A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF USE OF NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER AUDIO CLIPS AND NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER AUDIO CLIPS IN ESL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) CLASSROOM IN THE UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA

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INTRODUCTION

The use of technology and authentic study materials in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms have become a popular teaching method. There is a common understanding that syllabi designers incorporate audio materials to enhance the students' exposure to the English language, and specifically to enhance the learners' listening skills. However, ESL/EFL students' listening comprehension skills and retention ability are not satisfactory, especially in the Sri Lankan university context. Most ESL students are not exposed to the language used by native English speakers, given the fact that listening and speaking skills are not tested in national examinations that select entrants to the Sri Lankan State universities. The study assumes that university students who have been taught by non-native English-speaking teachers at government schools, find comprehension of native speakers' use of English language difficult. The present study is predominantly influenced by Arabani et al (2019) study on Iranian EFL students. It analyses the use of native English speaker audio clips and non-native English speaker audio clips on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. This study aims to critically analyse the use of native English speaker audio clips and non-native English speaker audio clips in ESL classrooms in the Sri Lankan context. The study is also informed by Krashen's comprehensible input theory (1985) and Philipson's native English speaker fallacy (1992). Krashen, in his comprehensible input theory, argues that learners will only learn through comprehensible input. Phillipson's arguments are based on the taken for granted superiority of native English speakers.

METHODOLOGY

The study elaborated on the effectiveness of native English speaker audio clips in ESL classrooms in Sri Lanka. The researchers conducted an action research and convenient sampling was used to select the sample group of the research. Thus, 52 first year students were selected from the Department of Fine Arts, University of Kelaniya. The sample was selected based on the results of the English placement test, which was conducted by the Department of English Language Teaching to all the undergraduates of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. All the 52 students belonged to the category of UTEL benchmarks 6. Then, the students were informed about the study and the consent was taken, because according to Govil (2013), the participants of the study should have prior knowledge of the work expected from them. Consequently, the selected first year students were given a test compiled from the Michigan English Test to evaluate their level of proficiency to consolidate that no significant difference existed between the proficiency level of the control and experiment groups.

Next, the sample was divided into two groups as the control group and the experimental group. Each group had 26 students. Both the groups were then given a pre-test in which the students had to listen to an audio clip and answer 20 questions. Out of the 20 questions, 15 questions were multiple-choice questions, and 5 questions were short answer questions. The pre-test was followed by a treatment period. The treatment period was two months long covering 16 hours in eight sessions. During the treatment period, multiple listening activities were done to improve the students' listening skills using native English speaker audio clips and non-native English speaker audio clips for the experimental

group and the control group respectively under 8 different themes. The content used in for audios for both the experimental group and the control group was identical. After the treatment period, the post-test was conducted. The post-test was designed following the same format of the pre-test including 20 questions out of which 15 questions were multiple-choice questions, and 5 questions were short answer questions. Finally, a quantitative method was used to analyse the collected data. The scores of both pre-tests and the post-tests were analysed using SPSS Statistical Analysis Software 25.0 as Dornyei (2007) states that this software package is mostly used in applied linguistics and educational research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the methodology section, one pre-test and one post-test were conducted for both control and the experimental groups separately. The marks obtained by the students for the above tests were used for the data analysis of the study. For each pre-test and the post-test, marks were given out of 20. The pre-test and the post-test marks were entered into a data set in SPSS 25.0 statistical software and subjected to analysis.
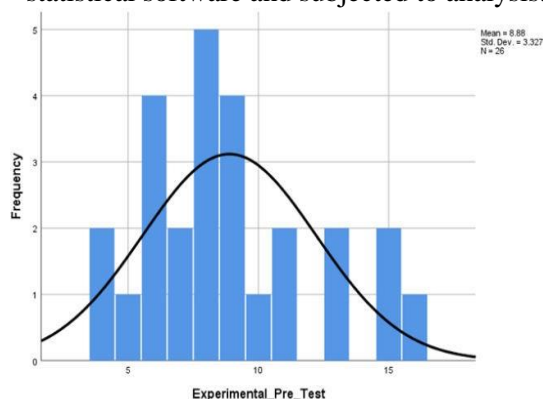

