

Proceedings of the
**Research Conference on
Educational Leadership & Early Years
2026**

*"Bridging
Leadership and
Early Childhood
Practice:
Research for
Transformative
Education"*

RCELE 2026
31st January 2026

Organised by
AIC Campus, Colombo, Sri Lanka

In collaboration with
Plymouth Marjon University,
United Kingdom (UK)



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP AND COMMITTEES	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT – ACADEMIC & STUDENT SUPPORT	7
MESSAGE FROM THE CONFERENCE COORDINATOR.....	8
ABOUT RCELE 2026	9
KEYNOTE SPEAKERS.....	10
PUBLISHED ABSTRACTS.....	11
1	12
2	13
3	14
4	15
5	16
6	17
7	18
8	19
9	20
10	21
11	22
12	23
13	24
14	25
15	26
16	27
17	28
18	29
19	30

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP AND COMMITTEES

The successful organisation and academic delivery of RCELE 2026 were made possible through the guidance, expertise, and dedicated contributions of the following academics, senior leadership, and teams.

Advisory Committee

- Professor Inoka C. Perera
- Dr. Dharangan Bakthaseelan
- Dr. Gishan Sumanasiri
- Dr. Amila B Kulatunga

Distinguished Academic Guests

- Professor Emmanuel Otu - Former Founding Dean, College of Natural and Health Sciences; Professor of Chemistry and Distinguished Academic Research Leader.
- Professor Inoka C. Perera - Professor of Molecular Biology, University of Colombo; Director of Academics & Quality Assurance, IMC AIC Campus.

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- Mr. Surath Edurapola - Chief Academic & Academic Administration Officer
- Mr. Nipuna Adihetty - Head of Department – Academic & Student Support
- Ms. Kaushalya Gunawardana - Lecturer & Academic Coordinator
- Ms. Dinomi Nimna Meuni - Conference Coordinator – RCELE 2026; Assistant Lecturer & Academic Coordinator – Psychology

Academic Review Panel / Editorial Committee

- Ms. Hasini Gajadeera - Senior Lecturer, AIC Campus
- Ms. Imesha Wickramaarachchi - Senior Lecturer, AIC Campus
- Ms. Nilushi Senadeera - Senior Lecturer, AIC Campus *Special acknowledgement is extended to Ms. Hasini Gajadeera and Ms. Imesha Wickramaarachchi for their valuable academic contribution to the review of research submissions and for providing constructive feedback to researchers prior to the conference.*

Marketing, Admissions, and Operational Support

- Mr. Inthikab Zufer - Chief Marketing Specialist & Senior Lecturer, IMC AIC Campus
- Mr. Nafas Nasar - Senior Manager – Admissions & Branch Operations, AIC Campus
- The Enrolment Team - AIC Campus

The conference was further supported by the dedicated staff members of IMC AIC Campus, whose collective contributions to academic coordination, administration, communication, logistics, marketing, registration, and event operations played an essential role in the successful delivery of RCELE 2026.

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The successful organisation, delivery, and publication of the Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026) proceedings were made possible through the collective commitment and support of many individuals and institutions.

We gratefully acknowledge our institutional partners, AIC Campus (Colombo) and Plymouth Marjon University (United Kingdom), for creating a collaborative platform dedicated to scholarly dialogue and the advancement of knowledge in educational leadership and early childhood education. We also extend our sincere gratitude to the senior leadership of IMC AIC Campus - Dr. Dharangan Bakthaseelan, Dr. Gishan Sumanasiri, and Dr. Amila B Kulatunga - whose guidance was instrumental to the conference's realisation. We are honoured to acknowledge Professor Emmanuel Otu and Professor Inoka C. Perera for their distinguished presence and contribution to interdisciplinary academic dialogue.

Special appreciation is extended to our keynote speakers, Ms. Hannah Holdgate and Ms. Hasini Gajadeera, for enriching the conference with valuable international and local perspectives. We also thank the Academic Review Panel - Ms. Hasini Gajadeera, Ms. Imesha Wickramaarachchi, and Ms. Nilushi Senadeera—for their rigorous evaluation of research submissions and constructive academic feedback.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the Academic Department—Mr. Surath Edurapola, Mr. Nipuna Adihetty, Ms. Kaushalya Gunawardana, and Conference Coordinator Ms. Dinomi Nimna Meuni - as well as Mr. Inthikab Zufer, Mr. Nafas Nasar, and the wider IMC AIC Campus staff, for their tireless work in the planning, promotion, and seamless execution of the event.

Most importantly, we express our deepest appreciation to the researchers, authors, and presenters whose scholarly work forms the heart of these proceedings. To all participants, guests, educators, and students who joined us, thank you for contributing to the spirit of intellectual curiosity and collaboration that defined RCELE 2026. This publication stands as a lasting record of your collective efforts to advance educational research and practice.

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT – ACADEMIC & STUDENT SUPPORT

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Proceedings of the Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026), held on 31 January 2026 at the Tulip Hall, BMICH, Colombo, Sri Lanka, organised by AIC Campus in collaboration with Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom.

RCELE 2026 provided a valuable platform for academics, researchers, educational practitioners, and students to share research, exchange knowledge, and engage in meaningful discussions on contemporary issues in educational leadership and early years education.

