

Out-of-Classroom Second Language Learning of the University Students: A Study Based on the Second Year Undergraduates of the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

Lifelong language knowledge and skills should be assured to the learners of a second language in the process of language learning, and this cannot be done only inside a classroom which carries limitations in it. This research investigated the OCSLL of the second year students of the faculty of Applied Sciences of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka through a random sample of 14 undergraduates. The data was collected by administering a questionnaire. The study explored the frequency of engagement in a selected list of OCSLL activities to investigate the exposure of undergraduates to the English language. The selected activities were reading English books, reading novels, reading newspapers, visiting websites for a special reason, visiting websites for any other purpose, listening to English songs, listening to English radio programs, watching English films, English news, watching YouTube videos, speaking and writing in English out of the classroom. These activities were categorized and analyzed under the four language skills they represented. It was revealed that the students preferred to visit websites, watch English films and watch English YouTube videos more frequently than other activities. However, reading novels, books and newspapers, listening to English radio programs and watching news were activities of low-engagement. The study provides recommendations on how the second language learners should get the maximum benefit out of OCSLL to enhance their language skills.

Keywords: *Out-of-classroom second language learning, frequency of engagement*

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Introduction

Out-of-classroom language learning can be defined as “any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning” (Benson, 2001). Languages are not learned solely in the language classroom, but can take place at any time and in any place. (Pickard, 1995; Hyland, 2004). Traditionally, second language teaching is done in classrooms which carry limitations such as time restrictions, lack of resources, lack of good teaching methods, lack of authentic use and meaningful interaction. Out-of-classroom second language learning (OCSLL) will enhance language knowledge that will retain in the learners for a life-long time as input plays a vital role in the language acquisition. As the theories of education evolve from teacher-centered to student-centered and new concepts such as learner autonomy and self-learning dawn into the field of education, the language classroom cannot be antagonist towards them. Apart from learning English inside a classroom, it is mandatory for a learner to get exposed to English outside the classroom since it provides room for the authentic use and meaningful interaction in the target language. This will create sustainable language knowledge in the learner by reducing anxiety and increasing motivation since the learner is exposed to authentic English atmosphere. Most researches in the recent decades have acknowledged the significance of out-of-classroom second language learning which is essential for sustainable and lifelong language learning. Hence, the study explores this concept of out-of-classroom second language with the aim of engaging university students in English language learning beyond the classroom to supplement the in-class language learning. From the findings of the research, the course designers will be able to prepare courses that cater the needs and preferences of the language learners as the findings will showcase the out-of-classroom language learning of undergraduates.

Out-of-classroom language learning plays a significant role in the enhancement of the language knowledge of the students. They refer to language learning activities done outside the classroom to learn and develop all the skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary learning and grammar learning. Referring to the language in general, it often refers to contact outside the classroom. If any person has the necessary linguistic environment, learning a language is an unchallenging and effortless task. Most of the students find it difficult to be proficient in English owing to the fact that they do not have the necessary exposure to the English Language. Any learner can improve immensely through exposure rather than struggling in language classrooms memorizing and drilling grammar rules forcefully. With the advancement of technology, the world has shrunk to the size of our palms at present, and through the new technology exposing to English is very simple because English acts as the linking language and also the major language used in computer and

internet. Second language learning has transcended the walls of the classroom and the learner is autonomous and independent to self-learn and self-regulate language learning. There are many sources of language inputs such as television, radio, internet, books, newspapers which will supplement what is done inside the classroom and these activities will pave way for a sustained language knowledge and skills. The research highlights that out-of-classroom language learning should supplement what is done in the classroom.

Multiple factors decide the engagement of students in out-of-classroom activities. Some learners prefer to engage in independent activities in which they do not have to interact with others. While some prefer activities related to receptive skills such as reading and listening, others prefer activities related to productive skills such as writing and speaking. Learner autonomy, socio-psychological factors and motivation are pivotal for engaging in out-of-classroom activities.

