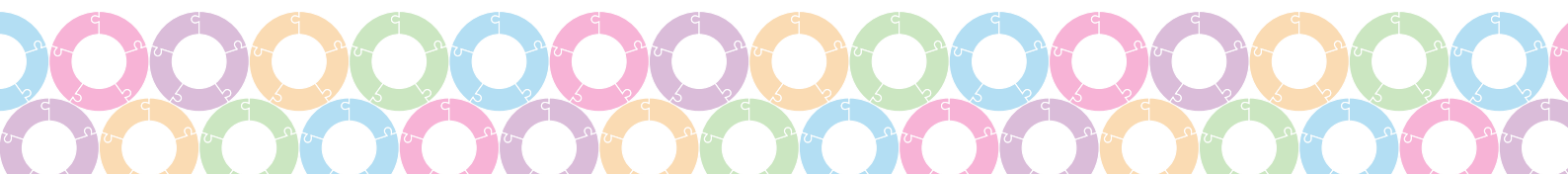# TRANSFORM

Impacting young lives
through quality education

Current Challenges, Future Directions

An overview of research exploring key challenges
in education in Sri Lanka

Contents

Foreword

The British Council is celebrating 70 years of continuous presence in Sri Lanka this year. Established in the post-independence period, we have been offering services to the public through our libraries, teaching English and delivery of UK examinations and qualifications – all of which support personal growth and enhance the educational and employment opportunities of young Sri Lankans. In the arts we have supported the growth and professionalisation of the sector by drawing on the creativity of the UK to contribute to developments in Sri Lanka. We also work to foster social enterprise and to empower youth leaders to engage in the development of their community.

However, without doubt, the most influential and powerful aspects of our work are those where we work hand in hand with government to bring about systemic change to improve the quality of education for all in Sri Lanka. Over the past two years this has been through a sustained focus of effort in our education work. We call this work TRANSFORM, and its aim is to bring about systemic change that will make a lasting difference to young people's lives, though supporting judicious interventions in the state education system, in collaboration with the government, to enhance the quality and relevance of the educational experience to all young Sri Lankans.

We asked ourselves: what is a relevant education experience for young Sri Lankans? I think we all know the answer. It is one that society, parents, employers, the government and young people themselves tell us. In different words and at different times, they are all fundamentally saying the same thing – the education system must provide the skills and the knowledge to enable the workforce of the future to be employable, to meet the needs of industry, business and commercial sectors, to support the growth of the economy.

How do we know what interventions are the right ones to make? How do we know what works and what doesn't? Our answer is to look elsewhere in the world, especially to the UK, to build on that experience and expertise and, most importantly, to do research and to collect evidence to inform our approach.

Research and evidence are the basis of all good decision making, and so I am pleased to note that the collection of research papers contained in this publication are exemplary in their scope and in their depth. They touch on all the relevant areas of TRANSFORM, from Professionalisation to Quality Assurance and to Transitions to Employment. The University of Lancaster has provided us with a view on the link between English and employment, and we have a take on the level of English proficiency of teachers – what it is and what it should be – thanks to NILE (Norwich Institute for Language Education). In higher education we have research on making classrooms more learner-centred, thus enhancing the student experience, courtesy of the University of Leicester, and on Improving higher education research quality from Edinburgh Napier University. We know from the UK experience that making education relevant to future work depends on building in a strong connection with employers. The University of Bradford has given us this insight. On transitioning to employment through careers guidance we have advice from Career Connect – a UK charity that leads on providing career advice.

In addition to the UK contribution, much research has taken place here in Sri Lanka and throughout South Asia. We regularly carry out research and evaluation on our own programmes. We work with local partners such as Save the Children on important areas like whole school culture, and together with Sarvodaya and the University of Peradeniya we have conducted a survey of young people across the country to find out what is important to them – *Next Generation Sri Lanka*. With the Open University PGIE we explored options for *Peace and Beyond* by looking at the arts.

With all this rich data and insight, I anticipate that the debates and discussions of this research symposium will reach some firm conclusions about the way forward.

I look forward to being part of that debate and to planning the next phase of a concerted effort in which all participants – educators, employers and government – will contribute to ensure that education in this country is fit for purpose and supports the growth of a stable and prosperous society and economy in Sri Lanka.

Gill Caldicott
Director Sri Lanka
British Council in Sri Lanka

Messages
University Grants Commission

In July 2019, the World Bank declared that Sri Lanka has achieved upper-middle-income status, with a GDP per capita of $4,102 in 2018. Sri Lanka has performed well in its education indices: over 95 per cent of children complete their primary education, and over 85 per cent complete secondary education. Many school leavers aspire to some form of higher education before entering the workforce, but opportunities remain limited. Career pathways are available for job-oriented vocational education, but for various reasons, this is not a preferred route.

The gross enrolment ratio is the total enrolment in higher education, expressed as a percentage of individuals in the 18–24 year age group. In Sri Lanka, the gross enrolment ratio is only 21 per cent, even when the numbers in private sector higher education institutes, external degree programmes and alternate higher education institutions are included. Thus, it is evident that there is a pressing need to expand access to post-secondary further education.

At the same time, Sri Lanka also has a problem with graduate employability. The type of workforce that are urgently required to support economic development at this stage of the country's growth are graduates in the STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Unfortunately, the majority of graduates from the state universities in Sri Lanka are from traditional arts stream subjects. We need to ensure that while expanding access to higher education, the expansion is in a direction that supports the country's development in the best possible manner.

Rapid expansion in access to higher education carries the risk of compromising on the quality of education on offer, whether it is delivered by state or non-state sector institutions. In order to mitigate this risk, the University Grants Commission strongly emphasises a range of different quality assurance activities. External quality assurance with peer review of universities and the undergraduate degree programmes offered by them are conducted by the Quality Assurance Council of the University Grants Commission and are now in the second cycle. Analysis of the outcomes of the reviews conducted in the first half of this second cycle indicates that there is much room for improvement in degree programmes in the fine arts, humanities and social sciences, and particularly with regard to human and physical resources for these programmes.

Other aspects that have been identified as important include the development and delivery of curricula that define clear learning outcomes and adopt student-centred learning activities for delivery of programmes of study. Strong student engagement in quality assurance activities must underpin this transformation, in order to ensure that all higher education institutions serve the needs of their student population and equip them well for entry into the workforce required of a rapidly developing upper-middle-income country.

Professor Mohan de Silva
Former Chairman, University Grants Commission

Ministry of Education

Education, as the most invaluable tool used in the contemporary technologically advanced world to achieve success, opens doors to a lot of opportunities for better prospects in career growth and mitigates most of the challenges faced in life. Building strong education pathways and creating collaborative networks around a common vision reflecting national goals is critical to the success of every student stepping into the world of work either directly or through higher education. Therefore, all the stakeholders across the different levels of the education system responsible for policymaking, delivery and implementation must pay attention to multiple elements of the system to ensure strong quality assurance. As part of quality assurance, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to provide all the infrastructure facilities and guidance for systematically improving the quality of the teaching/learning process. This will be done through sustainable initial training for prospective teachers, induction, continuing professional teacher development programmes and methodical evaluation of teacher performance. Therefore, the professionalisation of teacher educators and all education leaders, based on professional standards, is a vital necessity.

Simultaneously, given the benefits and utilisation of English in world trade, commerce and technology, uplifting English language education is essential in realising the goals in education. Areas such as the definition of learning outcomes, curriculum and materials development and assessment, together with the ongoing commitment to professionalisation of education practitioners, are vital for producing a strong workforce for the country.

Thus, conducting research to identify challenges together with making recommendations for possible action is timely. I highly appreciate the British Council team along with all the education practitioners for contributing to the successful accomplishment of this venture. I am sure that all the recommendations of the research will be very beneficial for future endeavours related to education reform.

Hasini Thalagala
Former Director, English and Foreign Languages
Ministry of Education

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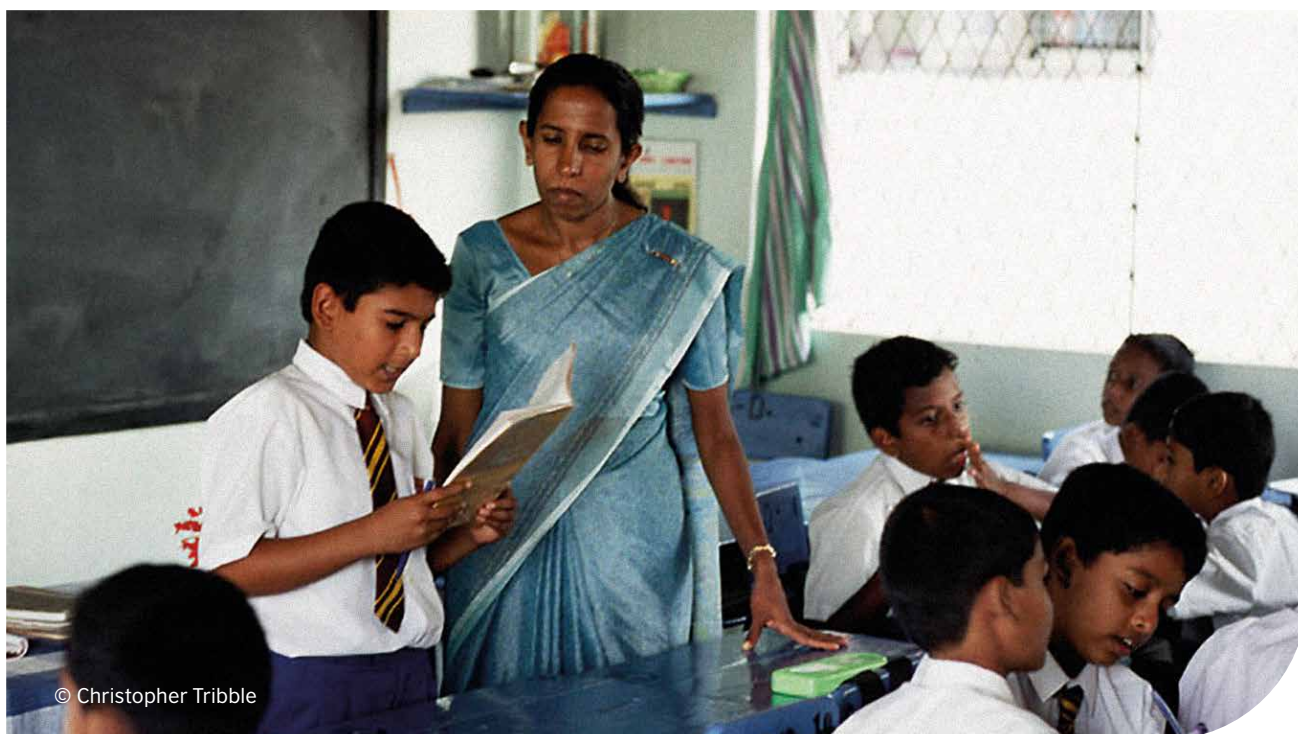
Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission

The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the apex body in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector in Sri Lanka, would like to state its reflections in relation to skills development as part of the education system, which in general needs strategic and critical reforms to be relevant in the emerging world of work.

A compartmentalised education system has been a major drawback in the country for the past few decades. Education was not seen as a holistic process and not considered as the path for seamless progression to vocational education and employment. While many policymakers are still advocating university education as the only path for success, the country now needs much effort to bridge the gap between education, training and employment through various programmes, including career guidance. The current fuzzy transition comes at a high cost to youth, who lack clear vision and proper guidance on life and career goals.

Vocational education and training is often considered the last choice by many parents and students despite the fact it provides high employability and access to higher qualifications and lifelong learning opportunities. Economies that are considered developed have raised the profile of TVET to attract youth and provide them with the required skills for the 21st century. These skills must also include soft skills and transferable skills to enable young people to adapt to different contexts and situations. English language is recognised as an enabling factor for knowledge acquisition and better employment opportunities.

Today's world demands skills for Industry 4.0 in the areas such as mechatronics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, machine learning, cloud computing and cyber systems. In fulfilling these demands, youths need emerging core technical skills with supporting soft skills, which are vital for success in their careers. Blended learning, work-based learning and mobile learning will be common methods of learning in future and will be recognised in formal qualification systems through approaches such as recognition of prior learning and record of achievement by awarding bodies and qualification authorities such as TVEC.

The TVET system of Sri Lanka has been the pioneer in the skills development of more than 200,000 youths per year. It increasingly uses digital platforms for student, centre and course registration and online system for career guidance. Since 2004, the TVET systems have gone through major policy reforms and paved the way for the enhanced supply of skills through new programmes and initiatives such as sector skills councils, occupational standards, rationalisation of programmes, standardisation of skills by industry's lead bodies, and increased access for skills by differently abled and vulnerable persons.

Sri Lanka's TVET system, revitalised after the introduction of the National Vocational Qualification framework in 2004, has set an example for many countries in South Asia by sharing expertise and experiences. Sri Lanka's system for vocational careers guidance and the quality assurance of the vocational qualifications framework have been recognised as two examples of best practice by UNESCO-UNEVOC, the UN agency responsible for TVET. TVEC has been playing the role of sub-regional cluster co-ordinator of the UNESCO-UNEVOC network for the past ten years as the clearing house for best practices and sharing experiences among the network of nine countries in the region. We hope to expand our collaboration with the British Council's TRANSFORM programme as we continue to build a world-class TVET system.

Janaka Jayalath
Deputy Director General
Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission

National Education Commission

Transforming education in Sri Lanka to overcome the current crisis in education and also to meet the demands of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030 is the current challenge before policymakers, programme developers, implementers and evaluators of the education system. Education in Sri Lanka has moved without the guidance of a coherently enunciated education policy, ad hoc changes at different times in curriculum development, professional development of teachers, heads of schools and administrators, monitoring, implementing and assessment evaluation in the provision of leadership for educational change and development in Sri Lanka.

In the formulation of an educational policy we have two major tasks of undertaking both an analysis of the present policy context and a process of consultation of all personnel engaged in education. Our research base is not at the expected depth and the consultation is a continuing challenge.

The challenge and the task before us is to bring about an appropriate change that transforms the system across the entire education spectrum.

We welcome the engagement of the British Council's TRANSFORM programme in the three areas of Professionalisation, Quality Assurance and Transition from Education to Employment, which are critical areas at present in the Sri Lankan education system. In addressing the challenge of educational reform, we value and appreciate the role of the British Council in working with the National Education Commission.

Dr GB Gunawardena
Former Vice Chairman, Policy
National Education Commission

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Introduction to TRANSFORM

The British Council in Sri Lanka is implementing a major education reform programme, known as TRANSFORM, in collaboration with the government of Sri Lanka.

The aim of TRANSFORM is that all young people have access to and benefit from learning opportunities provided by a fit-for-purpose and relevant education system, enabling young women and men to fulfil their potential, achieve their aspirations and contribute to Sri Lanka's economic and social development and growth.

TRANSFORM adopts a holistic approach to sustainable systemic reform with key areas of focus across secondary, further and vocational and higher education:

- professionalisation – this builds the professional skills and competence of the education body through individual and institutional capacity building, targeting, for example, teacher educators, in-service advisers, school principals and lecturers. Our extensive work in English features highly here

- quality assurance – we are collectively keen to ensure that young Sri Lankans have access to an education system of internationally benchmarked quality. We support the review and ongoing development of national education policy, professional standards, quality assurance and language assessment

- transition from education to employment – the focus is on ensuring that education provision links through to employment. This includes areas such as careers guidance, employer and student engagement in higher education, and the adoption of national occupational standards as the basis for developing curricula and assessment.

Our work is underpinned by key cross-cutting areas:

- English – we promote the use of English as a key employability skill, and work to ensure that the delivery of English teaching and learning reflects this view of it as a transferable skill relevant to the world of work

- research, evaluation and learning where we make sure that everything we do is evidence-based and that we learn from our work to foster sustainability

- communications to inform, raise awareness and shape knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of education professionals and the wider public

- social inclusion – we foster social inclusion through capacity building on inclusive pedagogies and research on whole school culture.

We are committed to collaborative working and as such, TRANSFORM operates with a range of stakeholders. Working with the government of Sri Lanka is critical for our engagement in education reform. We work with and across multiple government ministries and departments, including the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, National Education Commission, Technical and Vocational Education Commission and the Ministry of Labour Department of Manpower. We also collaborate with development partners whenever we can to share insights and maximise our respective inputs and areas of engagement. As we recognise and acknowledge the link between education and employment, we also engage with employers, both as individual companies and through their representational and industry bodies. Finally, as our programme aim focuses on youth benefiting from a relevant education system, we seek their views whenever and however possible to better understand their expectations and aspirations and to ensure relevance of what we do.

This publication presents key highlights of research and projects that were commissioned and implemented between April 2018 and September 2019. All of the research papers are available in full on the British Council in Sri Lanka's website at: https://www. britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research. Topics were agreed in collaboration with the respective Ministries and their departments and reflect key priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka's education reform agenda. The research was presented at a symposium, Current Challenges, Future Directions, which brought together government, academics, employers and development partners to explore these key challenges in education.

The education challenges remain and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with our partners to address these in a systemic way to the benefit of all young people in Sri Lanka.

Louise Cowcher
Director Education and English
British Council
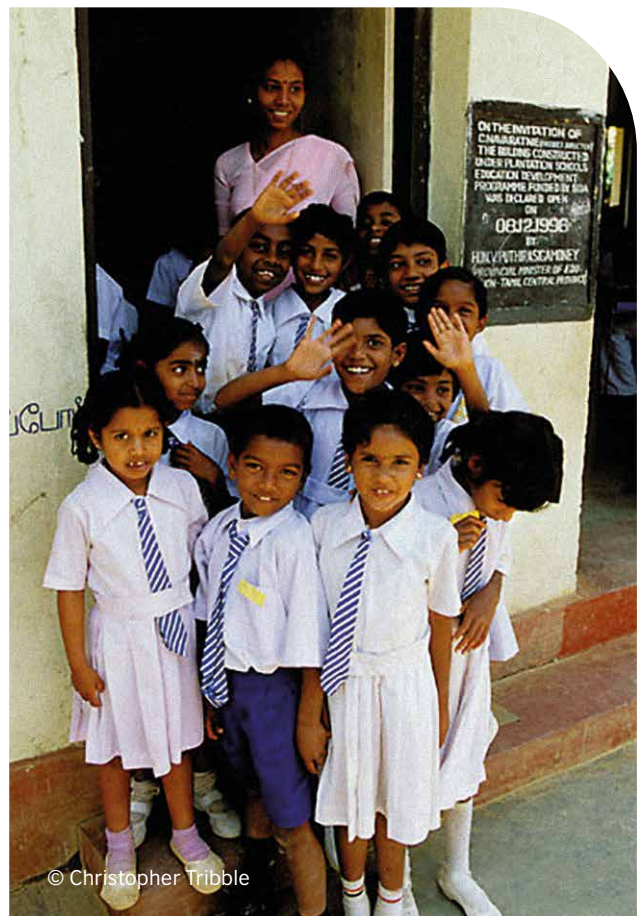
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Context

Introduction

The world today is changing at a pace and in ways that were previously unimagined. Advances in technology, mass global migration, urbanisation, conflicts and changes in traditional family structures have changed our social, economic and political landscapes.