The papers presented in these proceedings reflect the commitment of our academic community to research, critical thinking, professional practice, and evidence-informed approaches to education. I hope these contributions will provide valuable insights and encourage further research and collaboration in these important fields.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Plymouth Marjon University, the conference organising committee, academic reviewers, authors, presenters, and all staff members who contributed to the success of RCELE 2026.

I congratulate all the authors on their valuable contributions and wish readers an engaging and thought-provoking experience with these proceedings.

Nipuna Adihetty
Head of Department - Academic & Student Support
AIC Campus, Colombo, Sri Lanka

MESSAGE FROM THE CONFERENCE COORDINATOR

It is with great pleasure that I present the official proceedings of the Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026), held on 31 January 2026 at Tulip Hall, BMICH, Colombo. Organised by AIC Campus in collaboration with Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom, the conference was created as a platform to bring together researchers, academics, educators, and students to share knowledge, engage in meaningful scholarly dialogue, and contribute to the advancement of research in educational leadership and early childhood education.

One of the most meaningful aspects of RCELE 2026 was the diversity of its research community. The conference brought together undergraduate and postgraduate students, doctoral researchers, lecturers, academics, and practitioners, creating a space where emerging researchers could present their work alongside experienced professionals. The research presented addressed a wide range of contemporary issues within education and early childhood studies, including educational leadership, equity and access, inclusive education, language development, student well-being, teaching practices, and innovative approaches to early learning.

The publication of these proceedings represents an important continuation of that academic journey. Beyond the presentations delivered on the day of the conference, this volume provides a lasting record of the research, perspectives, and ideas shared through RCELE 2026. It is my hope that these proceedings will encourage further discussion, inspire future research, and contribute meaningfully to both academic scholarship and professional practice.

Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge every researcher and presenter who entrusted us with their work and contributed to the academic spirit of RCELE 2026. Research requires curiosity, commitment, critical thinking, and the willingness to share one's ideas with others. Your contributions formed the heart of this conference and made this publication possible.

As Conference Coordinator, I am proud of what RCELE 2026 achieved and deeply grateful to everyone who was part of this journey. I hope that this conference and its official proceedings will serve not only as a record of academic achievement but also as a foundation for continued research, collaboration, and scholarly engagement in the years ahead.

Ms. Dinomi Nimna Meuni

Conference Coordinator

Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026)

ABOUT RCELE 2026

The Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026) was held on 31 January 2026 at Tulip Hall, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), Colombo, Sri Lanka. Organised by AIC Campus, Colombo, in collaboration with Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom, the conference was conducted under the theme “Bridging Leadership and Early Childhood Practice: Research for Transformative Education.”

RCELE 2026 provided an academic platform for researchers, educators, academics, practitioners, and undergraduate and postgraduate students to share research, exchange knowledge, and engage in meaningful scholarly dialogue. The conference focused on strengthening the connection between educational leadership, research, and early childhood practice, recognising the importance of research-informed approaches in achieving meaningful educational transformation.

The research presented addressed contemporary areas including educational leadership, early childhood teaching and learning, inclusive education, equity and access, language development, children's well-being, parental engagement, teacher practices, and innovative approaches to learning and development. These contributions highlighted the importance of connecting academic research with educational policy and professional practice.

A strong emphasis was placed on academic quality and constructive feedback. Research submissions underwent an academic review process, while presenters had opportunities to receive feedback, engage in scholarly discussion, and strengthen their research and professional practice.

The conference was enriched by the contributions of distinguished guests, keynote speakers, academics, and senior lecturers, whose expertise encouraged reflection on current challenges and future directions in educational leadership and early childhood education.

The Official Proceedings of RCELE 2026 provide a lasting record of the research presented and extend the conference's contribution to future academic inquiry, educational practice, policy development, and scholarly collaboration.

Through RCELE 2026, AIC Campus and Plymouth Marjon University reaffirmed their commitment to developing a strong research culture and supporting research that connects leadership, practice, and evidence. The conference ultimately provided a valuable space for inquiry, reflection, dialogue, collaboration, and academic growth, contributing to the pursuit of more inclusive, innovative, and transformative education.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The **Research Conference on Educational Leadership & Early Years 2026 (RCELE 2026)** was enriched by keynote addresses that brought together international and local perspectives on educational leadership and early childhood education. The keynote sessions provided valuable insights into the role of research-informed leadership, transformative educational practice, and the importance of understanding early childhood education within both global and Sri Lankan contexts.

Ms. Hannah Holdgate

Senior Lecturer and Programme Area Lead for Early Years

Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom

Ms. Hannah Holdgate is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Area Lead for Early Years at Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom. Her academic and professional work focuses on early childhood education, leadership, professional practice, and the development of high-quality learning experiences for young children.

At RCELE 2026, Ms. Holdgate delivered a keynote address on bridging leadership and early childhood practice research for transformative education. Her address highlighted the important relationship between educational leadership, research, and professional practice, emphasising how research-informed leadership can contribute to meaningful and sustainable improvements within early years settings.

Drawing on an international perspective, the keynote encouraged educators, researchers, and educational leaders to consider how scholarly inquiry can inform decision-making, strengthen professional practice, and support transformative approaches to education. Her contribution reinforced one of the central aims of RCELE 2026: connecting research with practice to create meaningful impact within educational communities.

