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THE ROLE OF TELEVISION AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM IN EMPOWERING RURAL STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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The online learning and media-based learning have been introduced as alternative solutions to the education sector at the local and international levels in the context of Covid-19. Therefore, “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s house) Television (TV) programme was mainly introduced to the students who do not have the internet access to provide formal education during Covid 19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to examine the role of television in empowering rural school students in Sri Lanka. The FGDs were conducted with 36 students in Billewa Vidyalaya (School) in Anuradhapura District. The personal interviews were conducted with five key people in the same geographical area (purposive sampling). The qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Uses and Gratifications theory was used to examine the role of TV as an educational media in empowering rural school students. The results showed that television is an effective educational medium among rural school students during Covid-19 pandemic. There are also opportunities and challenges of using TV as an alternative educational tool during the pandemic. It is important to develop the ICT and social infrastructure in the rural areas to provide the ICT access to the rural communities. Combining the TV, radio and online platforms is also another option to empower rural students with formal education.

Keywords: Covid-19; television; educational medium; rural students; Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis which is the greatest challenge faced since World War Two. This global pandemic makes negative impacts on the socio-cultural, economic, political and education sectors at the local and international levels according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also emphasized that Covid-19 pandemic made the biggest disruption to the education sector at the local and global levels. More than 90% of the world student population was badly affected by the pandemic and some alternative mechanisms such as online learning and media-based learning have been introduced at the local and international levels. Many countries have implemented online teaching and learning via new technology for the education sector due to the seriousness of Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, UNESCO has given some short-term and long-term alternative suggestions for online based learning and teaching. The main purpose of providing these suggestions is to prepare the students for the personal adjustment to daily life and the replacement of face-to-face classes with online mode (UNESCO report on COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow, 2020).

Galagedarage (2015) notes that there is a digital divide between information rich and information poor locally and globally. Most of the rural people have some problems when it comes to new media usage due to the lack of IT infrastructure, lack of English and computer literacy, technical issues, affordability issues etc. The UNESCO has also emphasized that most

of the developing countries in Africa and Asia are still using television and/or radio-based programmes to implement distance education. Ghassabi & Zare-Farashbandi (2015) note that mass media such as television, radio, print media, new media and traditional media play a special role in providing information and entertainment, educating and motivating people on different contemporary issues and scenarios. Saglik and Ozturk (2001) note that the television is an effective audio-visual medium that covers a large number of viewers. The television medium can also be successfully used as a distance education tool.

Sri Lanka was also affected by Covid- 19 from March 2020. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has also made a serious negative impact on socio-economic, cultural, political and education sectors in Sri Lanka. In this context, the government and private schools, universities and the other education institutions are also facing some challenges with the traditional mode of education. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has introduced some alternative teaching and learning mechanisms via new technology. The circular on remote work arrangements during the global coronavirus pandemic-PS/GPA/Circular/33/2020 has been also issued by the government to officially implement the alternative teaching and learning mechanisms. As a result, online learning was introduced to primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country.

Karunarathne et al (2020) note that the majority agreed that the e- learning is an effective and a flexible alternative learning and teaching method during COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, many students face some challenges in e- learning such as technical issues, a lack of internet connectivity, higher charges, IT literacy, health issues like eye issues that limit the online learning. Especially the students in rural areas do not have the online education mainly due to unavailability of internet coverage or connection.

The computer literacy in Sri Lanka is also 30.8 percent and the internet usage is 30.3 percent in 2019 according to the Annual Computer Literacy report published by the Department of Census and Statistics. In this context, the Ministry of Education had to find some alternative solutions to provide the formal school education since the majority of school students throughout the country are away from online education. As a result, it was proposed to have an educational TV programme for school students who are having difficulties in internet based online learning as well as to facilitate all the students for the formal education. The Department of Census and Statistics report in 2018 presented that more than 80 percent of households have television sets in Sri Lanka, Therefore, the majority of students can have a TV based formal education with the new implementation. In this context, "Guru Gedara " (Teacher's house) TV programme was introduced by the National Institute of Education (NIE) which is under the Ministry of Education in 2020. "Guru Gedara" (Teacher's house) is telecast on Channel eye which is the government owned channel for youth and sports operated by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation (SLRC). In this context, the main problem is what is the contribution of this TV programme in empowering rural school students in Sri Lanka during Covid-19 pandemic. The literature also shows that no research has been conducted on this TV programme. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to examine the role of television in empowering rural school students in Sri Lanka during Covid 19 pandemic. The specific objective is to find out the opportunities and challenges of using TV as an alternative educational tool during the pandemic.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Television and Education

