

Promotion of reading habit among school children in Sri Lanka

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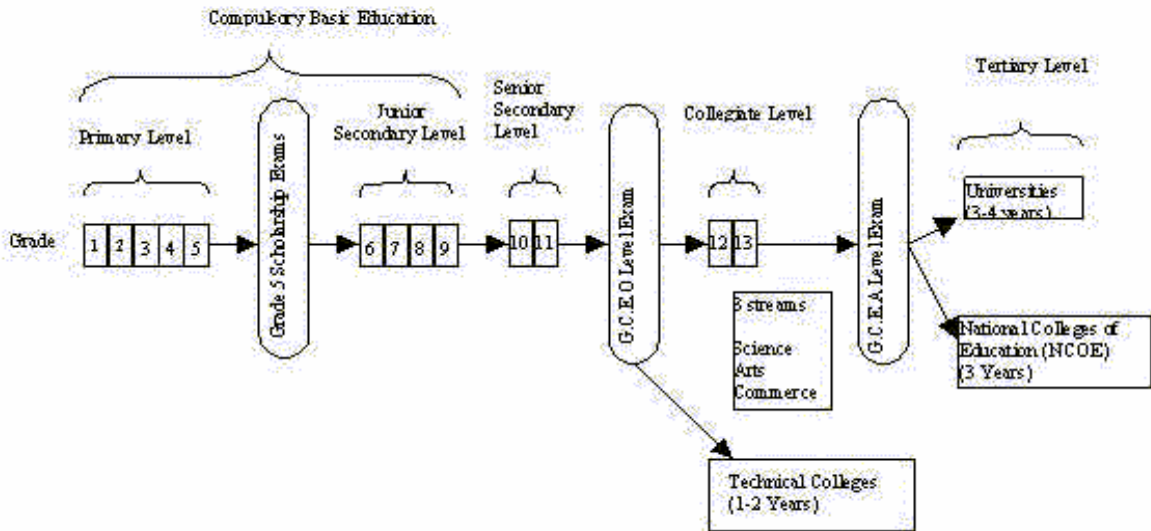
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School Library Development in Sri Lanka is a large scale project which covers 4000 schools and includes building construction, distribution of books, furniture and equipment and training of human resources funded by the World Bank. BOBLEP (Book Based Language Enrichment Programme) developed from the concept of reading promotion within the library project. The project not only promotes reading using the purchased books, but it also promotes production of books by school children as well as teachers. It was decided as a result of the success of the project, to expand similar reading promotion activities in general. Teacher and Teacher Librarian education programmes of Sri Lanka incorporated a variety of such activities to train reading promotion among school children. The full paper will present the history and the structure of the project and activities carried out by the teacher librarians to expand it from an English language project to a reading promotion project conducted by the school libraries. It is expected that by sharing the information of this project, other developing countries which face similar constraints in providing suitable reading material can gain useful ideas.

Introduction

The figure below depicts the current school education system of Sri Lanka. Grades 1-5 is known as primary education and grades 6-9 is known as junior secondary education. These are the stages of compulsory basic education. Grades 10-11 are senior secondary level while grades 12-13 are known as collegiate level.

Figure 1 School System



Source: Ministry of Education (2005)

Sri Lankan education system is characterized by three National Examinations conducted by the Department of Examinations:

- Grade 5 Scholarship Examination,
- General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) examination, and
- General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examination.

In 2002 there were 9,829 government schools, 561 Pirivenas (Buddhist Monasteries) and 66 Private schools (Registered before 1960) in Sri Lanka. The government schools consist of 320 National schools managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and 9,509 provincial schools, managed by the Provincial Councils.

Sri Lankan government schools are classified into 4 types:

- Type 1AB schools with classes up to grade 13 including A' Level Science Stream;
- Type 1C schools with classes up to grade 13 but without A' Level science stream;
- Type 2 schools with classes up to grade 11 and
- Type 3 schools with classes up to grade 5.