Ms. Hasini Gajadeera

Senior Lecturer

AIC Campus, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Ms. Hasini Gajadeera is an experienced educationist and senior lecturer with more than 26 years of teaching experience across Sri Lanka and Australia. Her professional and academic expertise encompasses early childhood education, teacher education, quality teaching, productive pedagogies, and the professional development of educators.

At RCELE 2026, Ms. Gajadeera delivered a keynote address focusing on early childhood stages within the Sri Lankan context. Her presentation offered valuable insights into the developmental and educational realities of early childhood in Sri Lanka, drawing attention to the importance of culturally responsive, contextually relevant, and evidence-informed educational practices.

Through her keynote address, Ms. Gajadeera emphasised the need to understand children's development within their social, cultural, and educational environments and highlighted the important role of educators and educational leaders in creating meaningful, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Together, the two keynote addresses brought valuable international and local perspectives to RCELE 2026. By connecting educational leadership, early childhood research, professional practice, and contextual understanding, the keynote sessions contributed significantly to the scholarly dialogue of the conference and reinforced its commitment to advancing research-informed education.

PUBLISHED ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts represent the scholarly contributions selected for publication in the Official Proceedings of RCELE 2026. These studies reflect diverse perspectives across educational leadership, early childhood education, inclusive practice, language education, student well-being, parental engagement, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Each abstract presents a concise overview of the respective study's purpose, methodology, key findings, and implications. Collectively, these contributions reflect the commitment of RCELE 2026 to promoting meaningful academic inquiry, encouraging research-informed educational practice, and creating opportunities for scholarly dialogue among researchers, educators, practitioners, and emerging academics.

Bridging Educational Leadership and Early Childhood Practice: English Teachers as Agents of Change in Multilingual Contexts

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Abstract

Persistent low confidence in English among tertiary-level learners in Sri Lanka remains a significant challenge in higher education. As a tertiary-level language and literature educator, repeated observations of learners' reluctance to speak, limited classroom participation, and anxiety surrounding English use point to deeper, long-term issues rooted in earlier stages of language learning. Research in early childhood education highlights the formative role of early language experiences in shaping learners' confidence and identity.

This paper examines how English-learning practices in early childhood settings can influence learners' long-term confidence, participation, and personal growth. It addresses a gap in educational research that rarely connects early years English pedagogy with later academic and personality development. The study adopts a qualitative, reflective approach grounded in practitioner inquiry. Data consist of reflective analyses of tertiary-level classroom experiences, supported by a review of literature on early language acquisition and transformative education. These insights are used to conceptually trace links between early childhood English practice, learner confidence, and personality development.

The analysis suggests that early English-learning environments that prioritise rote learning, error correction, and limited child-centred interaction contribute to enduring low confidence and anxiety. In contrast, healthy early years practices that emphasise play-based learning, linguistic inclusivity, and positive language identities foster children's self-efficacy, curiosity, and participation. Such practices provide a strong foundation for learners' ongoing personal development and long-term academic engagement.

The paper argues that healthy English practices in early childhood can have transformative effects on learners, shaping their overall growth. Emphasising inclusive and empowering early English experiences can help children develop positive language identities, academic competence, and other essential personality traits. These insights have implications for early years curriculum design, pedagogy, and policy in multilingual contexts such as Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Early childhood; Personality development; English education; Learner confidence

Bridging Leadership and Early Childhood Practice Research through Fuzzy Logic Methodology to Evaluate Transformative Education

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Abstract

Transformative education in early childhood settings requires leadership approaches that effectively integrate empirical research, reflective practice, and contextual realities. While substantial research exists on early childhood pedagogy, persistent research–practice gap limits systemic transformation. This chapter advances a comprehensive framework that bridges leadership theory and early childhood practice research through an empirically grounded, policy-informed, and complexity-sensitive approach. Using a qualitative and mixed-methods methodological design, the chapter integrates Indian and global policy perspectives and introduces fuzzy logic–based decision models to capture the ambiguity inherent in leadership and pedagogical judgment. The chapter offers conceptual models, tables, and practical tools to guide scholars, policymakers, and practitioners toward sustainable transformative education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Educational Leadership; Transformative Education; Mixed Methods Research; Fuzzy Logic; Policy Studies

Bridging Leadership for Transformative Early Childhood Education: A Multi-Stakeholder Model for Equity and Systemic Change

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Abstract

This article introduces a bridging leadership model for multiple stakeholders, aimed at transforming the system of early childhood education (ECE) through equity and inclusion at the same time. The research is based on transformative leadership theory and a systems approach and investigates how leaders are to go through hierarchical institutional structures in order to build collaborative relationships between educators, families, policymakers, and community organisations.

The model suggested defines the interrelation of structural change—policies, practices, and resource distribution; relational change—power-sharing, co-leadership, and genuine partnerships; and transformative change—shifting from deficit-based to asset-based mindsets and questioning systems that maintain inequity. Bridging leaders, through distributed leadership practices and intentional stakeholder engagement, position themselves as connectors across sectors, thus addressing fragmented coordination that undermines the quality and access of services to vulnerable populations.

The framework combines evidence-based principles such as equitable funding mechanisms, culturally responsive pedagogy, professional development aligned with equity goals, and meaningful family engagement rooted in shared decision-making. The model recognises that enduring systemic change demands moral courage, interdependence, and devotion to democracy and liberation in the ECE context.

