers towards the end of the year, this should have been an easy question to answer provided they have a way of evaluating into the vocabulary of the students. If they had such a system of evaluation that would in turn provide them with some sort of feedback. To this question, 87% have said “yes” and 13% “no”. Not a single teacher has refrained from answering this question. During the informal discussions almost every teacher said that they themselves have not prepared tools to evaluate the students. Instead, they use question papers prepared by outside institutions though the zonal and provincial officers continuously and firmly advice them against using such question papers. Further, grade 1 and 2 teachers are strictly advised against using any kind of question papers for grade 1 and 2. When some of the question papers were studied they looked as if prepared to suit the level of the students. But, some of the questions and question papers might have discouraged students to learn English and there could have been psychosocial problems created too (appendix V). Teachers further added that they think there is a development in students’ vocabulary because majority of the students have scored higher in the third term test than they did in the second term test.

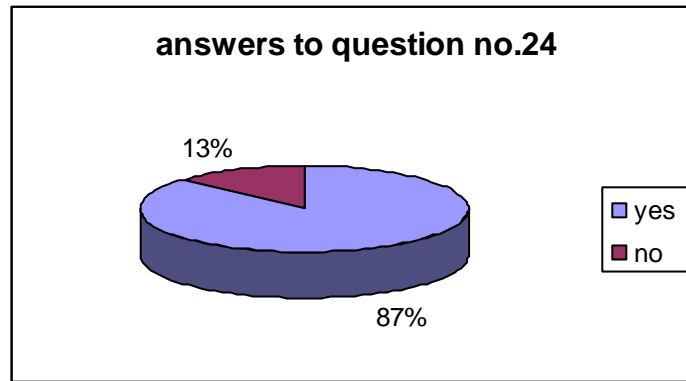


Figure 4.18 – Percentages of answers to question number 24

Question no 25 asked whether the progress of the weaker students is similar to the progress of the clever students. This question intended to find out whether the techniques the teachers used to handle student heterogeneity have been successful and whether the teachers have made a realistic evaluation. As expected, a greater majority has said “no”. Some of the teachers do not give any answer to this question. With this, the conclusion can be arrived that the teachers have used valid methods to evaluate the progress of the students, as practically it is impossible to bring the weaker students to the level of the clever students just in one year.

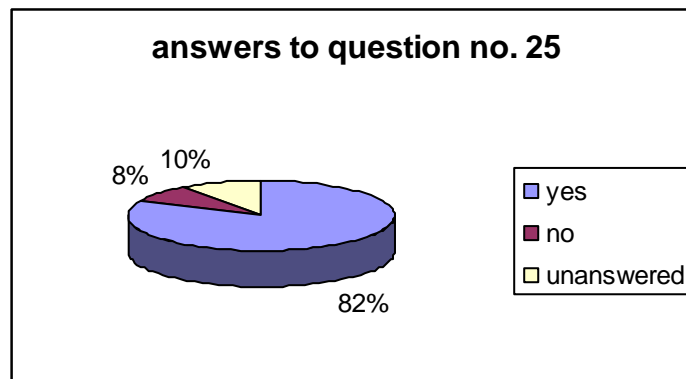


Figure 4.19 – Percentages of answers to question number 25

“If the progress of the weaker students is not similar to that of the clever students, what obstacles you think hinder the improvement of the weaker students?” was what asked in question number 26. This question aimed at finding out whether the teachers have a clear understanding about the factors that cause heterogeneity and if so, what they are

according to the teachers' view. From the teachers who have answered "no" to question number 25, about $\frac{1}{4}$ has not written any answer for question number 26. Although the answers provided by the rest of the teachers sound more practical, more than 30% of the teachers seem not to have understood the true causes of heterogeneity. Following are the obstacles identified by the teachers;

- Lack of usage of English words by students
- Home background
- Lack of attendance of the students
- Lack of speech practice
- Environment
- Variations of mental conditions
- Lack of parental backing
- Lack of enthusiasm of the students
- Students being distanced from parents
- Tuition classes
- Lack of attention
- Some students whose parents have not had education do not have the basic competencies even in their MT. (specially the students with aural and listening disabilities). Such students should be taught their MT not English.
- Problems of students
- Weak students are afraid to use the language
- Clever students use language freely
- Weaker students are satisfied with basic achievements
- Clever students like challenge
- Carelessness of students
- Weaker students take more time to learn
- Differences in intelligence
- Life style of parents.

