Multilingual Learning Platform for Kids to Learn Foreign Languages in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: *Learning and teaching a foreign language is not easy. It is not challenging if it is practiced from childhood. This research paper mainly considers which age range of students will be helpful and scrutinizes the attitudes of parents and teachers of the foreign language learning tools. The main aim is to achieve the initial steps when developing a foreign language learning tool for kids. For that, the researchers have surveyed to gather information about the students who are learning foreign languages and those who are willing to learn. And also to find the most popular foreign languages that are used in Sri Lanka, find the difficulties that occur when following these languages, and find methodologies that can be used to improve the language learning skills of small children and mitigate the time constraints and students' shyness in learning Foreign Languages.*

Keywords: *Foreign languages, Learning tools, kids language learning interests, Multilinguism*

1. Introduction

A language is deemed international if it is primarily taught in the school and is not being spoken in the place where it originated. And also, foreign language teaching and learning contexts have shifted from traditional classroom teaching methods to student-centered learning methodologies. The acquisition of other languages enables the persons to share information successfully and freely, as well as engage in real-life scenarios, using the vocabulary of the native culture directly. Multilingualism allows exposure to some ideas distinct from others, improves one's power to detect linkages across different topics, and encourages an integrative viewpoint while acquiring global knowledge and skills. Foreign language pedagogy is tutoring a formal language that is neither the primary nor native language of a large portion of the population. Academics devised instructional techniques and learning contexts that involved students in dynamic communicative language tasks based on linguistic principles, research methods, and practices. There is sometimes a difference drawn between second and foreign language acquisition. The acquisition of a second language demands that the student dwells where the gained language is being spoken.

In this research paper, the researchers have discussed the percentages of the students who are following and not following foreign languages. From the survey, it can be categorized according to the age range and the languages that the children are learning. Preferred kinds of languages of the children who do not follow any languages at the moment by learning in the future. Furthermore, this research paper includes the perspectives of parents with children from the ages of two to nineteen and educators teaching foreign languages. And also, the researchers have collected ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to consider from both the parents and teachers when developing a foreign language tool for kids because, in Sri Lanka, most children do not know foreign languages other than English. The researchers are trying to identify the cautions for not selecting to study some foreign languages and come up with a solution for the problems and difficulties faced by the students, parents, and teachers when learning and teaching foreign languages.

2. Literature Review

The research (Awan et al., 2010) highlights anxiety in English undergraduate classrooms in terms of the kind of events that cause stress at various phases of the curriculum, as well as the link between anxiety and learners' accomplishment. Furthermore, students' GPA in English courses is examined to determine its association with language anxiety. The findings demonstrate that linguistic stress and performance are inversely associated. It's been discovered that female students are less worried than male students when studying English as a foreign language. The most common source of concern is speaking in front of people, followed by fears of grammar faults and pronunciations.

According to the research (Fryer and Carpenter, nd), Foreign Language Learning (FLL) students commonly have few opportunities to use their target language. Teachers in FLL contexts try their best to offer possibilities within the class through pair or group work. Still, several reasons such as time constraints, awkwardness, or a lack of opportunities for appropriate support prevent this. This study examines the possible role of online chatbots in

meeting this demand. Chatbots might give students a way to practice their language skills at any time and in nearly any place.

The researchers in the study (Golonka et al., 2014) review evidence regarding the efficacy of technology in the foreign language (FL) acquisition and instruction, emphasizing empirical research that compares modern technologies with more conventional techniques or materials. Automated voice recognition (ASR) is based on computer-assisted pronunciation instruction research. These experiments proved that ASR might make things more accessible.

The researchers (Guetl et al., 2013) sought to investigate and build an environment that uses Web 2.0 technologies and online language learning tools to deliver a more integrated language learning environment. This research will examine technology and give information on how the tools can be integrated to provide language learners with a more productive working environment. A first working proof of concept based on this approach is promising, supporting modern language requirements, and the first findings and space for improvements are discussed.