By giving priority to the voices of marginalised communities and addressing the inequitable distribution of power and resources, bridging leadership offers a promising route to transforming ECE systems into just and nurturing places where every child, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can enjoy and benefit from opportunities for development and learning.

Keywords: Bridging leadership; Transformative leadership; Early childhood education; Systemic change; Equity; Multi-stakeholder collaboration; Distributed leadership; Inclusive practice; Systems thinking; Family engagement

Educational Leadership in Early Childhood Education: Exploring the Role of English Language Exposure in Shaping Learning Environments and Leadership Practices

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) administrative leadership is a key factor in shaping educational environments, pedagogical strategies, and eventual school success. English is a global language, and for many Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, teaching and learning English have the potential to powerfully influence early years learning trajectories. This study investigates the ways in which leaders of teaching and learning in preschool settings integrate English-language exposure and what this means for institutional practice, teacher decision-making, and children's early learning experiences.

Qualitative research methods were used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with early childhood educational leaders, preschool principals, and senior teachers, as well as through classroom observations across a range of early childhood centres. This research explores leaders' conceptualisation of English as a medium, subject, or emblem of quality education and their involvement in policy-making processes leading to curricular planning and teacher preparation in the early years.

The findings highlight educators as key mediating agents in the use of English in early childhood contexts, either enabling an extension of equitable, child-centred language practices or encouraging early exposure to English as a marker of competitive school identity. The study also illuminates the tension between parental expectations, global educational norms, and children's developmental needs. In some contexts, early English is viewed as an opportunity, while in others it may act as a stress factor for educators and students, potentially contributing to the marginalisation of home languages.

The study concludes that successful educational leadership requires a practical recognition of the value of English alongside inclusive and developmentally appropriate language policies. It advocates multilingual awareness-building, teacher empowerment, and child-friendly language environments within leadership models. By centring leadership practices, this study contributes to the dialogue on equitable language education and sustainable leadership in early childhood education within a globalised context.

Keywords: Educational leadership; Early childhood education; English language exposure; Multilingual learning; Language policy

Educational Leadership under International Human Rights Law: Integrating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Early Years Governance in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This research investigates how the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been incorporated into the governance of Sri Lanka's early years through the use of educational leadership frameworks that put into practice international human rights law. The CRC was ratified by Sri Lanka in 1991, which required the establishment of child-centered governance as part of the country's constitution, but still, in the area of ECCD, gaps in implementation remain where children aged 0 to 8 are being served. The analysis of the primary legal sources (CRC Articles 3, 12, 28, 29; General Comments 1, 7) through doctrinal method, national policies (2018 ECCD Policy, 2023-2033 NEPF, 2025 National Early Childhood Curriculum), CRC Committee reviews (2003, 2018), and Sri Lankan Court judgments points to the multiple governance structures and leadership models that need to be implemented to realize the children's rights. Among the main findings are the complete coverage of the policies with the principles of the CRC; however, there is weak enforcement, especially in the 95% of the private preschool sector, the post-13th Amendment devolution fragmented provincial coordination, and insufficient training of teachers in rights-based approaches even though the 2025 reforms which target 19,000 preschool educators have been announced. Distributed leadership, ethical decision-making frameworks that prioritize children's best interests (Article 3), and age-appropriate participation mechanisms (Article 12) emerge as significant for overcoming the policy-practice divide. The study highlights the role of the judiciary in Sri Lanka's CRC domestication through child participation precedents while provincial disparities still exist. Among the recommendations are the statutory enforcement powers for the National Institute of Education, NVQ Level 6 certification in rights-based ECE leadership, and child-friendly accountability systems.

Keywords: Child Participation; CRC Integration; Early Years Governance; Rights-Based Leadership; Sri Lanka ECCD

Enhancing Circle Time with Positive Reinforcement in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Early childhood settings offer and conduct also value circle time that let early aged children's an opportunity to socially connect with peers, communicate and to express emotions and sense that early aged children participate. Even though early aged children's focus durations are continued to grow and develop and they showcase different types of behaviors and learning needs, it can become challenging to keep early aged children engaged throughout circle time. To develop strategies to assist teachers establish more diverse, supportive and important learning activities within settings of early education, this qualitative secondary study evaluates the way positive reinforcement strategies can increase participation and involvement of early aged children and with circle time.

To be able to understand how positive reinforcement improves development in participation within early aged children by the means of both behavioral actions and relationships with others, this research depends on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and skinner's operant-conditioning theory. 22 peer-reviewed articles were included as part within particular qualitative secondary analysis that linked with classroom-based study with underlying theory. To identify common themes within classroom implementation, engagement and strategies of reinforcement, a thematic analysis of the research was carried out.

As a result, it enhances intrinsic motivation, self-regulation and positive social behavior; outcomes point out that behavior specific verbal praise is among the most effective and long-lasting kind of positive reinforcement throughout circle time. Short term participation is frequently increased through material incentives such as stickers or token systems, specifically for early aged children that demand greater behavioral assistance. To avoid dependency and reduced intrinsic motivation, such rewards require being utilized carefully.

