

Phonemic and phonological development in the speech of 3 to 4 year old Sinhala-speaking children living in the Rathnapura district whose mothers are employed or not employed

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This study investigates the phonemic and phonological development of Sinhala speaking children, age between 3 to 4 years, living in the Rathnapura district. It focused on the possible effect of age, gender and socio economic status (SES) and whether the mother is employed or not employed.

The total sample consisted of 80 children (44 females and 36 males) from preschools in the Rathnapura district. They were selected using a purposive and convenient sampling method. The sample was split into 2 age groups(3;0 – 3;6 and 3;7- 4;0) of 40 participant in each. Gender and SES were considered within groups and age was considered between groups. An informal picture based assessment tool based on Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP) (DEAP, Dodd et al., 2003) was used to obtain speech samples.

The assessment tool consisted of 75 coloured pictures which represent speech sounds in word initial, medial or final positions, in identical consonant clusters (reduplication) and in non identical consonant clusters. The speech samples were gathered during spontaneous naming or in repetition. Inferential statistics and t-tests were used in the analysis to determine the influence of age, gender and SES on phoneme accuracy and the acquisition of phonology.

The study found that Sinhala speaking children acquired all the vowels and 22 consonants by the age of 4 years. Phonological accuracy increased with age with fewer typical phonological processes observed. Gender and SES were not found to significantly influence phonemic or phonological acquisition. The study found some language specific phonological features of Sinhala compared to English norms. The findings have clinical implications for service delivery.

Keywords: Phonemic, Phonological Development, Socio-economic Status