

An analysis of pronunciation difficulties encountered by visually impaired Tamil speakers in acquiring English as the second language in Northern Sri Lanka

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This paper aims at updating the difficulties and problems encountered by the visually impaired in acquiring English pronunciation, with special reference to accommodating the phonological features of Tamil speakers in Northern Sri Lanka. Northern Sri Lanka, like many other sectors, is in the process of emerging from a devastating economic meltdown that left many schools without the basic teaching learning resources. Facilities that cater to learners with disabilities and other special educational needs are not readily available. Hence, it is instructive to analyze the learning difficulties in students with visual impairments and to identify the remedial actions that can be undertaken in this regard.

Previous studies on Sri Lankan English have little reference to the impact of Tamil in the acquisition of English phonology and almost no attention paid to people with special needs. In the post-conflict context, it is mandatory to undertake a study to analyze the special features of English phonology in Tamil second language learners in the area of special needs education. Therefore, this paper attempts to document the views of both the teachers and the students in secondary education, in special needs education and their difficulties in teaching and learning the pronunciation of English. This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection, but is rooted in a qualitative epistemological position that recognizes the importance of locating the research within a particular context. A questionnaire was administered and focus group discussions were held with 10 teachers and 25 students of secondary level schools. Thus, this paper hopes to depict a clear description of the English phonological features of the speakers with visual impairment (particularly the secondary level students) of the Northern region of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Phonological Features, Special Needs Education, Visual Impairment