The above information portrays the theories of student heterogeneity discussed in chapter two. As they are directly connected to the theories of student heterogeneity possible solutions to overcome those obstacles will be discussed deeply in chapter five. Only on teacher has paid her attention on students who have speech and listening disabilities. What she says is that some students, whose parents have not had any education, do not have even the basic competencies in their MT. Her solution is that those students should be first taught their MT. before teaching English.

It is clear that this particular teacher two believes that one should first master his/her MT. in order to start learning a second language. It is again proved that there are teachers who do not have clear understanding about first language acquisition and second language learning although they have received training on language teaching. This teacher further claims that she is not satisfied with the training she received.

To gather more information about what the teachers think about primary teachers teaching English and the training thy received, question number 29 was included in the questionnaire. The question asked, “Do you think that a special training should be provided for the teachers to teach English In grade 1 and 2?” It is more predictable that majority of the teachers would answer in affirmative to this question. As predicted, a greater majority of the teachers agree that special training is needed if they are to teach English in grade 1 and 2 though there are 8 teachers who do not answer this question as well.

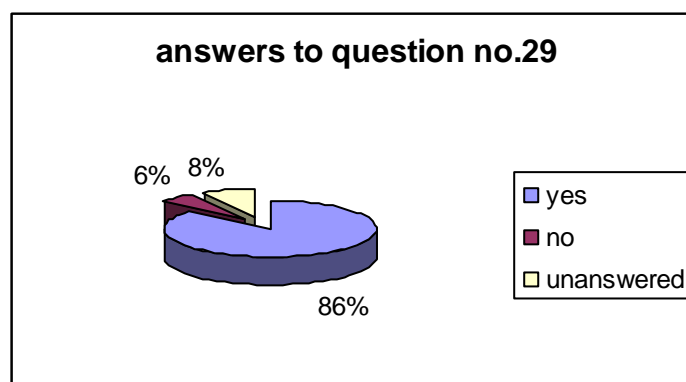


Figure 4.20 – Percentages of answers to question number 29

When question number 27 questioned from the teachers whether they think that it is advisable to teach English as a separate subject from grade 1, again a greater majority say “yes”. Only six teachers refrain from answering while a similar number says “no”. it is evident that most of the teachers perceive it as a good move. Even the teachers, who say

that students must be taught their MT. first, agree that teaching English from grade 1 is an advisable step.

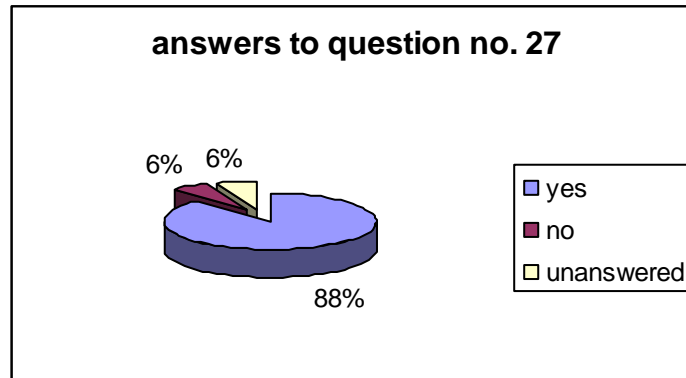


Figure 4.21 - Percentages of answers to question number 27

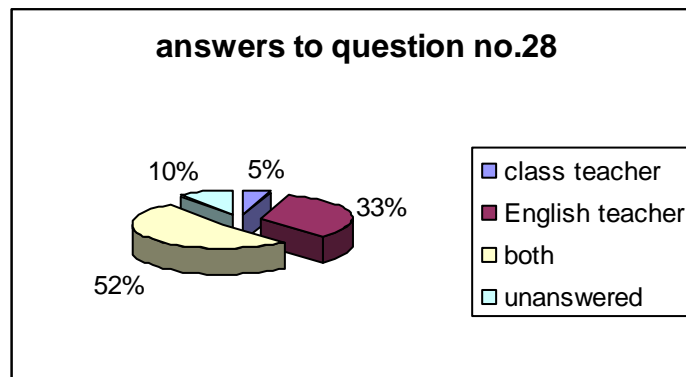


Figure 4.22 – parentages of answers to question number 28

Question number 28 was prepared to find out whether the class teachers are willing to take the responsibility of providing initiative to the students in teaching English. The question asked “Who should take the responsibility of teaching English to grade 1 students, if you think that it is a good move to teach English to students from grade 1?” for this question, three choices were given as answers and the teachers were supposed to underline their choice.