As a way to promote behavior, involvement and engagement within education of early aged children's settings, the research study shows that positive reinforcement succeeds well when used thoughtfully and properly, combining behaviorist and sociocultural perspective

Keywords: Circle Time; Positive Reinforcement; Engagement

Equity in Access to Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka: With Special Reference to Kurunegala District

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Abstract

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is globally recognised as a foundation for lifelong learning and social equity. In Sri Lanka, however, access to quality preschool education remains uneven due to socioeconomic status, geographic location, and institutional disparities. Kurunegala District, one of the largest districts in the North Western Province, provides a significant context for examining these disparities because of its diverse urban, semi-urban, and rural communities. Accordingly, this study investigates equity in access to ECCE in the Kurunegala District, focusing on enrolment, resource distribution, teacher qualifications, and parental perceptions.

A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative surveys conducted with 100 households and qualitative interviews involving preschool teachers, administrators, and parents. The findings reveal considerable disparities in access to quality early childhood education. Urban children benefit from better-resourced preschools and qualified teachers, while rural and estate communities experience shortages of facilities, affordability challenges, and lower levels of parental awareness regarding the benefits of early learning. Although gender equity in enrolment was found to be relatively balanced, children with disabilities continue to be underserved due to limited inclusive educational practices.

The study concludes that, despite Sri Lanka's progress in expanding Early Childhood Care and Education, significant equity gaps remain within the Kurunegala District. The findings highlight the need for strengthened government support for rural preschools, financial assistance for low-income families, expanded teacher training in inclusive education, and initiatives that promote greater parental engagement. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensuring that every Sri Lankan child has equitable access to quality early childhood education and enters primary education with equal opportunities for success.

Keywords: Access to Education; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE); Equity; Kurunegala District; Inclusive Education

Exploring the Impact of Resource Gaps in Learning and Development in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an important basis for lifelong learning and development; nevertheless, data from the literature consistently shows that resource shortages greatly decrease the quality, equality, and effectiveness of early learning environments. Drawing on the findings of twelve reviewed studies, this paper investigates the impact of resource disparities on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, including shortages of learning materials, facilities, outdoor play environments, trained educators, funding, and support from institutions.

According to the literature, a lack of age-appropriate teaching and learning resources restricts play-based and child-centred pedagogical approaches, limiting engagement, creativity, and early skill development. Professional resource gaps, such as insufficient professional preparation, limited ongoing training, and a lack of institutional support, restrict educators' ability to implement developmentally appropriate practices, which frequently results in increased workload, stress, and inconsistent teaching quality.

Several studies have found that gaps in outdoor learning areas and play materials limit possibilities for physical growth, social engagement, and experiential learning, all of which are necessary components of holistic early childhood development. Structural and systemic difficulties, such as poor financial allocation, inefficient policy implementation, and gaps between urban and rural or socioeconomically varied groups, continue to contribute to unequal early learning results.

Overall, the examined literature views resource gaps as an ongoing problem that affects not only classroom practices, but also accessibility, inclusion, educator effectiveness, and long-term growth paths. This study thus justifies a thorough examination of resource gaps in ECE and emphasises the importance of coordinated policy reforms, sustained investment, and targeted professional development to ensure equitable, high-quality learning and development opportunities for all young children.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Resource Gaps; Learning and Development

Facilities Management as an Enabler of Educational Leadership and Quality Learning Environments in Early Years Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the importance of facilities management (FM) as a critical factor in facilitating quality learning environments and promoting effective educational leadership in early years education (ECE) environments. Although there is an ever-growing acknowledgement of the role of ECE in child development, the combined managerial model of maximizing physical and functional elements of such settings is under-researched. The study uses a systematic literature review to generalize various managerial practices, especially how the strategies of planning strategic planning, procurement, utilization, and maintenance of educational facilities and structures can help in the pedagogical quality and leadership success of ECE. Major results show that there is a positive strong relationship between well managed facilities and better learning outcomes, teacher motivation, and the overall institutional quality. The analysis shows that, effective FM aids the educational leadership in offering a steady, safe as well as a challenging atmosphere that is vital in achieving successful teaching methods and facilitating all-round child growth. The research concludes that the application of FM principles to the process of ECE leadership is the key to the quality of the educational services and their sustainable development during the initial stages of education.

Keywords: Facilities Management; Educational Leadership; Quality Learning Environments; Early Years Education

Facilitating Inquiry in the Digital Age: A Qualitative Study of 3-to-8-Year-Olds' Spontaneous Questioning in Hybrid Learning Ecologies

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Abstract

In early childhood, children are driven by epistemic curiosity and explore their world through constant questioning (Schulz & Bonawitz, 2007; Ronfard et al., 2018) that is mediated through adult and technological interactions (Frazier et al., 2009; Xu & Warschauer, 2020). Qualitative research was conducted to investigate some of the persisting questions that remain unanswered in current literature which include: (1) detailed analysis of the nature of questions that children ask when seeking information, (2) how adult responses mediate to nurture their emerging critical thinking and (3) the evolving role of digital tools as either a supplement for inquiry. Adopting an ethnographic research design, qualitative data were collected through semi structured interviews with preschool and lower-primary teachers and semi-structured parental questionnaires to capture diverse perspectives across home and school settings in urban, digitally emerging environments in Sri Lanka. Findings indicated that children's questioning progressed from ontic, fact-seeking (What, Where) questions toward epistemic, explanation-seeking (How, Why) inquiries as they develop across age groups. Therefore, developmentally responsive adult practices were found to be critical: in early years, adults supported inquiry through developmentally graded explanations while in lower-primary, dialogic counter-questioning strategies such as revoicing and redirecting were more effective to stimulate independent reasoning and deeper inquiry. The findings further highlighted the importance of intentional adult mediation during technology use. Parental co-engagement, regulated screen time, and post-digital hands-on investigations enabled children to validate ideas through experimentation, completing the inquiry cycle and preventing passive consumption. These findings support the view of implementing inquiry-based-learning pedagogies (IBL) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for active learning.