In addition to the Government Schools there are 33 non-fee-levying Assisted Private Schools and 33 fee levying autonomous Private Schools. There is another category of English Medium International Schools approved and registered by the Board of Investments Sri Lanka. The number of international schools which are not controlled by the MOE has increased recently in urban areas. In 2002 there were 4,027,075 students and 191,812 teachers in 9,826 government schools. (World Bank 2005)

Education policy reforms

In 1991, a National Education Commission was constituted with the mandate of advising the government on overall education policy covering all aspects of education and they identified a set of Overall National Goals and also prepared a list of Educationally Relevant Goals, which are derivatives of these overall national goals. It also identified a set of basic competencies, which are essential for the attainment of educationally relevant goals.

In order to implement the policy recommendations the government of Sri Lanka sought aid from foreign missions and the World Bank provided credit for two major projects; General Education Project (GEP) first and second phases and the Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment (TETD) Project.

Second General Education Project (GEP2)

This project started in 1997 and completed in December 2005. Total project value is US\$ million 70. The objectives of the GEP2 are to improve the quality, access, management and financing of existing education programmes, and to increase education's responsiveness to economic needs and to reducing poverty. There are nine components of this project;

1. **Curriculum development**, which prepares a strategy to implement a sequential and cyclical curriculum in all subjects for grades 1-9, improves curriculum management, and trains teachers;
2. **Textbooks/educational publications**, which improves textbook content and physical conditions, allows re-use and a multiple textbook option, increases private sector printing, and continues private sector delivery;
3. **School facilities rationalization**, which increases equitable and cost-effective allocation of educational facilities and libraries;
4. **Quality inputs**, which supplies educational materials and equipment matching the curriculum for elementary and junior high schools;
5. **Libraries component**, which provides books, equipment, furniture, and training for staff in library management;
6. **Education management and planning**, which upgrades planning capacity and develops national, provincial, and institutional plans, strengthens quality assurance and financing mechanisms, and defines policies and lines of authorities;

7. **Education financing**, which implements a formula to improve resource allocation, trains staff, and allocates management tools and equipment;
8. **Impact analysis studies**; and
9. **Project coordination**

As a key activity of the Libraries Component of GEP2, a School Library Development Unit (SLDU) was established within the Ministry of Education with the following mandates;

- Development of policies for the school library sector.
- Development of 4000 libraries in selected schools throughout the country, which includes construction of new libraries and renovation of existing libraries.
- Provision of books (reference sources, supplementary reading and light reading), furniture and equipment to these libraries.
- Development of the reading habit through "Books in School".
- Development of library management skills of the MOE and provincial administrators.
- Development of library staff.

Reading Promotion Project

Book-Based Language Enrichment Programme (BOBLEP), though not directly related to library development project requires a mention here as it serves to promote the reading habit among Sri Lankan school children.

In 1994 International Book Development (IBD) and Canadian Organisation for Development through Education (CODE) recommended the introduction of mini libraries in the schools, to the MOE of Sri Lanka. In 1995, Wendy Pye Ltd. of New Zealand accepted a contract with IBD to undertake a "Book Flood" project in a sample of primary schools. This company provided funds for books, training and evaluating the impact of the project. A sample of 20 small schools from Kegalle district and 10 similar schools from Colombo District as a control group were selected for the project.

The pilot project was successful and as a result a proposal to expand the project to 200 schools was accepted as part of the GEP2. A national co-ordinator was appointed and the project was named BOBLEP. A full description of the original pilot project can be found in Elly (1998) and Kuruppu (2001). After a period of 12 months BOBLEP was evaluated and resulting from its success, it was expanded to a further 600 schools and again to a further 2000 schools. Later the MOE decided to expand the project to all schools and to introduce the project to teachers through National Colleges of Education (NCOEs)

A set of English books were distributed to about 7000 schools - except to those which do not have primary classes. These include schools which received library support from GEP2, and schools which did not receive such support as well as Types C schools. Only "Big Books" (large size picture books with limited text designed to teach English language) have been distributed to Type C schools. When the pilot project was started, eight provincial co-ordinators and eight provincial BOBLEP trainers attended a two-week training at Wendy Pye Ltd. in New Zealand. In 2001 and 35 teachers from 20 schools were given the following training by staff of Wendy Pye Ltd. in Sri Lanka in the same year

1. Two-day workshop in shared reading, story reading aloud by the teacher, role play of stories, language study, book care and storage and making of big books.
2. One-day follow up workshop to consolidate the above and to introduce paired reading, silent reading, questioning techniques, and simple story writing based on books.
3. One-day workshop in sharing experiences, receiving feedback, displaying samples created by children i.e. masks, puppets and big books.