Again, around 10 teachers have not underlined a choice. Although only a minority of the teachers say that the responsibility should be taken by the class teacher, around $\frac{1}{2}$ of the teachers say that it should be done together by both the class teacher and the English language teacher. The rest of the teachers say that it should solely be handled by the

English teacher. It is evident that majority of the grade 1 and 2 teachers fear to teach English because they are not much competent in the language. The minority that has a fair knowledge in English agrees to take the responsibility and say that the class teacher herself must teach English to the students. Around $\frac{1}{3}$ of the teachers who have that traditional fear in English and because of the same reason are not brave enough to take the challenge of learning it and teaching, go for the easy solution; i.e. washing their hands by giving the responsibility to the English teachers. Yet, it is encouraging to notice that still the majority of the teachers are willing to take the responsibility of providing the basic knowledge in English to the students even with their comparatively less knowledge of English. What they need in compensation to their lack of confidence is the support from the English teachers. Therefore they go for the last choice; i.e. both the class teacher and the English teacher together should teach English to grade 1 students.

As it is the class teachers who teach ABOE in practical pedagogical situations, they are the group that quickly and accurately sees the shortcomings and the strengths of the programme. Hence, the last question of the questionnaire requested the teachers to mention the changes that they would expect to see in ABOE in the future. It is assumed that as they have practical experience in teaching ABOE, they must have understood the weaknesses in the programme. Moreover, they must have worked out and practiced some sort of solutions to these problems. The question intended to find out the problems the teachers face as well as the practical solutions they suggest to overcome those difficulties. Followings are the changes they expect to see in ABOE in future.

- Including an activity at the end of every theme that reminds every thing the students learn in relation to each theme.
- English should be used always in the classroom, not only during ERA lessons but also in other subjects.
- English should be limited to words
- English should be taught in grade 1 and 2 by a specially trained teachers
- Usage of audio visual facilities
- Because the poems given under themes are not suitable (difficulty level of the language), proper activities should be introduced.

- There should be frequent training programmes. *⁴
- Support from resource personals
- Introduction of new methods
- Formal teaching of English from grade 1
- It would be better if English could be taught as a separate subject because ABOE is a part of ERA
- If MT. were not taught to grade 1 and 2 students, there would be deterioration in their knowledge of MT.
- It is advisable to teach them English from grade 3 using special methodologies. Otherwise, the students will lose interest towards both the languages
- Class teacher should receive the fullest corporation from English teachers
- Introduce only the alphabet in grade 1
- Inserting English words into ERA lessons appear to be eurhythmic, inappropriate and forcefully inserted. There should be an alternative.
- Diction should suit the students who come from various backgrounds
- Appoint a specially trained English teacher in ABOE to assist the class teacher in ERA lessons
- English knowledge should be given to class teachers
- It is advisable to give the training to English teachers
- Brief the teachers properly about ABOE and ERA

The teacher, who is against teaching English as a part of ERA fears that teaching English with their MT, would result in students using English words in their pieces of formal writing in MT. Furthermore, she says that the students might have more problems in pronunciation of MT words. She sees this as creating more problems to the class teachers. Her solution to this situation is teaching English as a separate subject.

In this chapter the data gathered for the research were analyzed deeply. The data gathered from the questionnaire, observations and informal discussions were analyzed in relation to each other so that the validity and reliability of the data were verified. The

⁴ A group of teachers say that there should be training for at least each term and another group says that it should be in every month.

questionnaire was analyzed item-by-item. The data gathered under each item was analyzed in relation to other items that come under the same objective to get a clear picture about the practical pedagogical situation of ABOE and student heterogeneity. Charts and graphs were used whenever possible to present the information more clearly and precisely.

Conclusions will be drawn out in chapter five in relation to analyzed data. The same chapter will be dedicated to provide the suggestions and recommendations in relation to the drawn out conclusions. The theories discussed in chapter two would be taken into further consideration when the conclusions and recommendations are made in chapter five.