Background of the research

The objective of this research is to investigate the Out-of-Classroom Second Language learning (OCSLL) activities the undergraduates engaged in. In this research the frequency of engagement in some out-of-classroom language learning activities were examined with a sample of 54 students. The out-of-classroom activities selected for this research are as follows:

- Visiting any website for a special interest or hobby
- Watching English movies
- Visiting any website in English
- Watching YouTube videos in English
- Listening to English songs
- Writing in English outside the classroom
- Speaking in English outside the classroom
- Watching English news
- Reading English newspapers
- Reading English books apart from novels
- Listening to English radio programmes
- Reading English novels

A sample of 54 second year undergraduates of the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka was selected to conduct this research. There were 30 male students and 24 female students in the sample from different districts of the country such as Kandy, Gampaha, Galle, Kegalle, Matale, Badulla, Colombo, Kaluthara and Kurunegala. All the students in the sample said

that they spoke Sinhala as their first language. It is noted that most of the students get exposed to English once they enter the university and it is only a minority of students who have a satisfactory competence in English to carry out their studies.

Literature Review

Muries Saville Troike (2006) in his book *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* explains that SLA can occur in both 'informal L2 learning' and 'formal L2 learning'. 'Informal L2 learning' means the learning of a language in an informal setting or a naturalistic setting while 'Formal L2 learning' means the learning that occurs in a formal setting like classrooms. An example, according to Troike, for informal L2 learning would be 'a child from Japan is brought to the US and "picks up" English in the course of playing and attending school with native English-speaking children without any specialized language instruction'. An example for formal L2 learning would be 'when a high school student in England takes a class in French or when an attorney in Colombia takes a night class in English.'

The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most significant of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory. The acquisition learning hypothesis states that acquisition and learning are two ways of acquiring a second language. Acquisition is the subconscious process: the process like the way children acquire the first language (Troike, 2006). Acquisition is a process whereby the learner unconsciously acquires the language which requires meaningful interaction or natural communication in the target language in which speakers are not concerned to the form of their utterances, but are concerned of the communicative act itself. In contrast, Learning is the deductive method where the language is taught and learnt explicitly. Learning is when, in a formal setting the students are taught about the building blocks of language such as grammar in a formal way. Acquisition occurs in a subconscious way and learning occurs in a conscious manner. The most suitable method for language acquisition is the subconscious way. (Krashen, 1981).

Krashen (1981) 'Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning' (1981) explains about the 'formal and informal linguistic environments in the language acquisition and language learning'. According to this, there are two linguistic environments in which L2 learners get exposed to the target language. One of them is the "artificial or formal environment", mostly the classroom and the other is "natural or informal environments".

As cited in Knight, Tracey Louise, Bialystok proposes two types of input: formal practicing and functional practicing of the language. The language code and form, for example grammar and spelling is the 'formal practising' and "increased exposure to the language for communication" (Bialystok, p.77) is known as the Functional practice. 'Formal practice often occurs in the classroom,

but can take place out of the classroom if the learner studies a grammar book, for example' whereas buying movie tickets, calling a plumber or talking with native speakers over dinner are examples of Functional practice. (Tracey Louise Knight, 2007).

Griffiths (2008) based on Rubin and Thompson (1982 as cited in Tanjila Ferdous 2013) defines the characteristics of a good language learner. One characteristic of a good language learner is to communicate in L2 outside the classroom. Nunan (1991) as cited in Knight (2007) carried out a research to investigate the factors affecting the successful acquisition of their second language. All the participants were English teachers and they could be referred to as 'good' learners. The survey was done to find out the ways and means that were most and least important for them to learn the language. From the findings of the research, it came into limelight that in-class instruction was not enough to be a successful language learner. 'The learners were successful because they were willing to apply their language skills outside of the classroom by participating in activities such as reading newspapers, watching TV, talking with friends in English and talking to native English speakers.

Learner autonomy is one of the main factors that plays a role for students to search for OCLL activities. (Benson, 2001). Chan, Spratt, and Humphrey (2002) cited in Tanjilaferdous (2013) conducted a study to assess and review the out of classroom use of English of 508 undergraduates are studying an English program in a university in Hong Kong. They "indicated that they participated most frequently in independent activities using English outside of the classroom" and engaged in activities like sending emails, surfing the internet and watching movies very frequently.

Hyland (2004) conducted a research with 228 trainees and practicing ESL teachers and found out that they preferred to engage in independent or activities done by their own to practice English out of the classroom. Writing emails, reading books, surfing the internet, watching TV, and listening to music were the most common activities they engaged in. Sixty percentage (60%) of the participants made use of OCLL activities, but these activities were mainly individual ones, not allowing interaction outside the classroom. They were hesitant to speak in English because they thought that speaking in English showed that they were showing off or trying to be proud or superior.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka with 54 second year undergraduates. The students came from different parts of the island like Colombo, Kandy, Mathale, Kurunegala, Galle, Badulla, Kegalle and Kaluthara.