Education in particular is witnessing scrutiny from all segments of society. There is increasing pressure on education to prepare future generations for the unseen, unknown and unpredictable. There is a perception that a good command of the English language can bring about many social and economic benefits. Therefore, English language education is under constant scrutiny.

Yet any changes in education need to be context-specific and evidence-based. The two preliminary papers in this collection are executive summaries with relevant extracts of much larger research projects. These two large-scale multifaceted studies can be the foundation on which policies and changes in education are based. *English Impact* reports on the findings of an impact survey that was carried out among students studying in Sri Lankan public schools. It looks at the English language capability of schoolchildren, compares students attending schools in urban and rural settings across all nine provinces and examines the relationship between English language learning motivation and its impact on proficiency. The findings reveal there is still a lot of work that needs to go into improving levels of English language proficiency across the country.

Next Generation shifts its focus to Sri Lankan youth. It includes perspectives on youth education and employment at a time when the country is going through larger processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The findings reveal the expectations youth have in relation to employment, their aspirations and the various challenges they encountered as they navigate the educational landscape. One of the key insights of this study come from in-depth interviews, which shed a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by youth from disadvantaged backgrounds when accessing education and employment, and which in turn contribute to sustaining the existing status quo.

Both papers provide evidence-based insights for educators, administrators and policymakers to rethink how education is delivered to the present generations in ways that connect education to the world of work.

English Impact
British Council

English has been part of the school curriculum in Sri Lanka for many years. There is a general perception that acquisition of English language proficiency can bring many benefits, from social (global connectivity, travel) to educational (international study, research) and finally to employment (national or foreign). However, clarification was needed on the level of proficiency among school leavers together with the implicit question of whether it was enough to enable them to achieve their goals. In order to gain a better understanding of the level of proficiency school leavers attain, research was commissioned by the British Council in 2017, leading to the publication of the English Impact Survey in March 2018.

The results confirmed the findings of the Ministry of Education, which indicated that, in general, levels were low. Responding to these findings has allowed the British Council to engage with the government of Sri Lanka to consider English education from several perspectives. This has taken place in the context of the government's ambitions for wider education reform.

Current work on teacher educator development must remain a priority, given the importance of having skilled education professionals and practitioners who work to international standards. Accompanying this is research on teachers' language proficiency, which has implications for teacher development. At the same time, a renewed interest in the definition of learning outcomes, curriculum, materials and assessment has been initiated.

However, unexpected areas of focus have emerged from the English Impact Survey that can lead to wider benefits. There were many assumptions that English is necessary for employment. This was tested – and found to be the case – through research into the role of English in workforce development and economic growth. Yet this focus on transitions to employment has also opened new avenues to explore, for example, on learning pathways, skills development, employer engagement and careers guidance.

There is an exciting sense of optimism with the appearance of multiple possibilities for collaboration in education reform across secondary, vocational/further and higher education. This is happening as policymakers, academics and practitioners converge in perceiving education as a coherent and cohesive holistic system.

In this publication, the introduction and key findings are included to provide some initial context. In addition, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is included for information.

The English Impact Survey aims to provide robust policy-relevant data evidencing English language capability in Sri Lanka.

English Impact aims to assess capability by measuring the current ability of a targeted sample of the school population from the Sri Lanka government sector using an English language assessment. It also aims to assess future potential of learners through an in-depth analysis of students' language learning opportunities in and outside the classroom, language learning motivations and socio-economic background.

English language learning now plays a significant role in many national and regional education systems, with increased proficiency having been identified by policymakers as contributing to economic prosperity. Examples of government policies that prioritise the improvement of English proficiency can be seen across the world. Considerably harder to find is good data that provides a comparable baseline of evidence showing levels of English language capability at the heart of where government policy makes an impact – in publicly funded school classrooms.

Highly influential sources of data assessing academic achievement across public education systems do exist in the shape of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). Collectively known as international large-scale surveys and administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) respectively, their results are at the same time eagerly awaited and severely criticised for their deeply influential impact on educational practices in many countries. To date, none have included the assessment of language, but much can be learned from the decades of experience in designing the processes to sample and implement large-scale research of this kind.

This global best practice in research, together with experience of data collection, is emulated within the design of the English Impact methodology that will be detailed in the following chapters. When designing this research, we have also tried to learn from the potentially damaging effect that international large-scale surveys can have. By identifying the best and, by implication, the worst performing education systems, international large-scale surveys can, at times, have a negative impact. In anticipation of this perhaps inevitable 'horse race', an adaption of the concept of capability underpins our research design.

The theoretical basis used to define English language capability is derived from an adaptation of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. An eminent economist, philosopher and driver of social change, Sen's revolutionary contribution to development economics involved defining the concept of capability. First conceived in the 1980s as an approach to welfare economics, the theory become predominant as a paradigm for human development and inspired the creation of the UN's Human Development Index. Sen describes the capabilities approach to human development as a concentration on freedom to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular.

The core concepts within his theory involve functionings that are explained in relation to achievements, and capabilities, as people within societies possessing the opportunity to achieve (Saito, 2003).

Following on from Sen's concept of capability as encapsulating functionings and capabilities, achievement and opportunity, English language capability can, therefore, be described in terms of the level of achievement, or proficiency, reached by a defined population; and the opportunities provided to them to achieve greater proficiency via teaching and learning practice derived from a policy or national guideline.

Achievement, proficiency, progress or aptitude of individual English language learners are most commonly measured by a language test. Bachman (1990) suggests that as research instruments, language tests can support investigations into the nature of language proficiency and language teaching practice and perform a role in programme evaluation, only when combined with other forms of data. Critical language testing theorists also believe the knowledge created via a test is 'narrow and simplistic […] it is mono-logic based on one instrument which is used on one occasion, detached from a meaningful context.' They suggest that using a test can provide 'a quick fix' (Shohamy, 1998), and an instant solution. However, analysis of data captured via this method alone overlooks the complexities of broader subject matter and is meaningless for the reform of education policy.

The evaluation of English language capability, reflecting Sen's capabilities approach, is therefore not limited to the measurement of English language proficiency as captured by a test. Other data was captured and combined to provide a broader context to our analysis: language policy, language learning environment, language proficiency and language learning motivations. The presentation of this supporting data is intended to provide further insight into students' assessment outcomes and indicate the impact of the English language policy in Sri Lanka.

The research aims outlined and investigated were to:

- evaluate the English language capability of students studying at public schools in Sri Lanka
- compare the capability of students attending urban and rural schools
- compare the capability of students attending schools across the nine Sri Lankan provinces
- understand the relationship between English language learning motivation and increased proficiency.

To achieve these research aims, the British Council brought together world-leading research institutions, such as the Australian Council for Educational Research and the University of Bath in collaboration with our own expertise in English language assessment, to create the English Impact research methodology. To ensure that the data collected by English Impact Sri Lanka can be used to inform and support education system and policy development, the British Council worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, tailoring the research to meet local needs. This research is underpinned by the British Council's Royal Charter and charitable objective to develop a wider knowledge of the English language, and it looks to build upon the organisation's rich heritage of global English language research.

English Impact in Sri Lanka

- English Impact employs a two-stage cluster sample design used by other recognised large-scale international surveys, sampling schools at the first stage and students at the second stage.
- For English Impact 2016–17, 150 government-funded schools and 1,734 students were sampled, with 148 schools and 1,437 students participating following exclusions, student withdrawal from school or absence.
- Students were sampled from Grade 11 in compulsory secondary education. This grade represents ten years of schooling, counting from the first year of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 1, with a mean age at the time of testing of at least 15 years and six months.
- Students sampled were studying English as part of their studies at this grade level. A minimum of 90 minutes of formal English study per week as part of the school programme was required for eligibility in the target population.
- Students completed the British Council's Aptis for Teens English language assessment, testing reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar and vocabulary.
- A questionnaire comprising 53 items, delivered in Tamil and Sinhalese, gathered opinions and information from students on their school and language learning backgrounds, their language learning motivations and socio-economic status.

Key findings

- Overall school and student participation in Sri Lanka met the English Impact international participation standard of at least 85 per cent of sampled students in 85 per cent of sampled schools.

- Of the participating students, 49 per cent started learning English in preschool or first grade.

- In their current grade, 52 per cent of participating students chose to study English at school, while it was a compulsory school subject for 41 per cent. More than half of participating students, 51 per cent, spent at least three hours a week studying English.

- Of the students who interact with the internet and computer games, around 87 per cent reported this to be primarily using an English language medium.

- Over half of the participating population, 58 per cent, achieved A1 CEFR level in the English language assessment, with almost 30 per cent achieving A2 level.

- The skill of listening achieved the highest mean scale score of 23.6. Almost 40 per cent of students achieved B1 level, while 48 per cent achieved at A2 level.

- Reading achieved the second highest mean scale score of 14.92. Just over 56 per cent of students achieved A2 level on the CEFR.

- Participating students achieved their lowest performance scores for the productive skills. Speaking skills had the lowest mean scale score with 4.91, followed by writing skills, with 8.34.

- Female students performed better than male students across all skills.

- Female students reported a higher level of confidence in their ability to learn English and more motivation to learn English than male students. However, positive relationships between proficiency and all motivational variables were more pronounced among male students than female students.

- There are clear effects of socio-economic status on language learning motivation, with students from more advantaged backgrounds reporting higher motivation in all examined areas than their peers from less advantaged families.

The results of this assessment and survey have implications when considering education reforms needed in Sri Lanka.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Table 1: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

Next Generation
British Council

Introduction

In March 2019, the British Council published the milestone report *Next Generation Sri Lanka*.

According to the 2012 census, the youth population in Sri Lanka is roughly 4.4 million – almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the total population. More than previous generations, young people today are technologically savvy, they are connected to the world, they have opportunities to study and work overseas, and they are highly aspirational. The Next Generation research aimed to get an understanding of how they see the world around them, what concerns them and what their hopes are for the future. A field survey questionnaire was completed by 2,636 young people aged between 18 to 29.

Young people in Sri Lanka live in a highly complex environment: the economy is stagnating and while the civil war ended ten years ago, the political situation is unstable, and peace and reconciliation continue to pose challenges. It is within this context that the primary research question of *Next Generation Sri Lanka* was framed: how have young people responded to the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process? However, the research was part of a broader approach that enables young people from all communities in Sri Lanka to have a voice in the wider society, which may allow them to contribute to policies that address their needs. It is from the broader perspective that the Next Generation report provides invaluable insight into how young people view education and employment and whether the education system provides the conditions for a positive future. Relevant extracts of the report are included below.

Sri Lankan youth: education and employment challenges

While the acknowledged research focus was on reconciliation and social cohesion, young people are unequivocal in stating what they see as the challenges: they want education that does not only offer quality but that is also relevant in preparing them for the job market, as unemployment is one of the top issues they face. This is the expectation they have clearly articulated, and the onus is on policymakers and implementers to listen to their powerful voice.

Education overview

The majority of respondents are currently enrolled at an educational institution. Financial issues, lack of interest and unavailability of schools were cited as the main reasons for dropping out by the respondents who had dropped out of school before completing their primary education (up to Grade 5).

Participants noted that the curriculum does not prepare students for the job market. This is despite the fact that the main reason that most participants seek education is to gain the knowledge and skills to get a good job, with the majority feeling that highly educated youth easily secure better employment than others. Young Sri Lankans believe the education system should start with the very youngest children to include education and learning on social cohesion, in order to promote an inclusive society in Sri Lanka, and which values all cultures of the country.

Educational development

In Sri Lanka, the term 'literacy' is nationally defined as the 'ability to read and write simple sentences in specified languages in Sinhalese, Tamil or English' (UNESCO, 2006: 157). Due to the implementation of the free education policy in 1945, the country holds a high literacy rate overall, with a literacy rate of 98.8 per cent among Sri Lankan youth.

The national educational system is composed of public schools, semi-government schools, private collages, religious institutions and international schools. The university system is dominated by the government-owned universities, although some private institutions attached to foreign universities are available in the main cities. The government, alongside the private sector, also runs vocational training institutions.

The majority of survey respondents (53.2 per cent) are currently enrolled at an educational institute and the rest are either working, gaining both academic and professional skills or have completed their studies, or are staying at home. Three per cent of Sri Lankan youth in the age category of 20–24 are in universities. Under half (40.9 per cent) of those surveyed completed their secondary education, with 0.7 per cent having incomplete primary education (up to Grade 5). Only 2.7 per cent have not attended school.

The youth who have dropped out from formal education before completing Grade 5 cited financial issues as the main reason. The others stated lack of interest in studies and unavailability of schools as the main reasons. Concerns regarding availability of schools in their living areas were brought up by youth from all ethnic groups.

When respondents were asked which areas in the Sri Lankan education system need to be improved, the top three answers were improvement in the quality of teaching, improvements in the curriculum and improvements to the facilities at educational institutions. The lack of qualified teachers in all three languages was also highlighted, noting that there were insufficient Tamil language teachers in majority Sinhalese areas, insufficient Sinhalese language teachers in Tamil-majority areas, and a lack of qualified English teachers overall, but especially in rural areas. Participants also highlighted the poor administration in government schools and lack of sensitivity to different ethnic and religious groups even at primary level. It was felt, especially at primary schools, that teachers influence children to only value their own language, religion and culture.

Respondents also noted that the curriculum does not prepare students for the job market. Lack of IT education and English language skills have already been identified as factors that keep youth away from taking advantage of global employment markets (Arunatilake and Jayawardena 2010a). These drawbacks have serious consequences as nearly half the survey participants identified the most important reason for education was to gain the knowledge and skills to get a good job.

Employment overview

The three most influential factors for job satisfaction were identified as wages, working for a prestigious company and job security. Youth are steering away from state sector employment due to very low remuneration and other benefits, as well as perceived discrimination and corruption in the recruitment process. They prefer to work in the formal private sector, although some young people prefer to work in informal economic activities, with its high wages, flexibility of time and not needing to resort to political nepotism to secure a job. Those who dropped out of school often see this route, as well as self-employment and entrepreneurship, as possible career options.

Minorities believe upward social mobility is possible for Sinhalese, but not for themselves. Even the graduates from the north and east (Tamil majority) suggested that getting a better job with decent pay is much harder for them.

While reporting some slight improvement in job opportunities, they noted that the economy is stagnating at present, and also that blatant corruption meant that government jobs were effectively 'sold'. They felt that government support for small-scale enterprises for youth and micro-finance schemes lack direction, as they are given without proper training or market analysis.

Malayaha Tamils expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to their wages, which is insufficient to pay for food and daily living. In the most badly war-affected areas in the north, unemployment is highest among ex-LTTE combatants, both male and female.

Unmet employment needs

Even a decade since the war ended, unemployment is a problem for the youth in Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, unemployment among the age group of the survey sample is high, with unemployment among young and educated women being considerably higher than men. The majority of youth are limited to employment in the informal sector (National Youth Survey, 2000; Gunatilaka et al., 2010). Just under 15 per cent of respondents classified their job as in the government or semi-government sector. Of those respondents, ten per cent were from the age group from 18–19, 36 per cent were aged 20–24 and 53 per cent were aged 25–29, indicating that access to employment in the government sector increases considerably with age. A total of 17.8 per cent of survey respondents are employed in the private sector, with a 62 per cent male and 38 per cent female split. Although, government jobs still hold prestige and are preferred by youth, the research reveals, as discussed subsequently, a tendency for youth to seek alternative formal (private sector) or informal employment.

Almost 70 per cent of those employed were satisfied with their current jobs, citing wages (19.3 per cent), working for a prestigious company (ten per cent) and job security (ten per cent) as the main reasons. Wages were by far the main factor for the Sinhalese, with 78 per cent of the Sinhalese indicating it as the most influential, against 12 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils, nine per cent of Muslims and just one per cent of Malayaha Tamils.

A substantial number of youth stated that they prefer to work in self-run businesses, such as marketing, private teaching, transport activities, media, tourism, fashion and beauty. Respondents noted that these informal activities did not get much attention from policymakers and politicians. Yet, young people prefer to engage in informal activities because they can obtain a higher income, have flexibility in working hours, are not reliant on political nepotism, and face less bureaucracy and corruption. Those who were unsuccessful in formal education/schooling also perceive self-employment and business creation as possible career options.

> 'I could not complete my Advanced Level studies, but I could then easily join a marketing firm as a sales representative. I served for some years there and learned the business. Now I own a small shop and have become the boss of my own business.'

Male focus group discussion participant, Sinhalese, Monaragala

Sri Lankan minorities are taught to believe upward mobility is possible for Sinhalese, not minorities, and that upward mobility is impossible for them even if they have higher educational qualifications.

> 'I am a graduate from a state university. Now it has been two years, no job is found matching my expectations. This year, I came to know if I pay 400,000 Sri Lankan rupees, there is a possibility to secure a job. Even I do not know to whom I should pay to get the work done. Also people say that the amount may rise next year as it has increased in the past.'

Female focus group discussion participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Jaffna

Comparing youth perspectives of all ethnic communities regarding job satisfaction, the Malayaha Tamils expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to their wage, which is minimal and insufficient to pay for food and daily living. They said that the wages do not 'catch up' with the cost of living. According to the survey, 40.7 per cent of respondents reported their satisfaction about the availability of jobs and a sizeable minority of respondents (21 per cent) responded regarding the unavailability of employment. Nearly 27.7 per cent respondents found a few or some job opportunities available to youth.

