Teachers are believed to be the builders of a nation

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# Abstract

Teachers are believed to be the builders of a nation; it is them who shape the destiny of a nation. It is so as they are the one who determine the direction in which a country is progressing through shaping its future generations. As their guides and role models, teachers are believed to have more influence on the young generations. Teaching is a noble profession of all as it involves nurturing the souls and minds of others and also the most influencing of all as it provides the base for all the other professions.

A teacher is responsible for passing on the culture of a nation to its future generations in all forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices.

English is the most renowned language that is spoken in many countries by millions of people, to some people English is their first language, while to some people it’s their second language as mother tongue being their first language. In most cases proficiency in English is greatly influenced by the mother tongue as in most African countries’ Sri Lanka being one of them.

Difficulty in speaking and reading and understanding English as a language makes it difficult for some teachers to disseminate information and knowledge to students, hence this makes it very difficult for some students to excel in their academics and to speak fluently in English.

Therefore, it’s very important for students to be taught English as a language so that once they visit their friends of different mother tongues can speak in one langue and understanding each other. Unlike when they don’t know how to speak which hinders them to communicate.

Also, once they visit different countries, they have to communicate in a common language in which everyone is able to understand.

This can enable different people from different countries bringing together hence improving in different sectors for example marketing, one is able to import goods or order them since they can communicate in one language, in religious places and even on sports and other social activities.

Without a common language like English communication, learning and teaching could be so difficult, especially where people from different background and different linguistics are together for basis of communication and learning.

## Introduction

English was introduced as the government administration language under the British rule in Sri Lanka (1796–1948). It was also the Medium of Instruction in Sri Lanka’s prestigious English medium schools. The schools mostly levied fees to cater for the needs of the privileged and elite of the society. These schools were inaccessible to the general population in the country.

The English medium schools in Sri Lanka were in most cases under the administration of Christian missionaries, while other schools that used native languages were under the control of the government. This meant that the country had a dual education system and this remained in place until the 60s where apart from a few schools, the government took total control of all the institutions of learning.

English gradually turned out to be an inevitable tool for social mobility, government employment, and prestige, creating two states in Sri Lanka. The states that spoke in English were thrived to enjoy the fruits of social development and an advanced standard of living while the other state formed under the language umbrella speaking Tamil and Sinhala led a life of hopelessness and frustration (Jayasuriya 1969). This condition continued to be a challenge and brought up dissatisfaction and resentment amongst deprived majority population. This continued to the time when the Sri Lankan people were issued a reasonable share in power to govern their own country. This was done under the Donoughmore Reforms1 in 1931. The struggle and agitation to offer the national languages their worthy place in state governance and in the education system brought about an unhealthy struggle with imaginative politics of abandoning English without the need to recognize its future importance in international communications and trade.

This was an insensitive and a blinded action that was meant to deny the next generation the right to proper and articulate communication in a more global setting, reducing their capacity to pursue higher education outside the country and limiting their chances to secure professional careers outside Sri Lanka.

# Background of the study

The privilege of being educated in English became available for all students, irrespective of location in Sri Lanka by 2001 with the aim of preparing the Sri Lanka citizen who can serve and disseminate knowledge throughout the world (Island.Ik, 2004).

Although, students learnt English as a second language, using it as medium of instruction for other subject namely, Mathematics, Science and Technology and Social Science etc. has resulted in many difficulties for teachers as well as students due to their gaps in proficiency in English language. Further, learners and parents prefer English as medium of instruction in the anticipation of a better future.

Therefore, it is essential to teach students in a way that they will be able to attain the knowledge and skills expected by nation. On other hand, students should be enlightened tom adapt proper learning technique that will through balance in favor of them upon others in this competitive environment.

This study focuses on the influence of mother tongue in teaching subject and learning when the medium of instruction is English in Sri Lankan context. Due to the population of this study is big, it is planned to investigate students and teachers of grade 8 in G/Neluwa national school as, students of this age is representative of both upper and lower level of secondary level of school, while having the ability to make dependent respondent.

For students who have another language as their mother tongue, English becomes their crucial subject. The quality of education in schools is greatly determined by the language of instruction as well as people’s attitudes towards the language. Positive attitude helps learned to interact well with materials.

On the other hand, a negative attitude affects a student’s ability to attain skills and knowledge. It is therefore, vital to have an appositive attitude. This paper is a proposal that seeks to investigate the mother tongue influence to learn and teach English for grade 8 students in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is a multicultural and multiethnic society and language has for the longest time been a point of contention in the country, particularly after the colonial period. The lack of a global vision and far-sightedness in its law making arm of the government and the legislators towards developing and sustaining a thoughtful language policy that is supposed to be able to promote harmony, economic development, and social cohesion has for the longest time led to a great misunderstanding, hatred and mutual suspicion amongst different ethnicities and communities across Sri Lanka. The Bandaranaike government in 1956 made Sinhala the national language of Sri Lanka. This was the language of the majority ethnic community in the country. This ended up being a point of contention and was viewed as a disrespect to the Tamil community and brought about the thought that the step was more political that logical and was meant to trigger political insensitivity. This has been affecting the land to the present day. The language policy also included the issue of medium of instruction in Sri Lanka. English as a language in the colonial times held a very high position in the administrative and educational set up of the country and the locals resented this because Sinhala and Tamil languages which were the native languages held a very subordinate position. Nevertheless, at this time and even in the early post-colonial times, only seven percent of the population in Sri Lanka were literate in English. This situation continuously and gradually opened employment opportunities and social mobility to the select educated. J.R.Jayewardene, who was a member of the State Council (1931-1947) and destined to be the President in 1977, was frustrated and disgusted by this state of affairs. He grieved,

*“… this country is always in danger of being governed by a small coterie who*

*Go through these English schools, whereas the vast majority who go through Sinhalese and Tamil schools must always be in the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water ...”* (Jayasuriya 1969)

Nevertheless, despite the fact that he had a great concern with both of the native languages, in 1943 Jayawardene introduced a motion in the council to make Sinhala a medium of instruction and a compulsory subject in all schools across the state. He by doing that forgot

Tamil, which was the second major spoken language of in the country. He later agreed to add Tamil after the word 'Sinhala'. This was a positive response to one amendment that was the proposal of V.Nalliah, who was a member of the State Council where the motion was later passed.