

Exploring the Efficacy of Audio-lingual Method for Adults' English Language Speaking Proficiency: A Case from a University in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

There has been an increase in the number of English language learners in Sri Lanka and so do the diverse teaching methodologies: the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-lingual method, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Language Teaching have been used for this purpose, as per the individual teacher's discretion or as prescribed by the authorities or as presented in the curricula since the 1950s. Despite the plethora of studies related to teaching methodologies worldwide, the efficacy of learning, specific to the socio-cultural background has gained inadequate attention in the scholarship, in spite of the significance of learners' socio-cultural background for learning processes. This claim is especially valid both in terms of Sri Lankan adult learners and in terms of speaking skills in the English language. Therefore, this exploratory study aimed to unearth the efficacy of English language speaking proficiency in relation to the audio-lingual

method. The present study reports the findings of a quantitative study of undergraduates from a state university in Sri Lanka. The paper argues that the findings may be related in part to intrinsic linguistic features of Sri Lankan adult learners, in particular. The paper, therefore, is structured as follows; first, as a preamble, it briefly examines English language education in the country. Secondly, it offers a brief introduction to the Audio-Lingual Method. Then, the theoretical framework related to the Audio-lingual method will be reviewed. Next, a critical analysis of the Audio-lingual method is presented before delving into the methodology used. Before the end, the findings are discussed along with the implications.

Keywords: English, Second language, teaching methodology, Sinhala speakers, L2 learning

Introduction

English Language Education in Sri Lanka

During the British Colonial era, and after the early independent days in the late 1940s, English has been taught to Sri Lankan learners in various degrees, with diverse aims, at different schools. For instance, students who attended missionary schools were exposed to a high level and a high quantity of English while at the national schools, the expectations related to English were limited. However, with the Educational Policy reforms in the 1970s and the 1990s, English is made a

compulsory subject for all school children: they learn English as a Second Language in all national schools. School children are exposed to English at schools for more than 10 years. Nevertheless, the outcome is not significant. For instance, only a few students can express themselves in English in their day-to-day activities, while many fail the subject at the National Level Examinations conducted by the Examinations Department, Sri Lanka.

This condition may be linked to several variables. Yet, one significant reason could be related to the teaching methodologies used in schools and other teaching institutes in Sri Lanka. While some teachers may use their discretion in teaching English, others use the prescribed teaching methodologies, especially in regularized teaching contexts such as in schools. In such contexts too, such methodologies have been changing from time to time, from the Grammar Translation Method, through the Communicative Approach to Eclectic Approach. This study's focus was one such methodology named the Audio Lingual Method.

Introduction to Audio-lingual Method

Audiolingualism is an oral-based approach that has a strong theoretical base on linguistics and psychology. It was Charles Fries (1945) of the University of Michigan who initiated a way in applying principles from structural linguistics in developing this method. Therefore, sometimes this method has also been

named as the 'Michigan Method.' The audio-lingual approach has its roots in the USA during World War II, when there was a pressing need to train key personnel quickly and effectively in foreign language skills. The results of the Army Specialized Training Program are generally regarded to have been very successful, with the caveat that the learners were in small groups and were highly motivated, which undoubtedly contributed to the success of the approach. The objective of the army programs was for students to attain conversational proficiency in a variety of foreign languages. Since this was not the goal of conventional foreign language courses in the United States, new approaches were necessary. Linguists, such as Leonard Bloomfield at Yale, had already developed training programs as part of their linguistic research that were designed to give linguists and anthropologists mastery of American Indian languages and other languages they were studying. Textbooks did not exist for such languages. The technique Bloomfield and his colleagues used was sometimes known as the "informant method," since it used a native speaker of the language- the informant- who served as a source of phrases and vocabulary and who provided sentences for imitation, and a linguist, who supervised the learning experience. The linguist did not necessarily know the language but was trained in eliciting the basic structure of the language from the informant. Thus, the students and the linguist were able to take part in guided conversation with the informant, and together they gradually

learned how to speak the language, as well as to understand much of its basic grammar. Students in such courses studied 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. There were generally 15 hours of drill with native speakers and 20 to 30 hours of private study spread over two to three 6-week sessions. This was the system adopted by the army, and in small classes of mature and highly motivated students, excellent results were often achieved (Diane Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Linguists, during this period, were becoming increasingly involved in the teaching of English as a foreign language. America had then emerged as a major international power. There was a growing demand for foreign expertise in the teaching of English. Thousands of foreign students entered the United States to study in universities, and many of these students required training in English before they could begin their studies. These factors led to the emergence of the American approach to ESL, which by the mid-1950s had become Audio-linguicism.