The second year students followed English Language Proficiency Course during their second year and passing this subject was compulsory to be graduated. Besides, the English knowledge was

mandatory for them to perform better in their studies and also to secure a better career. Therefore, they had an interest to develop their language skills and this research intends to explore a path in which they will improve their English sustainably.

A random sample of 54 students was selected from and they were given the questionnaire. In this random sample, there were 30 male students and 24 female students coming from different parts of the country. All the students in the sample said that they spoke Sinhala as their first language. The marks of the First Year Second Semester examination of the students in the sample was in the range of 50-70.

Data Collection

Primary data used for the study was gathered by employing a questionnaire which carried different questions about the OCSLL activities in which they involved in. The questionnaire was distributed among the second year undergraduates following English Language Proficiency Course (ELPC 2+20) of the Faculty of Applied Sciences and the necessary explanations regarding the questions were given to them. Secondary data was extracted from journals, other research reports, books and electronic sources.

Data Analysis

Data in this research was analyzed using Descriptive statistics. Data collected from questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software. First of all, the general information presented from the first part of the questionnaire such as gender, grade obtained for General English, language used at home was analyzed to identify the frequency. Second, the mean exposure to each out of classroom activity was calculated using Descriptive Statistics to find out the hierarchical order of the engagement in each variable (OCSLL activities). Then, the frequency of engagement in each OCSLL activity considered for the study was analyzed using SPSS. The questions regarding the OCSLL activities in the questionnaire were constructed based on the Likert scale format with 1 as Never and 5 as Very often. 12 questions on Likert scale to find the frequency of engagement of the OCSLL activities were included.

E.g.: How often do you watch movies in English?

Never rarely sometimes often very often

The questionnaire included some multiple choice questions.

E.G.: When I listen to English songs,

I listen to the song without lyrics

I listen to the song with lyrics in English

The results of this analysis were presented according to the language skills the OCSLL activities represented. The Language learning activities were divided according to the language skills as shown in the table.

Table 1. Language learning activities divided according to the language skills they represent Results

Types of language skills	Mode of communication	Type of OCLL activities
1. Reading (Receptive)	Written	Books <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading English novels • Reading English novels apart from novels Newspapers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading English newspapers Websites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting any website in English • Visiting any English website for a special interest
2. Listening (Receptive)	Oral	Audio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to radio programmes • Listening to English songs Audio Visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watching English YouTube videos • Watching English news • Watching English movies
3. Speaking (Productive)	Oral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking in English outside the classroom
4. Writing (Productive)	Written	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing in English outside the classroom

The mean value of all the variables was calculated using descriptive statistics and the following table illustrates the mean value of exposure of those variables.

Table 2. Mean value of exposure to OCLL activities

Out of classroom language learning activity	Mean value of exposure
Visiting any website for a special interest or hobby	3.67
Watching English movies	3.52
Visiting any website in English	3.43
Watching YouTube videos in English	3.43
Listening to English songs	3.24
Writing in English outside the classroom	2.91

Speaking in English outside the classroom	2.78
Watching English news	2.65
Reading English newspapers	2.61
Reading English books apart from novels	2.57
Listening to English radio programmes	2.41
Reading English novels	2.15

According to the above table, it was found that “Visiting any website for a special interest or a hobby” obtained the highest mean value and topped the list with a value of 3.67 which proves the fact that the students engage in this activity more frequently than the others. Watching English movies is the second highest and visiting any website, watching you tube videos (except movies and songs), listening to English music were activities the students engage in a considerable level. Speaking and writing outside the classroom had average mean values which showed that the students engaged in them in an average level. “Reading English novels” obtained the lowest mean value which shows that the students engage in this activity very rarely.

Frequency of engagement in OCSLL activities according to the language skills

The frequency of engagement in selected OCSLL activities are illustrated below.