The study concluded that inquiry development in early childhood is best supported through responsive adult mediation, with digital technologies integrated as complementary tools. By foregrounding a South Asian context, this research extends inquiry theory beyond WEIRD settings and offers evidence-based implications for educators and policymakers seeking to foster inquiry-based pedagogies within hybrid learning environments.

Keywords: Early childhood inquiry; Inquiry-based learning (IBL); Children's questioning; Adult scaffolding; Educational technology; South Asia

From Examination-Oriented Schooling to Holistic Education: A Comparative Study of Sri Lankan and Japanese School Systems

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan school education system has historically been shaped by an examination-oriented structure in which high-stakes national assessments play a decisive role in determining students' educational progression and social mobility. While this system has contributed to high literacy rates and expanded access to education, growing concerns have emerged regarding student well-being, equity, life skills development, and the limited attention given to holistic learning. In contrast, the Japanese school education system, although academically rigorous, systematically integrates character education, life skills, student responsibility, and school culture into compulsory schooling. This study conducts a comparative analysis of the Sri Lankan and Japanese school education systems with the objective of identifying key structural, pedagogical, and cultural differences and using these insights to generate contextually relevant reform directions for Sri Lanka. Adopting a qualitative comparative research design, the study draws on policy documents, curriculum frameworks, secondary data, peer-reviewed literature, and virtual semi-structured interviews with twenty school teachers from public schools in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo, Japan. The findings reveal that Sri Lanka's strong reliance on examinations marginalizes non-academic competencies and contributes to uneven educational experiences, whereas Japan embeds holistic development through continuous assessment, moral education, and institutionalized school culture practices. Based on these findings, the study's principal contribution is the development of the Contextualized Holistic Education Model for Sri Lanka (CHEM-SL). This model proposes a balanced integration of academic rigor and holistic development through curriculum reorientation, assessment reform, school culture transformation, enhanced teacher roles, and a systematic focus on student well-being and equity. The study contributes to comparative education literature by moving beyond achievement-based comparisons and offering an original, policy-relevant education model tailored to Sri Lanka's socio-cultural and institutional context.

Keywords: Comparative Education; Holistic Education; Examination-Oriented Schooling; Sri Lanka; Japan; Education Reform

Household Economic Stress and Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Sri Lankan families face growing economic pressures caused by increasing living costs, rising income instability, and work-related stress. These economic challenges can influence parental capacity to engage in their children's early education, including providing support for learning at home, participating in school events, and fostering socio-emotional development. Parental involvement is crucial for early childhood development, yet financial stress may limit the time, resources, and level of involvement that parents can provide. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to assess the multivariate effects of household economic stress, gender, and employment status on parental engagement in children's early education through home- and school-engagement outcomes, providing valuable insights for shaping policies and practices aimed at improving early learning outcomes in Sri Lanka.

The sample size of this study was 100 respondents, selected using a purposive sampling technique. Python software was applied to analyse the dataset, and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to evaluate the overall impact of the study variables. The study revealed that household economic stress and gender significantly predict parental engagement in early childhood education. Economic stress mainly affects home-based engagement ($R^2 = 0.88$), while gender influences school-based participation ($R^2 = 0.94$), whereas employment status showed no significant impact.

These results provide evidence-based guidance for Sri Lankan policymakers and educators to implement differentiated engagement strategies addressing household economic pressures that limit home-based involvement while removing gender-related obstacles to school participation. Specific interventions should include financial support mechanisms for economically stressed families, along with gender-inclusive programming that encourages the participation of both parents in school activities. By implementing these context-specific, multidimensional approaches, early childhood education programmes can generate equitable opportunities for parental involvement, improving developmental and academic outcomes for children regardless of their economic circumstances.

Keywords: Household economic stress; Parental engagement; Early childhood education; Socioeconomic factors

Improving the pronunciation of the foundational phonic sounds through rhymes A Secondary Research

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Abstract

The instruction of early phonics plays a pivotal role in assisting a student's emergent literacy skills, especially in the accurate pronunciation of the foundational phonic sounds.

