

Exploring Secondary School Students' Understanding of Solid Waste Management; a Case of Uyangoda Maha Vidyalaya, Kamburupitiya

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There have been few studies that have documented waste management issues in Sri Lankan educational institutions, particularly student perspectives. This study assessed the students' awareness of solid waste and their current solid waste management practices. It is majorly identified the challenges of maintaining effective solid waste management practices and analyzed the students' preference to maintain recommended solid waste management system. Grade 10 students (N=100) from *Uyangoda Maha Vidyalaya, Kamburupitiya* in educational zone of *Mulatiyana-Hakmana* were selected as the population and 35 students were randomly selected as the sample. The sample was surveyed using a structured questionnaire in January 2022. Mainly descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. As per the results, considering the students' level of awareness regarding solid waste, the majority of students (42.8%) were aware of solid waste management while 22.8% had a full awareness. Lack of interest is the main challenge for the majority of students (40%) to maintain effective solid waste management practices. 25.7% of the respondents stated that lack of guidance was a challenge for solid waste management while 20% of them indicated that lack of knowledge was the main challenge. Moreover, 14.3% of the school children mentioned that inadequate space has become a major challenge for sustainable solid waste management practices. School children mainly suggested implementing recycling system and proper waste management system as means to manage solid waste. This exploratory study is of great significance for in depth further studies for implementing public investment decisions to improve the quality of solid waste management systems in Sri Lanka and to increase students' awareness of waste management issues and practices.

Keywords: Knowledge, Solid waste management, Students, Understanding, Awareness