Chapter Five

5.1: Introduction

As student heterogeneity has been a problem of much concern to each and every teacher worldwide, the primary attention of the study was student heterogeneity. Chapter two of the thesis discussed the concept of student heterogeneity and the theoretical basis of ABOE. Through presentation and analysis of data in chapter four, how ABOE is implemented in the classroom was examined and how the problem of student heterogeneity is addressed in relation to how ABOE is practiced in the classroom was analyzed in deep.

To examine how ABOE is practiced in the classroom, 15 ERA lessons were observed in selected three schools. Information gathered in the observations was analyzed in relation to the data gathered by administering a questionnaire among 100 teachers.

Chapter five of the study would deal in drawing out conclusions based on the data presented and analyzed in chapter four. Recommendations to overcome the problems that come out in conclusions will be made in relation to the theories discussed in chapter two. Through those recommendations, suggestions to minimize student heterogeneity through ABOE will be made.

The first part of chapter four will discuss the general problems the teachers face in teaching ABOE and possible remedies for those problems. That will be followed by the

recommendations to minimize student heterogeneity through ABOE, paying attention deeply to the problems revealed in analysis of data. More suggestions and recommendations would be made for possible changes in ABOE based on the changes expected by the teachers.

5.2. *Suggestions to Overcome General Problems.*

Chapter 4.2 discussed how teachers practiced ABOE in the classroom. It is revealed in the analysis that although every grade 1 and 2 teacher practiced ABOE during ERA lessons, there was no uniformity in the time allocated and the amount of vocabulary used. Although a list of words is suggested under each theme in the T.G. the teachers are not supposed to follow it rigidly. They are advised to use English words spontaneously and in a natural way whenever possible during the lesson. It is clear that some of the teachers have made this an excuse not to use English words in ERA lessons.

Majority of the teachers come without any preparation to teach ABOE and only if they suddenly remember an English word during the lesson, they use it. The other problem the teachers faced was that although they come prepared to include English words in the lesson, they tend to forget teaching those words since their attention is basically focused on the theme of the lesson.

Suggesting a flexible list of words is a good move as it leaves scope for the teachers to include the words they already know or new words they find. This in turn benefits the students as teachers tend to use more English words. On the other hand it leaves a problem with those teachers whose vocabulary is limited. They should be helped to use at least the suggested list of words appropriately in their lessons. As there is not much time to do this in the teacher training programme, the best option would be distributing cassettes of recorded model lessons to schools so that the teachers regularly listen to those cassettes regularly and learn how to use the words appropriately during ERA lessons.

These model lessons would help them to keep a balance between the English words used and the MT, paying attention on the theme as well. A clear idea about the time that can be allocated to teach English words and the amount of vocabulary that can be used during a single lesson should be given to teachers in the teacher training programme as ABOE does not mean teaching ERA in English medium.

A common accusation raised against most of the teachers by most of the in-service advisors and other authorities is that most of the teachers come to class without any sort of preparation. Once the teachers are made aware about the importance of giving students the knowledge of words, they would try to use English words in their lessons. When the importance of appropriate usage of English words and the gravity of using words inappropriately are explained to the teachers, they would try to use English words in the right place to give the right meaning. As they try to do this, they would understand the importance of prior preparation. The importance of using the words appropriately and the gravity of the mistake of using them inappropriately should be explained in teacher training seminars giving examples.

The other problem noticed among the teachers is their limited vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation. Most of the areas that are commonly found difficult to pronounce by the Sri Lankan speakers of English (diphthongs, consonant clusters, f z, etc.) were mispronounced by the teachers. Since most of the teachers are in their middle ages. They have lost the plasticity of speech muscles. Hence, they find it very difficult to learn the new sounds in English language.

According to the mentalists view children lose the plasticity of the face muscles after the critical period. If the students who got the wrong pronunciation are not corrected before they pass their critical period there is a strong possibility of them pronouncing the sound in the wrong way in the future too. Since they are grade one students they will have the same teacher for two years. If they do not go to any other English class, the mistake will remain uncorrected for two years. The English teacher who takes over the class in grade three will find it extremely difficult to correct the mistake.

According to Krashan's input theory, learners must be provided with comprehensible input to facilitate their learning. Can the language the teacher used be called comprehensible input; can this classroom be called an environment, which provides acquisition rich environment. When it comes to interaction, will interaction with more able peers cure the problem or will it make the situation worse? Concrete answers to these questions will be provided in future, but it is strongly felt that there should be ways and means to overcome these problems.