Despite systematic phonics programmes been extensively used in early childhood education, many young children continue to experience difficulties with sound articulation, particularly those with developing speech and language skills or using English as an auxiliary language. This research titled, Improving the Pronunciation of the Foundational Phonic Sounds through Rhymes was presented as a secondary research investigation, conducted as part of BA (Hons) programme dissertation in early childhood education and care. The study was consolidated by the

researcher's background in the professional education and training in speech and drama, in which articulation, repetition, rhythm, and expressive oral communication is highlighted. Rhymes are perceived not merely as enjoyable classroom activities but as purposeful pedagogical tools that assist young learners in phonological awareness and accurate production of sound through repetitive and rhythmic language. The research integrated findings from six peer-reviewed research articles published between 2016 to 2025. They include the works of Hulme and Snowling (2013), Leitao and Flethcher (2018), Shad et al., (2024), Bryant and Bradley (2018), Goswami and Bryant (2016), and Wright and Neuman (2019). The selected studies extended diverse geographical and educational settings – such as United Kingdom, Australia, Pakistan, and the United States. This provided an extensive understanding of

mediation of rhyme in phonics instruction. The research methodology utilized was qualitative. It involved the extraction of systematic data and the thematic analysis of existing studies. Through extensive reading and analysing four key themes were identified. They were, the role of rhyme awareness in phonemic segmentation, the enhancement of articulation through rhythmic repetition, and the positive influence of teacher-led rhyme instruction on phoneme discernment (the ability to distinguish and differentiate between individual sounds).

Keywords: Phonics; Rhymes; Phonemic awareness; Pronunciation; Early Childhood Education

Mental Health Excuses or Genuine Struggles? Understanding the Balance for Students from Single-Parent Families

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Abstract

Students from single-parent families represent a growing and often under-supported population within higher education. Educational leaders are increasingly required to respond to student mental health concerns while maintaining academic standards and institutional accountability. This literature-based study examines whether mental health challenges experienced by university students from single-parent families constitute genuine barriers to academic success or whether such challenges are sometimes used to explain academic underperformance.

A systematic review of peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024 was conducted, focusing on mental health outcomes, socio-economic disadvantage, academic performance, and institutional support mechanisms in higher education contexts. The findings indicate that students from single-parent households experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, often linked to financial instability, reduced parental availability, and limited access to academic resources. These challenges negatively affect academic engagement, persistence, and performance.

However, the review also highlights concerns regarding the inconsistent implementation of mental health accommodations within universities, which may unintentionally reduce academic accountability when not supported by clear institutional frameworks. From an educational leadership perspective, the study emphasises the importance of balanced policies that provide appropriate mental health support while promoting student responsibility and academic integrity.

The paper contributes to leadership discussions on equity, student well-being, and decision-making in higher education and highlights the need for transparent, evidence-based support systems. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term effectiveness of institutional mental health policies and leadership practices across diverse higher education contexts.

Keywords: Educational leadership; Mental health; Single-parent families; Academic performance; Higher education

Perceived Use and Impact of AI Applications in Assignment Writing: A Qualitative Study Among Undergraduates in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence applications such as ChatGPT, Genie AI, and Quill Bot have become increasingly prevalent among university students globally, with particular growth in adoption among undergraduates in Sri Lanka. This qualitative study explores how undergraduate students across state-owned universities in Sri Lanka perceive and utilize AI tools in their academic assignment writing. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten undergraduate students from diverse degree programmes, this research employed an inductive qualitative approach to extract rich contextual insights. The findings reveal a nuanced perspective where students recognize substantial benefits of AI applications, including their ability to simplify complex concepts, provide grammar corrections, and facilitate content organization. However, significant concerns emerged regarding academic integrity, ethical boundaries, and the potential for excessive dependence on AI to compromise critical thinking skills and academic originality. Particularly notable were anxiety levels among final-year students regarding academic misconduct implications. The study contributes to the emerging discourse on AI integration in higher education within the Sri Lankan context, offering practical implications for educational leaders and institutional policymakers. The research underscores the necessity of developing clear institutional guidelines that promote responsible and ethical use of AI tools as complementary learning aids rather than substitutes for independent academic engagement. These findings provide valuable insights into educational leadership in establishing balanced approaches to AI integration that maximize pedagogical benefits while safeguarding academic standards and fostering the development of essential critical academic competencies among undergraduate students.

Keywords: Academic Integrity; Artificial Intelligence (AI); Assignment Writing; Educational Leadership; Qualitative Research; Undergraduate Students

Reimagining Digital Childhood: Building South Asia's Caregiver Digital Mediation Framework

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Abstract

The increased use of digital devices by South Asian children (0-8 years) risks attachment disruption and cognitive overload, yet caregivers largely rely on screen-time limits with little or no mediation training. Nowadays, digital tools function as “co-caregivers,” establishing risk factors of overexposure in low-resource contexts without adequate guidance. This qualitative narrative review synthesizes evidence across four digital databases and develops a caregiver digital mediation framework (CDMF), which is guided by Bowlby’s attachment theory (1969) and Livingstone & Helsper’s parental mediation theory (2008), and suggests co-use as central to secure digital engagement in childhood psychologically safe. Findings indicate that structured caregiver mediation improves children’s digital behaviors through guided co-use, emotional attunement, and interactive learning. CDMF unites 4 pillars: access control (co-use boundaries), curation of content (interactive alignment), interaction scaffold (dialogic play), and reflection prompts (emotional processing). The preschool's leader can implement the framework using low-cost artificial intelligence (AI) assistants, such as WhatsApp-based notifications, to implement it at a large scale without requiring high levels of supervision. The framework offers a culturally grounded and practical model for preschool leaders and policymakers to enhance cognitive self-regulation, secure attachment, and psychologically informed digital practices across South Asian early childhood education systems.

