

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A CASE STUDY ON THE PRIMARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ANURADHAPURAM DISTRICT

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(Published 15 October 2021)

Abstract

This study aims to identify the nature of English language education in primary classes of Anuradhapura district. The researchers observed an inefficiency of introducing English language to the beginner learners in their studies. Random sampling method was used to select eleven schools in Anuradhapura district. Data collection tools such as observation, interview, focus group discussion and questionnaire were used to collect the data. The study were analyzed in line with the theories of Educational philosophers regarding child education and the government curriculum. The results revealed that the majority of teachers are not tested the English language at the time of enrolment. In addition to that the teachers are aware of certain teaching methods and techniques, they are irregular as they are unable to design their classes based on language acquisition and language learning theories successfully. Finally, the teachers are faced challenges in paying attention all the students equally. This leads to a failure and generate a number of obstacles for a successful language teaching and learning process in Anuradhapura District. As such, this study recommends to conduct more capacity building programmed for the teachers in this district.

Keywords: Primary English, teachers, Anuradhapura district

1. Introduction

It is highly believed among the stakeholders that the quality of primary education impacts on the students' performance in their secondary, junior secondary, advanced level and tertiary levels of education in the country. English, both as a curriculum subject and a second language is taught in Sri Lankan schools from primary classes. For that, Activity-based oral English has been introduced from Grade 1 while students learn English formally from Grade 3. (Ferguson C, 1977) confirmed that "all language planning activities take place in particular sociolinguistic settings, and the nature and scope of the planning can only be fully understood in relation to the settings". It clearly emphasizes that the study of language in relation to social factors. Regional, class, and gender differences should be considered when we are planning any activities related to primary English language education. The Government of Sri Lanka also initiate a number of projects time to time considering the above factors for primary education. Further, educational Philosopher, (Rousseau J, 1978) emphasizes that the growth of a child should be according to nature. According to this statement, when the education is not provided concerning this concept, it would not be a good harvest in English language at the final

stage. The students can get the right education when the teachers give full support to the policy on primary English language education. Therefore, the study analysis the practices followed by teachers in primary education and their mismatches to correct them as good practices.

1.1 Research Problem

According to the discussion made with the teacher trainee students of Higher National Diploma in English programme. The problem was identified and confirmed that the teachers are directing irrelevant methods in the primary education. Further, interview have done on this issue specifically with the students' trainees in the Anuradhapura district. It is confirmed that the primary teachers show an inefficiency in providing English language education since either the teaching methodology or awareness of the teachers does not fall in line with certain thoughts of educational philosophers regarding child education.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to analyze the ways how English is taught to primary students in Anuradhapura District. The secondary objectives are to find out the awareness of teachers in terms of teaching English as a second language and to suggest the correct ways for teachers to set an ideal atmosphere to facilitate learning and acquiring English during during one's childhood period.

strings.

2. Methodology

The present study focuses the practices followed by the teachers in the primary teaching and their awareness on the methods of teaching. The study mostly conducted on the qualitative approach. The entire population of the study covers the Anuradhapura district. The eleven teaches in Anuradhapura district have been selected using random sampling method for the purpose of the study. Data collection tools such as observation, interview, focus group discussion and questionnaire were used to collect the data. Further, secondary data sources also were analyzed for the validity of the study. The statistical techniques such as frequency and percentage were used for the analysis and comparison of the practices.

A recent study conducted for the National Education Commission recommends that the medium of instruction at the primary stage of education should continue to be the mother tongue with English introduced via Activity Based Oral English from Grade 1 and as a subject from Grade 3 (Premarathna. *et. al*, 2016). It shows how the language acquisition is given priority before the concept of language learning for a beginner learner in Sri Lanka. The students in grade one and two are exposed for a language acquisition while they begin to learn the language as a subject from grade three. Further, John Dewey also supported to the decision that childhood is the center point in one's life as this period impacts in a man's later periods significantly. Further, he introduces activity method for a successful learning. The above concepts were tested with the teaching and learning process of the samples.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Role of English at students' enrolments

Out of eleven primary teachers, four (36.3%) responded that they had tested English language skills, and seven (63.6%) answered they had not tested the skills of the students at their enrollment in grade one. During the enrollment, 36.3% samples have tested almost all the students' speaking, listening and vocabulary skills. This will create a demand for the students to learn those skills before the age of six, before they go to school, which is neither a parallel with what educational philosophers suggest

about a child's growth nor the concept of curriculum developers in Sri Lanka. It is contrary to how the English language should be introduced to beginner learners formally in Sri Lanka.