Communication has had a long history. The story of human civilization is in a way the story of communication. From fire and smoke signals, to telephony, to e-communications, man has

strived to convey messages over long distances. Language and writing were amongst the greatest intellectual achievements of humankind. Schramm (1964) also classifies the media into four generations: the first generation media (charts, graphs, written materials, exhibits, models chalkboards, demonstrations and dramatization), second generation media (printed textbooks, workbooks and tests), third generation media (photographs, slides, strips films, silent motion pictures, recordings, motion pictures, radio and television) and fourth generation media (programmed introductions, language laboratories, and electronic digital computers used in tutorial processes and in the swift retrieval of information). This shows that the television is a third generation medium.

Ternholm (2011) notes that television was the most popular medium before introducing the internet to the world. Newspapers required 200 years, while magazines took about 170 years, sound took about 60 years, and movies took about 50 years. The radio took more than 40 and television about 30 years to become popular in the world. The Internet took less than 15 years to become the most popular modern communication medium in the world. But still television is more popular in rural settings than modern communication media like the internet.

It is proven that television is more popular than the internet among rural communities even in this modern age. Television medium can be used for the development of people including the rural communities. Rao (2002) notes that developing countries have considered mass media such as television, radio and print media as factors that play a critical role in the process of the socioeconomic growth of a country. Schramm (1964) also states that mass media including television can act as a middleman, a watch man, a change agent etc. in empowering communities. Television can play a significant role as a powerful mass media which provides education, entertainment, motivation and information. In terms of education, television can provide both formal and informal education to the people.

In this context, it is important to identify the nature and the structure of the formal and informal education.

“Formal education corresponds to a systematic, organized education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology. Educative processes endowed with flexible curricula and methodology, capable of adapting to the needs and interests of students, for which time is not a pre-established factor but is contingent upon the student’s work pace, certainly do not correspond to those comprised by formal education, but fit into the so-called non-formal education- informal education” (Dip, 1987: 300).

Lerner (1954) notes that communication media such as radio, television, newspapers are used to empower people economically, socially, educationally, culturally and politically. The media especially empower rural communities about different issues like farming, health issues, legal issues, and education. The radio and television play an important role in educating people and, at the same time, bring in consumerism in different villages and towns. Radio and TV programmes help people to get a better understanding of social issues like farming, agriculture, health, legal issues, or small businesses. Radio forums and TV programmes are weapons to empower a rural grassroots community. The communication media have a huge appeal to ordinary people. Choudhury (2011) also notes that television is used to encourage people to become active in the development process. The contents of television programmes should create interest in viewers' minds and target people of all ages. Television programmes such as documentaries, developmental clips and series should enable viewers to provide better understanding and good formal and informal education. Formal educational television channels and programmes at the local and international levels can be used to give a better understanding of several issues and subjects.

Some educational television channels are available locally and internationally. Some of the TV channels are Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Annenberg Foundation (The Annenberg Channel), NASA TV, TV Ontario, Discovery Channel etc.

As far as the communication media in Sri Lanka are concerned, currently television, radio, print media and new media are famous among Sri Lankans. Television, radio and printed media are the mainstays of media usage among Sri Lankans. The number of televisions, radios, telephones, and computers are presented; 88.3 percent of people own radios, 80.8 percent of people own televisions, 44.5 percent of people own telephones while 24.5 percent of people own computers in Sri Lanka (Annual report by Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka 2011). Madhubhashini (2021) notes that presently there are more than 40 private television channels in Sri Lanka including some satellite networks and pay per view television networks. Most of the Sri Lankan newspapers, television and radio channels have online media platforms. Television is the most popular medium among the people compared to the other media.

There are mainly a few official educational TV channels and programmes in Sri Lanka apart from the online channels, YouTube channels such as “DP education”. “Nenasa” (Knowledge) Dialog TV was launched in 2009 and “Videsa” (Scientific Knowledge), a series of educational TV channels on PEO TV was also launched in 2018. Apart from these, several formal educational programmes are telecast on the state and private TV channels. For instance, “Thakshalawa” on Independent Television Network (ITN) and “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) on Sri Lanka Rupavahini Channel (SLRC). Apart from the formal programmes, some informal educational programmes like “Lakshathipathiya” (Millionaire) on Sirasa TV and “Travel with Chathura” on Derana TV etc. are also currently telecast.

