

The role of social media in improving the English language proficiency of pre-school children in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT: *The English language has now become lingua franca, which means the language that bridges the globe and its importance has been observed much during the past decade. English has become an integral component of human capital, as it is intertwined with various aspects of life. Therefore, in the twenty-first century, many non-English speaking countries across the globe including Sri Lanka, offer importance for the English language in education and the foundation of language is taught from the early childhood stage in preschools. To understand the current nature of the Sri Lankan preschool education system, a qualitative study was performed with some selected participants across Sri Lanka and the results of the study explore the following. Although the Sri Lankan government acknowledges the importance of early childhood education, the preschool system is not administered by the government, instead, administered by private and community-based entities. Among the preschools in Sri Lanka, huge disparity is observed in the standard of preschools, so as the English language teaching in urban, suburban and rural settings. Some preschool teachers interviewed in northern rural Sri Lanka affirm that their students are taught the basics of the English language such as nursery rhymes, alphabets, and phonics sounds, with the help of social media such as YouTube. However, in Sri Lanka, there is no evidence available for the Sri Lankan government to have a clear policy on using social media in preschool teaching. The purpose of the study is to explore the use of social media in teaching the English language in Sri Lankan preschools and offer suggestions for the future policy option of English language induction in Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka.*

KEYWORDS: *preschools, early childhood education, Sri Lanka, English, social media, teaching.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Although the English language has been dominating the world in multifaceted domains, its growing influence has been observed in the past four decades (Reddy, 2016). The English language is intertwined with everyone's day-to-day life, predominantly through a range of current social media, that prompts everyone to learn English. Further, the English language has become extremely crucial in human development beyond a particular stage (Kaur, 2017). In many countries, the English language is therefore gradually incorporated from the stage of pre-primary schooling, and Sri Lanka is not exceptional to this. In Sri Lanka, the term 'preschool', also known as 'nursery' or 'playschool' or 'pre-primary school' is generally defined as "a learning space, or merely an educational establishment, that offers children of age from three to five with early childhood education. Preschool is also seen as a place where children are mentally and cognitively prepared for primary education (World Bank, 2018). In Sri Lanka, preschools are not administered by the government, instead, owned by individuals and private entities such as corporate establishments, private entrepreneurs, faith-based congregations, community service organizations, sports clubs, etc. (Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, 2013).

From a psychosocial perspective, preschools are the child-friendly environments that transform children's cognition from family-bound to a broader community-bound, that often induce children to establish wider social networking with their peers, teachers, and carers beyond their family network. Although the preschool or nursery system is not officially administered by the Sri Lankan education governance, the preschool system in Sri Lanka functions extremely well, compared to other South Asian countries. In Sri Lanka, the enrolment rate of preschools is tremendously increased in recent years (World Bank, 2014). As everyone is well aware, Sri Lanka is categorized by the United Nations entities, one of the prominent countries that possess a higher literacy rate in Asia as well as ranked the very first in South Asia for her higher education attainment. Sri Lanka is one of the prominent countries in South Asia for its higher school enrolment rate (Perera et al, 2017). However, huge disparity is observed between the preschools of different social settings. More specifically, the English language proficiency of the children, who attend the lower class or rural preschools is considerably lower or negligible. Preschools in metropolitan, the urban area is highly developed than that of rural areas. Therefore, the standard of preschools in rural Sri Lanka needs to be improved in terms of quality of teachers, learning tools and strategies, infrastructure and other facilities, etc. Social media is a vast resource that consists of countless teaching tools for the English language and could, therefore, be utilized as an effective resource pool. Although in Sri Lanka, there are no clear policies in utilizing social media as a teaching tool for English language, preschool teachers in metropolitan as well as some rural settings tend to use social media for teaching their students English rhymes, and stories. However, multiple interviews with preschool teachers stressed that in rural Sri Lankan settings, the impact of teaching English in preschools on the children's language development in their later stage is still not scientifically studied or publicly available.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of the utilization of social media for English language development in nursery care systems in Sri Lanka via the following objectives.

(i) to offer the updated literature about the current usage of social media in early childhood service including early childhood language education and training; (ii) to analyse the international literature in early childhood care and development; (iii) to understand the current Sri Lankan policy framework and delivery system of the early childhood care and education in the country; (iv) to analyse current nature of early childhood learning, care and development structures in Sri Lanka; (v) to explore the present situation of English language teaching in Sri Lankan preschools and the potentials of developing the social media-based English language teaching service; (vi) to suggest policy options for the future.