This research analyses (Habók and Magyar, 2018) Language Learning Strategy (LLS) utilized with foreign language demeanor, capability, and joint school accomplishment among lower secondary students in 8 to 5 Years in Hungary. The main objective was to supply a complex diagram of these estimation points and to look at how Language Learning Strategy can support children within the first stage of the language learning process.

The study (Nghi, 2020) examines bots as a medium for foreign language learners in foreign language education. It explores the possible function of bots in deploying for instructing English as a foreign language to replace the time gap and individuals' timidity in acquiring English as a Foreign Language. The fundamental perspectives demonstrate how studying a foreign language with a bot is much more efficient when training with a foreign language instructor. Even though the condition of chatbots during foreign language instruction has received minimal prominence, learners are interested in this type of advancing technology. The research paper conveys the impact of using bots in language education with practical scenarios for lessons and provides recommendations for future uses.

The research (Panagiotidis, 2018) explores technology's effectiveness as motivation in foreign language acquisition. The connection between the use of intelligent technologies such as online applications and services, computer games, mobile applications, or forms of communication and encouragement in the field of language teaching was thoroughly researched, using a range of techniques and

within the system with many language teaching and learning programs. Additionally, this article analyses the notion of encouragement in the academic domain and the link between technologies and language acquisition, highlights many of the various studies conducted by researchers on this matter, provides a summation of the works studied, and proposes a recommendation on how to use the modern technologies as a motivational factor for foreign language learning.

According to (Przygoda, 2017), the e-Learning course is a distributed system that combines socio-technical elements. Increasingly the technology networks of eLearning are becoming interconnected with the Internet. Language can be perceived in many ways by different individuals in various circumstances. As a result, it is critical to use terminology that is as exact and unambiguous as necessary. The fewer the alternative meanings for a statement, the more precise person's use of words becomes. It is critical to incorporate more engagement, animations, and multimedia; this can be a mash-up of details, facts, and figures blended and prepared on the computer with well-stated educational objectives.

The researchers of this research paper (Tsou, Wang, and Tzeng, 2006) have designed a multimedia Storytelling Web application to explore whether internet-based technologies may improve English language teaching and learning by using storytelling and narrative discussions and illustrating this Webpage's usefulness in considerably assisting kids' English language teaching and learning activities, it had been installed inside one primary school to verify its success in education and subsequent learning outcomes. The main aim is to produce multimedia tales easily, clearly, and quickly, even for teenage children, re-play and discuss the narratives created by someone in classrooms or at the house, showcase or study how storytelling may be linked to classrooms, and access the Service anywhere at any time.

3. Methodology

The researchers in this research paper have surveyed to collect data. The survey is mainly focused on three categories as parents and educators. The questions differ according to the user role of the survey. The primary purpose of dividing according to user roles is that it is helpful to get the results. The researchers have included both open-ended and close-ended questions to analyze better. This survey was distributed among 150 people, and the researchers got 94 responses.

4. Results and Discussions

The following Figure 1 indicates the three leading user roles the researchers have taken to conduct the survey. The

majority of the 60.2% are students. The other 28% are parents, and the rest, 11.8%, are educators.
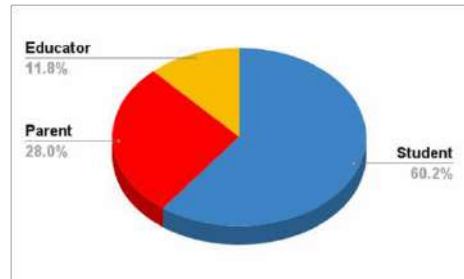