2.2 Covid 19 and formal education

Covid-19 outbreak has made a serious impact on socio-economic, cultural, political, education sectors locally and globally. This has a negative impact on the whole education system from primary education to higher education. In this context, UNESCO has suggested implementing online teaching and learning via new technology for the education sector due to the seriousness of Covid-19 pandemic (UNESCO report on COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow, 2020). Therefore, e- learning has become more popular specially during COVID - 19 pandemic as it is essential to identify alternative mechanisms to conduct the teaching and learning during the pandemic. In this context, both teaching and learning, assessments, tests etc. are conducted on different LMS platforms. Oliveira et al (2020) note that the e- learning has been identified as one of the best alternative methods of learning during a crisis like Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, it was stated that the different forms of free platforms such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, Zoom, FB messenger, Google meet, We Chat, Schoology, and Moodle have been used for e- learning purposes.

On the other hand, it was reported that there are some challenges and opportunities in e- learning. Naresh & Reddy (2015) note that e- learning provides more opportunities for teaching and learning in India. But there are some challenges such as lack of infrastructure, less trained instructors, lack of financial support, government policies and less student readiness. Oliveira et al (2020) also note that it is evident that both teachers and students in the Philippines have positive attitudes in using the e-learning classrooms. Both parties were benefited by e- learning during COVID 19 pandemic, but one major problem is the lack of training of both teachers and students. The second major issue is the lack of resources like unstable internet connection, technical issues and lack of internet access.

According to UNICEF report in 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has also made a serious negative impact on socio-economic, cultural, political, educational sectors in Sri Lanka. In this context, the government and private schools, universities and other education institutions also face some challenges with the traditional mode of education. Therefore, The Ministry of Education has introduced some alternative teaching and learning mechanisms via new technology. As a result, the circular no PS/GPA/33/2020 was issued by the ministry in 2020 to facilitate the students with alternative learning opportunities via online and electrical solutions. As a result, online learning was introduced to primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country. But some challenges and opportunities of e- learning in Sri Lanka are also found. Karunaratne et al (2020) note that the students and teachers have a positive perception on e-learning during COVID-19 and it is believed that e- learning provides them more benefits and alternative opportunities for learning. It was also found that many students have some challenges in e- learning such as technical issues, lack of internet connectivity, higher charges, IT literacy, health issues like eye issues that limit the e- learning.

Galagedarage & Salman (2015) note that, there is a digital divide between urban and rural communities in the country in terms of internet usage. In other words, there is a huge gap between information rich and information poor in terms of ICT access and dissemination of ICT infrastructure throughout the country. The computer literacy in Sri Lanka is 30.8 percent and the internet usage is 30.3 percent in 2019 according to the Annual Computer Literacy report published by the Department of Census and Statistics. The internet usage on all the electronic devices such as mobile phones, desktops and laptops etc. are calculated for this percentage. It is further mentioned that 21 percent of urban people use the internet while 9% percent of rural communities use the internet. It is very clear that ICT usage is quite low in Sri Lanka and the rural community is mostly away from the new ICTs compared to urban people.

By knowing the reality of ICT usage among rural communities, it was also suggested in the above-mentioned circular that the importance of having an educational TV channel/ programme as an alternative medium/tool for those who are away from online education and ICT infrastructure. As a result, “Guru Gadara” (Teacher’s house) educational programme was introduced by the NIE with support of Eye Channel and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The coordinator for this programme in NIE mentioned that the main purpose of the educational TV programme is to support the school students who are having difficulties in internet based online learning as well as to facilitate all the students to provide the formal education by experienced teachers. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SLRC stated that, this TV programme was launched in April 2020 on “Channel Eye” in Sinhala medium. The “Guru Gadara” (Teacher’s house) is telecast in Tamil medium on Nethra TV which is the Tamil channel of SLRC. This is telecast every day from Sunday to Saturday from 4.00 am to midnight covering the whole country. The school syllabuses are covered from grade 3 to grade 13. It was also mentioned that SLRC does not have any involvement in producing the TV programme and NIE provides the leadership for producing and coordinating this programme. The studios in the Open university, NIE in Maharagama, Jaffna NEI branch and Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIT) are used to produce the programme. Apart from the TV telecast, all the programmes are uploaded to the NIE YouTube channel. Some selected programmes are telecast on Derana 24 channel.

