

The Role of Different Speaker Accents in Enhancing Listening Comprehension and Learner Perceptions of Accented Materials

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Abstract

Listening comprehension is an essential component of English language proficiency. However, it has received comparatively limited attention to the Sri Lankan English language education context. Learners may have limited exposure to diverse English accents and consequently experience difficulties when encountering unfamiliar speech patterns in tertiary education and real-world communication. This study investigated whether speaker accent influences the listening comprehension performance of Sri Lankan undergraduates and examined their perceptions of incorporating accented materials into English Language Classrooms. An experimental research design was used with 58 first year undergraduates from the Department of English language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Participants were divided into control group (n = 29) and experimental group (n = 29). Both groups completed 40 item IELTS based listening pre-test and post-tests. During a seven session intervention conducted twice weekly, the experimental group received listening materials featuring native English speakers, while the control group received the same listening tasks presented through a nonnative English speaker. The sessions used activities targeting comprehension of main ideas, factual information, vocabulary, and different listening task types. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through paired and independent sample t-tests. Learner perceptions were examined through a 20-item questionnaire. Both groups demonstrated statistically significant improvement in listening comprehension following the intervention ($p < .001$). The mean score of experimental group increased from 21.52 (SD = 3.269) in the pre-test to 32.10 (SD = 3.519) in the post-test, while the mean of control group increased from 19.41 (SD = 3.561) to 23.76 (SD = 5.350). The independent sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between the post test performances of the two groups, where native accent group achieving higher scores. Questionnaire findings indicated generally positive perceptions towards accented listening materials. The findings suggest that exposure to native accented listening material, combined with explicit listening instruction, can improve listening comprehension among Sri Lankan undergraduates. Grounded in Krashen's comprehensible input theory, the findings support incorporating authentic and accent diverse materials into tertiary English instruction and increasing learners' exposure to different English accents to prepare them for academic and real-world communication and beyond.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Accented Materials, Learner Perception, IELTS Listening.*