Figure 1. User Roles

One of the prominent user roles in this research paper is the parent. The following figures indicate the analysis of the results which were given to them.
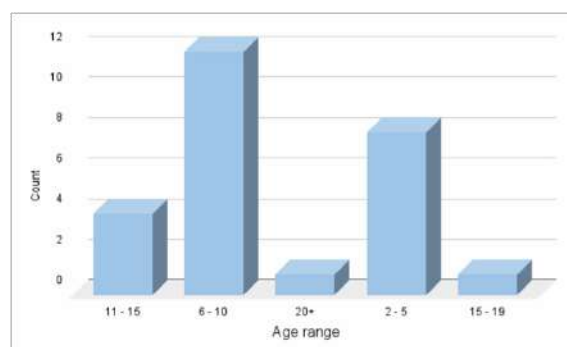

Figure 2. Age limits of the kids

The age limits of the kids of the parents are stated in Figure 2. 46.2% of the kids are from 6 to 10 years old. 30.8% of the parents have kids between the ages of 2 -5 years. Kids' ages eleven to fifteen have 15.4%, and 3.8% of parents have kids between 15 and above. Moreover, more than 80% of the periods mentioned above kids do not follow any foreign languages at the moment, and the rest of the twenty percent of the kids are learning some foreign languages.

Figure 3 indicates the languages of the children who are following any language.
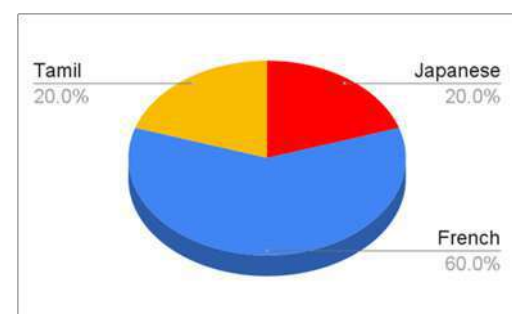

Figure 3. Languages that kids are learning

Most of the kids are learning French, and the other 20% are learning Tamil and Japanese. 60% of the total number of kids have learned the languages for more than a year, and the rest, 20%, have known for more than two years and three to five years. Most of the students who have learned

for more than two years are above fifteen. The students currently learning foreign languages are studied in private classes, and the remaining kids have learned the language from school. In Sri Lankan, most the schools have the facilities to learn foreign languages, especially French, Hindi, Japanese and Chinese. And also, students can select these languages for the Ordinary level and advanced level examinations.

The researchers have gathered information about the kids who don't follow any foreign languages and the hopes of their parents to teach foreign languages to their kids. According to the survey, more than 90% of the parents would like to teach foreign languages to their kids, and the other 10% neither like nor dislike engaging their kids in practicing a new language.

The graph in Figure 4 demonstrates the languages the parents have chosen to teach their kids who are still not following a foreign language. Most of the parents have stated that they are going to teach French language and German language for their kids, and also other than that, the parents would like to teach Spanish, Hindi, Chinese and Japanese for their kids.
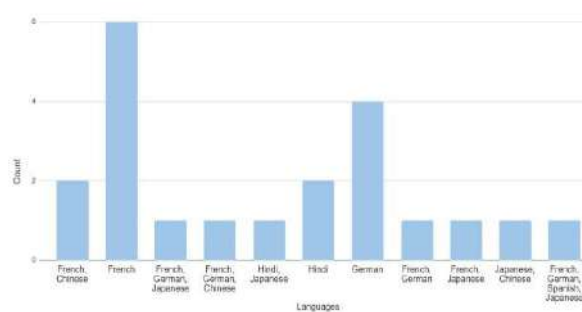

Figure 4. Preferences of parents on which languages to teach to their kid

Figure 5 indicates the parents' options to teach foreign languages to kids who don't follow any languages. More than 40% of the parents selected private classes to attend to their kids, while 28.6% of parents stated teaching by using online learning apps. Only 23.8% of parents liked private and online learning tools, and others chose YouTube to teach their kids.
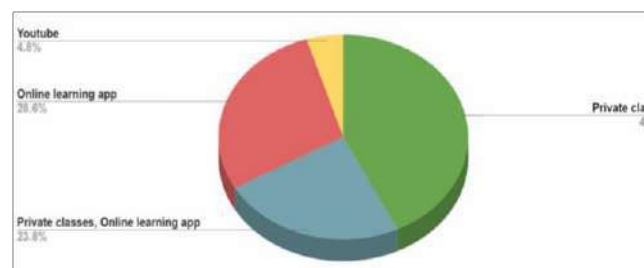