In 1939, the University of Michigan developed the first English Language Institute in the United States; it specialized in the training of teachers of English as a foreign language and in teaching English as a second or foreign language. Charles Fries, director of the institute, was trained in structural linguistics, and he applied the principles of structural linguistics to language teaching. Fries and his colleagues rejected approaches such

as those of the Direct Method, in which learners are exposed to the language, use it, and gradually absorb its grammatical patterns. For Fries, grammar, or "structure," was the starting point. The structure of the language was identified with its basic sentence patterns and grammatical structures. The language was taught by systematic attention to pronunciation and by intensive oral drilling of its basic sentence patterns. Pattern practice was a basic classroom technique. These basic patterns constitute the learner's task, requiring repeated drills, and vocabulary to make the drills possible (Hockett 1959). As audiolingualism developed as a rigorous teaching approach on its own, its structure-focused nature, particularly with greater emphasis on the use of drills received tremendous significance.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework Related to the Audio Lingual Method

The language teaching theoreticians and methodologists who developed audio-lingualism not only had a convincing and powerful theory of language to draw upon but they were also working in a period when a prominent school of American psychology - known as behavioral psychology - claimed to have tapped the secrets of all human learning, including language learning. Behaviorism, like structural linguistics,

is another anti-mentalist, empirically-based approach to the study of human behavior (Richards & Rogers, 2001). To the behaviorist, the human being is an organism capable of a wide repertoire of behaviors. The occurrence of these behaviors is dependent on three crucial elements in learning: a stimulus that serves to elicit behavior; a response triggered by a stimulus; and reinforcement which serves to mark the response as being appropriate (or inappropriate) and encourages the repetition (or suppression), of the response in the future (Skinner, 1957; Brown, 1980).

Reinforcement, either negative or positive, is a vital element in the learning process because it increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again and eventually become a habit. To apply this theory to language learning is to identify the organism as the foreign language learner, the behavior as verbal behavior, the stimulus as what is taught or presented of the foreign language, the response as the learner's reaction to the stimulus, and the reinforcement as the extrinsic approval and praise of the teacher or fellow students or the intrinsic self-satisfaction of target language use. Language mastery is represented as acquiring a set of appropriate language stimulus-response chains (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

The approach was theoretically underpinned by structural linguistics, a movement in linguistics that focused on the phonemic, morphological, and syntactic systems underlying

the grammar of a given language, rather than according to traditional categories of Latin grammar. As such, it was held that learning a language involved mastering the building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these basic elements are combined from the level of sound to the level of the sentence. The audio-lingual approach was also based on the behaviorists' theory of learning, which held that language, like other aspects of human activity, is a form of behavior that should be mastered by habit formation through repetition.

This approach also emphasized teaching the comprehension of texts. Teachers taught from books containing short reading passages in the foreign language, preceded by lists of vocabulary. Rapid silent reading was the goal, but in practice, teachers often resorted to discussing the content of the passage in English. Those involved in the teaching of English as a second language in the United States between the two world wars used either a modified Direct Method approach, a reading-based approach, or a reading-oral approach (Darian, 1972). Unlike the approach that was being developed by British applied linguists during the same period, there was little attempt to treat language content systematically. Sentence patterns and grammar were introduced at the whim of the textbook writer. There was no standardization of the vocabulary or grammar that was included. Neither was

there a consensus on what grammar, sentence patterns, and vocabulary were most important for beginning, intermediate, or advanced learners (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In its development, principles from behavioural psychology (Skinner, 1957) were incorporated. It was thought that the way to acquire the sentence patterns of the target language was through conditioning-helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement. Learners could overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits required to be target language speakers. In the behaviorist view, language is elicited by a stimulus and that stimulus then triggers a response (Richards & Rogers 2001). The response in turn then produces some kind of reinforcement, which, if positive, encourages the repetition of the response in the future or, if negative, its suppression. When transposed to the classroom, this gives us the classic pattern drill-*Model: She went to the cinema yesterday. Stimulus; Theatre. Response: She went to the theatre yesterday. Reinforcement: Good!* (Diane Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In its purest form, audiolingualism aims to promote mechanical habit formation through the repetition of basic patterns. Accurate manipulation of structure leads to eventual fluency. Spoken language comes before written language. Dialogues and drills are central to the approach. Accurate pronunciation and control of structure are paramount.