Though the TV programme was launched a year ago, any research has not been conducted on this programme in Sri Lanka. Moreover, at least there is no research conducted on this programme by the research divisions in the NIE or SLRC. This study was conducted to fill in the gap in this research area.

As far as the international scenario is concerned, the television was used as an educational medium during Covid-19 pandemic. The UNICEF has reported that Covid-19 pandemic has created an unexpected crisis in terms of delivering education services to children. Poor children in most of the developing countries are badly affected by the pandemic. “Aprendo en casa” (I learn at home) programme is delivered on radio, TV and web-based platforms to provide instruction in Maths, Spanish, Social Sciences, Art and Physical Education for school students during the pandemic by the Ministry of Education in Peru with support of UNESCO, World Bank and UNICEF. Poor children including indigenous, migrant and disabled children who do not have the online access are benefited through the programme.

Furthermore, UNESCO has also announced that more than 90 percent of the world student’s population is badly affected by the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, online learning was introduced to the education system as an alternative solution. Some 826 million students (50%) do not have access to a computer or internet in the world. Therefore, many countries have introduced television and radio-based solutions as an alternative option for education. This solution has become more successful in most of the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Uses and Gratifications theory is the main theoretical framework for the study which mainly explains how people use media for their own needs. The theory is mainly concerned with how audiences actively select a specific medium to satisfy the needs and gratifications (Baran & Davis, 2012).

“Five needs that people bring to their media consumption in Uses and Gratification theory are cognitive needs (acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding), affective needs (emotional pleasurable or aesthetic experience), personal integrative needs (strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status), social integrative needs (strengthening contacts with family, friends, etc.) and Tension release needs (escape and diversion)” (Katz, Hass, and Gurevitch 1973: 167).

As far as the study is concerned, the students in Billewa Vidyalaya (school) in Anuradhapura District had to find an alternative medium without discontinuing the formal education during Covid-19 as the internet based online learning facility is not available for the students. Therefore, it is essential to find some available medium which supports the school education. As a result, “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s house) programme is chosen by the students to fulfil their immediate needs as it is the only island wide official programme introduced by the Ministry of Education. In this context, Uses and Gratification theory is the best theory for the study. Compared to new media like the internet, TV and radio are closer to rural people. Based on the opportunities and strengths of the television programme, students have chosen “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) as this TV programme is the best alternative solution to fulfil the needs of the students as explained in the theory. In other words, students actively select the specific TV programme to satisfy the learning needs and gratifications in the context of Covid-19.

When it comes to the five forms of main needs, it is clear that students use television as an educational medium during Covid 19 as there is no online learning facility for them. When it comes to cognitive needs, students need subject specific information and knowledge based on the grade and subject/ stream specialization.

As far as the affective needs are concerned, the learning process happens on television medium with visuals, effects and verbal communications. When it comes to personal integrative needs, the students need accurate and reliable subject specific knowledge. As a specific social community, this student group as a whole does not have the online learning facility due to the lack of ICT infrastructure facility in the area. During the 2nd wave of Covid, the students got together and discussed what they learnt from the TV programme. The students also share the knowledge with the other peers specially before the General Certificate of Education: Ordinary Level (O/L) examination. This shows that this school community uses these mechanisms and practices to fulfil the social integrative needs as well. In other words, this helps to fulfil the social integration skills strengthening the harmony and the unity of this particular community. As far as the tension release needs are concerned, the students somehow watch the TV programme to fulfil their formal educational needs with all the difficulties faced during the pandemic.

RESEARCH METHOD

The geographical location of the study is Billewa Vidyalaya (school) in Mahavilachchiya Divisional Secretariat in Anuradhapura District, North Central Province. Billewa is rural in geographical sense, which is known as a Wew gama (a tank-based village) or a Kele gama (a jungle-based village). The North Central province has the highest rural population (1,266,663-96 per cent) compared to other nine provinces in Sri Lanka according to the population statistics of the Department of Census and Statistics in 2011. The same report emphasises that in Sri Lankan context, Municipal Council, Urban Council and Town Council areas are “urban”, while Village Councils are “rural”.

