Interactive multimedia drama to popularize the tea industry among school children in tea growing areas of Sri Lanka

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The Sri Lankan tea industry, which produces arguably the best black tea ("Ceylon Tea"), plays a major role in the economy of Sri Lanka and provides a reasonable family income. However, the industry is facing serious problems due to lack of participation by the younger generation. The rural young children of the tea smallholders and the plantations workers are the most important group that needs to be attracted to tea cultivation and other related occupations. Hence, special motivational programmes need to be developed to attract them to the tea industry, which has a high potential for making profits.

Entertainment-education is a more effective way to influence attitudes and behavior than traditional persuasive messages. Interactive drama methods are helpful in achieving educational goals by creating a hospitable space for conversational learning. Therefore the objective of this study was to develop an interactive multimedia drama programme to create awareness, enthusiasm and positive attitudes among senior school children in the tea growing areas towards the tea industry.

A preliminary needs identification survey was conducted with 70 randomly selected high school children from nine schools in Matara district. It was found that they have negative attitudes towards the tea industry and poor knowledge of its economic importance, health effects and mechanization. Based on these findings, an Interactive Multimedia Drama programme was developed incorporating Education-Entertainment, Personal-Dramatic, and Theoretical-Practical message treatments. Selected features of street drama, interactive drama and stage drama and multimedia were blended to present the key messages

A before and after study was conducted in the preliminary evaluation of the programme using 60 school children from a rural mixed school in Kandy district. Results showed that there was significant knowledge gain ($P<0.05$) on health effects, economic importance and machinery use in tea. The schoolteachers and the extension staff also confirmed that the interactive multimedia drama was entertaining and effective. This programme is proposed to be improves using further evaluations and to be used in the '150 years of Ceylon Tea' campaign in the year 2017, to motivate the young rural and plantation youth to engage in the tea industry.