The descriptive practices of structural linguists suggested a number of hypotheses about language learning, and hence about language teaching as well. For example, since linguists normally described languages beginning with the phonological level and finishing with the sentence level, it was assumed that this was also the appropriate sequence for learning and teaching. Since the speech was now held to be primary and writing secondary, it was assumed that language teaching should focus on mastery of speech and that writing or even written prompts should be withheld until reasonably late in the language learning process. Since structure is what is important and unique about a language, early practice should focus on mastery of phonological and grammatical structures rather than on mastery of vocabulary.

While some of this might seem amusingly rigid in these enlightened times, it is worth reflecting on actual classroom practice and noticing when activities occur that can be said to have their basis in the audio-lingual approach. Most teachers will at some point require learners to repeat examples of grammatical structures in context with several aims in mind: stress, rhythm, intonation, "consolidating the structure", enabling learners to use the structure accurately through repetition, etc. Question and answer in open class or closed pairs to practice a particular form can also be argued to have its roots in the audio-lingual approach.

Critical Analysis of Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) which was first known as Army method was initially used to teach Army personnel the enemy's language. ALM was the first method that was based on a theory of language. Fries and Lado (1958), the founders of the audio-lingual method, wrote that the process of language acquisition is the process of mechanical habit formation. This formation is possible through imitation and frequent repetition. In such a way mistakes are minimized. In the behaviorist theory it is expected that language could be habit-formed through repetition, with the advantage being increased accuracy. It is connected with descriptive linguistics as well. Brown (1994, p.135) states that this in combination with some new ideas about language learning coming from the disciplines of descriptive linguistics and behavioral psychology went on to become what is known as the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). Haycraft (2002) further elaborates that Audio-lingual theory is derived from linguistics and psychology. It is a combination of structural linguistics theory, contrastive analysis, aural-oral procedures, and behaviorist psychology. In this theory, language is seen as having its own unique system. The system comprises several different levels: phonological, morphological, and syntactic. It is strongly believed in ALM that like an infant acquires his L_1 with excessive repetition, one could be able

to master L_2 . Repetition as an important factor in learning a language is emphasized in many studies, especially regarding child language learning. "Child discourse at the early stages of language acquisition is extraordinarily repetitive in nature. Children often repeat a large number of utterances addressed to them (other repetition); they also often repeat their own utterances (self-repetition). The role of repetition in language acquisition has been much discussed in psychology, linguistics, and anthropology" (Huang, 2010, p.1).

The teacher acts as a model in ALM in which the students imitate the teacher whose role becomes a model in the classroom context. Ochoa (2011) mentions that through teacher modeling, students learn pronunciation, intonation, and stress. By mimicking what their teacher says, they unconsciously can produce the correct sound (intonation, pronunciation, and stress). It is more effective than learning through written text without knowing the correct sound. According to Xia (2014, p. 562) "a teacher acts as the conductor of an orchestra". The teacher's model here is very crucial as a teacher, in any case, makes a mistake that may lead to negative habit formation. The Audio-Lingual method considered language simply as a form of behavior to be learned through the formation of correct speech habits (Thornbury, 2000, p.21). In other words, the goal of this method is to form native language habits in learners (Dendrinos, 1992). Similarly, Richards and Rodgers stress that foreign language learning is basically a process

of mechanical habit formation and good habits are formed by giving correct responses rather than by making mistakes (2001, p.57). Students must unconsciously acquire the studied structures, phonetic peculiarities of the language and form the ability to construct sentences by analogy. Weidemann (2008, p.3) states “a teacher can help to reinforce the language by designing exercises that require learners to repeat different and specific forms of the language being learned”. The Audio-lingual method, like the direct method, is also an oral approach. However, it is very different in that “rather than emphasizing vocabulary acquisition through exposure to its use in situations, the audio-lingual method drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns” (Anggraeni, 2007, p.13).

Drills of different kinds (as explained 2.3.3.) and dialogue practices are the two key techniques that evolved from ALM. The purpose of the repetition/drills is to break down the troublesome sentences into smaller parts. Drilling is a key feature of audio-lingual approaches to language teaching which placed emphasis on repeating structural patterns through oral practice (Brown, 1998, p.137). In audio-lingual method, the teacher focuses on drilling their student as the drills are intended to make the students possess good language. Harmer (1998) says that by rewarding correct production during this repetition phase, students could be conditioned to learn the

language. Meanwhile, Xue-Qing and Jin-fang (2007) point out that this method stressed syntactical progression, while the previous method (direct method) tended to be preoccupied with vocabulary and morphology. Students hope to be able to arrange good language than to own much vocabulary. It means that drilling and practicing the language in the classroom gives examples to the students so that they can expand the language that they learn from the teacher. Dialogues and pattern drills that students need to repeat are often used to form habits. Hence, as Larsen-Freeman (2000) says the more often something is repeated, the stronger the habit and the greater the learning. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the popularity of Audio-lingual method did not last for a long time "because of its failure to teach long-term communicative proficiency. It was discovered later that language was not acquired through a process of habit-formation and over learning and it is not necessary to avoid errors at all costs" (Brown, 2007, p.112).