In the most badly war-affected areas in the north, unemployment is highest among the ex-LTTE combatants of both sexes. There is a notable increase in the unemployment rate in the district of Jaffna, recording seven per cent in 2016 and 10.7 per cent in 2017. This is the highest unemployment rate by district and more than double the national unemployment level (4.2 per cent) according to the Department of Census and Statistics (2018).

> 'You know, I studied in a town school, but I could not enter university because I did not have enough marks. I just cannot go for normal jobs. I will wait until I get a decent job with a good pay. I feel I am lucky since my elder sister who is married and lives in London sends some money for my expenditure.'

Male focus group discussion participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Jaffna

Youth from Northern and Eastern provinces were unhappy about the Sri Lankans from the southern part of the country being given jobs in the offices and government departments in the Tamil-speaking districts. Their limited or non-existent language competency in Tamil is creating unnecessary issues with Tamils in the districts of those provinces.

An analysis of labour market imbalances in Sri Lanka suggest that there is a mismatch between qualifications and skills required by employers and qualifications held by jobseekers. The authors of that report also recommend that vocational training should be introduced formally, as many youth waste time gaining skills from unrecognised sources (Arunatilake and Jayawardena, 2010b).

There are government strategies that encourage and support employment programmes and small-scale enterprises for youth. The evidence also shows conclusively that opportunities for self-employment appear high in the war-affected areas as the government organisations provide seed money for enterprise start-ups. However, there are no marketplaces identified for making the business profitable.

> 'A small-scale enterprise started manufacturing palmyrah fibre brushes in Mullaitivu and started exporting palmyrah fibre to foreign counties. They utilised natural resources and employed war-affected youth into manufacturing activities. Now, we see the company has stopped business as they failed in marketing their product due to lack of government support services.'
>
> Female focus group discussion participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Mullaitivu

Despite all this, respondents reported that personal economic conditions have somewhat improved in post-war Sri Lanka. Seventy-nine per cent of Malayaha Tamils, 61 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils, 58 per cent of Sinhalese and 55 per cent of Muslims stated that the economic conditions have improved slightly or considerably.

Males (65 per cent) are more optimistic about the improved family economic situation compared to young women (56 per cent). Overall, most youth experience only a slight improvement in their personal economic situation; there has also been a slight improvement in their ability to find good jobs. However, in focus group discussions (FGD) youth were quick to point out that the economy is stagnating at present and that there was no clear direction from the government. They also felt strongly about corruption and the fact that government jobs could be 'bought'.

The concern about lack of access to employment and frustration with this situation is not merely about the loss of productivity. An inability to satisfy youth aspirations, including their desire for a good job, and the notion that it is fuelled by ethnic, religious, class and caste-based discrimination has long been identified as the source of several youth-led insurgencies in both the north and the south of the country (Amarasooriya, 2010; Hettige and Mayer, 2002; Presidential Commission, 1990).

The British Council's education reform programme, TRANSFORM, is currently contributing to addressing some of the challenges highlighted in this research. Working across different government ministries and departments, it supports the development of a fit-for-purpose education system that provides learning opportunities which help young people transition to the world of work.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Professionalisation

Introduction

The high unemployment rates or underemployment of educated and skilled youth calls for school and educational reforms that re-envision the work of education practitioners.

The mismatch between the ways in which the present generation is taught, the skills they are taught, and how they are tested does not help them to access and integrate into the job market. This discrepancy has created high employment rates among youth. A rhetoric that is heard increasingly and frequently in this climate is tied to the professionalisation of teaching and teacher education. The professionalisation of teaching demands that practitioners not only understand the importance and relevance of teaching the curriculum (including English language) but also the need for professional standards with particular values, ethics and social interests.

This section brings together six research studies that provide an overview of diverse aspects of learner-centred education. Three of the reports are impact assessments. The flagship *Improving teacher education in Sri Lanka: impact evaluation* teacher educator project focuses on developing a sustainable model of teacher educator development. Working with national colleges of education, the project works at the level of both institutional strengthening and capacity building of master trainers and mentors using a cascade approach. The *NDB English teacher training* project aims to help teachers develop their language skills and supports English teachers to develop up-to-date learner-centred activity-based teaching approaches. The aim is to make teachers more confident. While the assessment shows the teachers have improved in various ways, it also highlights the areas that need improvement in teacher development. *Teacher Education for English 2017–19: impact assessment* reports the findings of the impact of Teacher Education for English. While this study provides very rich insights to teachers' language skills and their perceptions of the language skills they possessed, the rigour of this paper lies in the findings of the study as well its methodological sophistication.

Mapping and embedding teacher education approaches maps two teacher education programmes, Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka and Teacher Education for English, and how they can contribute to the professionalisation of teacher education in Sri Lanka. This study highlights the need for capacity building at institutional as well as individual level. Three key findings that emerge from this study are the need for structural changes at the institutional as well as larger systems level, the need for resources to deliver the English Language Teaching Methodology curriculum, and the shift from a lecture-based to a more learner-centred delivery model.

English language teacher proficiency in state secondary schools in Sri Lanka explores teacher proficiency levels of state secondary school teachers of English, the levels of proficiency to target and the factors that shape and influence teacher language development. The findings were generated through the Aptis test for teachers, an assessment tool that relates specifically to teachers. It reports on the language proficiency of a sample of teachers across the nine provinces and highlights their strengths and areas in which development is needed. The findings of the study include the call for strengthening of teacher professionalisation and more focused professional development that helps teachers develop their language skills.

Student-centred learning in higher education shifts the focus to the tertiary learner and the need for tertiary education to change in ways that better prepare them for the world of employment. It looks at the need for professional development for tertiary educators to change their teaching approaches from more conventional teacher-centred teaching to student-centred learning that requires learners to be active and engaged, and assists them in acquiring the skills required in the workplace.

Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka: impact evaluation
Deborah Wyburn

Background

Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka (iTESL) is a three-year project, established in November 2017. It supports pre-service and in-service teachers to deliver content and core skills for English, maths, science and IT more effectively. It upgrades their training and mentoring skills in inclusive, activity-based, learner-centred methodology. These skills are transferred in a cascade from three British Council consultant trainers through 42 Sri Lankan master trainers (18 for ELT) to deliver:

- four-week (120-hour) intensive residential methodology courses to nearly 200 English, maths, science and IT teacher educators from national colleges of education (NCoEs), provincial teacher training colleges (TTCs), teaching centres (TCs) and regional English support centres (RESCs)
- seven-day (53-hour) mentoring skills courses to 254 English in-service advisers (ISAs) and an estimated 1,000 maths, science and IT ISAs.

Evaluation summary

'If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow.'

These are the words of John Dewey, the famous American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer.

The questions that naturally arise when we read these words are 'What is the situation in Sri Lanka?' 'Do teaching approaches in Sri Lankan schools and colleges embrace international best practice or is it a case of teaching today's students as we taught yesterday's?'

While pre-service teacher education in Sri Lanka covers the concepts of interactive and learner-centred teaching, a recently completed review of the Teacher Education for English (TEE) programme indicated that these concepts are often presented through lectures rather than by modelling the techniques directly.

'The theoretical facts are being given to us inside the classroom. This is how you should do, and this is how you should manage. It is more or less like a lecture. But when it comes to [the TEE trainer's] session, the theoretical facts are being put into practice.'

Peradeniya NCoE trainee

TEE trainees reported that experiencing activity-based and learner-centred teaching for themselves as part of TEE convinced them that this was the better approach and encouraged them to use the approach in their teaching practice blocks.

'At first we didn't know how to teach the students … we got only the lecturing parts … only the theory part … [the TEE trainer] gave us a lot of things … she taught us how to teach the students in an attractive way and, not only that, she did it to us and we all enjoyed and we all learnt so many things and without her, I think I couldn't do any teaching. Because of her, I have improved a lot of things. Now I can go in front of a classroom and teach to any student.'

Pasdunrata NCoE trainee

The participation of TEE trainers in the supervision of teaching practice provided the final element of support and ensured that trainees had the confidence to implement the new approaches despite the many challenges faced in the typical Sri Lankan classroom.

'Actually I had one block teaching experience with [the TEE trainer] with second years … she joined with me in observing lessons. There I saw that she was explaining to the students about more effective and novel ways that they could plan their lessons. She gave a lot of ideas regarding planning group activities. As I felt it was a novel experience for the students and that they could get a lot of things from her … warm-up activities and that sort of thing. The students were really impressed.'

Pasdunrata NCoE lecturer

The aim of the iTESL programme was to build the skills of pre-service teacher educators to enable them to provide a learning environment for their trainees that would confer the same benefits experienced by TEE trainees. The elements of the training provided under iTESL included lesson planning; training delivery and role modelling to provide trainees with an effective model in the expectation that they will teach in the way that they themselves were taught; and observation and feedback to build the quality of teaching supervision during teaching practice block and the critical final 'internship' year of pre-service education.

iTESL also targeted existing English teachers in secondary schools and the ISAs who mentor them since it was apparent, even during the review of TEE, that young trainees were likely to encounter negative role models as well as positive ones once they entered schools.

'Actually [internship] is the hub of training, no? But still there are in-service teachers outside. Now, if they were not subject to this kind of thinking … different thinking and capacity about changing … they will influence our students and say, "No, no just finish the syllabus." That will also change because ISA is the trainer for this iTESL and they are capturing them also so it will take a little time but there will be a big impact.'

Mahaweli NCoE lecturer

Finally, the programme included awareness raising sessions for additional directors (ADs) and school principals to empower them to support these important actors within the teacher training ecosystem.

Figure 1: Best practice English teaching in Sri Lankan secondary schools

iTESL is a strand of the TRANSFORM programme. TRANSFORM aims to provide young people with access to learning opportunities, provided by a fit for purpose and relevant education system, allowing them to achieve their potential and contribute to economic and social development of Sri Lanka.

This report looks at the impact of the iTESL programme on teacher educators, ISAs and English teachers in secondary schools. A separate report reviews the leadership training provided for school principals.

What did we find?
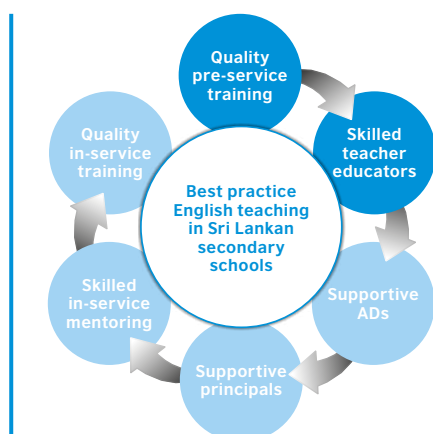
Building the training competences of teacher educators was a complex programme which involved drawing master trainers from NCoE and zonal offices and building their skills so that they could work with iTESL consultants to co-facilitate a programme of extended training for teacher educators known as TEC (teacher educator course). English TEC training reached 88 per cent of its intended target audience. Both master trainers and TEC participants were monitored throughout by iTESL consultants.

Analysis of the evidence derived from this process unequivocally affirmed that the training had a positive impact on the training competences of the participants. Differences in ratings given by iTESL consultants observing participants as they conducted micro-training during the course and again after participants had returned to their own institutions (TEC), or continued on to co-facilitate workshops (MT training), were statistically significant indicating that the noted improvement was not simply due to chance variations in the data. Many participants were able to demonstrate mastery of individual competences – particularly in the areas of planning and delivery, although there are pockets of residual weakness. Self-assessment ratings at course commencement and end-of-course also indicated a substantial and statistically significant increase in participant confidence.

However, the evidence consistently pointed to weaknesses in the areas of observation and feedback – skills critical to teaching practice and internship supervision. While competences in this area tended to be those most highly impacted by the training, the same competences were those in which TEC participants tended to demonstrate low skill levels on entry. This may indicate that although all teacher educators are involved in the supervision of trainees in schools, they have not received specific professional training in mentoring. Since support at this stage of the trainee professional development journey was found in the analysis of TEE to be critical to developing trainee confidence to use activity-based and learner-centred approaches in schools, the noted improvement in this area was encouraging.

The iTESL programme required TEC participants to embark on a certificate of practice contract after their 20-day training programme, where they observed other trainers and were themselves observed in their own classrooms. Observations conducted at this stage indicated that trained teacher educators were able to effectively apply the new methods and tools in their own institutional context. Thus, this study supports the achievement of outputs 1 and 2 in the iTESL programme logic.

Output 1: A cadre of MTs with strong skills in planning, ELT and mentoring available to mentor and deliver TEC and core skills training to pre-service training institute staff (English, maths, science and IT).

Output 2: English teacher educators have strong skills in planning, ELT and mentoring.

However, no evidence has been collected against Intermediate Outcome 1.

Intermediate Outcome 1: English teacher educators use ELT TEC content and methodology skills in regular training institute curricula and teacher training.

It is a recommendation of this study that observations be undertaken in teacher training institutions to establish whether this critical intermediate outcome has been achieved and whether the community of practice set up to support its achievement is functioning well.

The initial intent of the programme had been to also provide TEC training to 120 maths, science and IT teacher educators, with training co-facilitated by a team of 20 maths, science and IT master trainers. In the end, the subject TEC training was delivered to only 21 teacher educators (17.5 per cent of target) with the assistance of the original 18 English master trainers. However, analysis of data from the observation of micro-training at baseline and end of course indicates that the training improved competences in all areas – planning, delivery, observation and feedback, and role modelling and reflection. Differences in ratings

of participant competences by iTESL consultant observers were statistically significant in all cases with equal or higher effect sizes[1] to that observed in English TEC training. Participants in the course acknowledged that they had received little previous training for their roles. This and their observed enthusiasm for the new ideas and techniques they were exposed to in the training, explains both the initially low observation ratings and the substantial impact the course was observed to have on both their competency level and their confidence. This study supports the achievement of Output 3 of the programme logic (right) albeit with a reduced target.

Output 3: Maths, science and IT teacher educators have strong skills in planning, training and mentoring.

Unfortunately, little data is available about the performance of subject TEC participants on their return to their institutions, so no conclusions can be reached about the extent to which they were able to apply their new-found skills in their own institutional context. Moreover, no evidence has been collected against Intermediate Outcome 3.

Intermediate Outcome 3: Maths, science and IT teacher educators use TEC content and methodology skills in regular training institute curriculum and teacher training.
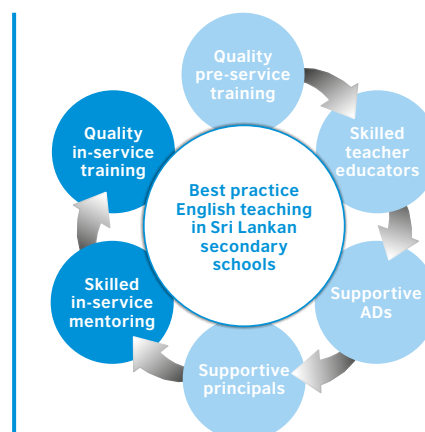
1. In statistics, an *effect size* is a quantitative measure of the magnitude of a phenomenon.

Programme logic

End of Project Outcome
Teachers in secondary schools use inclusive, activity-based, learner-centred methodology to deliver content and core skills for English, maths, science and IT

Intermediate Outcome 1	**Intermediate Outcome 2**	**Intermediate Outcome 3**
English teacher educators use ELT TEC content and methodology skills in regular training institute curricula and teacher training	Community of practice functions to maintain momentum of iTESL training	Maths, science and IT teacher educators use TEC content and methodology skills in regular training institute curricula and teacher training

Intermediate Outcome 4	**Intermediate Outcome 5**
ISAs use mentoring skills in regular support of English, maths, science and IT teachers in schools in their education zones	ADEs support ISAs to train and mentor teachers

Output 1	**Output 2**	**Output 3**
A cadre of MTs with strong skills in planning, ELT and mentoring available to mentor and deliver TEC and core skills training to pre-service training institute staff (English, maths, science and IT)	English teacher educators have strong skills in planning, ELT and mentoring	Maths, science and IT teacher educators have strong skills in planning, training and mentoring

Output 4	**Output 5**	**Output 6**
A cadre of ISAs and senior teachers skilled in mentoring and ELT available in each province and capable of training secondary English teachers	Assistant directors of English familiar with content of training provided to ISAs and school leaders	Secondary school English teachers capable of teaching reading and grammar communicatively and using activities to maximise participation

Having contributed to the quality of pre-service teacher training through the TEC training, iTESL targeted the improvement of the in-service English teaching environment by directly training English teachers in secondary schools and the ISAs who supervise and mentor them.

Training for ISAs was initially intended to focus only on their mentoring role. The ISA mentoring course brought about a modest improvement in knowledge of mentoring practice, reflecting a high level of awareness prior to course commencement. However, there was an appreciable change in attitude towards a more collaborative approach to mentoring, with participants more likely to see themselves as a support and guide helping teachers to achieve their own goals.

On the recommendation of iTESL consultants, an extra component of ELT methodology was added in a follow-up training course. This latter course targeted both the 173 ISAs who had already completed the ISA mentoring course together with 126 senior teachers. Offering the course to senior teachers was a direct response to the need to increase the cohort of trainers available to train English teachers in schools. This, in turn, necessitated the training of a cohort of ISA master trainers who could work with iTESL consultants in facilitating the expanded ELT methodology training.

A ten-day master trainer workshop was offered to 27 ISA master trainer candidates. Over the course of the workshop, the skills of the ISA master trainer candidates saw a moderate but statistically significant improvement. Their skills were later substantially enhanced as the result of their co-facilitation of the ELT methodology course. This was especially noted with planning skills reflecting the heavy emphasis in Block A of the ELT methodology course on lesson planning.

ISAs and senior teachers participating in the subsequent ELT methodology course demonstrated a substantial and statistically significant improvement in their understanding of interactive and learner-centred teaching approaches as well as classroom management techniques. This was reflected in a consistent increase in confidence across all training competences, especially for the cohort of senior teachers. On this basis, it can be concluded that the programme was successful in achieving Output 4.

Output 4: A cadre of ISAs and senior teachers skilled in mentoring and ELT available in each province and capable of training secondary English teachers.

However, since observations have not been made directly in schools, no conclusion can be drawn in relation to Intermediate Outcome 4.

Intermediate Outcome 4: ISAs use mentoring skills in regular support of English, maths, science and IT teachers in schools in their education zones.