Figure 5. Methods chosen by parents to teach kids

Another prominent user role in the survey is Students. The researchers have collected the data and information from the students currently schooling and university undergraduates between the ages of ten to twenty-five years.
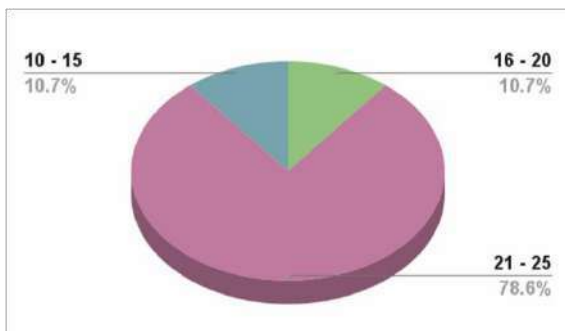

Figure 6. Student age limits

The researchers have mainly focused on high school students and undergraduates in the student category. In Figure 6, more than 78% of the students are between the ages of twenty-one to twenty-five years. The other 20% of students are in middle school and high school.
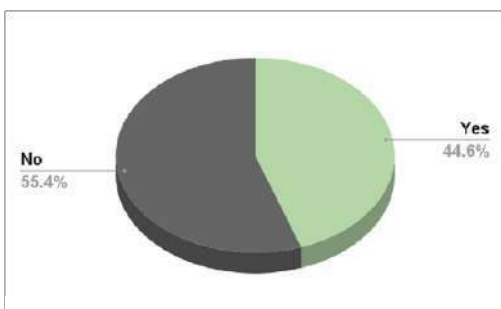

Figure 7. Students who follow foreign languages and who are not

Figure 7 indicates the percentage of the students who are following some foreign languages and those who do not follow any. Most students with fifty-five percent in the ages of ten to twenty-five have not studied any foreign languages and have surveyed that they would like to learn new languages. 44.6% of students have reviewed any of the foreign languages.

The languages that the students who don't follow any languages would like to learn are stated in Figure 8. The majority of the students want to learn French and German. There were other languages like Spanish, Hindi, Japanese, Russian, Chinese, and Korean. French and German are the most popular languages among school children.
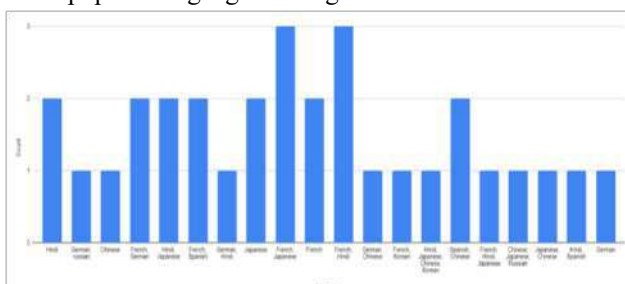

Figure 8. Preferred languages of the students

From the survey, the researchers have identified that 29% of students who still do not follow any foreign language course will like to attend private classes, and 35.5% of the students would like to learn a new language using a language tool. And another 29% of students like to learn through both private classes and the language tool. 6.4% of the students would like to study using YouTube and Alliance Francaise institutes.