Dissanayake (1985) notes that “Gama” in a rural setting (Rural village) is defined as a small settlement having between 1000- 3000 inhabitants which is smaller than a town and larger than hamlet. Billewa had 2012 of population according to the Department of Census and Statistics in 2011. It was also found that internet signal coverage is extremely poor in this area and about 365 students in Billewa could not have the online learning opportunity during COVID-19 pandemic. Billewa Vidyalaya (school) is the only school which is available for the children in the area and there are 13 teachers attached to the school. Classes are conducted from grade one to grade eleven. The O/L results of the students during the last five years are quite good according to the available statistics in the school. But it is challenging for the students to prepare for the O/L examination during the pandemic since the online learning is not available for the students. Apart from 25 students in the O/L class, the other students are also facing the same issue when it comes to formal education. In this context, it is mentioned that, the students watch “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) as an alternative educational tool to fulfil their educational needs during the pandemic. The location of the study was selected based on the above-mentioned criteria, statistics, facts and justifications to examine the role of television as an alternative educational medium in empowering rural students in the context of Covid-19.

The study used a qualitative approach to obtain data using Focused Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. FGD is a structured discussion used to obtain in-depth information (qualitative data-insight) from a group of people about a particular topic (Omar, 2018). Therefore, FGDs were conducted with 36 students covering all the grades from grade 3 to 11. For the FGDs, 4 students from each grade (2 males and 2 females) were selected as “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) only covers the syllabuses from grade 3. The purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. Three FGDs were parallelly conducted with the

support of three experienced moderators/ facilitators (12 students per each discussion). Omar (2010) suggests having 6-12 participants for each FGD. Mostly open-ended questions were asked to get critical, insightful and informative data on the given issue/ topic.

The personal interviews were conducted with five key people in the same geographical area: principle, primary section head, section head from grade 6-11, director, Mahavilachchiya zonal educational office and three randomly selected parents of the students. The data were collected in January 2021 with support of three research assistants. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Some limitations of the research can be identified. The sample size is also limited as the study was carried out only in Billewa in Anuradhapura district. But the sample size and the geographical area can be expanded in future research using both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to generalize the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As far as the socio-economic and cultural situations are concerned, the people in Billewa face some problems in day-to-day life such as elephant- human conflicts, lack of clean water, post war challenges, low income, childhood marriages, illegal marriages and extra marital affairs etc. The Covid-19 pandemic made their life more challenging due to domestic violence, low income and a lack of formal education for children etc.

When it comes to media usage, newspapers, magazines, mobile phones, radio and television are mostly used by the students. Three students out of thirty-six have desktop computers at home, but the main problem is that internet coverage is extremely poor in this area. The parents of all the students have mobile phones. But only 6 students can have access to the smart mobile phones with support of the parents while the other parents only have basic mobile phones which cannot be connected to the internet. Though a few students have access to smart mobile phones, the internet coverage of the area is extremely poor. Moreover, the internet connections including fixed, Wi-Fi or mobile data are not available for the people in the area. Furthermore, the mobile data signal coverage is extremely poor. But all the students have televisions in their houses. It was found that the parents and students mostly watch Hindi mega teledramas and Sinhala teledramas. The results showed that from 7 pm to 11 pm both students and parents watch the teledramas even without watching “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) or engaging in studies. The same practice has been used on the weekends to watch movies on the TV channels. This TV usage behaviour has continued during the pandemic as well.

Especially during Covid 19 pandemic, television and radio are used by people. The television medium was mainly used for educational purposes. It was reported that parents encouraged the students to use television as an educational medium during the pandemic since the online classes are not available. Among the other educational programmes, the students had watched “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) to have formal school education. Because this programme is continuously telecast covering the whole country from April 2020 until now. Since almost all the students are Sinhalese, the Sinhala medium programme on Channel eye was watched by the students.

The students and teachers mentioned that the TV programme is very useful for the students to learn the school syllabus for all the subjects during the pandemic. It was further

emphasized that the TV programme itself covers the whole syllabus by the experienced teachers. Therefore, the TV programme has been continuously watched by most of the students in Billewa. The students in the grade 5 and 11 mentioned that this programme was very useful for them to prepare for the year 5 scholarship examination and the O/L examination. During the 2nd wave of Covid, the students did some peer group activities, revisions and collaborative learning before the examinations. “It is natural to use television, a multifunctional tool, in providing student support. Giving support service to the students, though expensive, is a significant factor in passing from information to learning (Gibson, 1998 :247).