Having co-facilitated the ELT Methodology workshops, the ISA master trainers were challenged to train ISAs who had participated in their ELT methodology courses to deliver the continuous professional learning and development for teachers (CPLDT) training. In designing the CPLDT course, iTESL consultants collaborated with serving English teachers and ISA master trainers to select the most relevant components of the TEC training. The three-day, 18-hour CPLDT training was delivered to almost 50 per cent of its original target of 10,000 secondary English teachers.

To assess achievement at Kirkpatrick Level 2: Learning, participating teachers answered a quiz both before the course and on the final day. Teachers were also observed by ISAs back in their schools providing data at Kirkpatrick Level 3: Behaviour. Teachers who had not participated in CPLDT training were observed in addition to those who had, in order to provide a counterfactual for the evaluation.

Given challenging time constraints to roll out and evaluate the training, an innovative approach was adopted whereby teachers took the quiz on their phones and ISAs also entered observation ratings through their devices.

At the completion of the training, 81 per cent of teacher participants strongly agreed that they understood the course content while 76 per cent strongly agreed that they understood how to increase pupil participation in their classes. Their confidence was substantiated by their results on the pre- and post-course quiz.

The average score on the pre-course quiz was 54 per cent while the average score at the end of the course was 71 per cent.

An important and disappointing finding was the continuing lack of emphasis that teachers placed on spoken English even after they returned from the training. This finding underlines the importance of the speaking and listening assessment soon to be introduced into school-based assessment.

Overall, the findings from this iTESL component show that trained ISAs are capable of effectively mentoring and monitoring secondary English teachers. Trained teachers also demonstrated their capacity to teach reading and grammar effectively. However, no evidence is yet available to link this enhanced capacity to the End of Project Outcome for iTESL.

End of Project Outcome: Teachers in secondary schools use inclusive, activity-based, learner-centred methodology to deliver content and core skills for English, maths, science and IT.
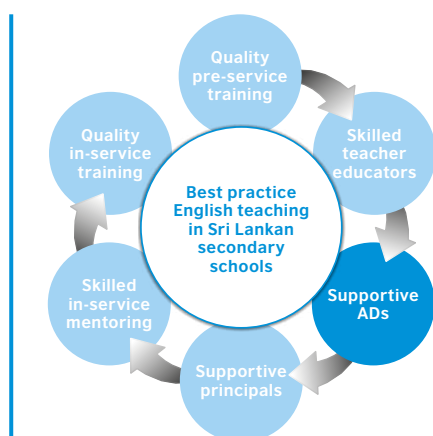
This evidence would logically be collected by ISAs over time and monitored by the Ministry of Education. Ideally, now that ISAs have demonstrated their ability to use mobile phone apps, supervision reports would be computerised and stored online so that ISAs can effectively mentor teachers on their progress since their

previous visit. Ready access to online data would also provide the ministry with ease of access to the situation of teaching practice in schools.

In zonal offices, ISAs work directly with assistant directors of English (ADEs). To ensure mutual understanding and support between these two key roles, iTESL consultants were asked to conduct awareness-raising workshops for ADEs. The initial focus of the course was on best language teaching and training practices, with peripheral sessions on mentoring and leadership. After discussions with those attending the first workshops, the course was adapted to focus on action planning to support future iTESL activities. The training was attended by 57 ADEs – approximately 60 per cent of the island-wide cadre.

While ADE participants were not formally assessed, they were given a short quiz at the beginning and end of the course. Their results on this quiz showed that they benefited from improved ELT knowledge reflecting a wide range of knowledge of English language systems and methodology within the group.

The analytical framework employed in this evaluation is the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. Due to the absence of evidence related to sustained change once participants return to their institutions, this report comments only on impact at Kirkpatrick Level 2: Learning and Level 3: Behaviour.

In terms of the programme logic for iTESL, this means that no strong conclusions can be reached about progress towards the intermediate outcomes and the End-of-Project Outcome. Recommendations are made throughout the report for follow-up monitoring to address these limitations. An analysis of the extent to which ratings on the Trainer Competency Self-Assessment Questionnaire used in TEC training correlated with observed mastery of the 16 competences measured using the Training Competency Observation Tool strongly suggests that any follow-up evaluation strategy should rely on direct observation rather than participant self-assessment.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/ programmes/education/research

Teacher Education for English 2017–19: impact assessment
Deborah Wyburn

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, the British Council engages widely in the field of education reform under the umbrella programme TRANSFORM. A teacher education project, Teacher Education for English (TEE), ran from November 2017 to April 2019. TEE trainers worked with teacher trainees in four NCoEs offering courses for teachers of English, Jaffna NCoE, Mahaweli NCoE, Peradeniya NCoE and Pasdunrata NCoE, and with in-service teachers at two teacher's colleges.

The TEE programme provided English language training and advanced teaching skills to 856 English teacher trainees, while 157 in-service English teachers and 476 teachers of English medium science and maths, Sinhala and Tamil and primary received shorter courses of training. TEE trainers worked with the 2016 batch of trainees (who entered the college in 2017) and the 2017 batch of trainees (who entered the college in 2018). This evaluation measures impact on English teacher trainees only from both the 2016 and 2017 batches with research undertaken at Mahaweli, Peradeniya and Pasdunrata colleges.

The TEE project was designed to achieve these broad objectives. Teachers will:

1. be more confident in using English in the English language classroom
2. create more opportunities for the students to interact in English with each other in the classroom within the existing curriculum
3. use a more learner-centred and activity-based methodology in the classroom
4. have a clearer understanding of the teaching and learning process
5. improve their English language level.

Sources of information

The primary sources of information were: a survey conducted with 708 teacher trainees from the four English NCoEs; focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with 30 teacher trainees, 2017 batch; interviews with 23 lecturers from three NCoEs (Pasdunrata, Peradeniya, Mahaweli); pre- and post-tests of English language ability using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT); and the findings of 76 lesson observations.

Figure 2: Survey respondents

	2016	**2017**
Jaffna	40	29
Mahaweli	109	103
Pasdunrata	92	167
Peradeniya	49	119
	290	**418**

The evaluation model

Using the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, the evaluation looks at the impact on English language ability and teaching skills, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. Quantitative results (survey responses and OPT results) are analysed initially with qualitative results (FGD and interview responses and lesson observations) subsequently drawn upon to help interpret the data.

English language skills – the 2016 batch

Trainee perceived improvement by type of skill and level at programme exit

Self-ratings of skill level on entry to the programme were mainly Good for reading and writing (for around 60 per cent of trainees) and only Fair for other skills (also for around 60 per cent of trainees). Less than a quarter of trainees across all colleges rated themselves as Excellent on speaking, and on grammar and vocabulary.

Comparing their confidence in their English language ability at the end of the course, most trainees from the 2016 batch agreed that there had been an improvement. Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of improvement on reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar and vocabulary. The predominant trend was for a perceived improvement from Fair to Good.

Oxford Placement Test

All trainees participating in TEE were tested at the start and end of the programme using the OPT. This test examines grammar, vocabulary and comprehension skills, and provides a rating against the CEFR.

Figure 3: OPT results – percentages (2016 batch)

Jaffna		Mahaweli		Pasdunrata		Peradeniya		Total	Total %	
6	20%	52	39%	66	44%	15	30%	139	38%	CEFR increase
14	47%	74	55%	45	30%	19	38%	152	42%	CEFR same-score increase

English language skills – the 2017 batch

Trainee perceived improvement by type of skill and level at programme exit

Asked to compare their confidence in their English language ability at the end of the course to that at the beginning of the course, trainees from the Peradeniya and Pasdunrata NCoEs were most likely to say that they had experienced a substantial improvement. The predominant pattern seen in responses reflected a perceived improvement from Fair to Good, with some trainees claiming that their skill level had improved from Good to Excellent.

It can be assumed that, if a trainee self-rates as Excellent at the completion of the TEE programme, they have a high level of confidence in their English language ability and are likely to use English in the classroom. While increases were recorded from Fair to Good, it is of concern that only 13 per cent of trainees across all NCoEs rated their speaking skills as Excellent on completion of the TEE programme. Trainees were more confident in their reading and writing skills, but this reflects the emphasis on these skills in English teaching in Sri Lanka whereas the objective of the TEE programme was to build confidence and encourage the use of English in the classroom.

Comparison of 2016 and 2017 batches

There were consistent differences between 2016 and 2017 batches in trainee self-ratings of perceived improvement in English language ability. For example, the number of Pasdunrata NCoE trainees in the 2017 batch who considered that their skill level rose from Good to Excellent were twice, and in the case of reading, writing and listening skills, three times as high, as their counterparts in the 2016 batch. The anomaly is Jaffna, where a substantially higher proportion of trainees from the 2017 batch jumped forward one CEFR level even though numbers claiming to have improved from Good to Excellent were lower in the 2017 batch on all skill types.

This may be due to the TEE programme starting halfway through the academic year for the 2016 batch and, although extra time was added to make up the requisite hours, this was done at the expense of running the programme for the 2016 and 2017 batches concurrently. For the 2017 batch, TEE was fully a part of their diploma experience. The 2016 batch may have viewed it as something of an add-on.

Figure 4: OPT percentage change scores for 2017 batch

Jaffna		Mahaweli		Pasdunrata		Peradeniya		Total	Total %	
16	50%	53	40%	123	69%	66	46%	258	53%	CEFR increase
7	22%	59	44%	35	20%	54	37%	155	32%	CEFR same-score increase

Commentary on English language skills

It is appropriate to evaluate these findings against levels 1, 2 and, to a certain extent, level 3 of the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. It is not yet possible to evaluate at level 4 results (the impact on the organisation/system of changes in behaviour).

Kirkpatrick Level 1: Reaction (trainee perception of the value of the training to them)

Trainees from all colleges agreed that having a native speaker as a teacher was a great help to them partly because they were forced to speak in English simply to communicate and without fear. Not being afraid to speak English reflects the lack of distance between TEE trainers and trainees but a common anxiety among Sri Lankans speaking English to each other: that they will be judged for their poor mastery of grammar. There are suggestions that trainees were highly reliant on speaking and listening practice with TEE trainers. Even their own lecturers said that, because trainees realise their English language ability is low, they are 'shy' to engage in conversation with lecturers, but much more confident about practicing their English with TEE trainers whom they feel close to.

Kirkpatrick Level 2: Measurement of Learning

Trainees from both batches tended to enter the TEE programme with self-rated skill levels of Good for reading and writing but only Fair for other English language skills. This reflects the emphasis on reading, writing and grammar in the English teaching curriculum in Sri Lanka and a general lack of exposure to spoken English in school classrooms and in day-to-day situations, particularly in rural areas. Admission to English courses at NCoEs is often based on their O-level results and an interview, with a resulting low level of English language proficiency on entry.

The OPTs indicated that a substantial number of trainees increased their CEFR level over the period that the TEE programme ran (between 20 per cent and 45 per cent for the 2016 batch and between 40 per cent and 70 per cent for the 2017 batch). However, if B1 is seen as an acceptable CEFR level for an English teacher in Sri Lanka, seven per cent of the 2016 batch and 18 per cent of the 2017 batch had unacceptable English skills at the end of the programme. These trainees will not become teachers unless than can pass their college speaking and listening test. However, of more concern is that the proportion of trainees who considered their skills to be Excellent at completion of the programme was less than 30 per cent for all skills except reading.

Kirkpatrick Level 3: Behaviour

In their teaching practice blocks, trainees used English almost exclusively in classrooms (as directed by their college) and, according to their lecturers, did their best to encourage their students to also use English. They were also observed to teach using a variety of activities. Lecturers were unanimous in attributing improvements in the teaching style of both batches to the TEE programme.

Teaching skills – the 2016 batch

6.1 Trainee perceived improvement by type of teaching skill

Asked to compare their confidence in their teaching ability at the end of the programme to that at the beginning of the course, most trainees from the 2016 batch agreed that there had been a substantial improvement, with a very strong response from Peradeniya NCoE trainees. The predominant trend was for the perception of teaching ability to improve – most frequently from Fair to Good, although a lesser pattern of improvement from Good to Excellent is also evident. However, the pattern of responses strongly suggests that trainees at the different colleges had a different experience of the programme.

6.2 Level at programme exit

Less than one-quarter of trainees across all colleges rated themselves as Excellent on grading classroom language, teaching grammar, teaching the four skills and lesson planning. Peradeniya NCoE trainees were the most likely to rate their teaching skills as Excellent after completing the TEE programme while Mahaweli NCoE trainees were the least likely to do so.

Teaching skills – the 2017 batch

7.1 Trainee perceived improvement by type of teaching skill

Asked to compare their confidence in their teaching ability at the end of the programme to that at the beginning of the course, most trainees from the 2017 batch agreed that there had been a substantial improvement, with very strong responses from Peradeniya and Pasdunrata NCoE trainees. While there was a stronger tendency for 2017 batch trainees to rate their initial skill level as Poor, responses for this batch were generally more positive than the responses received from the 2016 batch. There is a repeating pattern of improvement from Poor to Good in addition to the predominant Fair to Good improvement noted in 2016. Larger numbers of trainees self-rating themselves as Poor on teaching skills at the beginning of the programme probably reflects the fact that they attended the TEE programme from the start of their diploma, whereas TEE had started in the middle of the academic year for the 2016 batch. 2017 trainees were also more likely to report improvement from Fair to Excellent and Good to Excellent than the 2016 batch.

Level at programme exit

If a student self-rating of Excellent at the completion of the TEE programme is taken as a proxy of success and an indication of the likelihood of ongoing successful deployment of the skill, it is promising that more than 30 per cent of trainees across all colleges rated themselves as excellent in skills such as classroom management, maximising student participation, presenting and eliciting language, giving instructions and checking meaning, and more than half of all trainees felt that they were Excellent at using the board and visual aids. However, there is room for improvement in critical skills such as teaching grammar, lesson planning, grading classroom language and teaching the four skills at all colleges (except Pasdunrata). A lower proportion of trainees from Mahaweli NCoE tended to self-rate as Excellent in comparison with trainees at other colleges.

Evidence of improvement and learning were seen in: accuracy/level of English; classroom interactions (pair and group work); eliciting; classroom management techniques; adapting materials; and use of board for feedback and recording answers.

Stronger skills identified in survey responses of the 2017 batch in the areas of classroom management, maximising student participation, presenting and eliciting language, giving instructions and checking meaning, supplementing the textbook, and use of the board and visual aids are consistent with these observations.

Comparison of 2016 and 2017 batches

Despite a higher proportion of trainees from the 2017 batch rating their initial skills as Poor, their level at exit was better than that of the 2016 batch for all colleges except Peradeniya. Surprisingly, fewer trainees from the 2017 batch at Jaffna NCoE rated themselves as excellent in teaching grammar, teaching the four skills and lesson planning in comparison with the 2016 batch.

Commentary on teaching skills

At this stage of the journey of trainees towards becoming English teachers, it is appropriate to evaluate these findings against levels 1, 2 and, to some extent, level 3 of the Kirkpatrick model.

Kirkpatrick Level 1: Reaction

Each college conducts a course on English Language Teaching Methodology (ELTM). There is also Education Practice (EP) prior to teaching practice blocks. However, trainees in every focus group argued that the TEE training was more useful in preparing them for teaching practice because the trainers role modelled the practices trainees should adopt when they went to schools.

Kirkpatrick Level 2: Measurement of Learning

In survey responses, trainees were more positive about improvements in their teaching skills than in their English language abilities. Most said that their teaching ability was 'a lot stronger' after participating in the course. However, it is evident that further capacity building is required. Based on the proportion of trainees who rated their skills as Excellent across the range of teaching skills examined and the techniques they claimed to have used in their teaching practice, it is apparent that there is a strong level of mastery of the following practices: pair and group work; use of the board/visual aids; classroom monitoring; using activities to supplement the textbook; and using warm-up activities.

Around 30 per cent of the 2017 batch and 25–30 per cent of the 2016 batch ended up rating themselves as Excellent in a range of skills, including: classroom management; maximising student participation; presenting and eliciting language; giving instructions and checking meaning; and use of the board/visual aids.

In focus group discussions, many trainees were earnest about avoiding traditional teaching practices that they saw as deleterious to learning English. These trainees talked about how they would identify and work with slow learners, how they would build rapport with their classes

to help create a good learning environment, and how they would use different techniques to do group work even within congested classrooms. However, others were not so positive and foresaw the realities of the Sri Lankan education system making it extremely challenging, if not impossible, to continue to use student-centred and activity-based teaching approaches.

Kirkpatrick Level 3: Behaviour

Trainees and lecturers were unanimously of the opinion that the programme's contribution was substantial in their application of the skills. During their teaching practice block, trainees are 'rewarded' by scoring higher marks for classes that are activity-based and where they demonstrate competent use of English. As college lecturers cannot supervise every class, it is important that school English teachers whom trainees have been assigned to work with also encourage good approaches and reinforce the value of the new techniques they attempt to use. In less supportive environments, some trainees also appear to have self-censored, opting out of activities such as mingles or language games which they felt would generate too much noise and disturb adjoining classes.

Other trainees reported a highly positive experience of teaching practice. In focus group discussions, trainees from Mahaweli NCoE spoke of teachers and even parents coming to watch their classes. Role modelling by school teachers to which trainees are assigned is also important. In the absence of role modelling by school teachers, role modelling of learner-centred and activity-based approaches by NCoE lecturers is particularly important. All lecturers interviewed said that they recognised the importance of role modelling and had incorporated new techniques into their lectures and were teaching in a more interactive way.

Lecturers also expressed concerns about being able to support their trainees to pass their exams in the face of a crowded syllabus, many other demands on their time, and a lack of textbooks. One lecturer estimated that due to external factors and commitments, lecturers actually ended up with only 80 per cent of the official academic year to work with their trainees.

Concluding comments and recommendations

It is clear that trainee English language ability and English teaching skills have improved over the period within which the TEE project was implemented. Evidence for this came from trainee reflections, observed behaviour during teaching practice blocks, and OPT results. Lecturers and trainees attribute a lot of the improvement to TEE training. The rapport that TEE trainers were able to establish with trainees – providing them with a non-threatening and supportive learning environment focused on ensuring that their first experiences of teaching practice were successful – undoubtedly contributed to this. Many of the academic staff interviewed also mentioned the benefit of having a native speaker in the college since trainees could not revert to their mother-tongue when speaking to them. There was wide consensus that TEE trainers effectively role-modelled learner-centred and activity-based approaches, building the confidence of trainees to use these techniques in their own teaching practice.

