

## **Acquisition of Reading Skills of Sinhala Vowel Modifiers among Pre-School Leavers and Grade One Leavers in Gampaha District**

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Vowel modifiers are a very important feature in Sinhala written language, which are used with consonants to make different sound syllables. They always appear in word medial or final positions to represent the associated vowel sounds; they can be used before, after, on top, bottom or around the consonant (Dissanayaka, 2005). The main objective of this study was to identify teachers' expectations in children's performance, in terms of reading vowel modifiers at pre-school level and grade one leaver level, as well as to identify the actual performance level of children. A quantitative cross-sectional exploratory study was done in four selected schools in the Gampaha District. The sample comprised of forty pre-school leaver level students, eighty grade one leaver level students, eight pre-school teachers and eight grade one teachers. Teachers' data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and a record sheet to mark the expected level for the whole class. Children were tested individually using a Sound Blending and Meaning Picture Card Test (SBMPT) with the same record sheet to mark their performance. The results reveal that teachers' expected level of children's performance in reading vowel modifiers were 0% and 100% for preschool and grade one leaver levels respectively. Average scores for pre-school children on SBMPT was 0% and most of the grade one children were able to obtain 100% for vowel modifier / a:/ at syllable level. The least performance was noticed with /o:/ at 88%. Acquisition of the skills in reading vowel modifiers was not associated with gender, but was significantly associated with age. i.e., when age of the children increased the percentage of vowel modifiers they acquire also increased proportionally. In conclusion, it was found that most of the pre-school leavers have not acquired reading skills in terms of vowel modifiers and the majority of the grade one leavers have mastered most of the vowel modifiers.