These problem areas should be discussed in teacher training programmes and teachers should be helped to overcome those problems. If the wrong pronunciation is

registered in the students it would be difficult to correct them in future. It was revealed in chapter four that even though the teachers sometimes mispronounced the words, there were students in the class who could pronounce the words correctly. Teachers should be advised to use these students as models. Primary teachers should be encouraged to follow the second language courses conducted by the Teacher Centers in order to get their knowledge of English language improved. Teachers should be continuously observed in order to provide them with necessary help and guidance through the English subject ISAs.

Grade 1 and 2 teachers can get support from English language teachers. It is advisable to call both the English language teachers and grade 1, 2 teachers together for seminars so that both are equally briefed about ABOE. An English language teacher from each school can be appointed to regulate ABOE in the school.

When teacher-training programmes are considered, it was revealed that there had not been uniformity in those training programmes. All the training programmes conducted in one zone were three-day seminars while there had been five day and two day seminars in some other zones. It is evident that there should be national level and provincial level supervision to the teacher training programmes.

Since there had been a vast area of knowledge and information to be given to the teachers, the seminars were meant to be residential seminars. As majority of the female teachers are reluctant to participate in residential seminars, a number of seminars have been unsuccessful due to lack of participants. Therefore, it is very important to take in to consideration the target group of participants when training programmes are planned. If the knowledge supposed to be given to teachers cannot be completely given within a short period, the best solution could be organizing a series of seminars of comparatively shorter duration that run throughout the year.

Although majority of the teachers see the teacher-training programme as fruitful, several complaints were raised against the training programme by some teachers. One of the common complaints made by the teachers is that the problems they face in the classroom were not taken into consideration during the seminar. A session to discuss the problems the teachers face when they teach ABOE was not included in the training programme. This could have happened because the observed seminar was one of those seminars that introduced the ABOE programme to the teachers. Hence, no envisaged

problems were discussed in the particular seminar. The best solution to this problem should be a programme that runs in course.

Again the work of the ISAs is critical because they are the only resource persons available in close contact to the teachers. Whenever the ISAs visit schools they have to meet the grade 1 and 2 teachers to discuss the problems they face in teaching ABOE. They must observe the way ABOE is practiced in the classroom and find out the problems the teachers face and lapses in teaching methodology if there are any. Proper guidance and assistance should be provided to teachers through ISAs.

If the ISAs find it difficult to mentor the ABOE programme while supporting the English teachers in teaching English language and English Literature, as mentioned earlier an English teacher of the school staff can be trained as a mentor to help the grade 1 and 2 teachers when they face problems in relation to English.

During the observation of teacher training programmes, it was found out that some seminars became failures because of lack of co-ordination between organizers and resource persons. For example, one observed seminar became an utter failure due to lack of participants and the resource persons had to cancel the programme.

The organizers had called teachers for a residential seminar whereas the resource persons were informed that it was a non-residential seminar. Only a few participants had turned up and not a single organizer was present to handle the situation. This problem could have been solved, had the responsibility of organizing the seminars too been given to the English division. Or else, proper co-ordination should be established between the organizers and the resource persons to make the seminars more effective and useful.

Another problem revealed during analyses of the questionnaire and interviews is that some primary teachers still carry undesirable attitudes towards English language. Some still believe that the students should master their MT to begin learning a second language. They perceive teaching English words as an extra burden to both teachers and students. Briefing them in the seminars can change these attitudes.

Language learning theories the teachers study in teacher training programmes must be revised during seminars. If necessary, they should be made aware about the second language learning theories also. Knowledge about language learning theories would help them shed the negative attitudes they have about learning two languages simultaneously.

Suggestions to Minimize Student Heterogeneity

As the major concern of the research is handling student heterogeneity, the researcher expects to suggest practical solutions to the problems faced by teachers in relation to student heterogeneity. Although majority of the teachers accept that there are students of different ability levels in their classes, there are some teachers that rigidly believe all the students in their classes are in the same ability level and possess similar potentiality.

Again the knowledge about theory could be helpful to understand and accept that all the students in a class do not carry same ability level and potentiality. Nobody would expect a teacher to argue that his/her students do not differ in ability level since in the analysis of the questionnaire also it is revealed that majority of the teachers accept that heterogeneity is the natural situation in the classroom. Attitudes of such teachers must be changed as early as possible because these attitudes might harm not only the learning teaching process but also the personality of the students.