Enablers of success can be identified as the amount of time trainees had in small group learning environments where a cohesive and structured programme of skills development ran without undue interruption; a commitment to the use of English across college activities; and reinforcement of good practice within schools during block teaching. Challenges included the crowded syllabus of the National Diploma of Teaching, poor skill levels on entry, and exam-driven teaching practice in schools.

NCoE lecturers are driven by a strong sense of duty to ensure that trainees pass exams against a highly theoretical syllabus. Effort needs to be made to ensure that teaching practice in lecture halls role-models student-centred and activity-based learning approaches but, while the syllabus remains as it is, lecturers will be tempted to revert to 'covering the content' by a heavy reliance on lectures and giving up their weekends to help trainees cram for the exams.

Trainees undoubtedly have a clear understanding of how the teaching-learning process demonstrated by TEE trainers aided their learning and say that they are committed to creating a similar learning environment in their own classes. Although trainees appear to have a solid repertoire of basic teaching skills, they were less likely to have used activities such as mingles and pronunciation/vocabulary games which would create opportunities for their students to interact in English with each other in the classroom. Their mastery of grading their classroom language to support their students to develop at least functional English language also needs improvement. Trainees were also less likely to employ a range of activities to meet the needs of stronger/weaker students.

Gaining familiarity with these techniques requires having an opportunity to try them out in a teaching environment without any concern of being criticised for creating undue noise or not covering the textbook. These skills are best developed in an environment where the emphasis is not simply on covering the content. A carefully structured internship year could provide such opportunities. It is recommended that trainees be placed, where possible, with English teachers who have done British Council professional development courses elsewhere.

Finally, trainees and lecturers alike said that they would like to see a continuation of the TEE programme particularly if it could be integrated into the existing syllabus rather than borrowing lesson allocations from different subjects. The syllabus revision of the ELTM course would provide a highly effective framework for this. There are also opportunities within the listening and speaking course taught in all three colleges.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Impact assessment of the NDB English teacher training project
Deborah Wyburn

Introduction

The aim of the NDB (National Development Bank)-funded English for Teaching (EfT) teacher training project is to upgrade teachers' English language skills and support teachers to develop up-to-date learner-centred, activity-based teaching approaches. In this way, pupils will benefit from having better trained English teachers, thus improving their English skills and employability. The goal of this impact evaluation is to examine whether the commitment and professionalism observed in the course participants is ultimately reflected in teachers with better language skills using learner-centred approaches and activity-based methodology in classrooms.

At the outcome level, the NDB EfT course has four objectives:

1. teachers will be more confident in using English in the English language classroom and teachers will improve their English language level from CEFR level A2 to B1

2. teachers will create more opportunities for the students to interact in English with each other in the classroom within the existing curriculum

3. teachers will use a more learner-centred and activity-based methodology in the classroom

4. teachers will have a clearer understanding of the teaching and learning process.

Approach

Ten Regional English Support Centres (RESCs) offered the NDB EfT course in 2017–18 with a total of 184 English teachers participating in Phase 1 of the course (May to August 2017), 194 participating in Phase 2 (September to December 2017) and 178 participating in Phase 3 (January to April 2018). Survey forms were mailed directly to the 171 teachers who had completed the entire course with the inclusion of a pre-stamped and -addressed envelope to encourage returns.

Focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 21 teachers in four zones, and RESC co-ordinators in the four zones were also interviewed. In each zone, three lessons were observed – the first conducted by a teacher who had followed the course in 2017–18, the second conducted by a teacher who had followed the course in 2013–14, and the third conducted by a teacher who had never followed the course.

It is a limitation of the study that RESC co-ordinators were requested to invite teachers of their choice to the focus group discussions and to arrange in advance with schools for access to lessons for observation. Moreover, it was expedient to conduct the lesson observations in schools proximate to the RESCs which tended to be larger and better resourced schools in the town area. In many cases, the evaluator was also told in advance whether the teacher whose lesson was to be observed was a course participant or not. However, the RESCs who participated in the evaluation were selected to be representative in terms of rural–urban location, potential exposure of students and teachers to English outside school, and the probable relative importance of English for employment locally.

Findings, conclusions and recommendations

The results of the classroom observations and the detailed survey findings are available in the full report. Here the findings from the lesson observations, survey responses and focus group discussions conducted during this evaluation are drawn together to shape conclusions and recommendations.

Objective One

Teachers will be more confident in using English in the English language classroom AND teachers will improve their English language level from CEFR level A2 to B1

Teachers were given the OPT before and after the course. The overall average improvement was 2.1 per cent. While the average pre-test scores were in the B1 band, 19 teachers who scored initially in the A2 band improved their English language skills to score in the B1 band by the end of the course. Fourteen course participants also completed nine language development assignments during the course with an average score of 78.36 per cent.

A preliminary analysis of these results might lead to the conclusion that the language component of the course is less important given the generally high level of English language skills of teachers taking the course. However, some poor English was still observed by the evaluator in lessons where NDB EfT graduates had developed visual aids and exercises to complement those in the textbook.

Regardless of their initial level of English fluency, FGD participants concurred that the extended professional discourse in English that they experienced improved their confidence in using English including, and importantly, in their classrooms. Teachers who were already fluent benefited from advanced modules such as that on phonemics, while others had an opportunity to improve their grammar. Out of the 51 teachers who returned the survey, 27 per cent identified 'being able to have professional discussions with other English teachers' as one of the three most beneficial things about the course. All but those few teachers who were already strongly confident in the use of the language prior to taking the course (78 per cent of survey respondents) agreed that they were more confident using English with their students than they were before doing the course.

Recommendations

- The British Council continues to support RESC co-ordinators to offer workshops and seminars for English teachers. Even short courses are likely to maintain the momentum gained through participation in the NDB EfT course. Many of the RESC co-ordinators interviewed during this evaluation had heard of the British Council 'Roadshow' series and were keen to be included.

- Provide access to ICT apps and audio-visual materials that could be used to help course graduates refresh their knowledge over time. An example is the British Council LearnEnglish Sounds Right app, which helps the user master the sounds of English using the British Council's pronunciation chart. As the final report of the course notes, RESC trainers also requested more help with English pronunciation and speaking, and therefore making such apps more easily accessible could serve a dual purpose. Sharing such resources on a community of practice website or Facebook page dedicated to teachers who have completed the NDB EfT course would help to maintain the sense of being part of a dedicated and professional community described by teachers consulted during this evaluation.

- For the same reason, it is recommended that the NDB continues to sponsor professional association meetings of EfT graduates. All survey respondents said that they would like opportunities to attend professional seminars or meetings.

Objective Two

Create more opportunities for the students to interact in English with each other in the classroom within the existing curriculum

The course has equipped teachers with a comprehensive toolbox of activities (surveys, dialogues and mini-dramas) and games that they can use to encourage their students to interact in English in the classroom. The course emphasised the need to build student confidence in using English by supplementing textbook and workbook activities with activities, visual aids and worksheets generated by the teacher to reach students at their own level. Teachers appreciated new ideas presented in the course about how to help students gain confidence with grammar (the lack of confidence with English grammar reportedly being a major disincentive to using English – and, to a lesser extent, pronunciation). Teachers also gained knowledge about how to track the extent to which individuals within their classes were mastering content. Although it was observed that interactions in the classroom were still heavily weighted towards whole class response to teacher questions, teachers who had completed the course more frequently elicited responses from individuals and more frequently set up group activities that encouraged the input of everyone in the group.

Many of the teachers observed or interviewed during the evaluation had adapted the activities and ideas they gained from the course, and from interacting with their peers during the course, to use in their primary classes. They were unanimous that it is easier to encourage their primary classes to speak and engage in English than older students, and expressed disappointment that some primary schools neglected the opportunity to build English skills at this foundation level, resulting in wide gaps in ability in classes at secondary level.

The support of school administrators in promoting English language assemblies, English-speaking days, nd literary associations as well as support from the Ministry of Education centrally and provincial departments of education for English language, drama/oratory, handwriting, recitation, dictation and creative writing competitions must also be appreciated, given the subliminal messages it sends to students about the importance of English.

Recommendations

- Given the potential to create a solid foundation in the language at a younger age, there is value in adapting the course to the needs of primary school teachers or providing additional modules for teachers who teach at both levels.

- In rural areas, students may only hear English spoken by their teacher. However, a number of teachers were observed during the evaluation to be competently using audios of songs, poems and stories downloaded from the internet in their classes. These were broadcast to students through Bluetooth speakers linked to teachers' smartphones or laptops exposing students to a range of accents. Teachers reported that they were more likely to use such resources rather than take their students to the school ICT lab, as ICT labs can typically only accommodate 20–25 students and taking students there wastes too much time in a 40- minute period. Audio and video resources are widely accessible online under Creative Commons licensing systems and could be shared, together with similar resources that the British Council itself has access to, through on online community of practice.

Objective Three

Assist teachers to use a more learner-centred and activity-based methodology in the classroom

While most teachers consulted during this evaluation claim to have been previously trained in activity-based and learner-centred approaches to teaching, learning new teaching methods, learning new classroom management tools, getting ideas for teaching-learning materials and getting ideas for new activities and games were the four components of the course that survey respondents found most beneficial. More to the point, most focus group participants were able to describe examples of using the new approaches in their classes and, in all lessons observed, teachers used visual aids, a range of interaction types generally including group or pair work, and a range of activities all designed to supplement the textbook and help learners at different levels master the content.

Teachers who had followed the NDB EfT course tended to conduct lessons which logically progressed from teacher-led explanations to eliciting student comprehension, to application or extension activities for pairs or groups of students. They were also more successful in managing group work activities to ensure the involvement of all students. The fact that teachers who had followed the course in 2013–14 were just as likely to exhibit these behaviours as those from the 2017–18 batch demonstrates the sustainability of results. On the evidence available, it appears that credit for this is due in some part to the continuing programme of workshops and seminars provided by the RESCs for English teachers and the opportunities that these programmes provide for peer support and cross-motivation.

However, teachers were observed to be weaker in using instruction checking questions to check that students understood instructions and concept checking questions to check that concepts were clearly understood. The extent to which this was due to the content of the lessons and the activities engaged in being already familiar to students is uncertain.

As mentioned above, a limitation to the study was the fact that teachers knew in advance that their lessons were to be observed and RESC co-ordinators were free to nominate teachers and classes to be observed.

Many of the teachers observed also used English almost exclusively throughout the lesson, although it was apparent that much of what was said was unlikely to have been clear to the majority of the students. However, it is likely that they would have made more judicious use of their mother tongue in the absence of an observer.

Besides motivating students by providing an attractive, inclusive and active learning environment, the new activities, games and teaching methods that teachers learned through the course are intended to provide teachers with the means to supplement the activities in the textbook and workbook, particularly where these are pitched at a level above that of the students. While most of the teachers consulted claimed to have done this successfully, even if it took several attempts, it is concerning that only 78 per cent of survey respondents agreed with the statement, 'I am confident that I can adapt activities and teaching materials to any level of student' and even fewer (57 per cent) agreed that 'the learner-centred approach is suitable for all my students'. Given that teachers often teach English medium students in the one class with Sinhala/Tamil medium students and may have students who come from a range of feeder primary schools which have placed more or less emphasis on the study of English, the ability to adapt activities to support different learners is key to success. One teaching tool that received frequent mention in this regard was the error correction protocol. While teachers said that they had always tried to give individual guidance to students by correcting their work, time constraints meant that this was not always done effectively or comprehensively. Use of the error-correction protocol was uniformly endorsed as lessening the burden on teachers while still providing students with the information they needed about their personal progress.

While teachers who had participated in the NDB EfT course appreciated the value of the micro- teaching session, there were multiple requests for their RESC trainers to be able to observe their lessons in their actual classrooms. While it might be possible to negotiate for this to happen on a limited scale while the course is in progress, there is an official process and structure for lesson observation which is being supported by the British Council through its training of ISAs as part of the iTESL programme.

FGD participants said that, realistically, given the time available and with limited financial support from the school for materials/resources, they were generally only able to conduct one or two activity-based lessons a day. One group requested that the British Council or NDB support teachers by providing them with professionally prepared visual aids and worksheets. One of the RESC co-ordinators also related requests that she had received from teachers for pre-prepared activity-based lesson plans.

Recommendations

• Clearly neither the British Council nor the NDB is in a position to provide pre-prepared lessons/materials that will meet the needs of all English teachers in the country and all of their students any more than the prescribed textbook can cover content at a level suitable for all, nor is this desirable. The ability to adapt methods and activities to promote learning in a given context is the essence of the learner-centred approach as we have defined it here.

However, it would be motivational for teachers to be able to share examples of good practice (lesson plans and supporting materials/resources) with each other and to receive comments and suggestions from fellow teachers who have tried to implement the lesson with their own students. Teachers in one FGD commented that they were motivated by the healthy competition in their group for generating good ideas and good examples of applying new concepts in their own schools: 'We did our development journals and how to do interesting lesson plans and we competed. Then we gained some knowledge from other colleagues about how to do the same lesson in an interesting manner'.

Objective Four

Assist teachers to have a clearer understanding of the teaching and learning process

While 30 per cent of survey respondents identified learning more about the theory of teaching and learning as one of the three most beneficial aspects of the NDB EfT course, it was unclear how they had applied this knowledge in their classes or whether this was new knowledge or simply refreshed what they had already covered during their diploma/certificate pre-teaching courses. Several teachers mentioned that understanding students' family circumstances had helped them to appreciate their learning difficulties, but again it was not clear whether this was a new insight or simply a reminder.

Contribution and impact

In Hanguranketha and Nuwara Eliya, RESC co-ordinators asked if they could offer the course again soon as the 2017–18 phase had been oversubscribed. Teachers who had done the course were highly appreciative of what they had gained through the experience and urged the British Council and NDB to provide opportunities to more teachers. Teachers in the Kalutara and Galle area have access to courses conducted in Colombo and Galle so the need for professional development training is not felt to the same degree.

While the evidence presented in this report indicates that this fourth phase of the NDB EfT programme enthused teachers, improved the quality of the English language learning experience for their students, and resulted in more students enjoying their English classes and being prepared to use English, there have been three previous iterations of this course, and O-level results for English remain very poor island wide. This suggests that the desired impact of improving the English skills, employability, access to information and opportunities, and the international mobility of young people is unlikely to be realised within the current systemic constraints. Some of these constraints were identified to the evaluator by teachers and RESC co-ordinators and suggestions are made for future inputs that might mitigate these, although it must be acknowledged that most of them are clearly beyond the remit of the course providers.

The **examination system** is clearly an important influence. Many students (and some school administrators) do not prioritise English, as a pass in English is not essential to progress through the education system. Specifics of this issue are outlined above. Unfortunately, English teachers are likely to experience this as a demotivational influence. One teacher described how, in her first two years of teaching English, she had worked hard to help students put on a drama performance for the school in English but had been discouraged by teachers of other subjects who criticised her for taking student attention away from their examinable subjects. The teacher networking and peer support that the NDB EfT programme engenders and continues to promote through the professional association meetings convened by the NDB and the continuous programme of professional workshops and seminars organised by the RESCs is an important counter influence here.

Not all teachers have **access** to this course or similar face-to-face courses because their schools or their homes are located too far from the nearest RESC. Some teachers commute long distances to their schools each day and might actually live closer to an RESC that is not the one linked to their school. They might have better access to the course if they could attend it at an RESC closer to their home – particularly if courses are held on a Saturday. This could be easily resolved by a more aggressive campaign of advertising course availability and providing opportunities for teachers to attend the course at the RESC of their choice. In other cases, it is not so simple. RESC co-ordinators acknowledged that the course was, realistically, only accessible to teachers in the same division as the RESC because of travel time. Self-learning or online courses are not the answer, at least in the immediate future. RESC co-ordinators in Nuwara Eliya described how, when the British Council 'Teachers in Action' course was offered as a self-study course in 2016, only three of the 40 who enrolled were able to finish the course. However, Baddegama RESC did manage to negotiate to conduct the 2017–18 NDB EfT course at Vidyaloka Maha Vidyalaya (school) after the RESC premises were damaged by flooding. No fees were charged by the school. This mobile trainer option might be a solution.

Summary

In summary, there is strong evidence of a demand among English teachers, particularly those in rural areas with limited access to other courses, for opportunities for professional development such as that provided by the NDB EfT course. It is recommended that, not only should the course be continued into a fifth phase, but that innovative solutions be found to enable teachers who live or work far from an established RESC to avail themselves of the opportunity. The course is highly regarded and, within the limitations of this study, appears to be having a positive impact at the level of the classroom and as measured by the four course objectives. Nonetheless, there are external constraints which will be difficult to overcome despite the evident enthusiasm and dedication of the teachers consulted and observed during this evaluation.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Mapping and embedding teacher education approaches
Psyche Kennett

Introduction

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the British Council in Sri Lanka is implementing the TRANSFORM education reform programme. The iTESL and TEE projects contribute to the programme's professionalisation strand.

Improving Teacher Education in Sri Lanka (iTESL) is a three-year project, established in November 2017, which supports pre-service and in-service teachers to deliver content and core skills for English, maths, science and IT more effectively. It upgrades their training and mentoring skills in inclusive, activity-based, learner-centred methodology. These skills are transferred in a cascade from three British Council consultant trainers through 42 Sri Lankan master trainers (18 for ELT) to deliver:

- four-week (120-hour) intensive residential methodology courses to nearly 200 English, maths, science and IT teacher educators from NCoEs, TTCs, TCs and RESCs
- seven-day (53-hour) mentoring skills courses to 254 English ISAs and an estimated 1,000 maths, science and IT ISAs.

Teacher Education for English (TEE) was a 14-month project (March 2018 to May 2019), funded by a philanthropist donor. British Council trainers are placed directly in four NCoEs (Jaffna, Mahaweli, Pasdunrata and Peradeniya) and one teacher training college (Giragama) where they deliver 120-hour English and methodology-integrated language improvement courses to over 750 English medium and other subject pre-service student teachers during their regular timetable. In addition, up to 80 English language teacher educators get informal mentoring opportunities working alongside the British Council trainers. In this way student teachers and teacher educators are exposed to models of best practice in the training classroom on a daily basis.