Listening: Audio

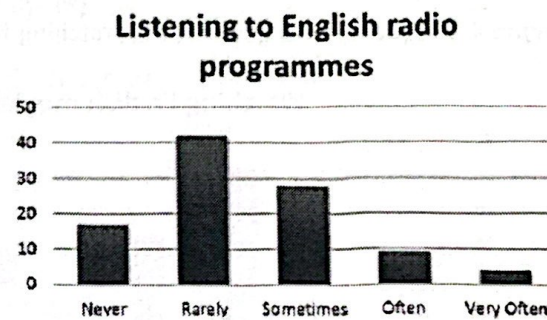
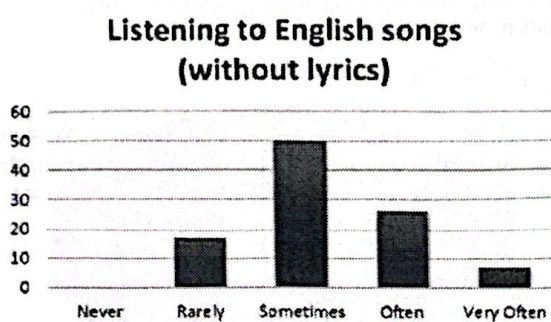


Fig. 1. Frequency of engagement in listening to English Songs **Fig. 2. Frequency of engagement in listening to radio programs**

It can be seen that the engagement in listening to English songs is higher than listening to the English radio programs.

The following graph shows that majority of the participants prefer to listen to English songs without lyrics being displayed

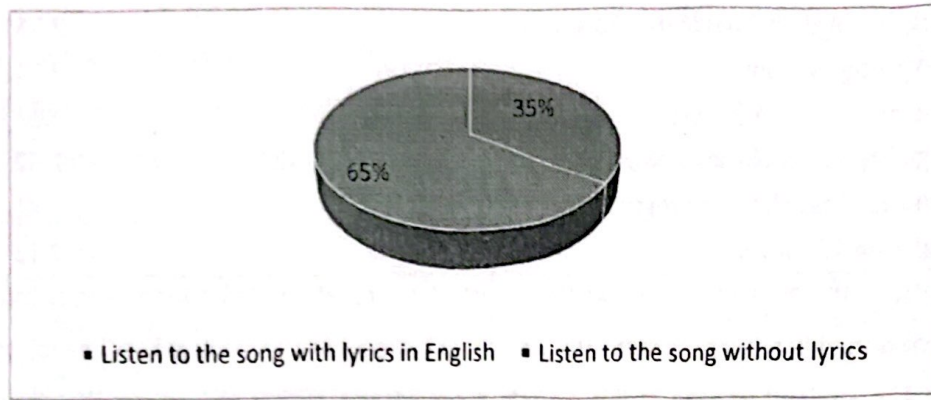


Figure 3. Percentages of preference for listening to songs with lyrics and without lyrics