ALM can be used as a basis for the selection of some teaching techniques that can be modified in EFL contexts. The study undertaken by Faridatusolihah (2012) initially aimed to determine whether teaching English speaking using Audio-lingual method was effective in improving the students' speaking abilities. The research used a quantitative method and non-equivalent group pretest-posttest design. The research used quasi-experimental with a non-equivalent pretest-

posttest control design. This research used a quantitative method; a quantitative study is an experimental design that tests hypotheses through the use of objective instruments and statistical analysis (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.11). The result of the research showed that teaching English Speaking using ALM was effective to improve the student's speaking ability. This suggests that several techniques of ALM too can be effectively used in EFL contexts.

Methodology

The study followed the quantitative approach to explore learner perceptions of the audio-lingual method used in teaching English as a Second Language.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

Problem

Is there any correlation between the teaching techniques of ALM, already used and English as a second language classes for English language proficiency for Sri Lankan adult learners?

Hypothesis

Ho 1 = There is no relationship between teaching techniques of ALM and English language proficiency for Sri Lankan adult learners.

To explore the research questions scientifically the following questions and relevant hypotheses were examined at two stages – prior to using the new methodology, in particular the teaching techniques, and subsequent to it.

- Is there a correlation between the pre and post-test marks of the participants?

Procedure

The procedure of the current research is succinctly mentioned as follows:

- Selecting the participants
- Gaining due ethical concerns
- Preparing a test to be used as a pretest to affirm the participants' overall language proficiency including speaking skills
- Piloting the test to confirm its validity
- Administering the pretest to affirm the participants' overall language proficiency including speaking skills
- Treatment: teaching the participants through the Audio-lingual method by the teacher-cum-researcher
- Administering the posttest to affirm the participants' overall language proficiency including speaking skills
- Analyzing the data collected

Participants

Second-year undergraduates from a state university in Sri Lanka were taken as participants in the research. The participants of this study involved 15 undergraduates. All of them had scored between 40-60 marks on a language test conducted by the universities, prior to the research. They were between the ages of 23-24 years. Participant students of this study were from a similar linguistic background: their mother tongue was Sinhala; they had started learning English as a Second Language at the age of 10 years, at state-run educational institutes situated in Sri Lanka; these students had learned English at such institutes for 10 years, as English is a compulsory requirement. A majority of the students admitted that they had obtained Simple Passes for the English Language at the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination administered by the Ministry of Education of the country; exact details are presented in chapter eight. After enrolling in the university, they followed the ESL noncredit course offered by the university. However, even though English is a compulsory requirement to obtain the degree, these students had not followed it regularly due to various personal reasons. During the period of this research study, the subjects did not follow any English Language courses except for the classes conducted for the purpose of this study. During this period, they also followed the three

subjects for the degree which were taken in the Sinhala medium. These undergraduates were supposed to follow lectures for three subjects related to their degree in their L1-Sinhala. Thus, their exposure to the English language during the research was limited.

The data collection instrument: the test

One main instrument utilized in this study was a pretest which was administered to the participants to determine their prior status of English language speaking proficiency. It consisted of 5 main speaking test items. The total score was 50 points distributed among these items. The test content was validated by two experts in the field of linguistics. Considering the test instructions, the relevance of questions to content, its suitability to the research goals and objectives, the number and arrangement of questions, and the appropriacy of the time assigned for the test, the team was asked to validate the content of the test. The time allocated for each participant for the test was 40 minutes. It was a one-on-one test conducted by the researcher with the support of two colleagues.

Administering the Pretest

The pretest, modified according to the results of the pilot testing, was administered to the learner group to measure their speaking proficiency. This pretest was held, although

their speaking proficiency level was similar according to a previous test held at the university prior to the present study (in their first-year studies at the university). This is to further validate the present study. Then, all the marks obtained at the Pretest were examined and the overall results of the Pretest were examined to gain an idea of the proficiency level of the students.

Teaching/treatment

The next step was to teach English as a Second language to the participants by the researcher himself. During teaching sessions, accordingly, the researcher conducted 10 (1 1/2hours each) teaching sessions, covering approximately 15 hours, meeting the students twice a week. Although classroom activities were teacher-directed, students' level of second language proficiency was taken into consideration when selecting the materials.

