

Challenges in English Education Among Students in Rural Schools. (In Kalutara District Of Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the type of English language instruction provided in Kalutara District primary schools. In their investigation, the researchers found that teaching English to beginning students was ineffective. Five schools in the Kalutara district were chosen using a random sampling technique. The data was gathered using a variety of methods, including questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and observation. The study was examined in accordance with educational philosophers' beliefs about government curricula and child education. The majority of teachers are not tested in English at the time of enrollment, according to the findings. Additionally, although the teachers are aware of specific teaching strategies, they are inconsistent because they are unable to effectively plan their sessions using theories of language acquisition and learning. Lastly, it is difficult for teachers to provide each pupil equal attention. This results in a failure and creates several barriers to the Kalutara District's good language teaching and learning process. Therefore, this study suggests that further capacity building programs be implemented for the district's teachers.

Keywords: Primary English, teachers, Kalutara district, Teaching methods

01. Introduction

The stakeholders firmly believe that students' performance in the nation's secondary, junior secondary, advanced, and university educational levels is influenced by the quality of their primary education. In Sri Lankan schools, English is taught starting in primary school as both a required subject and a second language. For this reason, kids start using activity-based oral English in Grade 1, whereas formal English instruction begins in Grade 3. According to Ferguson C. (1977), "all language planning processes take place in particular sociolinguistic settings, and the nature and breadth of the planning can only be completely understood in connection to the settings." It makes it very evident that language study is related to social variables. When organizing any activities pertaining to primary English language instruction, regional, class, and gender disparities should be taken into account. The Sri Lankan government occasionally launches several initiatives for basic education that take the aforementioned considerations into account. Additionally, educational philosopher Rousseau J. (1978) argues that a child's development should follow nature. This claim states that there won't be a good harvest in the English language at the end if instruction is not given on this idea. When teachers fully embrace the primary English language education policy, pupils can receive the proper education. As a result, the study examines primary school teachers' methods and differences in order to rectify them as best practices.

02. Research Problem

Based on the conversation with the Higher National Diploma in English program's teacher candidate students. The issue of teachers using irrelevant teaching approaches in primary school was found and verified. Additionally, interviews have been conducted on this matter, particularly with the Anuradhapura district's student trainees. It is established that primary

teachers are ineffective at teaching English because their methods or awareness do not align with the ideas of educational philosophers about child education.

03. Research Objectives

Analyzing the methods used to teach English to elementary pupils in the Kalutara District is the study's main goal. The secondary goals are to ascertain teachers' understanding of teaching English as a second language and to provide appropriate methods for teachers to create the best environment for learning and acquiring English during a child's early years. strings.

04. Methodology

This study focuses on elementary school teachers' activities and their awareness of teaching approaches. The study used a qualitative method for the most part. The Kalutara district is included in the study's total population. For the study, eleven teachers in the Kalutara district were chosen at random. The data was gathered using a variety of methods, including questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and observation. Additionally, secondary data sources were examined to ensure the study's validity. The practices were analyzed and compared using statistical methods like frequency and percentage. According to a recent study done for the National Education Commission, English should be introduced as a subject starting in Grade 3 and through Activity Based Oral English starting in Grade 1, with the mother tongue remaining the primary language of instruction (Premarathna et al., 2016). It demonstrates how, for a novice student in Sri Lanka, language acquisition takes precedence over the idea of language learning. While they start learning the language as a topic in grade three, pupils in grades one and two are exposed to language acquisition. John Dewey also endorsed the idea that childhood is the pivotal time in a person's life since it has a big influence on a man's later years. He also presents the activity technique for effective learning. The teaching and learning process of the examples was used to test the aforementioned ideas.