If such teachers try to give the same amount of input to all students using the same method the level of affective filter of the less ability students might go up and it may obstruct them taking in input resulting in very low or zero output. Thus, it is evident that such teachers might do nothing else than increasing student heterogeneity. Therefore, a programme to readjust the attitudes of the teacher about students' abilities is a must.

According to the Good Language Learner Model (figure 2.2) learner variable is very important for the learning process. Their intelligence, aptitude, attitudes, personality and cognitive style vary from the beginning of the teaching learning process. Those independent influences are what they bring from their nature and nurture. Thus the context variable too becomes another important factor. The students' social milieu and the opportunities they have to use the language outside the classroom either in ESL or EFL situation decide the outcome.

In rural areas the students come from a background where no opportunity for English language use is available. They bring the attitudes of their elders to the class. Most of these attitudes are not desirable towards English language. It is evident that the learner variable and the context variable are at the rudimentary level whereas the components of the teaching variable (especially the syllabus and methodology) are in high standards. The

teacher has to compensate this situation with material and resources trying to motivate the learner to learn and use English language as much as possible.

When the learner variable is taken into consideration only the sub devices like motivation and attitudes can be influenced by the teacher. As they are motivated and attitudes are changed desirable, their personality and intelligence would be developed. To motivate the learners and to address the aptitude of the learner, teacher should have good understanding about their cognitive style. Teachers should be provided with knowledge on how to prepare activities to motivate the students and to change and mould their attitudes taking their cognitive style into consideration. Techniques to prepare such activities are discussed in due course.

Although majority of the teachers accept that there are students of different ability levels, some teachers do not perceive it as a problem [figures 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10] If they do not distinguish this as a problem because they can easily handle those students of different ability levels; that could be treated as the teacher's cleverness of handling student heterogeneity. But, the results of observations proved this fact to be otherwise. Some teachers did not see student heterogeneity as a problem because they did not realize that there was student heterogeneity in their classes or they just neglected the less ability students during their lessons.

A problem that arose in the classroom incessantly was that, weaker students lose their interest in the lesson and begin to disturb the lesson because the teacher pays more attention on clever students. Although teachers say that they use different techniques (like group work and pair work) to handle student heterogeneity, it was evident in the observations that majority of the teachers used whole class activities as their major method of teaching. As a help to those teachers who prefer whole class activities to group and pair work, the following techniques can be suggested to make their lessons more interesting and to motivate the students.

One of the most effective methods would be, using a tape recorder. The apparatus itself should lure the students' attention as they like the instruments like cassette recorders; televisions etc. teachers can get simple conversations recorded by English language teachers or senior students whose English pronunciation is accurate. This will help avoid the problems arisen due to lack of confidence of the teachers and difficulties in pronunciation.

As an activity, teachers can provide students with pictures of various items of which the names come in the dialogues. Students can be asked to circle or mark with a star the pictures of which they hear the names in the dialogues. This can be done as a “Bingo” game also.

Another problem area identified during observation was the techniques of questioning. As majority of the teachers preferred whole class questioning weaker students were always neglected. If the teachers could make the following adaptations in questioning techniques, that would be an advantage in handling student heterogeneity.

If a question is posed in general, the same question can be repeated for one or two weaker students. As an answer has already been provided to this question weaker student would find it easier to interact.

Teachers intentionally can prepare several easy questions and keep them preserved only for the weaker students. Questions can be directed group wise also. When a question is posed to a group, teacher can ask the whole group to give the answer first. Then the weaker students of the group can be asked to repeat the same answer. Another way of getting the weaker students to speak is appointing them as the leaders of the group. They should present the answer on behalf of the group. Since, at this levels the students are supposed to give one or two word answers they would not find it too difficult to utter the answer. At the beginning the teacher must inform the other members of the group that they should find the answer and tell it to the leader so that the leader can provide the answer to the class.