After gaining ethical concerns confirmed, the said undergraduates were taught English through the Audio lingual method, especially through the following techniques for about three months, by a teacher-cum-researcher who is a qualified, experienced male teacher. To reiterate, throughout the project, I was working as a researcher, practitioner, and manager. The role as a teacher-researcher enhanced the present action research practice and developed the researcher's teaching

practice as well. I also gained an in-depth knowledge of the complexities involved in ELT in large classes. Participant learners were under the researcher's observation. It must also be noted that I have experience in teaching English as a Second Language both at the university level and at school levels for more than 25 years in Sri Lanka.

Treatment: Techniques used

During the teaching sessions, the following techniques were used which are significant in ALM.

- Drills

Dialogues and drills form the basis of audio-lingual classroom practices. Dialogues provide the means of contextualizing key structures and illustrate situations. Dialogues are used for repetition and memorization. Correct pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are emphasized. After a dialogue has been presented and memorized, specific grammatical patterns in the dialogue are selected and become the focus of various kinds of drill and pattern-practice exercises. The use of drills and pattern practice is a distinctive feature of the Audio-lingual Method.

- Repetition drill

Students are asked to repeat the teacher's model as accurately and as quickly as possible. This drill is often used to teach the

lines of the dialog. The students repeat an utterance aloud as soon as he has heard it. The teacher with the lapse of time may increase the length of the sentence. Example:

This is the seventh month. – this is the seventh month.

This is the seventh month of the year 2016- This is the seventh month of the year 2016

- Chain drill

A chain drill gets its name from the chain of conversation that forms around the room as students, one-by-one, ask and answer questions of each other. The teacher begins the chain by greeting a particular student, or asking him a question. That student responds, then turns to the student sitting next to him. The first student greets or asks a question of the second student and the chain continues. A chain drill allows some controlled communication, even though it is limited. A chain drill also gives the teacher an opportunity to check each student's speech.

E.g. Teacher-How many sisters and brothers do you have?

Student – I have one sister and no brothers.

(Turning to next student)How many sisters and brothers do you have?

- Single-slot substitution drill

The teacher says a line, usually from the dialog. Next, the teacher says a word or a phrase-called the cue. The students

repeat the line the teacher has given them, substituting the cue into the line in its proper place. The major purpose of this drill is to give the students practice in finding and filling in the slots of a sentence.

E.g. I am going to the _____

(Teacher shows a picture of post office)

- Multiple-slot substitution drill

This drill is similar to the single-slot substitution drill. The difference is that the teacher gives cue phrases, one at a time that fits into different slots in the dialog line. The students must recognize what part of speech each cue is, or at least, where it fits into the sentence, and make any other changes, such as subject-verb agreement. They then say the line, fitting the cue phrase into the line where it belongs.

E.g. I am going to the post office _____

(to send a letter)

- Transformation drill

The teacher gives students a certain kind of sentence pattern, an affirmative sentence for example. Students are asked to transform this sentence into a negative sentence. Other examples of transformations to ask students to perform include changing a statement into a question, transforming an active

sentence into a passive one, or converting direct speech into reported speech. A sentence is transformed by being made negative or interrogative.

E.g. He knows my address.

He doesn't know my address

Does he know my address?

He goes to Kandy

He went to Kandy

He will go to Kandy

He is going to Kandy

- Backward build-up (expansion) drill

This drill is used when a long line of a dialogue is giving students trouble. The teacher breaks down the line into several parts. The students repeat a part of the sentence, usually the last phrase of the line. Then, following the teacher's cue, the students expand what they are repeating part by part until they are able to repeat the entire line. The teacher begins with the part at the end of the sentence (and works backward from there) to keep the intonation of the line as natural as possible. This also directs more student attention to the end of the sentence, where new information typically occurs.

E.g. Teacher- a letter

I am going to register a letter

- Question-and-answer drill

This drill gives students practice with answering questions. The students should answer the teacher's questions very quickly. It is also possible for the teacher to cue the students to ask questions as well. This gives students practice with the question pattern. There are slight variations of drills. They include; Inflection. One word in an utterance appears in another form when repeated

E.g.

I bought the ticket. – I bought the tickets

He ...

Replacement. -One word in an utterance is replaced by another.

E.g.

He bought this house cheap. – He bought it cheap

Restatement - The student rephrases an utterance and addresses it to someone else, according to instructions.

E.g.

Tell him to wait for you. –Wait for me

Ask her how old she is. – How old are you?