The following Figure 9 shows the difficulties parents and students face when selecting to teach and study foreign languages.
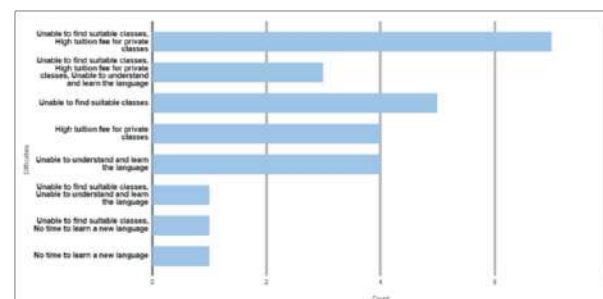

Figure 9. Difficulties when learning

Most parents have mentioned that the main difficulty is finding suitable classes for their kids. In Sri Lanka, most children and parents are not attentive to learning foreign languages except English. And also, a few students learn foreign languages, and the students who have learned the languages do not have suitable vacancies in the country. So they tend to migrate. Not having suitable classes in every district and the limited courses with many students may lead to not selecting the learning stream. Moreover, most parents said that the classes teaching foreign languages have a very high tuition fee, and most people cannot afford that. Some students have said that they don't have time to learn a new language and think they will be unable to understand and use the language properly.

Figure 10. Likelihood of the usage if propose an online learning tool

According to the Figure 10 majority of the people who have done the survey is like to use the online tool that the researchers have proposed.

Below, Figure 11 represents the languages recommended by the people to use in the foreign language learning tool. Some are French, German, Spanish, Hindi, Japanese, Russian and Chinese.
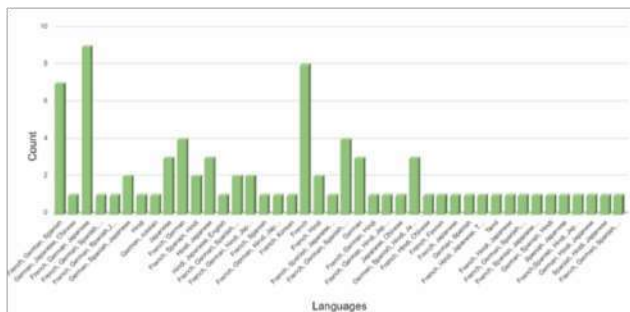

Figure 11. Proposed languages to include in the tool

There are a lot of suggestions to be included in the language learning tool proposed by the people who participated in the survey. Some of them are to categorize the activities and lessons in the language learning tool according to the age or from beginners to advanced steps, to include some exciting activities regarding the lessons to make them understand easier for the kids. They should be attractive and user-friendly as kids to use and also have more pictures, videos, and animations rather than a lot of text areas which are easily understandable and convenient for the kids, enable options to practice letters, numbers, grammar, and pronunciations in the tool, have some flashcards, quizzes, puzzles, and some games which keep the kids using the tool without any boring. And also, some have mentioned adding features like consulting teachers and direct contact via the tool. Moreover, the letters are somewhat challenging to write and memorize in languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean. So, the people suggested adding the tool's letter practice modules. And also, it is stated that to include day-to-day words, some essential vocabulary, real-life conversations, and some cultural practices and traditional events. Clear audio, pronouncing the words like native speakers, and stating the phonetics are other responses.

The following section includes the questionnaire sent to educators teaching foreign languages in Sri Lanka.
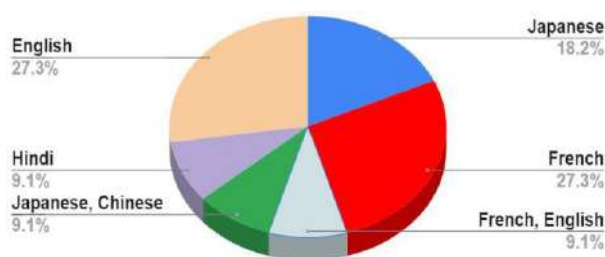