Both iTESL and TEE contribute to TRANSFORM as they take a bottom-up, issue-based approach to changing pre- and in-service teacher education systems. Although the emphasis is on professional skills development through improved course design and delivery, this incubates change which affects the other results areas: quality assurance and transition to employment, underpinned by research, evaluation and learning (REL) and strategic communications. They:

- build capacity at institutional level by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness (master teacher and teacher education selection and deployment that builds capacity for change management)
- establish classroom standards for learner-centred methodology which can be measured and assessed with greater transparency and used to establish constructive and more resilient continuing professional development (CPD) and future communities of practice
- increase responsiveness to Sri Lanka's economic development learning needs by equipping teachers and their students with relevant school-leaver skills in core skills, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, IT and effective communication
- develop management capacity of the Ministry of Education, National Institute of Education (NIE) and NCoE by building on lessons learned about ELT mapping and embedding teacher education approaches and deploying trainers for scalability to other subjects in the school and NCoE curricula (maths, science and IT)
- use key development issues in pre-service and in-service institutions to bring a range of education stakeholders together to make decisions in a more participatory and inclusive way, and use current gaps and inequalities in teacher education provision to trigger equity policies for inclusion.

The purpose of this report

While the purpose of this report is multifaceted, the current extract focuses on:

- mapping the iTESL and TEE materials on to existing NIE NCoE teacher training curricula in terms of coverage, gaps, relevance, sequence, standardisation and quality
- using the mapping process to encourage NCoEs to embed the TEC from iTESL and aspects of EfT from TEE in their regular ELT methodology and general skills (English) courses.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this study consisted of a document analysis, a range of interviews with the diverse stakeholders, and observations and activities. They included: reviewing existing documentation on the current state of teacher education in Sri Lanka, public administration circulars pertaining to the release, deployment and payment of master trainers as external resources; meeting key stakeholders (officials from the NIE, Ministry of Education, Peradeniya, Mahaweli and Pasdunrata NCoEs and Yakarawatta Provincial English Support Centre, master trainers and NCoE lecturers); and observations of classroom practice (teacher educators, iTESL master trainers and their participants in training sessions, and pre-service student teachers in NCoEs trained by British Council TEE trainers).

Mapping and embedding iTESL and TEE in NIE–NCoE systems

Syllabus

An overview of the NIE–NCoE syllabus for English

English language pre-service teacher training at the NCoEs (and by extension the TTCs and TCs) is structured by the NIE syllabus for English. This syllabus is made up of the following subjects, which are taught across the two years of study:

- **professional subject:** educational psychology, educational sociology, educational guidance and counselling, educational measurement and evaluation, elements in education and school management. This is a subject designed for all pre-service student teachers regardless of subject specialisation

- **educational practice:** characteristics of the profession; learner diversity and humanistic considerations; implementing the whole school curriculum; lesson planning; work arrangements and inclusive, child friendly approaches and rights; using visual aids and educational technology; classroom management skills; school management and reporting; linking school to community; disaster management. This is a subject designed for all pre-service student teachers regardless of subject specialisation and is taught just prior to teaching practice ('block teaching') in the first and second years

- **English (subject 1)** commonly referred to as 'four skills': listening, speaking, reading, writing, linguistics, and Introduction to English phonology. This is for pre-service student teachers who will teach English as a subject in grades 3 to 13. Variations of this course are delivered to primary English teachers (grades 3 to 5) and student teachers of maths, science and other subjects, studying in Sinhala and Tamil, who need English to teach the Grade 1–2 activity-based oral English programme if they are assigned to teach in primary schools

- **English literature (subject 2)** poetry, drama and prose. The first year mainly comprises detailed study of the set literature text for O-level, the second year mainly comprises detailed study of the set literature text for A-level.

- **ELT methodology (subject 2)** is printed together with English literature and forms the second part of subject 2. It includes lesson planning, teaching aids, classroom management, child-centred methods, English textbooks used in schools, different methods and approaches, teaching the four skills, error analysis and correction, and testing.

Mapping iTESL and TEE to the NIE–NCoE syllabus for English

The core material for iTESL is the TEC, a tailor-made training course based on curriculum and material from the British Council's Teaching for Success system and Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) 'lite'. This maps closely to the NIE–NCoE ELT methodology syllabus, with 90 per cent of the content covered in 53 per cent of the time allocated in the NIE–NCoE timetable.

In addition, the sessions on assessment and mentoring skills in TEC can be mapped respectively to the educational guidance and counselling, and educational measurement and evaluation components in the NIE–NCoE professional subject syllabus. Likewise, some of the TEC sessions on core skills, diversity and inclusion, and child protection sessions can be mapped to the inclusive, child-friendly approaches and rights components in the NIE–NCoE educational practice syllabus.

The core material for TEE takes a content and language integrated learning approach and is based on the British Council's EfT, which integrates English with methodology. EfT maps to 38 per cent of the content of the NIE–NCoE English subject 1 (four skills) curriculum within 21 per cent of the time allocated for the subject in the NIE–NCoE timetable. In addition, EfT integrates coverage of key aspects of the linguistics and introduction to English phonology components of the NIE–NCoE English subject 1 as well as many aspects of the NIE–NCoE ELT methodology syllabus.

Integrated and segregated syllabus approaches

TEC and EfT follow a highly integrated approach where content and delivery reinforce each other in a positive loop to showcase learner-centred methodology through participatory, task-based, reflective learning. The iTESL and TEE programmes and materials come from a professional, skills-based approach, influenced by CELTA and the British Council's Teaching for Success.

The NIE–NCoE syllabus on the other hand pursues a highly segregated approach that is academic, content-heavy, and lecture-based. It is influenced by the institutional traditions of the Sri Lankan university system and an organisational culture that:

- encourages narrow subject specialisation rather than cross-cutting skills or content-and-process integrated delivery
- timetables a large number of interchangeable staff who work independently of each other and who are used to 'dropping in and out' at designated times during the teaching day to deliver individual aspects of the course as 'one-off' lectures
- avoids the need to co-ordinate staff, build synergies through combined inputs or plan for systematic recycling of skills and ideas
- separates teaching practice from methodology input
- accommodates a public service employment, payment and promotion structure which upholds a system of specialisation and segregation of subjects.

Despite the constitutional status of English being that of a link language, the way ELT is presented in the NIE–NCoE syllabus is not as an international tool for helping Sri Lankan youth achieve social inclusion or access digital world resources, employability and higher education in the 21st century. It is more an academic, literature-based arts subject which has not been revised for some time. This accounts for the following:

- English literature and ELT methodology are combined in one 'subject' where 240 hours are devoted to poetry, drama and prose with only 180 hours to ELT
- within ELT methodology, 18 hours are dedicated to using teaching and learning aids effectively; in practice this means getting student teachers to develop endless posters and visuals, but there is no structured input on how to use the board effectively or how to use digital resources
- methodology for teaching young learners, phonology, basic literacy, lexical approaches, multi-level classes, multilingual approaches, self-access skills, core skills and special needs are not included in the ELT methodology syllabus
- the English (subject 1) 'four skills' syllabus and exams are characterised by an ambivalent mixture of proficiency (language improvement) and linguistics (language awareness), and there is no mention of vocabulary or a lexical approach.

Materials

The academic approach, rather than the professional skills approach used by iTESL and TEE, is also inherent in the way teaching materials are currently developed and used in the NCoEs. Lecturers are free to develop their own notes and handouts as long as they elaborate the NIE–NCoE syllabus and cover the hours allocated.

While allowing lecturers to interpret the syllabus according to their own professional ability, this lack of standardised teaching and learning material contributes to a lack of transparency and quality assurance.

Some English departments have perhaps become too comfortable with doing the bare minimum and are therefore resistant to change (with cases of sources still being in use after 30 years). On the other hand, Pasdunrata NCoE wants to break away from ad hoc inputs and has expressed the need for student teachers of English to have an ELT methodology coursebook.

After visits to four training centres and interviews with master trainers, only one could readily produce the materials she used for her regular ELT methodology classes – texts such as *A Course in Language Teaching* by Penny Ur (1991) and Hubbard et al.'s (1983) Training course for TEFL – which she delivered as (interactive) lectures.

No one interviewed felt in a position to explain how they would convert former lecture notes to task-based input-task-output (Experience, New, Analysis, Practice, Reflect 'ENAPR' type) sessions promoted by TEC or use TEC classroom management delivery skills once back in their regular classes.

The emphasis on lecturing, the use of elusive lecture notes, the short timetabled slots for each session, the general 'fixed desk' classroom environment, and the teacher-centred rote learning expectations of the organisational culture all come together to emphasise content over process, lecturing about the importance of group work rather than demonstrating its importance by using it on a regular basis. Even the best master trainers found it initially challenging to incorporate basic classroom management skills in the task-based delivery of the TEC course: giving clear instructions to set up tasks, monitoring and facilitating group work, taking notes for indirect correction and giving effective feedback. Although they knew the methodology content well, it was the first time they had been obliged to loop the input by demonstrating the skills they were advocating through the messages they were delivering.

Embedding the Teacher Educator's Course

Understandably then, it is difficult to map and embed iTESL's TEC or TEE's EfT in NCoEs. From the iTESL and TEE perspective this involves segregating integrated components and distributing them across a compartmentalised timetable. From the NIE–NCoE perspective it involves a fundamental change not only to the materials used but also to their delivery and to the organisational system itself.

It is therefore important to find initial synergy and use this as the entry point for change. The strongest 'match' is between the TEC – the core material for iTESL – and the NIE–NCoE ELT Methodology syllabus: TEC only takes up 53 per cent of the ELT methodology component's scheduled time, while covering 90 per cent of its content. This makes the TEC an integral support rather than a heavy addition to the regular NCoE teaching timetable. Strategically it is a good place to embed iTESL teacher education approaches.

TEC as part of the NIE–NCoE ELT methodology syllabus provides:

- a non-threatening, step-by-step change process
- leeway, leaving 47 per cent of the ELT methodology timetable for NCoE teacher educators to do their own thing, teach syllabus areas they feel are not covered by TEC, and rearrange sessions to accommodate exam preparation, block teaching and the vagaries of the new intake dates
- an opportunity for teacher educators to loop process with content and 'practise what they preach' in a guided way through the learner-centred, participatory, task-based nature of the TEC materials
- quality inputs including the sort of necessary recycling of ideas and skills which are missing from the current fragmented non-standardised approach

- consistency, coherence and accountability when one teacher educator covers for another's absence (a frequent occurrence in the colleges)
- constructive teacher educator support: by the end of the iTESL project all ELT Methodology 'lecturers' will have had the opportunity to be trained in its use
- learner empowerment and autonomy: student teachers can refer to the participant notes outside class, expand their critical thinking through the task-based approach and take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Contextualising core skills

In order to embed TEC in a sensitive and sustainable way that would propel not only professional but also system reform in the NCoEs, some adjustments were made to the TEC core skills materials. The sessions on *diversity and inclusion*, and *child protection* were re-written to embed the concepts in the Sri Lankan context. This makes the material more relevant to addressing the economic, geographic and ethnic disparities which exacerbate inequalities, vulnerabilities and exclusion in the current Sri Lankan school system.

The new session on *diversity and inclusion* looks at the excluding factors of de facto privatisation of education by private tuition classes, the university quota system, and the inherent disadvantages of remote estate sector and war-affected areas. It promotes English and gender equity as tools for inclusion and social cohesion.

The new session on *child protection* is based on the findings of the Global Partnership report, *Preventing Violence Against Children in Sri Lanka* (UNICEF, 2017) and focuses on stopping school related violence. It helps teachers examine the types of violence that occur, from corporal punishment to physical and online bullying to sexual harassment. It proposes a range of solutions to keep children safe and gets teachers to choose one of the solutions to develop into an action plan for their own school or college.

In addition to these changes, it is further recommended that TEC should include micro-teaching assignments based on the English subject 1 ('four skills') syllabus and materials that teacher educators normally use in college. Currently the micro-training assignments are based on the English school textbooks (and this is appropriate for when teacher educators use TEC to teach ELT methodology to student teachers). However, NCoE teacher educators first need to apply the methodology to their own teaching of the four skills, grammar, vocabulary and phonology at college level, not in schools. With micro-teaching assignments based on the English subject 1 it will be easier for them to loop content and process in a mutually reinforcing way on a daily basis.

Applying pressure and support

The possibility of professional and systemic change is increased when pressure is combined with support. In this case, teacher educators will not use the TEC materials in their regular classes nor will they try to apply task-based learner-centred methodology to other sessions in the professional subject, educational practice or English (four skills) curricula unless they are somehow obliged to do so but at the same time supported and incentivised.

One way of ensuring implementation is for the most senior personnel in the Ministry of Education to get academic board approval for the TEC materials and then send a circular to the NCoEs mandating the implementation of TEC as the core material for the NIE NCoE ELT methodology syllabus. This has been agreed in principle on receipt of a short report explaining the rationale, the edited TEC trainer and participant notes in coursebook form, and the map of how this version of TEC fits the NIE–NCoE syllabus.

Conclusion

In conclusion there are several issues that the mapping, embedding and communication strategy for iTESL and TEE have raised that can be used to trigger a more systemic change higher up the management chain in teacher education systems in Sri Lanka. They can be summarised in an issue-based approach as entry points for change and include:

1. mapping TEC to the NIE–NCoE ELT syllabus
2. embedding TEC as a core NCoE text through academic board approval

3. using TEC trainer and participant notes, and EfT, to standardise the materials teacher educators and student teachers use in NCoEs.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research
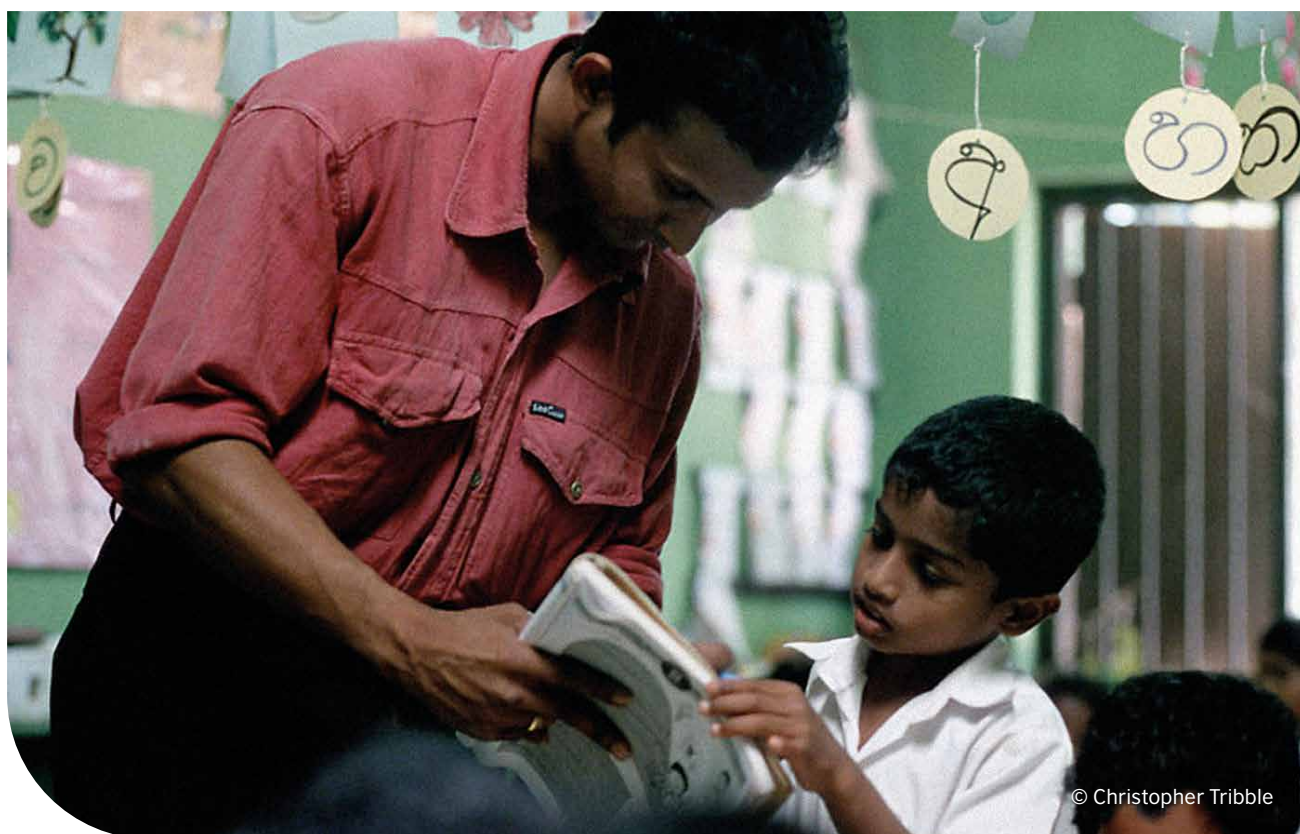
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English language teacher language proficiency in state secondary schools in Sri Lanka
Dave Allan and Alan S Mackenzie

Background

The British Council's education reform programme, TRANSFORM, supports the Ministry of Education's aims to enhance primary and secondary EFL teachers' ability to plan, deliver and evaluate quality learning outcomes. While there is recognition of the need for improved language proficiency of teachers and for data on the current levels of proficiency, there is little or no evidence of the level of English language proficiency of English teachers.

In 2018–19 the British Council commissioned NILE to carry out research to address this issue. Using a statistically significant representative sample, a study of the English language ability of English teachers within the secondary school system was conducted. As well as choosing, delivering and analysing a standardised test, Aptis for Teachers, the research team also arranged for test candidates to complete a survey on teachers' attitudes, motivations, learning histories and beliefs, and triangulated this with a series of focus group discussions.

The Sri Lanka School Census 2017 indicates that the number of secondary teachers potentially 'eligible', under our agreed definition of their being involved enough in the teaching of English to have significant impact on their learners, was over 15,000 across the nine provinces. We needed to ensure that the sample to be tested was a true reflection of the 15,000+, but also that it would provide proportionate coverage of the nine provinces and allow the agreed dimensions of interest for the report to be correctly represented. The target sample size of 500 teachers gives us a 99 per cent confidence level +/- 6.4 per cent across the whole population.

The sampling approach was a combination of stratification and randomisation, with the initial stratification designed to ensure coverage of the agreed areas of interest (e.g. urban versus semi-urban versus rural; age; years of English language teaching experience; O-level and A-level qualifications) at numbers reflecting the distribution across the different provinces, but with random selection then making sure that the samples were not skewed by factors which would make them non-representative of the total secondary teacher population of each province. We needed to avoid the potential effects of self-selection (stronger candidates are more willing to be tested) or the application of selection criteria for those to be tested which would invalidate the sampling.