- Memorization of Dialogue

Dialogues or short conversations between two people are often used to begin a new lesson. Students memorize the

dialogue through mimicry; students usually take the role of one person in the dialogue, and the teacher the other. After the students have learned the one person's lines, they switch roles and memorize the other person's part. Another way of practicing the two roles is for half of the class to take one role and the other half to take the other. After the dialogue has been memorized, pairs of individual students might perform the dialogue for the rest of the class. In the Audio-Lingual Method, certain sentence patterns and grammar points are included within the dialogue. These patterns and points are later practiced in drills based on the lines of the dialogue.

Administering the Posttest

After these teaching sessions, the participants were asked to sit for a post-test. The entire research sequence of data collection, thus, was carried out over a period of approximately 5 months.

Findings and discussion

The findings of this research which followed the qualitative means for data collection are described below.

Rationale of analysis

The main hypothesis being tested in the study was whether the ALM, as practiced through a number of inherent techniques mentioned above, had a positive effect on the English

language-speaking proficiency of the language learners. In order to exclude all the confounds and control the variables that may have impacted the teaching effects, the t-test was used to ensure study groups that did not have any significant difference in terms of English proficiency level (speaking) at the beginning of the study. All the final scores of pretests were converted to be valid to perform the statistical analysis. Thus, they were recorded and fed into SPSS. After the instructional intervention, all the participants were tested again. All of the scores were subsequently rerecorded and calculated.

In a nutshell, the entire analysis was focused on a paired t-test to statistically measure the efficacy of the ALM. Conventionally, t-test is used to compare two populations that mean where there are two samples in which observations in one sample can be paired with observations in the other sample. Under the null hypothesis, this statistic follows a t-distribution with $n-1$ degrees of freedom. In this study, before and after conducting instructional sessions, students' English speaking proficiency scores were tested using a paired t-test. The logic of using a paired t-test is illustrated below;

Each component of the study was based on the following general hypotheses;

- H_0 : There is no mean difference in test scores after the instructional intervention.

- H_1 : There is a mean difference in test scores after the instructional intervention.

To test the null hypothesis that the true mean difference is zero, the procedure used is as follows: if

- x_i = test score before the instructional intervention
- y_i = test score after the instructional intervention

Following formulae were used in calculating the statistics of the t –test:

- i. Calculating the difference between the two observations on each pair: $(d_i = x_i - y_i)$
- ii. Calculating the mean difference:

$$\bar{d} = \frac{\sum d_i}{\sum n}$$

- iii. Calculating the standard deviation of the differences, SD, and Standard Error of the mean difference

$$SE(\bar{d}) = \frac{SD}{\sqrt{n}}$$

- iv. Calculating the t-statistic

$$T = \frac{\bar{d}}{SE(\bar{d})}$$

- v. Using the tables of the t-distribution to compare value for T to the t_{n-1} distribution. (This will give the p-value for the paired t-test.)

If t-value > table value or p-value < α , there is sufficient evidence to reject H_0 at selected confidence level.

Confidence interval would be useful to calculate a confidence interval for the mean difference to identify within what limits the true difference is likely to lie.

A 95% confidence interval for the true mean difference is:

$$\bar{d} \pm (t^* \times SE(\bar{d})) \text{ Or equivalently } \bar{d} \pm t^* \times \frac{Sd}{\sqrt{n}}$$

The pretest reliability was found to be (0.94), which was considered to be extremely satisfactory for the purpose of this study. After the treatment, a post test was administered to assess the efficacy of ALM. The posttest was identical to the pretest as it had the same type of items, number, and structure.

Dispersion: Distribution of marks

The Figure displays the dispersion, the distribution of marks both at the pretest and posttest of the participants. They provide an accurate picture of the distribution of mark ranges elaborating evidence of diverse performance at the two tests: pretest and posttest. Although the mean value suggests the overall improvement, the dispersion of marks creates a picture

of individual performance at the tests, and more importantly provides proof of how many have performed better and how many have performed worse from pretest to post-test. The dispersion also provides us with a detailed analysis of improvement or otherwise explains the basis on which a rise or fall of the mean value is created. One or two participants of the groups may perform exceedingly well at the pretest and posttest which may cause a drastic rise of mean value. In such a context, it is difficult to come to a conclusion that the group as a whole has improved by the teaching methodology applied. Therefore, through these graphs we are able to decide with statistical evidence whether a majority of the members contribute to the overall improvement of the participants.

Efficacy of audio-lingual method on speaking language proficiency

In this study, the independent variable is the teaching method; the dependent variable is the improvement of students' English-speaking proficiency as reflected in test scores. The study follows the quantitative method in light of test performance. In order to statistically explore the efficacy of ALM on the participants' speaking language proficiency, the hypothesis described was tested.

