

**Education and Digital Literacy as Drivers of Social Mobility in Sri Lanka.**

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## Introduction

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Dignity is not something that people earn because of their class, race, religion, gender, educational qualifications, profession or any other advantage. It is something all humans are born with simply by being humans, all people deserve respect. According to the teachings of the Catholic church the phrase “Human dignity” is used specifically to support the church’s belief that every human life is sacred. Dignity is something that God gives to the human beings by creating them in the creator’s own image. “God created man kind in his own image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them.”( Genesis 1:27).

According to Buddhist philosophy, Buddhism beings with the understanding that humans are “rare” because they can make choices that lead to enlightenment. When everyone is equal, they are all equally deserving of basic respect and rights.

In contemporary history education has played a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining human dignity in societies worldwide. Sri Lanka being an island country had been influenced by many cultures, philosophies and political regimes. Literacy rate and level of education have been utilized in analyzing social mobility in Sri Lanka. The reasons behind educational attainments are recognized by this study. The long term poverty, racial discriminations, gender inequalities have negatively affected on the upward social mobility of individuals in Sri Lanka. When it comes to the modern era just literary or ability to read and write has being just an inadequate measurement. The possession of both hard skills and soft skills is vital for human existence today. Computer literacy is a key skill and a basic development criteria now. The matter of being illiterate in use of computer and digital devices has become a reason to get penalized by the society. The qualitative data presented in this writing will help the readers analyze the Sri Lankan experience of modern day human dignity.

### The Old and the New Measurements : Literacy Vs. Computer Literacy

Literacy Rate (%)		Computer Literacy Rate (%)	
Sri Lanka	93.3	Sri Lanka	35.9

  

By Gender		By Gender	
Male	94.0	Male	37.3
Female	92.6	Female	34.6

  

By Sector		By Language Literacy	
Urban	95.8	Sinhala	41.9
Rural	93.3	Tamil	42.5
Estate	82.6	English	74.0

## Why Literacy is Important?

Literacy is the key for effective communication. It is basic necessity for the upward social mobility. Literacy is not a privilege but a basic human right. The research findings show that Sri Lankans prefer any kind of employment and they are always eager in economic mobility. Employment data plays an important role as a viable social indicator of understanding the economy of the country.

Employment Rate		Unemployment Rate	
Sri Lanka	95.6	Sri Lanka	4.4
Male	97.0	Male	3.0
Female	92.9	Female	7.1

People are compelled to get employed informally in order to maintain life, in other words they struggle to survive. Informal employment is higher among persons with lower level of education compared to that of persons with higher level of education.

Level of Education	Total		Employment			
			Formal Employment		Informal Employment	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	7,949,751	100.0	2,663,170	33.5	5,286,581	66.5
Grade 5 & Below	923,763	100.0	94,294	10.2	829,469	89.8
Grade 6 - 10	3,469,664	100.0	633,267	18.3	2,836,397	81.7
G.C.E.(O/L)	1,519,303	100.0	552,799	36.4	966,505	63.6
G.C.E.(A/L) & above	2,037,020	100.0	1,382,810	67.9	654,210	32.1

## Nobodies to Somebodies.

A literate person can become somebody in the society even though he/she was born as unimportant. The ability to read and write has been the basic qualification to be recognized as an educated individual. Literacy helps people to get updated with the changes of their surrounding. Effective communication always has brought positive consequences to the society. Illiteracy has created long lasting effects to some societies. Some miscommunications have ended up with social riots, conflicts and civil wars. Communication through literacy is a

two way process. It produces both receptive skills and productive skills as well. Here is a general comparison of adult literacy rates in South Asia.

- Afghanistan – 38.2%
- Pakistan – 59.1% or 62.3%
- Nepal – 64.7% or 67.9%
- Bhutan – 64.9%
- Bangladesh – 72.9%
- India – 74.4%
- Sri Lanka – 92.1%
- Maldives – 99.1%

Sri Lanka has the highest literacy rate in South Asia and overall, one of the highest literacy rates in Asia. Education plays a central role in the economic development and cultural growth of a country. Sri Lanka has to take actions to enhance literacy in the job market value. A job-oriented education system, effective communication skills, and literacy in information technology have become the timely necessities for Sri Lanka. This strategy will ultimately improve the net value of human capital in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has maintained literacy rate without a vast gap or disparity between male and female population. It is a significant contribution towards maintenance of dignity among the folk.