Teachers and Teacher Librarians in promoting Reading

Since there was a severe lack of trained library professionals, it was decided to develop 4000 teachers as teacher librarians at the beginning and the project was searching for an organisation to undertake this responsibility. A proposal to establish a postgraduate institute of Library & Information Sciences was submitted to the World Bank and it agreed to fund the establishment of the institute on the condition that it trains these teacher librarians. National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (NILIS) was established in 1999 as an institution affiliated to the University of Colombo.

There are two types of courses conducted by NILIS for school library sector; Short-term programs (workshops, seminars, lectures and certificate courses) and Diplomas and Postgraduate programs. Following courses are conducted at present;

1. Certificate in School Librarianship – a six months course for school library staff who have had no training in librarianship before.
2. Certificate in Teacher Librarianship – a six months course for school teachers who have had no training in librarianship before.
3. ICT for School/Teacher Librarians – A six months course for school / teacher librarians.
4. Diploma in Teacher Librarianship – a 300-hour diploma course for trained teachers.
5. Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship – one-year (full time) course for teachers with a Bachelors degree from a recognized higher education institute.
6. Postgraduate Diploma in Library & Information Science – two-year (part time) course for those with a Bachelors degree from a recognized university. This is an entry point for the new entrants to the profession.

7. Masters in Teacher Librarianship – one-year (full time) course for teachers with a Bachelors degree and a PG Diploma in Education or any other discipline from a recognized higher education institute.

A module on Reading Promotion is included in all teacher librarianship education and training programmes conducted by NILIS since 2003. English Library Activities Development Committee established in the Ministry of Education to monitor the library development activities decided that Reading promotion project should be introduced not only to English Teachers but to all Teachers and Teacher Librarians who qualify from the National Colleges of Education (Seventeen National Colleges are the bodies responsible for pre service teacher training in Sri Lanka) in addition to the teacher librarians trained by NCOEs.

The author was assigned the task of reviewing the curriculum of the General Information Skills module of the NCOEs in 2005 and a module on Reading Promotion was introduced to the National Colleges accordingly.

Reading Promotion module

The training on reading promotion at NILIS and the NCOEs basically consists of the following;

1. Six hours of introductory lectures on;
 - Significance of reading promotion among school children, reading promotion initiatives by the Ministry of Education including BOBLEP.
 - Story telling; Purpose of story telling, selecting and preparing for story telling, presenting a story.
 - Story telling; for different age groups, for children with special needs.
2. Twenty hours of Reading promotion activities which, students have to cover as self study projects with guidance from the tutor includes the following
 - a). Making two Big Books on a selected topic paying attention to the following criteria.
 - Colorfulness
 - Large clear and attractive pictures
 - Simple language
 - Simple story with an appropriate plot for students
 - Any other characteristic

b). Twenty hours of reading promotion activities to suit different grades. Books mentioned in these exercises are only examples. Learners are free to use any children's book which is appropriate to their language and religion and they will interact with the school children in carrying out these projects.