Significance of the study

The concerned study itself possesses enormous significance. From the Sri Lankan context, this study explores the typology of Sri Lankan preschools in terms of their development and quality, their various settings, their affiliation with various types of management systems, etc. Therefore, researchers, scholars and policy developers and practitioners can get a clear picture of the nature of Sri Lankan preschools in different settings. Furthermore, for researchers, students, academics and policy developers on early childhood education, this study would be seen as a useful element in exploring preschool education from the context of English language development, as this study emphasizes the importance of teaching English as a secondary language in preschools as well as the global importance of constructing a good English foundation in the pre-primary stage.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study primarily envelops early childhood care and development in Sri Lanka including nursery care, influence and the utilization of English language in the environment of nursery care systems belong to different social classes in Sri Lanka, brief introduction of English language in Sri Lanka and its development, the influence and utilization of English language in different social classes, the historical impact of English language on grabbing resources and opportunities within 'gold-collar' and 'white-collar' job circles and ruling

elite circles, the unavoidable necessity of English language in the contemporary world, introduction of social media in Sri Lanka and their dissemination, contribution of social media in day-to-day life, utilization of social media for the cognitive development, including English language development in nursery care systems in Sri Lanka, and exploring potential future policy options concerning Sri Lankan nursery care system that could benefit wider society as a whole.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Definition of Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education is generally defined as “a branch of education theory which relates to the formal as well as informal teaching of children from birth up to the age of five”. In the context of Sri Lanka, formal Early Childhood Education is defined as the formal, teaching of children from the age of three to five (World Bank, 2014).

Early Childhood: the foundation stage in human development

Obviously, among the different stages of human development, early childhood period is the most critical, that stage consists of rapid physical as well as mental development, determines the foundation for future development, and therefore predominant. As the early childhood stage offers every human being, the opportunity to develop physically and mentally with the fastest pace. Quality early childhood education and care are becoming more widespread across the globe in both governments as well as private sectors in recent years (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). The report of the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) (2018) states that the benefits of early childhood education are not confined within childhood, instead, the benefits impact the wider society at large. The report further stressed that “at the level of the individual, participation in high-quality early childhood education and care is associated with higher earnings, greater educational attainment, improved social integration, and better health, among other advantages” (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). According to the World Bank (2014) & the European Union (2018), “participation in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been recognized as a fundamental step in children’s development”. The report of Australia’s Victoria State Government (2017) stated that children tend to learn in their early childhood the use of the body, including hands, respect for others, how to relate to others, both adults and other children, how to resolve conflict, problem-solving skills, communication, getting used to the things that make people different from each other, self-knowledge – understanding of feelings, a sense of their strengths, talents and uniqueness confidence, a sense of belonging to family, community, culture, how to look after and take care of yourself, behaving in acceptable ways and controlling your behaviour. Therefore, what they learn from their surroundings and the environment in which they live, will be embedded in their deep memory and that would ultimately impact their adulthood personality. Pre-schooling is an integral component in the early childhood development of children. Pre-schooling has a global priority. Because (i) it sets a very strong foundation for learning; (ii) pre-schooling helps the education system more effective and efficient; (iii) pre-schooling is considered an effective strategy in promoting a country’s economic growth. Sri Lanka is one of the prominent South Asian countries that officially recognize the importance of early childhood development, the foundation for human capital development. More specifically, early childhood development is enshrined in Sri Lanka’s National Development Policy Strategy that formally recognizes the role of early childhood care and development on the country’s human capital.