Listening – Audio Visual

Watching English news

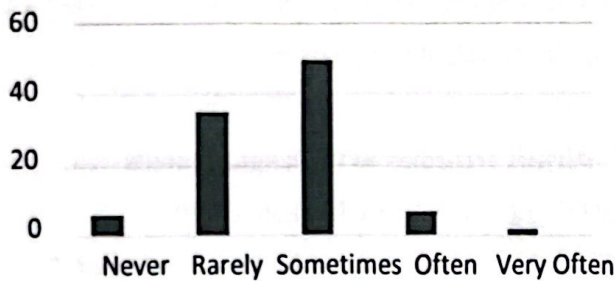


Figure 4. Frequency of engagement in watching English news

Watching English movies

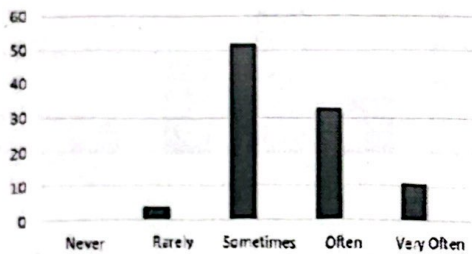


Figure 5. Frequency of engagement in watching English movies

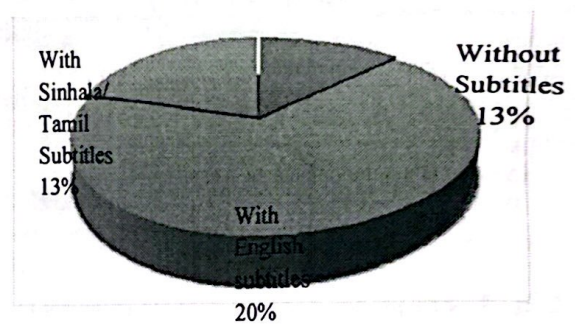


Figure 6. Strategies used when watching movies

Watching English YouTube videos

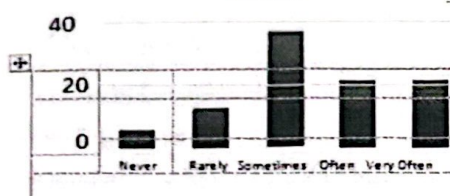


Figure 7. Frequency of engagement in watching

Reasons	To learn how to do something	For fun	To learn some information for classes	To learn some information for private use
No. of students	39	31	47	27

Figure 8. Reasons for watching YouTube videos

Youtube videos

As seen in the graphs, watching English movies and YouTube videos are highly engaging activities among students whereas watching English news is a low engaging activity.

Reading – Websites

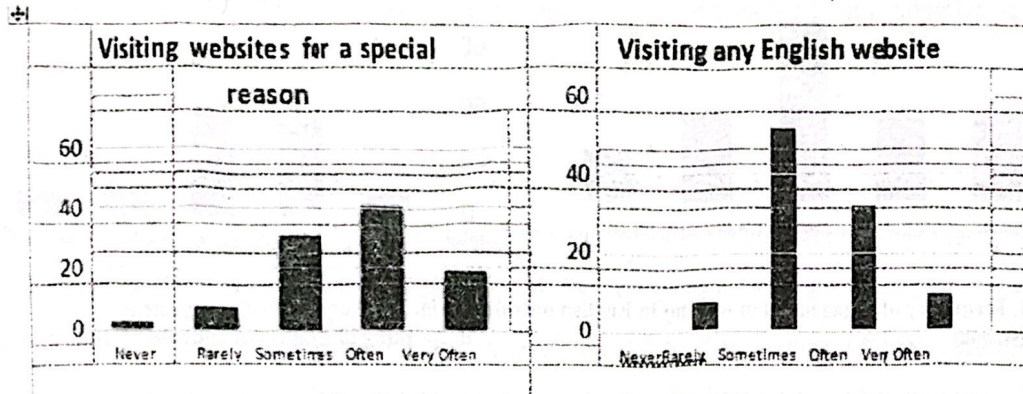


Fig. 9. Frequency of engagement in visiting websites for a special reason Fig. 10. Frequency of engagement in visiting any website

As seen from the graphs above, it is clear that visiting websites is a frequently engaged activity among the participants.

Printed Reading materials (books and newspapers)

Reading English novels

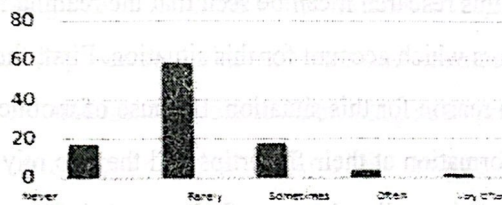


Fig. 11. Frequency of engagement in reading English novels

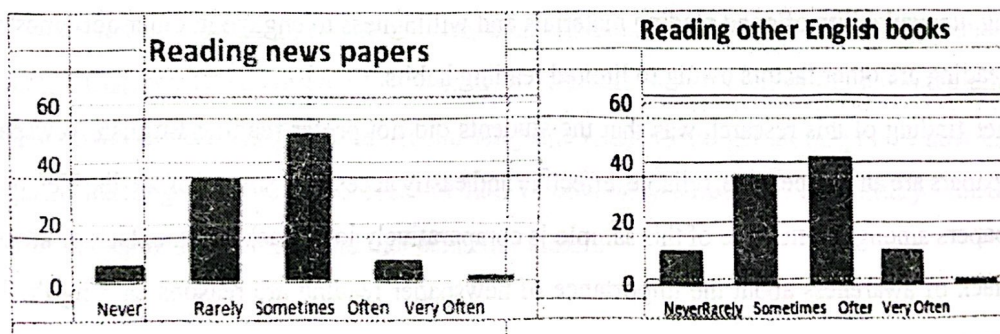


Fig. 12. Frequency of engagement in reading newspapers Fig. 13. Frequency of engagement in reading other books

The graphs show that the students do not prefer printed reading materials. Reading English novels was the least preferred activity among the participants.