Primary	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary
<p>Select any Sinhala, Tamil or English poem from a book of poems for children. Sing it to the students several times and let the students re-write the poem on a sheet of paper and draw a relevant picture. Emphasis should be laid on use of attractive colours.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(1 hour)</p>	<p>Recommend the children a collection of short stories Ask the children to prepare a folder containing five folk stories. They should include a variety of contexts like religious, humorous, historical etc. Stories should be written in an attractive manner and suitable pictures drawn.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>	<p>Read any suitable novel from a list recommended by the school and talk about it to the fellow students for 10 minutes using the outline given. below;</p> <p><i>Title, Author, Publisher, Price, Whether book is available in the school library, Indication of the plot (Avoid summarizing the full story), What you like and what you don't like, Do you recommend it to others.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>
<p>Read a story book to the children. It may be an incident in which a child falls into trouble by not following the advice of adults. (Example <i>W!hshd</i> by Janaki Suriyaarachchi published by Tikiri Prakashakayo) Ask the children to relate similar incidents which they faced by not listening to adults. Emphasis the message that they have to listen to advice of grown ups.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(1 hour)</p>	<p>Select a book on Creative Art (Example <i>Nirmana</i> by H.K. Dilina Jayanthi Published by S. Godage & Bros.). Using the creative activities build a story book of about 10-12 A4 pages.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>	<p>Read a book of a particular author recommended by the school and write a review of the book of not less than 500 words. Use the outline given in the above exercise</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>
<p>Read a short story from a book (Example "The Great Wise Man" by J.B. Dissanyake published by Sumitha Publishers) by to children and ask the whole class to enact the story as a play. Emphasis should lay on adopting materials like flowers, leaves, old newspapers, cardboard cartons etc. from their own environment without spending money on costumes and props.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>	<p>Read a collection of religious stories or something similar which gives good advice to children. Design three book marks using proverbs or messages from these books</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(2 hours)</p>	<p>select a theme (Space, United Nations, History of a country, Cultural event etc.) and organise an educational event to depict this theme using books, journals and other material.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(5 hours)</p>

A wide range of products which supports reading promotion are produced by teachers as well as students as outcomes of these activities as indicated in the Power Point presentation.

Areas for future developments in Sri Lanka

The art of Story Telling

Although Sri Lanka has a history of listening culture rather than a reading culture, story telling seems to have faded away from the contemporary society, especially from homes where both parents are employed. It is time to train professional story tellers to fill this void. There is a possibility for NILIS to train Teacher Librarians in the art of story telling. Under the present circumstances in which, a considerable number of children becoming orphans and facing other psychological conflicts, this may be taken up as early as possible to support them as well.

Building Partnerships

A recent exposure to the UK environment indicated that an excellent system of partnership has been built up among authors, editors, publishers, librarians, story tellers, professional bodies, teachers, parents and the readers. This kind of a cordial partnership is absent in Sri Lanka, but it needs to be developed gradually. By developing such partnerships, reading can be promoted in a more efficient manner.

The authors and publishers need to be provided with a sound understanding of the qualities of good children's books and encourage them to produce books of such quality. It is planned to obtain sample copies of children's books by NILIS and get the Teacher Librarians to evaluate them according to set criteria so that eventually there will be reviews of children's books for the librarians and others to use in selecting books for children.

The National Library should consider expanding their Reading Month to a national reading year and implement a variety of activities in collaboration with the British Council, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Cultural affairs and other stakeholders.

Role of libraries in promoting reading

So far libraries are not active in this field. The key reason for this may be the absence of children's librarianship or children's literature in the LIS curricula. In public libraries emphasis on children's centres are minimal. As a starting point, NILIS will introduce a

module on children's literature to the next group of Masters and PG Diploma students of Teacher Librarianship. It is also expected to develop a module on children's librarianship for the PG Diploma in LIS and also to run this module as a CPD event for public and school librarians. Funds may be secured through the partnerships with book sellers and publishers.

Research

NILIS, Dept. of LIS, University of Kelaniya, Faculties of Education and Arts and NIE should concentrate on conducting more formal research on different aspects of reading habits and children's literature. Guidance should be obtained from institutions like National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, UK. NILIS students have already started postgraduate level research in reading habits. Following are some of the ongoing research topics;

- Identification of reading habits of primary school children in the Mutur education zone of Trincomalee District
- Reading problems and reading promotion activities in school libraries in the Anuradhapura educational zone.
- The role of the school library in promoting reading among primary school children with special reference to Matara educational zone.
- The role of the school library in promoting reading among primary school children with special reference to Piliyandala educational zone.

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Statement of Originality

Professional papers and workshops

This statement certifies that the following paper was conceived and written by the author alone. All information and ideas and others are referenced.

Sgd/ Pradeepa Wijetunge (A printed copy will be mailed)

Author signature

Name

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