Recent Sri Lankan Policy on Early Childhood Education

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Education (2013) & the World Bank (2014) stated that the growing importance of early childhood education has widely been accepted by the government of Sri Lanka, and policy priorities are being developed by the relevant authorities to meet the development objectives of the country via developing human capital. Sri Lanka is currently working on expanding the accessibility of preschools by children from all socioeconomic stratum (World bank, 2014). Although the legal framework for early childhood education

provision in Sri Lanka doesn't provide adequate clarity on the implementation structure of the early childhood education, Sri Lanka's recent policy on Early Childhood Education (ECE) reflects the concept of partially absorbing all preschools into monitoring circle of the government education governance establishment. According to the report of the ministry of education (2013), the central government develops a set of national policies that guides preschool institutions to maintain a nation-wide standard. Under this policy, provincial governments take responsibility to regulate all preschools within their coverage and the provincial governments, therefore, expect all preschools to be registered in their respective zonal education offices. Every zonal education office possesses an Assistant Director for early childhood education, who is mandated with guiding and monitoring preschools, build their capacities, developing uniform learning tools, methodologies, and strategies with the guidance of the National Institute of Education (NIE). They will also train teachers and help to obtain teaching and learning materials. However, the World Bank (2014) cited that Sri Lanka's public investment in ECE is still very poor or negligible.

The introduction of the English language in Sri Lanka and its application

The English language was introduced in Sri Lanka with the onset of the British colonial era. English was the official language at that time and the English knowledge for government servants was mandatory. Like other former British colonies, the English language has been the identity of higher social and super-elite classes in Sri Lanka. Moreover, not only in the government sector, the English language was extensively used in the upper hierarchical levels of various industries, which produce goods and services across the country. Therefore, anyone, who knows the English language was able to grab ample opportunities such as 'white-collar' and 'blue-collar' jobs, quality education, and other services, easy access to the resources they need (Little et al, 2011).

The global significance of the English language

The English language has been occupied the stage of high significance throughout the history (Sekhar, 2012; Reddy, 2016; Kaur, 2017), partly because the English speakers were the pioneers of most of the global adventures including global exploration as well as the establishment of 'the English-speaking countries' which are highly developed and geopolitically influencing the contemporary world (Sekhar, 2012; Kaur, 2017). Also, the English language is still occupying the status of official language in almost all former British colonial countries. Most vitally, as the English speakers were the pioneers of modern science, industrial revolution and technology and also, they are still dominating the knowledge-based world, almost all knowledge-acquiring materials are only available in English (Sekhar, 2012). Collectively, those who gain the English proficiency can be able to access to more resources and opportunities in their lifetime such as highly paid white-collar, gold-collar jobs, quality education, and other services, etc. than those who are not proficient in English. The English language is the indicator of higher social class as well as a super-elite class in most developing countries in Asia and Africa. The growing influence of the English language in science and technology in the past four decades has made it very vital and unavoidable in human development beyond a particular stage of every human being (Sekhar, 2012; Murphy & Evangelou, 2016; Reddy, 2016; Kaur, 2017). Thus, apart from native English speakers, everyone in the world is encouraged to keep the English language as their second language, not as a foreign language. To do this, the English language has to be incorporated into the foundation of learning of all. Murphy & Evangelou (2016) pointed out that the current trend of increased global migration has made it essential for international migrants and their families to learn English.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using different methods of data collection viz. "conventional content analysis" of (i) relevant authentic documentations from the related authorities of Sri Lanka; and interview reports from some randomly selected preschool teachers, parents of preschool kids, and government officials across Sri Lanka; as well as (ii) direct observation of some randomized preschools across the country.

Coding of materials

Analysis of interview reports and other relevant documents constituted only 'manual coding' of documents by two individual experienced volunteers to minimize errors in document analysis. In the coding process, sentences related to the research objectives were coded and all codes, which are irrelevant to the research objective were eliminated. The remaining similar codes were then merged and formed categories. Similar categories were further merged and formed as a broader theme.

Verification of coding

Materials, which were separately coded by two experienced volunteers were then compared, and the differences in the coding process were then adjusted and finally, a conciliatory coding was accepted as the final coding of materials.

Cross Referencing

Moreover, the findings were validated by 'cross-references' and those cross-references are indicated especially in the reference list.

IV. RESULTS

The results of the analysis are synthesized under the following headings.

The use of English language in different communities in Sri Lanka

Based on the usage of the English language, communities in Sri Lanka are divided as (i) communities, which use the English language either as their mother tongue or primary language; (ii) communities, which use the English language as a second language; and (iii) communities for which, the English is a foreign language. Communities that use the English language as their mother tongue, primary language, and a second language are characterized by their relative socioeconomic advance, in which, parents are highly involved in their children's education with substantial English knowledge. Children from these communities, therefore, tend to absorb the English knowledge in their early childhood stage. English is widely used by the individuals of these communities during their lifetime. Whereas, communities for whom, the English is a foreign language are characterized by less involvement in their children's education with poor English proficiency. Children from these types of communities seldom possess adequate proficiency in the English language. The application of the English language is very rare or never possible, and these types of communities marginalize themselves from the advanced communities due to lack of English proficiency and fail to follow up on the latest science and technologies, and another necessary knowledge in their tertiary education.