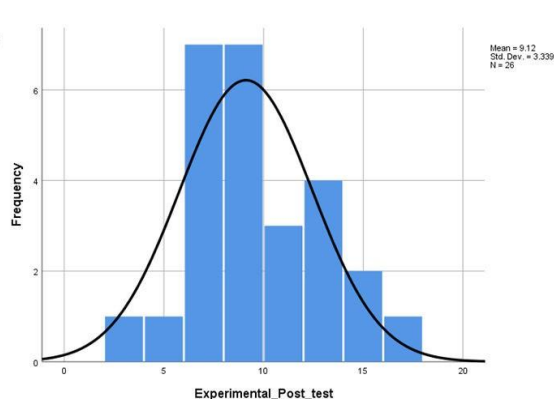*Figure 1: Experimental-Pre-Test*

Figure 2: Experimental-Post-Test

The above histograms show the distribution of the pre and the post-test marks of the students in the experimental group. The mean and the median of the post-test are (9.12) and (8.00), while the mean and the median of the pre-test are (8.88) and (8.00) respectively. This suggests that the distribution is also right skewed. Even though both distributions are skewed, it is not significant since the difference between the mean and median is small. Yet the skewness of the post-test is slightly higher than the pre-test. Hence, by mean comparison, it is evident that the performance of students has improved after the pre-test.
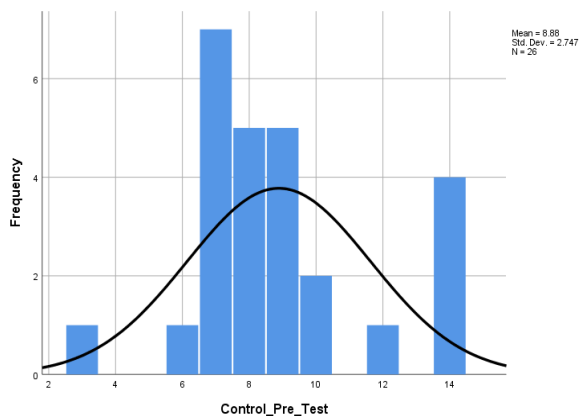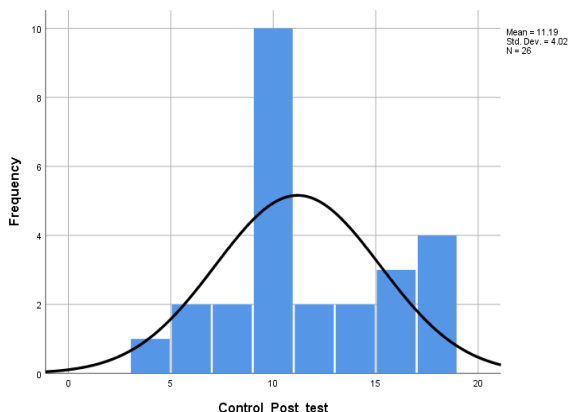

Figure 3: Control-Pre-Test

Figure 4: Control-Post-Test

The above histograms depict the distribution of the pre and post-test marks of the students in the control group. There is no significant skewness of the two distributions. The mean and the median of the post-test and the pre-test are (11.19), (10.00) and (8.88), (8.00) respectively. The mean being higher than the median suggests that the distribution is right-skewed. Both distributions are skewed but the skewness is not significant. Hence, students have performed better in the post-test than in the pre-tests.

Table 1. Paired Sample T-test of the Control Group and the Experimental Group

		Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper	
Pair 1	Experimental_Pre_Test - Experimental_Post_test	-.231	2.889	-1.398	.936	.687
Pair 2	Control_Pre_Test - Control_Post_test	-2.308	3.069	-3.547	-1.068	.001