Current methodology of learning teaching process highlights activity based teaching. As the subject too is named as Activity Based Oral English, a number of different types of activities can be suggested as ways of reducing student heterogeneity. They can be basically divided into three categories as;

- I. whole class activities
- II. group activities and
- III. pair activities

5.3.1 Whole class activities.

All primary classes are divided into small groups from the beginning. Seating arrangements of the classroom is also set to facilitate this methodology. It is believed that having small groups in a multi-level class can be very helpful to the teacher also. Nevertheless, it is very important that the whole class work together in some activities. There are three major groups of whole class activities that the teachers have been practicing in their classes for a long time.

1. Start-up introductory activities that are usually followed by group work,
2. Activities in which the members of the class apparently are working on the same task but, in fact are performing at different levels of complexity.
3. Whole group projects in which everyone will interact, but will perform different tasks.

Since the main target group of the research is the beginners to the language, activity group no. 3 [whole group projects] will prove to be impossible to use in these classes. Hence, major attention is paid on the first two groups of whole class activities.

1. Start-Up Introductory Activities That Are Usually Followed By Group Work.

I. Field trips;

Field trips provide an excellent opportunity for experiences shared by the whole class and involve lots of language use at all levels. They can be used in themes like;

- How we get our needs
- Transport
- Places where people work
- Different places in the environment
- People who help us

Long distance visits are virtually impossible with the key stage one students although they can be fun and interesting. Further, at this level they need not to be such

adventurous. Often visiting some local facilities which are situated in close vicinity to the school with the whole class will provide students with many learning experiences. The most important fact is that the change of the environment and the familiarity of the place [since they are situated in the students' own surrounding] will make them feel at ease, thus motivating even the lower level students to use the language.

A supermarket situated in the locality can be a suitable place for students to visit under the theme "How we get our needs". There, the students may learn the names of stationary items and other provisions. They can practise the structures of "asking for things and asking for the price". Visiting a village boutique can be even more successful, provided the village seller has satisfactory knowledge to support the students.

Students can be taken to paddy fields, building sites, hospitals and worksites to support them to learn the vocabulary related to the themes; "Places where people work and People who help us".

Taking students out will surely help in a theme like "Different places in the environment", because the students always prefer to be out in the environment rather than sitting surrounded by walls. In the observed lessons, it was noticed that even the students of the lowest ability levels were highly enthusiastic in responding to the teacher and it seemed that they had more experience and knowledge about the environment than the other students did. They could easily learn the names of the elements they found in the environment and even supported the other students.

When students are taken out to the fields, with the purpose of supporting their English knowledge, teachers should have a prior knowledge about the English knowledge of the people with whom the students interact at those places. If they are not enough competent in English to support the students, they might feel embarrassed and hence, the purpose of the field trip would be completely lost. It can be advisable to inform those people beforehand about the field trip and the purpose of it.

II. Photos and snapshots;

Showing family photos [for the theme "Our Home"] will also be helpful to awaken the curiosity of the lower level students. Family photographs of both the teacher and the students and wedding photographs will provide a lot of food for speech for the students. Something the teachers should pay more attention in using family photos is that they might

sometimes lead to offend some students because these photos most often depict social classes and economic background. It may always be advisable for the teacher to have a look at the photos the students bring before they are used in the lesson. In other cases teachers need to pay more attention on the students who do not like to bring family photos to the class. There can be students who do not have one of the parents or the both.

2. Tasks for the Whole Class, Performed at Different Levels;

A second major way in which all the members of multilevel classes can work together is to use exercise and activities in which a single source of information can produce different responses. All learners, for example can listen to a conversation and get something out of it. Even zero level students will benefit from exposure to the sound system of English and be able to guess whether the interaction is friendly or hostile. They could perhaps listen for one or two key words.

Stronger students can get a general idea about the conversation and perhaps be able to identify that one speaker is asking the other for some information. If the conversations about buying things in a shop, getting things done at different places have been previously practiced, once they hear a new conversation under the same theme they will be able to follow the same conversation and identify the details such as what, where, why and when.

The amount of information brought to the task also relates to its difficulty. In general, the more a listener knows what to expect from the source material, the easier he or she will find it to process. The teacher can thus reduce the demands on lower-level students by ensuring that they have clear ideas as to what will be required of them. This could take the form providing a set of simple oral questions, to which they must identify the answers.

By using different techniques like these to adjust the level of difficulty, a single source of input can be very useful in the multilevel class. The source material can be auditory or visual.