In addition, the questionnaire and focus groups covered the following areas: English language learning history; teacher motivation; teacher satisfaction; perceptions of English language proficiency; attitude to language improvement; autonomous language learning; use of English in class; and wider contextual factors.

Finally, consideration was given to the desired level of student language proficiency, desired level of teacher language proficiency and global benchmarks.

Top-level results

According to a survey of 412 teachers from across Sri Lanka, the proportions of English language levels among English teachers within the secondary school system in Sri Lanka are: A2 five per cent; B1 36 per cent; B2 48 per cent; and C ten per cent. Most teachers in the sample are at the B levels in the CEFR. Listening is B2 among the biggest group (38 per cent), Reading is B1 among 39 per cent of them, Speaking is B1 or B2 among most teachers (44 per cent and 41 per cent respectively), and writing is B2 among 51 per cent of the teachers.

Urban schools have proportionately higher levels of achievement compared to semi-urban, which are higher than rural schools. The highest proportion of C candidates are in Central, North Central, Sabaragamuwa, Southern and Western areas. The higher the O-level and A-level results teachers gained, the higher the CEFR level achieved.

Furthermore, the younger the teachers, the higher the CEFR level they achieved. In parallel with age as a negative correlation of English language proficiency among teachers of English, 'years of experience teaching English' is also a negative correlation. The most linguistically proficient teachers of English are those who have been teaching for less than ten years, with 63 per cent of them being B2 or above, and over 16 per cent of those being CEFR C level. The present evidence is that teacher language levels are improving, with younger teachers (under 30) and those with the more recent entry into the profession being markedly better on average than those who are older and with longer service while the number of years of ELT experience seems to correlate negatively with level of proficiency.

Teachers welcome standards for language ability. They are motivated and interested in developing their language ability further, given support and time to do so.

At 94 per cent B1 and above and 58 per cent B2 and above, the proficiency levels evidenced by this study are higher than many neighbouring or competitor states, although when compared globally, language levels could be higher. For Sri Lanka to be competitive against countries with higher levels and/or much larger populations, there is a need to produce learners with as high proficiency levels as possible. At the same time this needs to be done in a way that supports teachers and leads to positive quality changes within the education system.

Implications and recommendations

The main findings above and their implications for national policy and practice are stated below.

Teacher language proficiency

English language teacher proficiency matters. Teachers need to have a level of proficiency significantly above that of the target level of their learners to be able to provide positive models, recognise learner errors and be able to deal with them, explain issues in language and assist language development appropriately.

At 94 per cent B1 and above and 58 per cent B2 and above, in general, the English levels of English teachers in the state school sector in Sri Lanka are intermediate to upper intermediate. This contrasts with significantly lower levels in neighbouring India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, for Sri Lanka to maintain a competitive edge against countries with higher levels, such as Malaysia, or much larger populations, and thriving private sectors, Sri Lanka needs to ensure more consistent standards for English language teachers as a first step towards enabling the development of higher-level English language learners.

The in-service standard for English language teachers in Sri Lanka could reasonably be set at CEFR B2, as 58 per cent of teachers already meet this standard.

Recommendation 1: Set professional and linguistic standards for secondary English teachers with a required proficiency level of CEFR B2.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate statement of standards into the General Education Policy.

Consideration should be given by the Ministry of Education as to whether these standards should apply to both primary and secondary teachers. This survey did not capture primary teachers, though from the data, many secondary teachers teach at primary levels. Giving learners of English the best possible start by providing them with teachers demonstrating B2 and above levels of language ability would strengthen the foundations of their language learning.

Developing teacher language proficiency

Setting standards would be welcomed by the majority of the secondary teaching population sampled, but such a move would need to be done diplomatically, and with support structures in place for teachers not meeting those standards.

If in-service teachers are below B2 to a degree or below B1 for certain, then they will not only fail to enable learners to do as well as they should in skills development, but also cause them to 'mislearn'. However, simply demanding that teachers meet the new standards without providing support would be reasonable. Positive quality changes will only be achieved if those graduating with the required professional and linguistic standards enter schools where those standards are exemplified, or at least demonstrably being worked towards.

At the same time as setting standards for teachers, the education system needs to support teachers already within the system as well as teachers currently in training pre-service. Teachers already employed within the state school system first need to know what their level of English is, and second, need support and training to enable them to increase their CEFR levels. Given appropriate levels of support and resources, teachers currently within the education system should be given time and incentive to be able to develop their language ability. Priority for a CPD programme integrating language development should be provided, particularly for teachers registering at CEFR B1 or below.

In the medium term (five to ten years), the aim of enabling the vast majority of Sri Lankan teachers of English to attain B2 or above is highly achievable.

Recommendation 3: Convene a working group to develop and deliver action plans for systemic change to achieve target levels island-wide, throughout pre- and in-service teachers by 2030. This working group may include but is not limited to Ministry of Education Quality Assurance Council, University Grants Commission, National Education Commission, NIE.

These actions plans should consider all of the following:

1. Addressing the rural/urban divide

While there is a noticeable variation between provinces in English teacher language ability, this is not so great as to prohibit taking a national approach to development while tailoring it for specific states. The government of Sri Lanka also has the choice of where to send teachers depending on resource needs. Using language ability as a determinant quality for this might help redress the balance of language ability across states.

Recommendation 3.1: Consider language ability when assigning teachers to schools in provinces with lower average CEFR levels.

2. Incentivising teacher development

Although teachers report that they are motivated already, motivation can be a highly dynamic and fragile property. If too many demands are put on teachers, their motivation can disappear rapidly. Ensuring motivation is maintained is key to helping teachers to 'buy in' to the new standards and accompanying CPD activities. Positive reward schemes are likely to motivate teachers to take part actively in development programmes and communal rewards like the school badge would make positive use of peer pressure.

Recommendation 3.2: Develop an incentive programme for teachers.

Having a target of B2 at the outset of the course of study in colleges will clearly indicate the seriousness of the language requirement for professional qualification. Any student wishing to be an English teacher must attain B2 level. This is equally true for English medium students at university.

Recommendation 3.3: Incentivise language development in initial teacher education (ITE) by including language development courses with a specified target level of B2 by graduation. Non-achievement of B2 on a recognised standard test delays graduation until that target is achieved.

3. Resourcing teacher language development

To enable teachers to develop their language ability, they will need access to quality learning materials. However, considering the sparsity of time reported by teachers, along with the stated desire to take part in online learning, we would suggest canvassing for mobile solutions that could be delivered via mobile phones or laptops.

Recommendation 3.4: Commission language learning resources to be made available to teachers that will enable them to develop their own language ability.

4. Prioritising spoken language development

Speaking proficiency is extremely important for how classes are delivered as long as it is used. Examining closely how English is used in class, and how it might better support learner language development, would be useful foci for action research or even national research surveys.

Evidence from elsewhere in the region suggests that where ITE and CPD have a language proficiency focus, they can achieve positive results, when accompanied by in-service resources and training that support language development. We do not recommend face-to-face training courses that are purely language development focused, but dual-purpose training courses that deal with teacher language development along with student language development.

Recommendation 3.5: Commission a series of CPD courses to be delivered live across the country to all teachers that focus on language development, using speaking in class and autonomous language learning.

5. Promoting autonomy

Given that autonomy levels are low, a programme that develops teachers' autonomy as language learners, including their understanding of the concept, and equipping them with strategies for independent learning, would be most appropriate. By giving teachers experiences of more autonomous ways of learning, they may increase the learner-centredness of their own teaching.

Self-access modes, with clear in-school staff development structures, such as teacher development clubs, language development meetings, or online courses and resources, would be a low-resource, decentralised way of stimulating development. There might also be a consequent impact on teaching practice.

Recommendation 3.6: Integrate strategies for developing teachers' autonomy as teachers, and as language learners into all CPD activities. Ensure that autonomy development underlies the CPD programme.

6. Monitoring and evaluating teacher language proficiency

There is a need for reliable test instruments to support new standards or development goals. Independent development of such a testing instrument is highly inadvisable, as the technicalities involved in producing such a test are extremely difficult to achieve. Organisations such as the British Council, Cambridge Education, Edexcel and Pearson devote vast resources to ensuring the validity and accuracy of the tests they produce. If the government of Sri Lanka wishes to develop its own test, it could consider doing this in partnership with one of these expert organisations.

Recommendation 4: Introduce a testing tool reliably linked to CEFR levels to assess and monitor teacher language proficiency.

Used developmentally, a regular testing of teacher language proficiency introduced as an integral component of a wider continuing professional development (CPD) programme has the potential to become a rapidly accepted indicator of progress and a motivational tool. Used punitively, it is likely to have the opposite effect.

Because of the specific nature of the way English is used in the classroom, it is important that this testing tool has a 'teacher English' component. This will assure its utility to the teaching population and link the test directly to classroom practice.

7. Aligning teacher development and standards with learner development and standards

This study found that teachers did not have a clear picture of what their own language level was, or the language necessary to describe it. The CEFR provides a framework within which to do this. Familiarising teachers with the CEFR, its associated 'can do' statements and ways of describing language ability will better enable them to analyse their own and their learners' language ability. Linking the CEFR with the curriculum for learners would be a way of achieving at one and the same time:

- more accurate descriptions of learner and teacher language ability
- clearer descriptions of language necessary at different school year levels
- clearer guidelines for materials developers to write learning resources
- more specific assessment targets
- clearer guidance on assessment task development.

Recommendation 5: Convene a working group within the National Education Commission to CEFR-link the national English curriculum for both primary and secondary education.

Conclusion: a roadmap for development

In the event of a roadmap for development being designed, in the first 12 months we would envisage a period of policy environment reform which prepares the ground for the implementation of a series of interlocking initiatives aimed at improving teacher language ability across the island.

Target level setting and incorporation into general education policy may be politically sensitive. This will involve discussion with representative teacher groups such as labour unions as well as the relevant government bodies. It is important that there is broad buy-in by all these groups before proceeding to the planning stage. In fact, we would suggest that the working group formed includes representation from labour unions to ensure as little resistance to plans as possible in the form of potential protest and disruption.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Student-centred learning in higher education
Tony Daniels, George Forster and Mark Windale

Introduction

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka has identified the need to ensure that graduates of higher education institutes acquire the knowledge, skills and competences that will equip them to successfully enter the workplace. A strategy to achieve this is for all higher education professionals to be able to use a variety of teaching approaches and select appropriately depending on the learning outcomes. While traditional approaches may successfully address learning outcomes of knowledge, it was felt that more student-centred approaches would effectively inculcate core skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and analysis, creativity and innovation, and finally leadership and teamworking.

The British Council in Sri Lanka commissioned the University of Leicester to create an initiative to review policy, identify needs and current practice, and pilot an approach to capacity building for consideration of future adoption. A needs analysis study was carried out to identify current UGC policies and initiatives designed to support developments in higher education, particularly in relation to the development of the teaching and learning process and students' learning experiences.

Research findings and suggested strategies and actions to address the needs

A research study was carried out through initial interviews with a deputy secretary general of the UGC and followed by focus group interviews with the vice chancellors and deans of faculty from five universities, university teachers from four universities and students from three universities, plus questionnaires.

What are the current courses offered by the universities and how successful are they in developing high-quality, employable students?

Graduate employability is a priority for both the UGC and the universities. Employment difficulties exist for those studying the humanities, social sciences and general sciences; and in universities outside Colombo, with 100 per cent employment soon after graduation for STEM and related subjects. However, student numbers (predominantly female) are higher in the humanities, social sciences and other related subjects with lower employment rates, posing a challenge for gender equity. The UGC is introducing reforms, such as encouraging universities to introduce new industrially related undergraduate courses, to address these challenges.

The UGC encourages student-centred learning, but it must be noted that universities are autonomous. The faculty standing committees, chaired by the elected deans, have industrial representation and make decisions about the teaching and learning experience, which includes the introduction of student-centred teaching and learning. Successful faculties can increase student numbers and thus recruit more staff. The most important aim is to produce able and employable graduates, bearing in mind: proficiency in the English language is an important employability criterion; employer engagement supports employability; the need to align courses to the economy, such as introducing computing into arts and humanities courses; and, given the importance of the development of social, emotional and soft skills, it is crucial that the learning experience should be holistic.

What student-centred teaching and learning is currently being used and what is the experience and expertise of the teaching staff in using student-centred teaching and learning approaches?

Student-centred learning is being applied nominally in all the universities as a result of the quality framework outcomes, but the extent and quality of its use is very variable. Limited use may be due to the limited experience of staff, with local PhDs and relatively little training.

In those universities where student-centred learning is being used, the extent of use varies from faculty to faculty. A range of approaches that were reported to be used include laboratory practical work, case studies, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, active writing and role play. There is evidence of use in engineering and architecture, English and education, increasing across the years of study. However, such approaches are not always utilised across the curriculum.

How effectively is student-centred learning being implemented?

Although there was a range of student-centred activities implemented, they were not well structured or planned to ensure full impact and achievement of clearly defined learning outcomes. The teachers currently using student-centred learning need professional development to be able to implement the approaches more effectively and to structure and scaffold the learning.

What challenges do the university teachers face and what are their needs?

Academic face a range of challenges: very large class sizes (up to 400 in Year 1); fixed furniture fostering lecture style; student expectations of being 'spoonfed' knowledge and not being use to independence and autonomy; students' poor levels of English; lack of or limited facilities and external learning resources; and difficulties in funding work placements.

The outcome of these difficulties is a real need for professional development related to student-centred learning (and its associated assessment techniques together with the use of electronic learning and blended learning) to support the implementation of the quality framework and achievement of the 12 learning outcome categories.

What is the current CPD provision with regard to student-centred teaching and learning?

All universities have a staff development centre that is responsible for providing training for new academic staff. The new staff must complete a six-month training programme, which is for one day per week, to obtain a contract. The certificated course is run both by the staff development centre itself and invited academics from the university.

What have been the students' learning experiences?

The students interviewed from faculties where student-centred learning was widely applied and embedded were very complimentary with regard to their learning experience. However, other students who experienced a more traditional form of teaching expressed concerns about the more traditional approach, such as the lack of up-to-date and relevant content of lectures to industry, limited fieldwork experience, large group sizes preventing interactive work.

The pilot capacity-building programme on student-centred learning in higher education

A capacity-building programme was designed to develop the expertise of a core group of academic staff from across all faculties of interested universities in a wide range of structured student-centred learning approaches. These approaches put into practice context-based learning, active learning, co-operative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, constructivism and other contemporary learning theories and practices. The programme consisted of three four-day workshops, conducted at intervals with time between the events to foster reflective practice which would then inform their participation in the subsequent workshop.

Following an interactive approach, the participants on the workshops largely worked in groups of four. Each workshop/session introduced the philosophies and developed understanding of the structures of learning and practices through hands-on exemplar activities. Sessions engaged participants in reflection, sharing ideas, giving feedback and question-and-answer sessions.

Workshop 1

This workshop introduced the participants to student-centred learning through a holistic student-centred model. The model puts into practice context-based learning, active learning, co-operative learning and problem-based learning. It supports the participants as they develop similar learning experiences for students on their courses. It included action planning for implementation and action planning to be completed before Workshop 2.

Workshop 2

Building on the learning from and action implementation after Workshop 1, the second workshop introduced the participants to active reading and writing techniques, which are suitable for use in higher education as well as the active learning process and the 5E learning cycle, i.e. a serial constructivist model of learning adapted to put into practice context-based, active, inquiry-based and problem-based learning. Support was given to participants to develop similar learning experiences for their own students to be implemented before Workshop 3.

Workshop 3

This final workshop enabled participants to share their experiences of implementing their 5E learning episode through an exhibition of the curriculum materials use, evaluation outcomes and examples of student work. They were then introduced to role-play structures for dealing with controversial issues and finally trained as trainers. This included the development of an awareness building session on student-centred learning and a full training programme to run at their home faculty.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out in four of the five planned universities and adopted a range of approaches.

Evaluation of capacity-building workshops

Thirty-six participants completed a questionnaire, which included feedback on the objectives, usefulness and intent to utilise approaches.

The participants developed knowledge and deep understanding of all the student-centred learning approaches that were introduced during the workshops, particularly of the learning structures and scaffolds used to ensure effective learning and the development of deep understanding by the students. This was achieved through the use of hands-on exemplar activities and the provision of additional exemplar teaching resources that applied the approaches effectively. The survey results show that the methods described are applicable in many different situations, even technical areas which might not be expected to be amenable to student-centred learning.

Case studies of observed good practice

During the visits we observed very effective implementation of the various student-centred learning approaches introduced on the workshop in different learning environments, with different numbers of students, different year groups of students and in different faculties. The full report contains summary case studies of the good practices observed.

Focus group discussion

The participants stated that they developed greater understanding of student-centred learning. Some techniques they learned include questioning, group discussion, active reading and active writing. The participants stated that all the student-centred learning approaches introduced on the workshops have been applied. They have been used with Year 1, 2 and 3 students in class sizes varying in number from 24 to 250 in a range of subject areas.

Faculty dean meetings

The deans interviewed were very positive about their staff engagement in the programme as implementation of student-centred learning and/or the continued implementation of outcome-based learning are priorities for their faculties. They aim to have comprehensive teaching resources to support effective and sustainable implementation of student-centred learning across the faculties.

Student feedback

Course participants were required to collect student feedback as part of the action research that they carried out between workshops. The feedback indicated that these methods were appreciated, but there were doubts expressed, particularly with respect to the amount of time spent on each activity. Students felt that lectures were more efficient at conveying concentrated information. This indicates that an awareness raising approach, to sensitise students to the benefits of student-centred approach, could be of use.

Many students liked these methods of learning, quoting higher levels of engagement, greater autonomy and freedom while learning and the positive benefits from interacting with others. Many felt it an easier way to learn and retain knowledge. Discussion permitted a wider range of views to be understood and covered within the time frame with more people contributing to the process.

Compared with formal lecturers, students found that these methods were more engaging and held their interest for longer. Knowledge retention was improved and questions could be repeated until the answers were clear. Many students liked the freedom, self-motivation and initiative required.