Writing and Speaking in English outside the classroom

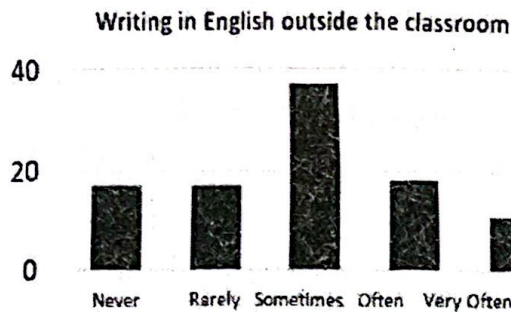


Fig. 14. Frequency of engagement in writing in English outside the classroom

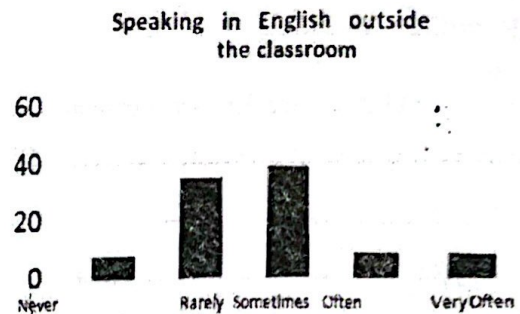


Fig. 15. Frequency of engagement in speaking in English outside the classroom

Discussion

The participants are highly engaging in visiting websites, watching English films and watching English YouTube videos. Reading novels, books and newspapers, listening to English radio programs and watching news are low-engaging activities. The students engage in speaking and writing on an average level. It is notable that most of the activities they engaged in are internet based activities.

According to the findings of this research it can be seen that the reading habits of the students were low. There can be many factors which account for this situation. First, the difficulty in accessing to printed reading materials is a reason for this situation. Because of mobile phones and the access to internet, they can receive information at their fingertips and they do rely much on internet. If they want to do extra reading for their studies they can find enough information from websites. Time constraint also acts as a hindrance to read and another notable factor is that they do not engage in pleasure reading which is another good way to improve English. Unawareness about the benefits of reading, unavailability of good reading materials and willingness to engage in other activities rather than reading are other factors owing to limited reading habits.

Another finding of this research was that the students did not prefer reading English Newspapers. Newspapers are an inexpensive, reliable, effective and easily accessible source of media. Yet, reading newspapers among the students of this sample is comparatively low. Lack of time, lack of interest to read, lack of awareness about the importance of newspaper reading are reasons causing the lower engagement in newspaper reading.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that participants more frequently deal with internet related language learning activities which is an unavoidable circumstance in this technologically advanced world. The participants were also low reading motivated and preferred to watch movies and YouTube videos. They also preferred receptive activities like reading and listening rather than productive activities such as speaking and writing.

Recommendations

The study provides the following recommendations for the learners and teachers to get the maximum advantage from OCSLL to develop the language skills. Since the students are low reading motivated, their reading can be improved by forming book clubs and reading corners. Online reading can be promoted by making the students aware of the ways to use the internet for enhancing their English language. Many students may dislike going to a library to read books because of the tight academic schedule they have. Therefore, learners can be encouraged to read novels and other English books available online so that they would reap the maximum benefits out of online reading. Moreover, it is possible to have mini presentations or a review about a book or a newspaper article in the classroom. An extensive reading course during the Intensive course for the New Entrants can be conducted. The collection of English books at the university library can be upgraded. Since most students are exposed to internet, the teachers can guide the students to use internet to upgrade their skills. For instance, if they are poor in grammar they can do online exercises and improve their knowledge of grammar. The teachers can guide the students to listen to interesting radio programs that fit well with their language proficiency. To encourage creative writing of the students, a university newspaper can be published. The students can publish their articles on this newspaper. Finally, a language club can be formed and the students can have interactive sessions like debates, discussions, movie nights at hostel and other competitions which will enhance their conversational skills in English.

The study aims to investigate Out-of-Classroom Language Learning in the Sri Lankan English Teaching Context. Effective OCLL occurs if the learners are exposed to the language through a variety of ways and means and the second language teachers can get an insight on how effective language learning is achievable. This method is obviously suitable in the tertiary education as students are more autonomous and independent to learn.

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