A paired sample t-test was conducted to identify the significant difference between the pre and the post-test of the experimental group and the control group. The p-value of the experimental group (pair 1) is (0.687). Thus, as the p-value is greater than 0.005 and it indicates that there is no significant difference between the pre and the post-test scores. Therefore, it concludes that, there is no significant improvement in the students of the experimental group. On the other hand, the p-value of the control group is (0.001) which is less than 0.005. This shows that there is a significant difference between the pre and the post-test marks of the control group. Thus, this implies that there is a significant improvement in the students in the control group who were taught and practiced listening skills using the non-native English speaker audio clips.
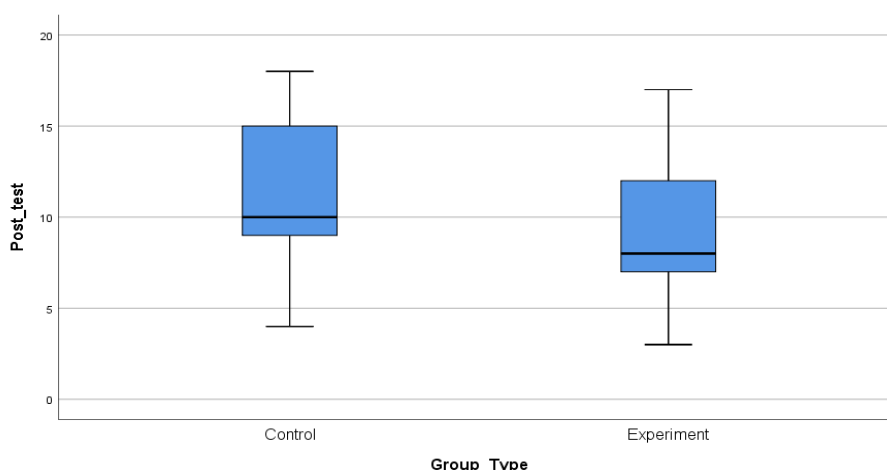
Figure 5: Boxplot of Post Test scores Vs Group

Boxplots were plotted separately for the post-test scores for the experimental and the control group. As shown in figure 05, the medians of the control group and the experimental group are 10 and 8 respectively and even the box plot is higher in the control group than the experimental group. Most of the students in the control group fall under the upper quartile which suggests that most of the students have scored more than 10. Moreover, the boxplot of the control group is significantly more right skewed than the boxplot of the experimentalgroup. This indicates that the students improved their listening skills when non-native English speaker audio clips were used, and the students have a better understanding of the language when non-native English speaker audio clips were used.

Table 2. Independent Sample Test of the Post Tests

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Post_test	Equal variances assumed	1.313	.257	.048	-2.077	-4.135	-.018
	Equal variances not assumed			.048	-2.077	-4.137	-.017

An independent sample t-test was conducted between the experimental and control group. The post-test results of the two groups were compared. According to the test, the p-value (0.048) is less than 0.005. Hence, the assumption of equal means is rejected. Therefore, it is evident that there is a significant difference between the means of the experimental and controlled groups. Hence, the boxplot interpretation (Figure 5) proves that the use of non- native English speaker audio clips helps the students improve listening comprehension skills.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the data proves that the use of non-native English speaker audio clips is more effective than native speaker audio clips. Through the comparison of the data, we can suggest that the students tend to improve their listening skills when non-native English speaker audio clips are used. In other words, native English accent failed to contribute significantly to the improvement of L2 learners' listening comprehension. The researchers identified that pragmatic relevance to the suprasegmental features of speech (tone, pitch and intonation) in non-native English speaker audio clips as one of the main reasons for the effectiveness of non-native English speaker audio clips. Moreover, it was clear that the L2 listeners have less difficulty in understanding L2 words spoken by a speaker whose L1 is as the same as that of the students. The researchers also observed that the students were more engaged in listening to non-native English speaker audio clips than to native English speaker clips. This challenges the global trend/emphasis on employing/hiring native English-speaking teachers as ideal candidates to teach listening skills and to record listening materials using native English speakers' voice. The study empowers non-native English-speaking teachers; their confidence can be developed to teach English as an international language as the study validates the claim that native speakers' accent is not superior to non-native speakers' accent since the ESL students in this study responded better to non-native English speaker audio clips than to native English speaker audio clips. The researchers propose the use of non-native English speaker audio clips in ESL classrooms. The present study incorporated ESL students in a higher education institute. The findings of the present cannot be generalized, and an extensive research incorporating primary and secondary level ESL students should be done in the future.

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