In Sri Lanka, different communities use English language in different levels.

- *Sundaram Theepan, B.Sc., Civil Engineer*

In Sri Lanka, affluent people, who live in Colombo, and other cities in the south are most likely to be very fluent in the English language, and in most instances, their medium of communication is English. Whereas, in other places, affluent peoples use the English language for official purposes.

- *Thavarajah, M A, Dept. of Education, Sri Lanka*

Preschools in different settings in Sri Lanka

There are significant disparities in preschool enrolment across the urban, rural and estate sectors (World Bank, 2014). In general, preschools in different settings have different characteristics. For example, preschools in the super-rich section of the metropolitan area are mostly corporate owned with luxurious facilities. preschools in cities are mostly characterized by the high standard in terms of learning facilities, the standard of teachers and carers, the sophistication of learning environment, etc. Preschools in rural settings are with fundamental standards with comparatively fewer facilities and capacities. In general, there are only 46% of Sri Lankan children are enrolled in preschools (World Bank, 2014).

In our village, poor people do not send their kids to preschools, because they can't afford to pay the school fees, even though the fees are not very higher.

- Lisa Marble, Mother of a preschool kid

Profiling of Sri Lankan preschools

The World Bank report (2014) states that there are 17,023 registered early childhood centres available in Sri Lanka with 29,341 teachers and carers, offering the service for 475,617 children in the 3-5-year age group. The report further went on to state that the majority of preschools are managed by non-governmental organizations as well as private entrepreneurs. There are significant disparities in access to preschool between the poorest and the wealthiest quintiles in Sri Lanka. Technically, there is a nexus between the profiling of Sri Lankan preschools and the socio-economic profiling of Sri Lankan society. Socioeconomic profiling of Sri Lankan society means collecting information about different groups of people in Sri Lanka on the ground of their socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control across Sri Lanka. Despite the existing classifications based on casts, tribes, etc., the Sri Lankan society, here, is classified as (i) super-rich and elite class; (ii) rich and accomplish class; (iii) upper-middle-income class; (iv) lower-middle income class; and (v) lower class. Ostensibly, the preschool education system of different socioeconomic classes greatly varies in terms of quality of learning facilities, the standard of teachers and carers, the sophistication of learning environment, management of preschools and care systems, etc. However, the World Bank (2014) stated that on average, early childhood education centres are resource-constrained and are inadequate in terms of teaching-learning materials, classroom arrangement, and teacher qualifications. But minority preschools of the super-rich as well as rich and accomplish class is highly exceptional to this nature.

As the expertise of primary education, I would say that the primary education systems across Sri Lanka are not uniform. The quality of the primary education system varies with the socioeconomic strata of the country's population. Primary schools of the rich are highly advanced with modern facilities, whereas, preschools of poor do not have enough facilities and resources.

- Justin Bernard, M.Ed., Primary School Teacher

I didn't want to enrol my son in the preschool that is run by our church. Because we are not satisfied with the quality of teaching. Therefore, we decided to send him to an international nursery.

- Rose, Mother of a nursery kid.

(i) Preschools of the super-rich and elite class

Preschools of this class are characterized by luxurious, highly standardized quality of learning facilities, highly qualified teachers and carers, the sophistication of learning environment, efficient management and administration as well as childcare systems. Children, who attend to these preschools are from the super-rich and elite families or ruling class and therefore, economically affluent. Whether formal or informal, the medium of communication of this type of class is English, and therefore, it will be made their mother-tongue. Kids, who attend here intensively care on top of their learning. Learning tools are highly standardized and most advanced with internationally designed curriculums. Often, these types of preschools are managed by multinational corporate entrepreneurship or wealthy businessmen and these preschools are always located in the mega-cities or metropolitan areas like Colombo, Kandy, Gampaha, etc.