There were some factors that affected students to limit the alternative learning option during the pandemic. The stress caused due to the domestic violence and low income had made a negative impact on the TV based formal learning process. Some parents highlighted that the children were asked to limit watching “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) due to the financial crisis faced by the whole family. It was mentioned that paying the electricity bill is also a problem for them due to low income during the pandemic.

Gokce (1997) notes that the one-way teaching is not that effective on television medium due to the less interactivity. The main limitations of “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) are less interactivity and feedback of the students. The students are unable to respond to the sessions to get further clarifications or explanations same as in the classroom sessions. It was suggested that SMS or call facility can be given to the students to interact with the TV session. But the NIE coordinator and the SLRC CEO mentioned that it is challenging to have live programmes with the limited resources and funds available for the programme. Saglik and Ozturk (2001) note that producing and broadcasting television programs are expensive and professional expertise is needed to maintain the quality of the programme.

It was also reported that the liveliness of the teaching is not maintained in the TV programme. The majority of teachers are excited and do not maintain the friendliness and liveliness of the programme. Therefore, it was suggested to maintain the liveliness and the interactivity in the videos by adding more pictures, visuals, graphics, animations, texts etc. The students emphasized that Sinhala subject is taught creatively and interactively than other subjects. But it is not effective in teaching science and technical subjects on TV due to less practical input.

SLRC CEO highlighted that SLRC does not have any involvement in producing the TV programme and the quality of the production is not good in terms of lighting, video quality etc. He has further emphasized that Eye Channel telecasts the TV programme without having any profits or sponsorships since the SLRC does a national service as a state-owned TV channel in Sri Lanka. Since SLRC currently runs without profits, the CEO made a request from the Ministry of Education to give some sponsorships for the programme. It was also reported that SLRC is not in the LMRB ratings report from the beginning of 2021. Channel eye channel had to telecast the recent Sri Lankan cricket match as Channel eye is the official sport and youth channel of SLRC. Therefore, “Guru Gedara” (Teacher’s home) stopped telecasting during this particular time period since sponsorship is needed and official responsibility should be done by the channel.

It was also mentioned that coordinating the TV programme is not that easy during the pandemic with some other challenges. The NIE provides the leadership for producing and coordinating this programme. Producing the TV series is expensive and moreover it is a more technical and practical process. Bates (1998) notes that, producing a TV programme is highly

technical and more staff involvement is essential to maintain the quality of the programme. The NIE coordinator has further mentioned that selecting the qualified and experienced teachers is done in a transparent and a systematic manner to maintain the quality of the programme.

The training and research division in SLRC has also not done any audience research on this programme. Therefore, it is difficult to find the audience views on the TV programme. The NIE coordinator for the programme has also mentioned that NIE or any other government institution has not done research to find out the audience view or impact of TV programme on school children. Therefore, the findings and suggestions of the research can be seriously considered by the relevant authorities or policy makers to take necessary actions and implementations to have a methodical and systematic learning mechanism for the students in both urban and rural settings. In other words, the original findings and knowledge in this unreached research area can be contributed to establish a better learning environment for school students during the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

As far as the results/ findings are concerned, the aim and objectives were achieved, and the problem was answered in the study. In other words, the role of television as an educational medium during covid-19 has been examined and the opportunities and challenges of using TV as an alternative educational tool during the pandemic have been found out. The results showed that television is an effective educational medium among rural school students during Covid-19 pandemic. In other words, there is a positive impact of television on school students in the rural setting during Covid-19 pandemic. Because the students do not have the internet facility to participate in online classes due to the extremely poor internet coverage. Some socio-economic and cultural factors such as financial issues, domestic violence etc. are also limiting their TV based learning mechanism. There are some challenges in producing and telecasting the TV programme such as limited feedback, technical issues and issues related to sponsorship and quality of the production etc.

In this context, some improvements are needed to maintain the liveliness, friendliness and interactivity of the TV programme as discussed in the previous section. The Ministry of Education, NIE and SLRC should take some initiatives to find a stable and official financial support to produce and telecast “Guru Gedara” programme in a professional and a high-quality manner. It is also important to develop the ICT and social infrastructure in the rural areas to provide the ICT access to the rural communities. Internet, electricity as well as the other infrastructure facilities are essential in using new media. Combining TV, radio and online platforms is also another option to empower rural students with formal education. UNESCO has also emphasized that learning on such combined platforms is an alternative method to ensure the quality of school education.

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