

The Present Socio-Economic-Political Culture and the Myth of English as an Access to Social Equality in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka

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This study investigates the myth of the English language as an access to equality in the post-colonial era in the present socio-economic-political culture in Sri Lanka. This is a literature-oriented research study based on the current state of English language and the role of English language education, in facilitating the process of poverty reduction and the promotion of equality in Sri Lanka. The researcher attempts to clarify the opinions, biases, presuppositions and interpretations of the existing socio-economic and political culture in relation to English as a language of opportunities and equality. The analysis of data reveals the dominant power of English as a global language, and the inequality in relation to access and allocation of public resources in diverse communities. Furthermore, it exposes recent proposals and accountabilities of the government on the elimination of poverty and the myth about English language as a panacea.

The majority of the Sri Lankans hold the view that English, as a universal language, is vital not only for lucrative local or foreign employment opportunities, but also for equal social standing. It is revealed in the data that while the affluent parents clamour for international or foreign schooling to secure better prospects for their children, the government faces increasing pressures to fulfil the demands of the majority of low-income parents whose children belong to the state school system. It seems the access to equal opportunities, to learn English, has created a social gap between the elite and the majority of low-income communities. Thus, the government contemplates establishing English as the medium of instruction and a compulsory subject. A conclusion could be drawn that the common use of English, the initiation of the language policy in education and the expectations of the masses could all be at odds. Thus this myth of English as a language of opportunities needs to be urgently addressed if the expected socio-economic-political and national goals of elimination of poverty and promotion of equality are to be achieved in Sri Lanka.

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