Figure 12. Subjects of the educators

Figure 12 shows the foreign languages that the educators teach. 27.3% of the teachers are doing French and English. 18.2% are teaching Japanese, and others teach Hindi and Chinese languages. Among them, 45.5% of the educators teach foreign languages for any age group. In comparison, 18.2% of the teachers teach only to students between the ages of eleven to fifteen and two to fifteen years. The rest of the educators are tech for the age groups of two years to ten and fifteen to nineteen years students.
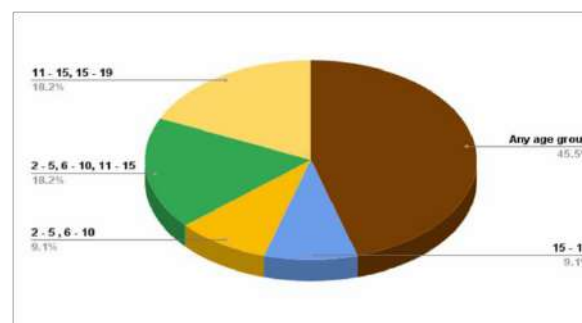

Figure 13. Age groups

Figure 14 indicates the teaching experience of the teachers who have participated in the survey.
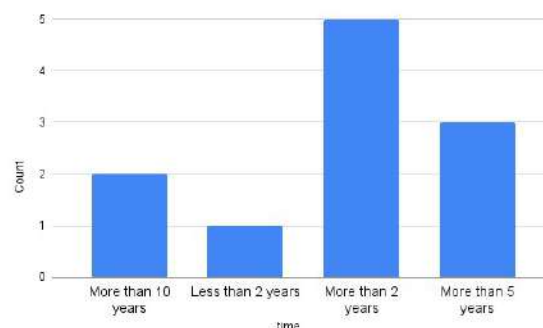

Figure 14. Teaching experience

The opinion of the teachers who are teaching foreign languages demonstrates the difficulties they face when teaching kids. Some have many kids in the classroom, and it is not easy to handle some students in the class. 71% of the teachers state that the kids use native languages when answering questions and communicating. It is challenging to teach some kids, and some don't concentrate on the lessons. Some educators demonstrate that some kids get bored and are not interested to learn the language. But some students are enthusiastic about learning and quickly understanding and getting used to the language easily at a young age. Lack of reference books with native language explanations for students' usage, Students show some hesitation when using the language in front of others are some of them. 91.7% of the educators recommend using the foreign language learning tools, while the other 8.3% of the teachers are going to recommend using the tool.

The educators' ideas and suggestions for the survey the researchers did are mentioned below. Make the learning tool more convenient for the kids and include attractive colours, pictures, videos, and animations to keep the kids using it. It will be successful because the kids love brain breakers rather than concentrating on the continuous lessons of the class. Make the interfaces simple and easy navigation system. Most of the teachers have stated to include lessons done by native speakers of these languages, accessible and attractive methods to practice characters and vocabulary, and practical sessions through conversations with native speakers. Successful because the kids love brain breakers rather than concentrating on the continuous lessons of the class. Make the interfaces simple and easy navigation system. Some of the teachers have stated to include lessons that are done by native speakers of these languages, easy and attractive methods to practice characters and vocabulary, and practical sessions through conversations with native speakers of the language.

5. Conclusion and Future Work

Living in a multicultural and multilingual world where communication is more crucial than before. The world is growing more international, and learning a foreign language may always provide an unexpected opportunity. Becoming multilingual has significant advantages. A foreign language may significantly impact one's job because people live in an interconnected society, and greater careers offer opportunities where understanding more than one language is required. Learning a foreign language may provide a sense of diverse societies in addition to increasing the possibilities of building a successful career or succeeding in the profession. People will be more equipped and enthusiastic about flying around the world and learning about other cultures and people.

Further, in this research paper, the researchers have surveyed and discussed the foreign language learning amount, age range, and the preferred languages to learn. Moreover, in future work, the researchers have proposed a system to learn the languages step by step from the beginning. This includes the basic areas of the language, which can be used by any age range. It also facilitates the study of grammar, spellings, tenses, and pronunciation which will be a little bit advanced in the language. After each step, a small quiz will enable the user to go to the next level. The users can get the progress of the learning and monthly reports of the learning. And also, the researchers hope to include a translator module in the proposed system.

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