(ii) Preschools of rich and accomplished class

Preschools of this class are a relatively high standard in terms of learning facilities, the standard of teachers and carers, the sophistication of learning environment, etc. The families of the kids who attend these preschools are economically affluent. However, English is not necessarily used in the informal life of all families of this class. Some families use English to communicate in their families and kids from these families are fluent English speakers and they keep English as their medium of instruction. At the same time, many families communicate by vernacular languages such as Tamil and Sinhala in their families and therefore, the kids who attend to these types of preschools only catch-up English language in preschools and become bi-lingual.

(iii) Preschools of middle-income class

Preschools of this class are characterized by a relatively lower standard in service provision. Although these types of preschools are located in all settings across Sri Lanka, preschools in almost all rural settings are of these types. Teachers and carers of these types of preschools have very little or no proficiency in English and the medium of communication and instruction to the students are given by vernacular languages (Little et al, 2011).

Children of lower-income class or economically the most vulnerable families in Sri Lanka

It is reported that more than a quarter of children in Sri Lanka lives under the poverty line, and the majority of them are concentrated in rural settings of Sri Lanka, especially in the north and east regions due to the protracted armed conflict that lasted until 2009. The conflict produced countless economically vulnerable families with many females headed, as well as male-headed with vulnerable income. Children from this lower economic background seldom attend preschools. Moreover, in the case of the families of daily wage labours, children are often left unattended, as their parents go to work. The World Bank (2014) stressed that in Sri Lanka, there is a shred of substantial evidence that the families from the most disadvantaged communities are at a greater risk of poor cognitive development. This phenomenon can easily be identified in conflict-affected rural Sri Lanka, where, a substantial number of children never have the opportunity to enter the early childhood education and care facilities.

As a former preschool teacher, from my observation, there are three types of preschools in Sri Lanka. The first one is for the super-rich, and the second one is for the rich and the third one for the middle-class population. Very poor people do not send their children to preschools.

- *Hilda Jetrude, Former preschool teacher.*

In the northern province, the preschools, which are run by Community Based Organizations and religious congregations have very limited facilities and the teachers need to get adequately trained.

- *Devaki, Government Employee*

Categorization of preschools of North and the east of Sri Lanka

Preschools in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka can be categorized on the ground of their types of preschool establishment. The majority of preschools of middle-income class, especially in rural parts are non-profit oriented, run voluntarily by community service organizations, sports clubs, and religious congregations, and almost all are registered with their respective Zonal Education Offices. Whereas, in urban settings, two types of preschools exist. The first type is international preschools that are registered with their respective Zonal Education Offices, run either by big business entrepreneurship or multi-national corporate companies. The second of its kind are preschools that are not registered with the Zonal Education Office, where, the medium of instruction is either English or Tamil. In these types of preschools, both local and international guidelines and syllabus systems are followed.

The use of the English language in Sri Lankan preschools

As stated before, the application of the English language in Sri Lankan preschools greatly varies based on the background of students and the level of standard of preschools. Accordingly, preschools in Sri Lanka are classified as (i) the preschools of the native English speakers, who, in general, belongs to the super-rich or elite circle and other higher social class; (ii) the preschools of people for whom, English is their second language and who, in general, belong to rich and accomplish the class. Therefore, the medium of instruction in these types of preschools would either be English or vernacular languages; and (iii) the preschools of middle-income class people for whom, English is their foreign language, and these types of preschools always use vernacular languages as their medium of instruction.

In northern Sri Lanka, two types of preschools are available. The one is rural preschools, which are, in most probably run by community-based organizations and religious congregations with non-profiteering. The other type is profit-oriented international preschools, which are probably based in urban settings.

- Justin Bernard, M.Ed., Primary Teacher.

My son goes to a preschool in an international setting in Manipai. He is very brilliant in English rhymes, reading small words, etc. His medium of instruction is English.

- Meera, Mother of a preschool kid.