Year	Male	Female
2020	93.8%	92.2%
2021	94.3%	92.3%
2022	93.9%	92.4%
2023	94.0%	92.6%
2024	94.0%	92.6%

On the other hand, there is equal distribution of literacy rate throughout the island. The imbalance is very low between males and females.

District	Literacy rate (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	93.3	94.0	92.6
Colombo	96.7	96.9	96.5
Gampaha	96.7	96.3	97.0
Kalutara	95.6	96.5	94.8
Kandy	93.8	94.5	93.2
Matale	91.4	91.4	91.4
Nuwara Eliya	88.2	92.1	84.9
Galle	93.8	94.2	93.4
Matara	93.2	94.1	92.4
Hambantota	91.4	91.4	91.3
Jaffna	96.7	96.6	96.7
Mannar	97.1	97.6	96.6
Vavuniya	90.6	92.4	89.0
Mullaitivu	92.6	94.2	91.3
Kilinochchi	90.2	91.1	89.5
Batticaloa	87.3	88.2	86.5
Ampara	88.8	91.0	87.0
Trincomalee	89.6	90.7	88.6
Kurunegala	93.9	94.6	93.3
Puttalam	92.0	92.2	91.8
Anuradhapura	93.9	95.1	92.9
Polonnaruwa	90.0	90.4	89.7
Badulla	88.2	91.7	85.1
Monaragala	92.2	93.7	90.6
Rathnapura	90.4	90.5	90.3
Kegalle	94.8	94.6	95.0

Younger cohorts show higher literacy rates and this indicates the achievements of the primary education of the country.

Age group	Literacy rate (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	93.3	94.0	92.6
10 – 14	99.1	98.9	99.3
15 – 19	98.9	98.8	99.1
20 – 24	98.9	98.6	99.1
25 – 29	98.4	97.8	99.0
30 – 34	98.0	97.3	98.5
35 – 39	97.6	96.7	98.3
40 – 44	96.4	95.8	96.9
45 - 49	95.3	95.2	95.5
50 – 54	93.0	92.6	93.2
55 - 59	89.9	91.1	88.9
60 +	83.2	86.4	80.6

## Why Computer Literacy is Important?

Computer Literacy Rate (%) – Sri Lanka: 35.9%

By Gender

Male: 37.3%

Female: 34.6%

By Language Literacy:

- Sinhala: 41.9%

- Tamil: 42.5%

- English: 74.0%

Computer literacy immensely contributes to the supply of skills and knowledge based economy. With compared to developed countries, Sri Lanka maintains a slower pace in the technological advancement of computer literacy. Computer literacy rate by language literacy shows how English language proficiency influences the use of computers and digital devices in communication. The following data reveals how educational background has impacted on computer literacy.

By Educational attainment	2022	2023	2024
No schooling	3.1	1.8	2.4
Below grade 6	12.9	14.3	10.8
Grade 6-10	24.8	27.7	23.6
G.C.E (O/L)	49.1	51.9	47.5
G.C.E. (A/L) or above	77.8	80.1	75.6

Computer literacy is more than just a technical skill. It is a vital form of empowerment that helps preserve and promote human dignity in the present world. It gives individuals the knowledge and skill to navigate the digital world. Computer literacy enables autonomy, challenges political power structures, promotes equality, and encourages creativity and critical thinking. They contribute to the human capacity to live a life of dignity and a life with purpose. Sri Lankan society needs a conversion, where there is computer and digital literacy lead its people towards an educationally powerful nation. Internet or artificial intelligence is similar to the invention of fire by the pre-historic man. It can be used either to destroy something or to feed someone by cooking a meal. Technology is basically neutral. The educators, including the religious or spiritual leaders, have a great role to play in teaching how to use it.

“The internet could be a very positive step towards education, organization, and participation in a meaningful society.”

“Technology is kind of like a hammer. The hammer doesn't care whether you use it to build a house, or whether a torturer uses it to crush somebody's skull." ( Noam Chomsky, 1957)

## **Conclusion**

The evidence provided here helps to perceive the fact that Sri Lanka is in a slow pace in achieving modern aspects related to the demands of twenty first century; especially in soft skills. Education should literate the minds, nurture critical thinking, and develop communicative competence. When a country neglects soft skills it risks creating a population that can not question authority, a work force that functions mechanically without ethical or social awareness and a culture where dialogue, respect, and human values decline. Neglecting educational needs and soft skill development is a moral and social crisis. Sri Lanka has got to invest more on development of education and soft skills.

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