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Teaching English as a Second Language in Sri Lanka: Facing a Paradox

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English is the most popular foreign language in Sri Lanka. This language played a key role in the process of social stratification which took place after the collapse of the feudal and the colonial systems. After teaching English for so many years in schools, why do students hesitate to follow and indirectly reject this subject at school level? There is a continuing matter of debate on whether first language (L1) contributes to or precludes the learning of a second language (L2). Internationally numerous studies have been conducted on this topic, but no clear consensus exists on whether L1 should be banned or its inclusion in classrooms should be allowed. However, few studies have identified the reasons for which students need such an inclusion. So this opinion survey was done to find out the root causes of this particular problem in Sri Lanka. This study primarily investigates the opinions of the persons who can make an influence on this issue. So, two university professors, one provincial director of English Education, two zonal directors of English Education, three instructors of English Education in three educational divisions and two instructors of English Education, attached to zonal English Support Centers were interviewed. This survey was confined to find data regarding the use of Sinhala as the mother tongue (MT) in teaching English as a second language. The findings may be useful to language education policy-makers in designing more formal and concrete guidelines to help teachers who teach English as a second language. While some interviewees agree the use of L1 judiciously in classrooms, all the interviewees agree, to make an impact on policy makers in this regard to design policies as well as a methodical approach to teach English as a second language in comparison with mother tongue (MT).

Key words: comparison, judicious use of mother tongue, L1, methodical approach, second language teaching