Multifaceted usage of social media across the globe as well as in Sri Lanka

Although it has widely been acknowledged that the term ‘social media’ doesn’t have a clear definition so far, in the report of Best Start Resource Centre (2014) ‘Social media’ is defined as “group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated contents”. Although there are several varieties in social media, the most popular across the world are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WeChat, Google+, Instagram, Daily Motion, WhatsApp, etc. (Jinadasa, 2016). Best Start Resource Centre (2014) & Weerasendera (2014) noted that currently, extensive utilization of social media is a common phenomenon across the country and the growth of social media is exponential. Weerasendera (2014) further noted that in 2014, there were around 2.3 million social media users identified, and the average time spent by an individual on social media for a day is around half an hour. Initially, social media was widely used across the globe primarily for entertainment purposes, however, as years goes by, continues evolving of social media laid the foundation for their evolutionary process (Jinadasa, 2016), that has created a notion of multi-purpose social media utilization, from entertainment to education, science and knowledge extension, politics, news media, religious events, sports and games, music, etc. and Sri Lanka is not an exception to this nature. Jinadasa (2016), furthermore cited that the

majority of Sri Lankan use social media for entertainment communication through the exchange of photos, video and other stylistic personal contents. Although the exact statistical data on the individuals who currently utilize social media is not available, it should be many times more than that of 2014. Moreover, the information on the exact types of social media and their purpose of usage in Sri Lanka is hardly available, and there are no clear government policies on the usage of social media in various service sectors.

Social media such as Facebook, YouTube usage in Sri Lanka have now intertwined with everyone's daily life and they are used for several purposes such as entertainment, propaganda, social networking with friends, etc. From my point of view, using social media would impact on the English language proficiency of everyone's life.

- Navis Consulate, (Higher National Diploma in English), Govt. Employee

Social media usage for educational purposes in Preschools in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, like other parts of the world, categorically, social media usage is exclusively prohibited to those who are under eighteen years of age, and the policy is applied specifically in their learning centres. However, there are no clear national policies in practice for utilizing social media as a tool of teaching in schools or preschools. It has been reported that initially, only a handful of affluent international private preschools, mainly in metropolitan areas like Colombo use social media for teaching nursery rhymes and drawings. Now, the habit of using social media as a tool of teaching nursery rhymes by preschool teachers and carers has started to spread gradually across the country. For the English language, there are countless nursery rhymes, alphabet, and phonic sounds available in various types of social media, and among those, the YouTube is the most prominent, and teachers are, therefore, either use them directly or download the video clips from YouTube to teach them to their children in their respective preschools. Furthermore, apart from the most affluent private preschools, which possess hi-tech broadband internet facilities, other preschools do not possess internet facilities on their own, and that precludes the teachers of the ordinary preschools to use social media as a tool for teaching. Nonetheless, the interviews with some preschool teachers in the northern province of Sri Lanka have unearthed the fact that the increasing mobile phone usage by preschool teachers subsides the limitation, and preschool teachers tend to use their mobile data for necessary English teachings. UNICEF research report (2017) highlighted the digital landscape of Sri Lankan children, in which, the UNICEF states that only 7% of Sri Lankan children below the age of 18 years cannot access to the digital media completely and 53% of Sri Lankan children can access to the online digital media. The report further stated that the most popular form of social media being used by children is Facebook. However, almost all online digital media are being used for entertainment purpose and the exact data on digital media being used for educational purposes is still unknown.

Although social media is prohibited from usage in Sri Lankan preschools, I have seen many preschool teachers use social media, especially YouTube using their mobile phones to get nursery rhymes and alphabets and that strategy is very effective in improving the eagerness in kids to learn the English language

- Mary, Preschool Teacher

The impact of learning English in preschools on the students' proficiency in English in their later stage

Learning the foundation of English in the preschool stage would constructively impact the English proficiency of students in their later stages. But that depends on what they are taught in preschools as well as the quality of preschools and preschool teachers. From the dimension of the typology of Sri Lankan preschools, preschools of the super-elite, rich and accomplish classes possess high-quality teachers with fluency in English to teach children who already have very good command in listening and speaking English. Therefore, for those who attend these types of preschools, learning English in preschools would be a good foundation for their later

development. In the middle-income class, the teachers as well as students lack English proficiency and therefore don't have good command in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In these types of preschools, only English alphabets, small words, and sentences, as well as nursery rhymes and stories are taught. Practically, this type of English teaching would impact very little or nothing on the English language development in their later stages. Interview with preschool teachers narrates the same facts.

From my knowledge, I would say that if you want to get the English proficiency of your child very well, you should train your kid from a very earlier stage. Because early learning of English is the cornerstone for everyone to trap the knowledge along with their lifetime.