As in the previous research component, a pretest was administered to the participants to determine the participants'

prior status of English language proficiency in speaking skills which consisted of 05 test items. The total score was 50 points distributed among these items. After the treatment, a post test was administered to assess the efficacy of the Audio-lingual method. The posttest was identical to the pretest as it had the same type of items, number, and structure.

The following table shows the descriptive statistics for pretest and posttest.

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Devi	Minimum	maximum
Pretest	15	32.00	2.176	8.426	25	42
Posttest	15	32.13	2.097	8.123	35	46

Table 1 : The descriptive statistics for pretest and posttest

The mean of pretest scores of the group was 32.00 and the mean of posttest scores of the group was 32.13. It seems that audio-lingual based learning has a positive effect on participants' English language proficiency in speaking skills.

Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T-Value	Df	Sig.
Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper			
0.133	1.246	0.322	-0.557	0.823	14	0.685

Table 2 : Paired T-Test result for the marks Pretest-posttest means, standard deviations, and differences appear in the above Table 2. Data collected to examine the differences between the pretest and posttest were tested and interpreted using the t-test for paired samples. Paired sample t test shows whether or not the mean of the pre and post-test is significant.

Table 2 also shows the mean, and standard deviation together with the standard error mean. The scores for both tests are found to be normally distributed with a bell-shaped curve. The mean of the posttest manifests that there is some amount of progress compared with the pretest. Table 2 also indicates that the standard deviation in the pretest is much higher than posttests, which implies that the participants' scores in the pretest are more spread out over a large range of values. In other words, the posttest scores are clustered around the mean with a relatively smaller degree of dispersion. It is found that there are a few scores in the pretest which are toward one extreme or other. However, in the posttest the scores are more closely clustered around the mean value.

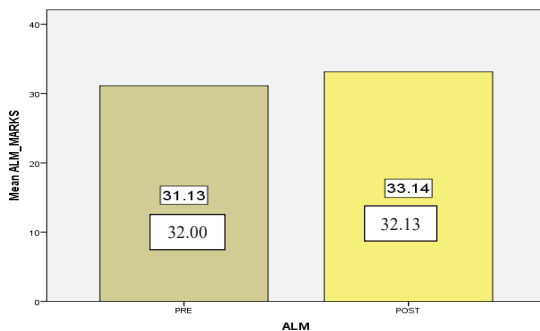


Figure 1 : Mean Values of Audio- Lingual Method

According to Table 2 the probability value is less than 0.05. Thus, there is adequate evidence to reject the null hypothesis; the variable is significant at 95% significant level. It confirms that there is a slight improvement on the marks of the participants, which is quite evident in Figure 1 too.

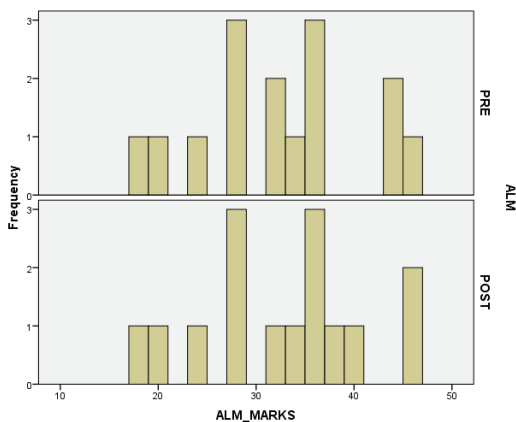


Figure 2 : Dispersion of Audio-lingual Method

Figure 2 elaborates on the dispersion of marks at the pretest and posttest of ALM. The two sections of the Figure: pretest and posttest, briefly, look identical suggesting no significant improvement as denoted by the mean value difference. The dispersion of marks suggests that the participants have performed at almost the same capacity in both tests which depicts an indication that the pedagogical application of ALM has not had a significant effect in the teaching-learning process. The graph however indicates that a few participants who performed well at the pretest have performed badly at the posttest while some others (also few in number) who had performed well at had pretest, have performed in the same capacity at the posttest too.

On the contrary, the majority of the participants performed almost the same in both tests which have undoubtedly caused no significant difference in the mean value. The graph also indicates that some participants who managed to gain average marks (25-35) have lost their momentum at the posttest and thus the results suggest some negative efficacy for a few participants. However, by and large, it seems that the pedagogical application of ALM has not been successful in making a significant impact in language performance.

Conclusion: Instructional Strategies of Audio-Lingual Method

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the efficacy of ALM in improving English language speaking skills in adult learners. Accordingly, an in-depth exploration of ALM was carried out, with a special focus on the techniques employed. In general, the findings of this study suggest that the techniques used had shown efficacy while they contributed considerably to the development of second language speaking proficiency in Sri Lankan university contexts.