05. Result & Dicussion

- Role of English at students' enrolment

Of the eleven elementary teachers, four teachers said they had assessed the students' English language proficiency, while seven teachers said they had not. Almost all of the kids' speaking, listening, and vocabulary skills were examined during enrollment in 36.3% of the samples. This will make it necessary for the pupils to acquire those skills before they turn six and start school, which is not consistent with the ideas of Sri Lankan curriculum designers or educational philosophers regarding a child's development. It goes against the way that beginning students in Sri Lanka should be formally introduced to the English language.

- Teacher Awareness towards language acquisition and language learning

In response of the teachers said they begin teaching English in grades one, three, and four, respectively. It demonstrates the teachers' inconsistent approach to teaching the language to their pupils, which highlights the challenges they have with the ideas of language learning and acquisition. These varied answers demonstrate teachers' ignorance of the appropriate times to introduce English to students.

Additionally, some of teachers fail to introduce English in accordance with the curriculum. Teachers should be made aware of the nature of primary English language instruction through the necessary training.

- Teachers' in-class methodology

To improve language proficiency in elementary school, teachers use a variety of strategies. In order to improve speaking skills, the study found that teachers in primary schools conducted exercises like introducing dialogues, using appropriate greetings and polite expressions, discussing everyday activities, asking students to tell the time, counting to ten, describing actions, simple dialogue, etc. The aforementioned facts demonstrate that while some activities are learned by drilling because they include different sentence and question patterns, others, including establishing dialogues and using polite expressions and greetings correctly, are learned in accordance with Sri Lankan social fibers. Teachers use copywriting, dictation, proper punctuation, writing dates, writing one's name, rearranging jumbled words, writing answers to simple questions, identifying the first sound of a simple word, writing some grammar exercises, and writing the alphabet to help students become better writers. According to the observation, teachers provide more writing assignments than any other talent, which results in inactive learners.

Songs, conversations, and narratives are examples of texts that are used to improve listening abilities. Additionally, teachers conduct activities to improve listening skills, such as listening to commands and responses, listening to songs and identifying specific words, listening to brief speeches, recognizing the differences between pairs of vowels and consonants, and answering basic questions. All of the aforementioned tasks demonstrate the listening environment that the teacher has built, while listening to instructions and responses and answering basic questions are examples of listening practice in an authentic setting.

The district's reading exercises include reading paragraphs, stories, textbooks, texts with image clues, any passage, reading aloud, reading classmates' names, and reading the days and months. The teachers were unable to identify any remedial instructional strategies to improve the below-average students' reading abilities. The teachers' answers demonstrated how ineffective they were at using these methods in any given situation.

- **Activities given as homework's**

We noticed that the language instructors in the Kalutara district assign homework to primary students that includes drawing and coloring pictures, reading exercises, fill-in-the-blank exercises, workbook activities, memorization of words for dictation, copywriting, pasting lesson-related pictures, paper-based homework, and creative work.

The philosophers' views on child education are positively correlated with this context. However, even though remembering words for dictation is a significant method of teaching vocabulary, the frequent use of this method in the classroom highlights a negative element of education since it promotes memorization of the words alone without providing sufficient suggestions for an application.

- **Challenges faced by the Primary Teachers**

According to the study, not all students have the same level of proficiency; they come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, are reluctant to participate, and are afraid to talk in English. As a result, certain teachers are unable to provide each kid the same amount of attention, which results in ineffective classroom management and instruction. Additional issues in the Kalutara District include students forgetting to complete their homework, writing at a slow pace that prevents them from finishing it on time, today's students being too intelligent to handle, a shortage of English teachers, slow learners, a lack of technical equipment, overcrowded classrooms, and time management.

06. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Kalutara district's teachers and educational institutions exhibit ineffectiveness and inconsistency when it comes to teaching their beginning students English. The primary English language education is not given in accordance with a child's natural growth, despite the teachers' awareness of the various teaching methods and techniques of each language skill and their ignorance of concepts like language acquisition and learning in the context of second language learning. However, this study demonstrates that the district should train its primary English language teachers and use their input as a basis for planning and decision-making for English language instruction.

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