- Prince Mathew, English Teacher

V. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the results of the research have offered a clear insight into preschools in Sri Lanka, the typology of preschools on the ground of their status, their location, as well as the type of their management. Albeit Sri Lankan has realized the impact of early childhood education and care on the overall development, as stated in the report, less than half of the total Sri Lankan children are enrolled in preschools due to several reasons. Among those, we should be much more concerned about the absolute poverty of considerable Sri Lankan children and its impact on their poor cognitive development. Protracted conflict is one of the major causes that has not only devastated the Sri Lankan economy, it has also produced countless children who are left desperate for their future. The report further highlights that there is a huge disparity among Sri Lankan preschools on the ground of their status. Preschools of the most affluent people are highly advanced when compared with ordinary preschools. Moreover, with globalization, English is becoming a global language and it has emerged as extremely vital for everyone. In developing countries, those who possess English language proficiency can be able to grab more opportunities than others and this trend makes the necessity of laying the foundation of the English language at preschools to get the English language proficiency of individuals become perfect in their adulthood. The preschools of the elite, super-rich and accomplished communities are mostly situated in the metropolitan area and there is no problem in English language teaching and learning. The problem in English language teaching and learning exist in ordinary preschools. At the preschool level, as the English language teaching materials are available on social media, the habit of using them in teaching nursery rhymes, phonics and stories have started to spread gradually across the country. However, there is no national policy on using social media as teaching tools in preschools and therefore, the government has neither monitoring nor control over them. This report, therefore, suggests some achievable policy options for future implementation by the relevant authorities to get the Sri Lankan preschool system very effective.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for the future policy option of English language induction in Early Childhood Education

i. Policy on the utilization of social media by teachers as a tool for teaching English

Despite the pros and cons of utilizing social media in preschools, Sri Lanka should develop a nation-wide policy guide on the utilization of social media as a tool for teaching English in preschools and it should be vigorously monitored to avoid misuse of social media and other forms of exploitations in preschools.

ii. The uniformed curriculum is needed for English language induction in Sri Lankan preschools

While Sri Lanka is acknowledging the importance of preschool education on the country's overall development, the country should be much more concerned about the necessity of laying the foundation of the English language in the preschool stage. To do this, the country should possess a policy to design a uniformed curriculum on elementary English for preschools in Sri Lanka.

iii. Making parents of children more aware of the benefits of English in preschools

Improving English language proficiency in preschool children can only be possible with wider community awareness as well as other forms of reach out interventions. To do this, the parents of preschool children and their communities should be made aware of the importance of English language proficiency in preschool children and its impact on their later stage. Community reaches out and awareness programs would improve the children's access to preschool facilities in all settings.

iv. Sri Lanka needs to develop a clear standard of English learning outcome of early childhood

The country needs to develop a clear standard of English learning outcome of early childhood to get island-wide children's improvement in the English language. In detail, every child that attends preschool, as well as their parents, should be able to know what their child will know and able to do in English at the end of his/her preschool period.

v. Offering a performance grant to preschools

Effective implementation of English language induction in preschools would be enhanced by offering performance grants to the preschools which achieve targeted learning outcome in the English language annually. These types of grants also motivate preschool teachers on self-development and eagerness in learning as well as teaching the English language more and more.

vi. Sri Lanka needs to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation system

If the country wants to develop a proper induction in the English language at the preschool level, the country should have a robust monitoring and evaluation system. This monitoring and evaluation system should be developed at the zonal educational authority level to get the intervention very effective. The following characteristics should be monitored and evaluated periodically.

❖ Quality of teachers and their inputs

The efficacy of preschool teachers to teach the English language in preschools exclusively depends on the quality of teachers, their teaching, assessment tools, and their inputs. Sri Lanka government should, therefore, include the above component as a vital element on its monitoring and evaluation tools.

❖ Improving access for children from the lower socioeconomic stratum of society

Sri Lanka will need to pay special attention to improve access of children from lower wealth quintiles, as well as for children in the estate and rural sectors to preschools to make sure all can access preschool facilities in Sri Lanka.

vii. Further researches are needed on the utilization of social media as a teaching tool in Sri Lankan preschools

As pointed out earlier on regarding the fact that there is lack of data available on the utilization of social media as a teaching tool in Sri Lankan preschools, more researches are needed to quantify the concerned concept, that

could facilitate the relevant authorities in designing appropriate policies on the utilization of social media as a teaching tool in Sri Lankan preschools in the future.

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