3.2 Teacher Awareness towards language acquisition and language learning

36.3%, 54. % and 9% of the teachers responded that they start teaching English in their school for grades one, three, and four respectively. It shows that the teachers do not have a uniformity in introducing the language to their students which reveals the difficulties faced by the teachers in the concepts of language acquisition and learning. These various responses show that the lack of awareness of teachers of the time periods when they should introduce English to the learners. Also, Nearly 45% of the teachers do not introduce English as specified by the curriculum. Necessary workshops should be arranged to create the awareness among the teachers regarding the nature of primary English language education.

3.3 Teachers' in-class methodology

Teachers employ various techniques to enhance the language skills in the primary classes. For the speaking skill, the study observed from the questioner that the teacher administered activities such as introducing dialogues, use polite expressions and greetings correctly, talk about daily actions, ask to tell the time, count up to 10, describe actions, simple dialogue etc. in the primary classes. The above facts show that activities such as introducing dialogues, use polite expressions and greetings correctly are acquired according to the Sr Lankan social fabrics while other activities are learnt by the learners through drilling since they contain various sentence and question patterns.

Copywriting, dictation, using punctuation marks correctly, writing the dates, write one's name, rearranging the jumbled words, writing answers to simple questions, identifies the initial sound of a simple word, writing some grammar activities, writing the alphabet are the activities employed by the teachers to improve the writing skills of the learners. The observation shows that teachers give more writing to teach the writing skills than all the other skills which make the passive learners in the class.

Texts such as songs, dialogues and stories are used to enhance the listening skills. Further, listening to commands and responses, listening to the songs and identify specific words, listening to short speeches, identifying the differences between the pairs of consonant and vowels, and responding to simple questions are the activities conducted by the teachers to enhance the listening skills. Among the above, listening to commands and responses and responding to simple questions are seen the listening practice in an authentic atmosphere while all the other activities show the listening environment created by the teacher.

Reading paragraph, storybook, textbook reading, reading texts with some picture clues, reading any passage, loud reading, reading the names of the classmate, reading the months and days are practices in the district to enhance the reading skills. The teachers were not able to reveal any remedial teaching activities to enhance the reading skills of the below average learners. The responses of the teachers revealed their inefficiency in employing such techniques in any specific circumstances.

3.4 Activities given as homework's

We observed that the language teachers in Anuradhapura district give activities like drawing and colouring pictures, reading practice, exercises like fill in the blanks, workbook activities, memorizing the words for dictation, copywriting, pasting pictures related to the lessons, paper-based homework and creative work as their homework for the primary students. This context positively correlates with the philosophers thoughts regarding child education. However, comparatively, as memorizing words for dictation plays a major technique to teach vocabulary, the frequency of employing this technique in the class brings out negative aspect in education since it encourages to memorize the words only without any adequate suggestion for an application.

3.5 Challenges faced by the Primary Teachers

The study observed that all the students do not possess same degree of skills; students are shy to participate, fear to speak in English, and they are from different socio-economic family backgrounds. Therefore, the particular teachers are unable to pay attention to all the students equally which brings out inefficiency in classroom management and the lesson delivery. Further, problems such as students forget to do homework, since their rate of writing is slow they do not complete the work on time, nowadays students are too smart to handle, teacher shortage for English Subject, slow learners, lack of technical equipment, overcrowded classroom and time management are some to mention as challenges in Anuradhapura District.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the teachers and schools in Anuradhapura district show inefficiency and irregularity in introducing the English language to their beginner learners. Though the teachers are aware on the various teaching methods and techniques of each language skills, their unconsciousness about the concepts such as language acquisition and learning in the context of second language learning, the primary English language education is not provided according to the natural growth of a child. On the other hand, this study shows that the primary English language teachers should be trained and their feedback should be taken as raw materials for planning and decision making regarding English language education in the district.

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