Tape;

A tape recording of short dialogues, especially of native speakers would be helpful to develop students' listening competency. Since, the students prefer the pronunciation of native speakers it will be an added motivation to the lower level students. If the teacher

finds it difficult to get cassettes of native speakers they can make use of the cassettes already available at schools. They may be too advanced, as most them are prepared for O/L and A/L classes. Still, the teachers can adjust them to suit the level of their students. As most of the cassettes carry simple day-to-day dialogues, the teachers can select parts of them that are more suitable for the level of their students.

The teachers can take help from the RESC centres also. They can find cassettes with short dialogues and songs at RESK centers.

Team Games;

If the class is divided up with an equal spread of abilities, team games can be played with questions adapted to the level of the learner. Spelling bees are an obvious example, as the word assigned can be chosen specifically to be within the learner's competence.

The teacher can also even out the balance in other games of this type. Variations on the "What am I /What am I?" idea, in which one student chooses a person or object and the other has to guess, can be made much easier for beginners if suggestions for key questions are on the blackboard. As well as the format "Are you male or female?" questions can be put up in the form of a pattern table.

Other team games may include something like labeling a diagram. The same game can be played with beginners using separate items [pictures of different body parts] and labels to be matched. Average students can match words to a complete diagram whereas clever students can be asked to write the names of different parts of a diagram.

5.3.2 Preparing Group Activities that Motivate Weaker Students to

Interact

In deciding the composition of a group, the teacher should bear in mind both the needs of the students and the activity. Following should be the considerations o grouping

students when the teacher tries to give more opportunity for the low achievement level students to speak.

1. The smaller the groups, the more students can be talking simultaneously in the classroom. Pairs of students thus, may provide the greatest chance for more students to talk in the classroom, but in practice this is only true for dialogues.
2. Listening activities can be done in groups of any size from two up, but a larger group requires less talking and more listening.

In addition to these general parameters, some special points should be born in mind when using groups in a heterogeneous class;

1. Dividing a class into two or three fairly large groups is useful when the teacher knows that one section of the class will need a considerable amount of attention and guidance before a task can be begun. By setting the other students up with a task that will keep them occupied, the teacher is able to concentrate attention on those who need it.
2. Activities that develop accuracy work best with equal-ability groups, in which the focus of the activity is more likely to be relevant to all students. Activities that develop fluency work well with multilevel groups, because the stronger students can provide a model for the weaker ones yet can be challenged themselves by the demands of restating and clarifying their speech to make it comprehensible even to a basic-level student.
3. Advanced students can make excellent tutors for beginners and can still be challenges themselves in process. Rather than always using a one-on-one arrangement, however, a valuable plan is to have two advanced students help one

beginner. This may work excellently because the students in key stage one always like to imitate their teachers.

The above mentioned are the conclusions drawn from the research conducted and the recommendations that can be given based on those conclusions. It is expected that these would help the teachers of key stage one to teach ABOE more successfully making use of the above mentioned recommendations and the suggestions. It is further expected that the way paved by this research would lead to more research on ABOE.

5.4 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

Although the research is based on ABOE, it could not study every aspect of ABOE since the research was more concerned on student heterogeneity. Even the broader meaning of the word student heterogeneity is here limited to the different ability levels of the elementary level students, in relation to their knowledge of English language. The term student heterogeneity hence leave a wide path open for further research in relation to the socio-cultural differences and psycho-social differences that the students carry to the classroom.

When ABOE is concerned the researcher paid more attention on the classroom practice of ABOE and how it could be used to minimize student heterogeneity. ABOE was introduced to classroom as a part of ERA lessons. Possibility of introducing ABOE to other subjects would be another area that would interest the researchers. Another area into which the researcher could not pay attention to was the amount of knowledge expected to be given to the key stage one students through ABOE. In analysis of data it was found that there were teachers who believed that the knowledge expected to be given to the students was too much whereas there was another group of teachers who believed that it was not up

to the level of the students. Research conducted on the above problem in future will solve these contradictions.

Another important area is the teacher training of ABOE. The researcher could observe only one teacher training programme depending on the demand of the research. The objective of observing the teacher training programme was to find whether these programmes provide teachers with any knowledge on how to handle student heterogeneity. The results of the observation and the questionnaire revealed several other problems regarding the teacher training. Teacher training on ABOE alone would provide a series of different problems for researchers who are interested in ABOE. So, further research on the above areas could be suggested for solving some problems still prevailing under the areas of student heterogeneity and ABOE.