The relationship between the theoretical basis of pedagogy and the application of instructional strategies is not by any means a straightforward one nor is there a consensus about how much of an influence the theoretical framework of methodologies should play on application. Studies on teaching methodologies show that propositional knowledge within instructional strategies plays a role in shaping learning outcomes (Larsen-Freeman, 2005). This view can be justified through the results of the current study, which indicated the effectiveness of ALM.

However, the current study is in total contrast to the findings of the experimental study conducted by Tambunan and Gintings (2012) which investigated the effectiveness of the communicative and audio-lingual methods on conversational

achievement. Tambunan and Gintings' (2012) results reveal that the audio-lingual method is effective. The findings of the current study are partially in line with the Faridatusolihah's (2012) study which shows that teaching English using Audio Lingual Method is effective to improve the students' speaking ability, and suggests that several techniques of Audio Lingual method can be effectively used in EFL settings. In fact, the Audio-Lingual method adopts a systematic presentation of grammatical construction of the second language moving from the simple to the more complex sentences, often of drills which the students had to repeat what the teacher said. This can be justified because learning structure or grammar was the starting point for the student. The students were given only "enough vocabulary to make such drills possible¹", which would have contributed considerably to its efficacy.

The standard deviation (SD) of 1.246 and only 0.823 of T-value indicates an average effectiveness in the methodology. Hence, the result of the research suggests that teaching English speaking using the Audio-Lingual Method was not totally a failure. This means that several techniques of the Audio-Lingual Method too can be effectively used in ESL contexts with necessary modifications.

Further, the findings of the current study illustrated here are similar to those of Faridatusolihah (2012) which showed

¹ Richards, J.C. et-al. 1986

positive results of the audio-lingual method for learners' language proficiency. The results also confirm behaviorists' theories which express that the behavior of a human being is dependent on three crucial elements in learning: a stimulus; a response; and reinforcement (Skinner 1957; Brown 1980). To recapitulate, there are three crucial elements in learning according to Behaviorist theory, namely, a stimulus, a response, and reinforcement which serves to mark the response as being appropriate (or inappropriate) and encourages the repetition (or suppression), of the response in the future (Skinner 1957; Brown 1980). Faridatusolihah (2012) comments that ALM techniques like dialogue practice and drill practice have had a positive impact on improving speaking ability; however, our study does not confirm the same. But techniques like communicative activities may have had a positive impact on oral fluency. For instance, the activity on "tell a lie"² is an apt case in point. However, such claims must be made with caution since our study mainly concentrated on a limited number of participants, from one case.

However, unlike Tambunan and Gintings' (2012) study, in the current study, the audio lingual method produces significant results. This can be justified through the claim that the theoretical foundation of this approach is weak, and learners

² Through this activity, each learner is given an opportunity to come forward and to tell a lie or to refrain from telling any truth in responding to the inquiries: if he/she tells the truth or a right answer is given, he/she loses the game.

are unable to use skills learned in the classroom in real communication. Accordingly, the Audio Lingual method's insistence on repetition and memorization of standard phrases may have ignored the role of context and knowledge in language learning. As the study of linguistics developed, it was discovered that language was not acquired through a process of habit formation, and that errors were not necessarily bad. Thus, the results of the current study seem to be par with the existing theoretical rationale.

It is also noteworthy to distinguish the current study from that of Assalahi's (2013) which examined the interplay between English as a foreign language teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and their reported practices in public schools in Saudi Arabia. Assalahi' study highlights that the analysis of teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and their teaching practices were both aligned and paradoxical, showing mixed perceptions about the method. While the consistency of beliefs and teaching practices stems from the harmony between theoretical knowledge and contextual factors, the paradox is due to the capacity of contextual factors on the belief system to which teachers were obliged to submit to. Hence, what is implicit from Assalahi's (2013) study is that the effectiveness of methods would vary according to learning and teaching contexts. However, in the current study, the researcher-cum teacher followed a method in which perceptions of the teacher were controlled to a great extent. Hence, the current study does

not totally agree with Assalahi's implication that the outcome is cognizant of teachers' belief of a particular methodology.

Limitations

This study, like almost all studies conducted in the field of teaching English as a second language, is not free of limitations. One of the main limitations associated with this study is based on the fact that it is a study conducted at one selected institute with a few learners and the conclusions found based on the research cannot always be extended more generally. In spite of the limitations and defects of the current research, second language teachers still can adopt the implications in a flexible way.

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