Keywords: Early childhood; digital engagement; caregiver training; digital literacy; caregiver digital mediation framework; educational interventions; South Asia; AI tools

Role of Music and Movement-Based Brain Break Activities in Enhancing Student Engagement in an Early Childhood Educational Setting

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Abstract

Student engagement is an essential factor in early learning. This significantly influences a student's participation, learning outcomes, and classroom behaviours derived from their experience in early childhood education. In this setting, educators encourage active student participation, minimise behavioural disruption, and foster a lifelong love of learning in young students.

This study aims to explore how music and movement-based brain break activities enhance student engagement in an early childhood educational setting. Music and movement activities are inherently appealing to young children. This research discusses how music and movement-based brain breaks can be used to enhance focus, improve motivation, and support effective classroom behaviour management.

The practice of brain break activities has emerged as a new trend in modern educational practice and is increasingly being adopted by teachers as a method of creating positive, inclusive, and stimulating learning environments for children. Although brain breaks are popular in international early childhood educational settings, there is limited research regarding this concept, particularly in the Sri Lankan context. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by exploring how short, playful, and enjoyable music and movement-based brain break activities can be used to enhance student engagement and encourage positive behaviour within classroom settings.

An action research design using a qualitative approach was followed in this study. Data collected through classroom observations and teacher interviews were analysed through thematic analysis to identify common patterns. The findings show that the activities implemented during the research period can improve children's focus, regulate their energy, help children respond positively to their learning activities, and make the classroom environment more manageable for teachers. It is believed that the findings of this study can provide insights for early childhood educators in developing effective teaching practices to enhance student engagement, enrich learning experiences, and improve overall classroom management.

Keywords: Student engagement; Early childhood education; Brain breaks; Music and movement; Classroom management

The Impact of Adapting Montessori Methods to Support a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Action Research Study

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Abstract

This action research explored how adapted Montessori materials can support the learning and participation of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive early years classroom. The study was guided by two research questions: how Montessori methods can be adapted to enhance engagement for children with ASD, and what impact these adaptations have on their skill development.

Data were collected through teacher interviews and classroom observations and analysed thematically. Findings revealed that while standard Montessori materials often posed challenges such as sensory overload and difficulty with abstract concepts, adaptations—including simplifying activities, enlarging manipulatives, and introducing flexibility—led to greater engagement, independence, and enjoyment for the child. Teacher reflections further highlighted increased confidence in supporting the child through these adaptations.

However, limitations were noted, particularly reduced opportunities for peer collaboration and the restricted scope of activities trialled. The study underscores the need for individualised approaches when applying Montessori pedagogy to autistic learners and recommends further exploration with larger samples. These findings contribute both practical insights for inclusive Montessori practice and theoretical implications for tailoring constructivist methods to the diverse sensory and developmental profiles of children with ASD.

Keywords: Montessori education; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Inclusive classrooms; Adapted materials; Child engagement; Skill development

The Impact of Preschool Leadership on Early Childhood Teaching Practices in Government-Run Settings: A Case Study of Balapitiya Divisional Secretariat Division, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

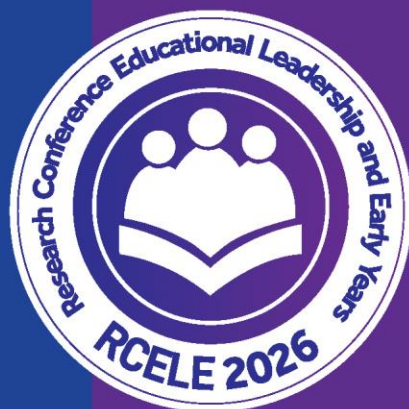
Leadership in early childhood education plays an important role in shaping teaching practices, learning environments, and the overall quality of preschool provision, especially in government-run settings. Research also shows that effective leadership contributes to improved pedagogical practices by shaping teachers' professional learning, instructional decision-making, and classroom interactions. This study examines the impact of preschool leadership on early childhood teaching and care practices in government preschools within the Balapitiya Divisional Secretariat, Sri Lanka, where empirical studies on leadership influence remain limited.

The primary objective of the study was to explore how leadership styles, supervisory practices, and administrative decision-making affect the implementation of child-centred pedagogy and teacher professional practice. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving purposive sampling of selected government preschools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with preschool principals, classroom observations, and focus group discussions with teachers and analysed using thematic analysis.

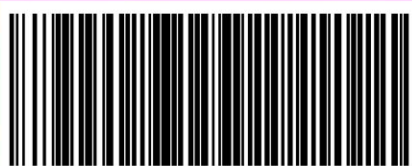
The findings revealed that collaborative and instructional leadership practices positively influence teacher motivation, professional practice, and the effective implementation of child-centred teaching strategies. In contrast, hierarchical and task-oriented leadership approaches were found to restrict teachers' professional autonomy, limit classroom innovation, and create workplace stress. The study further highlights the importance of continuous professional support, mentorship, and leadership capacity-building in enhancing early childhood teaching quality.

The study concludes that effective preschool leadership serves as an important link between policy intentions and classroom realities and that strengthening leadership practices can significantly improve educational outcomes in government-run early childhood settings. The study offers important implications for educational leadership development, policy formulation, and early years practice in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Preschool leadership; Government preschools; Child-centred pedagogy; Educational leadership



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