With respect to formal lectures, several participants preferred formal lectures, quoting time efficiency, concentrating only on relevant issues and the ability of the lecturer to explain subjects well. These observations may reflect the current curriculum-assessment approach where students are assessed on their knowledge of the content that is delivered and less on their ability to manipulate and transfer knowledge and skills to different contexts.

In general, the sessions were appreciated as innovative teaching methods.

Recommendations for the future development of student-centred learning in higher education

The pilot capacity-building project has been a success, and already has had significant impact in the classrooms of those participants who have implemented the student-centred learning approaches. We would therefore recommend a staged programme progressively to build capacity within the academic staff from all faculties in all 15 government universities.

Stage 1: capacity-building teams of academic staff from all faculties of all state-funded universities

We recommend a national professional development programme that adopts a capacity-building model similar to that of the pilot programme This would run over a period of three years to build the capacity of teams of academics in all faculties of all universities, thus supporting the implementation of student-centred learning in all university classrooms. It would also be organised on a cluster basis, with each capacity-building programme targeting a specific faculty. We would recommend a series of five-day workshops to develop teams of academics from each faculty. While this should target all universities, it may be suitable in the first instance for faculties that have additionally secured external funding (e.g. the World Bank or Asian Development Bank).

Stage 2: capacity-building academic staff from the staff development centres of all universities

We would recommend a capacity-building programme in student-centred learning for academic staff from the staff development centres and other academic staff regularly contributing to their courses, enabling them to train both new academics and other academics through a similar CPD programme. Using the approach in Stage 1, we would suggest that this capacity building should be run for appropriate clusters of universities nationwide to ensure maximum participation.

The above two stages would initially be delivered by international specialists with gradual handover, via training of trainers, to a dedicated cadre of national specialists. This cascade model would lead to the development of large sustainable teams of experts in all faculties of all universities who would develop all academic staff in their faculties through capacity-building programmes and provide follow-up support. The implementation would be supported by the teaching and learning materials developed on the programmes, with the academics working as reflective practitioner groups, that regularly share their action research.

The international/national trainers should advise or mentor the participants when they are developing their teaching and learning materials and observe them implementing these plans to provide further feedback and professional development.

We would recommend that there should be a series of writing workshops for the participating teams of academics, leading to the development of comprehensive teaching and learning materials to support effective implementation of student-centred learning across all courses in the participating faculties. The teaching and learning materials should be edited by the training team and professionally designed. Action research carried out by the participants should lead to publication in academic journals, periodicals, conference proceedings and books.

Stage 3: community of practice

We would recommend establishing a community of practice to support information sharing, peer support and networking. An annual conference for the participants in the programmes will enable them to share the outcomes of their action research and to promote the wider application and publication of their research.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Quality assurance

Introduction

Addressing challenges in education reforms calls for an evidence-based approach to drive wider systemic reform, carry out institutional strengthening and develop capacity at the individual level.

These changes require solid quality assurance systems and processes that improve quality and relevance, efficiency and effectiveness and, finally, equity in education. Quality assurance helps drive and maintain standards in education and ensures that the education system is strong and inclusive. Quality assurance is also crucial in addressing and tracking learner outcomes, and in this way creating conditions that facilitate student mobility within and outside of the country. With technological advances and the mass migration of people across geographical boundaries, it is important for education to ensure that youth have the hard and the soft skills needed to be economically and socially productive.

Assuring quality in education at primary, secondary or tertiary level requires systematic review of education which involves internal and external evaluation of systems, processes and key stakeholders. The two papers in this section provide research into ensuring quality in secondary and tertiary education. *Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka* provides a rich overview of language assessment in Sri Lanka. It outlines the Sri Lankan education system, the curriculum, the assessment schemes in place and systems in place, including the place of the standardised and competitive examinations that govern the entire teaching learning process. This large-scale study, which took input from multiple stakeholders, maps out the gaps, challenges and ways to move forward to ensure quality and, possibly more importantly, relevance in language assessment.

Improving research capability in higher education reports on an initiative addressing the needs identified by the University Grants Commission to provide not only professional development for university academics to raise the quality of higher education research but also to consider quality assurance of higher education more widely. While this paper reports on the initiative to support capacity development of academics in leading and developing quality research, exploring international research partnerships and collaborations and evaluating university academics research capability, the study highlights the need for an institutional culture within higher education that recognises the value of and mainstreams research. However, it sends a larger message that calls for the need for higher education research to be a catalyst in raising standards of the delivery of teaching, research and learning.

Improving research capability in higher education
Sophie Foley

Background and research design

Discussions between the UGC of Sri Lanka and the British Council indicated a common interest in the domain of excellence and quality in higher education. One of the external challenges reflected on by senior UGC personnel was the extent to which Sri Lankan higher education institutes (HEIs) featured in global rankings in terms of teaching and research, whether graduates of Sri Lankan HEIs were able to utilise their qualifications to provide opportunities for international study and/or research grants, and finally whether Sri Lankan HEIs are an attractive proposition for international students. This aspect of transnational education also included international academic collaboration.

As a result of a call for proposals, Edinburgh Napier University was selected to deliver a project from April 2018 to October 2019 to address specific key areas of work and deliver corresponding outputs, which were modified in response to UGC's current priorities, which include raising quality standards of teaching and research as well as international benchmarking of quality assurance processes. Four final outputs were agreed.

Report on outputs

Output 1: Workshop – 'Achieving impact through quality research'

A three-day workshop was held in Colombo from 13 to 15 November 2018. Participation was based on academic roles in relation to research, resulting in three distinct groups and clearly defined selection criteria for each group. In total, there were 47 participants spread across the three groups as follows:

- Group A – staff who contribute to the strategic development of research capacity and quality of research degree provision in their institution (five participants)
- Group B – senior academics with a significant responsibility for training of research degree students and probationary lecturers, and for research degree supervision (eight participants)

- Group C – senior lecturer Grade 2 and probationers (including PhD and non-PhD holders). These participants were expected to submit an application for the seed funding (output 2 of this project) (34 participants).

The overarching theme of the workshop was the achievement of research impact through improving the research culture and the quality of research linked to international benchmarking. Each session focused on a specific element of the research process, selected on the basis of its contribution to the enhancement of the quality of research outputs. The sessions and their associated learning outcomes included: why research; supporting research cultures that enables high quality research; enhancing the doctoral degree; developing proposals and winning funding; project management of research; creating high quality publications; open access publications and authorship conventions; impact and outreach/public engagement; and building collaborations.

Core themes and priorities identified across the sector

The trigger questions and the responses provided useful data on attitudes to, expectations of and current practice in higher education research.

Research culture: The notion of *research culture* is in its infancy across the university sector. A key conflict is the heavy emphasis on the undergraduate teaching provision, with relatively little postgraduate provision (taught master's or master's by research; PhD programmes). However, tangible actions were identified that can be taken to support/enable and address barriers to developing a research culture within universities, including:

- appropriate mechanisms for allocation of research budget from national level
- workload management/protected time for research, e.g. release of teaching staff for one year for research early-mid career; at department level, have dedicated time for research free of teaching/administration; feasibility to work off-hours

- address the reality of limited funding:
  – encourage private sector collaborations/ consultancy
  – improved efficiency of administrative process – move online
  – improvements to procurement – move online
  – access to publications – currently universities have limited access to databases
  – pooling of resources nationally and access to shared resources – could apply to databases, cutting-edge technology, analytical services
- leadership and development of shared values/ collective
- introduction of a new layer of postdoctoral research positions.

PhD supervision and quality of PhDs: Addressing the quality of PhD supervision was identified as a key priority by participants from all of the universities present. It was evident that there is a large variation in practice across the sector. The following were identified as required actions:

- improvement of the quality of supervisory teams including developing robust policy regarding the number of supervisors, and the qualifications, supervisory experience and subject expertise of the team
- articulation of the responsibilities of the supervisory team in relation to the development of a robust research project and the support of the PhD student
- implementation of a compulsory training programme for all supervisors. This appears to be absent across the sector.

The majority of PhDs in the Sri Lanka university sector are undertaken by newly appointed academics (who may only have a bachelor's qualification) on probationary contracts during which PhD completion is a requirement. They also have a heavy teaching and administrative burden during the probationary period. Overall, this may compromise the quality of PhDs and the training received by junior academics, which may have a longer-term impact on the ability of a university to improve their status in relation to research. In addition to addressing the quality of PhD supervision, appropriate mentoring for newly recruited academics needs to be considered.

Impact of UGC and university policies on quality of research outputs: During the event, a number of UGC circulars and/or university policies were highlighted as having a negative impact on the quality of research outputs. Potential impacts on research outputs included:

- research publication strategy, particularly in relation to authorship contribution, possibly discouraging collaboration within the home university and also between Sri Lankan universities and internationally. This may be to the detriment of the ambition to have an increased number of research publications by Sri Lankan academics in high-impact international peer-reviewed journals
- international collaborations – the approvals that one must seek for international collaborations are seen as an impediment.

In addition to promotion criteria, the requirements for PhD completion and stipulations set by national funding bodies in relation to publications may inadvertently be driving lower-quality research publications, encouraging researchers to aim for a higher number of publications rather than an ambition for publication in international journals and/or higher ranking journals.

Centrally provided support services: All represented universities identified a need to improve the performance of key support services operated centrally within universities in order to increase efficiency and responsiveness to researcher and funding body requirements. Procurement and ordering practices were identified as key barriers due to levels of bureaucracy and delays incurred. Required improvements included: updating procurement and ordering practice; online communication and requests/approvals; professionalisation of administrative and technical staff.

Securing research funding: When it comes to securing research funding, there is an over-reliance in terms of expectation on internal funding (i.e. internal to the university) and national funding from government bodies. There are a number of factors influencing this including, but not limited to, lack of exposure by academics to high-quality research and to international research, lack of incentive (and possibly disincentivisation) to collaborate (collaboration being key to increasing opportunities for actual grant applications to certain funding bodies and to the success rate in securing funding), and a lack of confidence in seeking international collaboration.

Output 2: Implementation and management of a call for seed funding for the initiation of new research collaborations between Sri Lankan state universities and UK higher education institute/research institutes

The funding call was specifically targeted at the early career academics (senior lecturer grade 2 and probationers) who participated in the research workshop (Output 1 above). The purpose of the call was to provide a context for applying some of the learning from the workshop and to support participants in initiating new international collaborative research partnerships. The call was limited to a collaboration between a minimum of one Sri Lankan state university and one UK HEI, and the criteria included (i) addressing economic priorities for Sri Lanka), (ii) own personal development as a researcher and (iii) potential impact of the proposed research collaboration through provision of a plan for accessing either future funding and/or translation to application.

Challenges included: lack of preparation pre-workshop in developing a suitable small proposal to meet specific criteria; lack of networks for international collaboration; and difficulty in working to tight deadlines.

From 34 Group C participants, only eight applications were received. Of these, five were funded (two of which required the applicant to address specific concerns of the review panel prior to final approval), following the decisions of the review panel of two Edinburgh Napier University academics, an independent UK academic, and the British Council in Sri Lanka. Individual feedback was given to each unsuccessful applicant. The five funded applications ranged from life science to marketing and the social sciences.

Output 3: Two-day workshop on 'An enhancement-led approach to quality management', focusing on the university quality assurance framework and quality enhancement

This was held in Colombo (27–28 February 2019) focusing on the university quality assurance (QA) framework and quality enhancement. In total there were 34 participants, including the vice chair of UGC, director and assistant secretary of the UGC's Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC), members of the UGC's Standing Committee on Quality Assurance, vice chancellors, directors of university internal quality units, deans of faculty, deputy director of Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development Operation, and director of the National Science Fund, with 14 universities represented.

The workshop ended with an action-planning session. Participants were asked to identify one element from the workshop that they found particularly pertinent to the enhancement of the QA process in Sri Lanka's state university sector – the dominant responses were *student engagement* (26 comments), *internal review* (17 comments), *enhancement-led approach* (six comments), *industry linkages* (six comments) and *graduate employability* (four comments). In terms of elements that could be acted on at institutional level for immediate action, student engagement, internal review and graduate employability were prioritised.

The group also explored aspirations and priorities for the future (three to five years ahead). These fell into two priority areas: *Development of a national level policy on the use of student engagement in QA/QE and curriculum design*, and *Enhancement-led approach to develop a vibrant internal QA system using an evidence-based approach.*

Output 4: Four-day exposure visit to Edinburgh Napier University on quality assurance and enhancement

Participation included the chair of the UGC, the director of the UGC's QAAC, members of the UGC's Standing Committee on Quality Assurance and British Council colleagues. Input was provided by Edinburgh Napier University, QAA Scotland, the International Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland. The key themes of the visit included: implementation of quality assurance, institutional review, regulation of quality assurance, research degrees framework, university leadership, student engagement and student participation, and employer engagement.

Recommendations and conclusions

The project design included the continuous collection and collation of feedback and opportunities to suggest areas of future focus. The first set of recommendations emerged from the participants themselves and, while they are not exhaustive, reflect areas current concerns and their aspirations for a vibrant future higher education sector.

Develop a research culture

This recommendation was overwhelmingly endorsed by participants throughout the entire project. Features include:

- enhance allocation of research funds
- promote collaborative research
- remove red tape on the administration side
- encourage staff to engage in research and publication
- move from being a 'teaching' university to a 'research' university
- 24/7 access to research facilities
- less administration work allocated for researchers/teachers
- different approaches to curriculum development.

Ensure the relevance of policy

Ensure proper academic planning, identifying a specific number of hours per day (or equivalent) for each activity including research. The view was that this is a priority and should be developed into a policy decision.

Build capacity in proposal writing to secure research funding and writing articles to journals

Universities to provide training in proposal writing, considering the criteria of key research funding bodies. Writing for publication in journals; create awareness of publication opportunities; how to find appropriate journals; address common mistakes in writing; raise awareness of publication ethics and authorship. Universities must consider the quality of the journal in evaluating research performance of staff; promoting publication in high-indexed journals and raising awareness of the quality of journals, e.g. encourage/create high-quality publications through reward schemes for publication in recognised journals (e.g. indexed Web of Science, Scopus).

Build international academic links and networks and support intra- and inter-university collaboration

Viewed as a priority, there is a need to develop collaboration with overseas universities, based on targeted matching of local and overseas expertise for research areas that exploit strength of the region. Collaborative research must be promoted for effective research, which needs to be supported by international exposure for researchers. Peer review of research within the department to take place.

Build capacity in research supervision

PhD supervision should be improved: (i) qualifying exam; (ii) supervisor training; and (iii) proposal defence. Regular supervisor training with a framework of regulations for PhD degree and supervision.

The final recommendation did not feature in the suggestions made by the workshop participants (as reflected in the recommendations suggested above) as it emerged at a later date, although conducting surveys of research students was included. It is, however, a recommendation that we see being supported and endorsed by UGC, so we include it here.

Embed student engagement into quality assurance processes

Include student voices in quality assurance, potentially including on teaching, performance, curriculum (including relevance), student experience and careers guidance.

In conclusion, the academic community has clear views on the direction of travel it wishes higher education to take and is committed to providing students with quality learning opportunities and experiences while increasing the status of Sri Lankan HEIs as a source of quality research. With support of this kind from the profession, UGC is in a strong position to continue with its reform programme to strengthen higher education provision in Sri Lanka.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka and comparison with the larger region
Tineke Brunfaut and Rita Green

The role of English in general education in Sri Lanka

English language teaching, learning and assessment are a priority for the government of Sri Lanka. Lancaster University was commissioned by the British Council to identify current practice, assess its suitability and, where appropriate, make recommendations for review and revision.

Over the past few decades, general education in Sri Lanka has undergone several reforms. The education reform of 1997 saw the development of a set of national goals and competences needed to reach those goals, and thus a shift to more competency-based curricula, followed by further incremental reform in 2003.

The majority of school instruction takes place in one of the two national languages, Sinhala (62 per cent) or Tamil (30 per cent) (Ministry of Education, 2018), and English is the medium of instruction in some schools, in combination with one or both national languages.

Regardless of the medium of instruction, English is introduced from the start of children's schooling in Grade 1, where it is used as a means of communication through so-called activity-based oral English teaching. English is more formally introduced as a subject from Key Stage 2 (grades 3 and 4). In junior secondary school (grades 6–9), English is one of 12 subjects which make up the common curriculum at that level. At senior secondary school level (grades 10 and 11), English language becomes a core subject, among a set of six core subjects and three optional subjects. At GCE A-level (grades 12 and 13), general English is mandatory, and a pass is needed to be eligible for university admission.

English language curriculum in secondary education

The secondary school curriculum for English language in general education in Sri Lanka, developed by the NIE, is competence-oriented, built around basic competences, and it aims to develop both learners' lower-order and higher-order skills in all four language skills in English. The English language curriculum aims to promote a competence-based approach to language learning and teaching.

The implementation of the curriculum is supported by the provision of teacher instructional manuals (up to A-level), developed by the NIE. In addition, suggestions are made for the assessment and evaluation of each skill. For example, for the testing of reading, ideas are provided on types of test tasks that could be used. For writing and speaking, suggestions are made on what aspects of students' writing or speaking could be evaluated (e.g. fluency, content and syntax) as well as for rating criteria.

Overall, however, the advice provided with reference to language assessment in the teacher guides across all secondary school grades can be characterised as follows (see also Green, 2018):
- broad and vague advice
- lacking concrete practical examples or advice on how to assess
- drawing on outdated sources
- not operationalising the intended construct
- representing inauthentic language use.

The above suggests a mismatch between what the curriculum is aiming to promote in terms of 'real world' English language skills (including for employment and further education) and what is actually being practised by means of the language, tasks and activities existing in the current textbooks.

Nature of the national English language assessment: O-level and A-level

Assessment in general education is characterised by three high-stakes public examinations: an optional exam at the end of primary level, and the GCE Ordinary Level (O-level) and GCE Advanced Level (A-level) exams in senior secondary school.

A number of issues have been identified. First is the exam-dominated nature of educational practice, with excessive time being spent on exam preparation and teaching to the test. A second issue raised is the narrow construct being tested in the public examinations, which has been described as knowledge-based and therefore leading to predictable exams which stimulate memorisation, reproduction, and cramming-oriented teaching and learning. Overall, assessment is not well integrated in the learning-teaching process but seen as an isolated event.

We conducted a content review of the English language exam papers from the 2016 and 2017 English language O-level and the 2017 A-level. This showed that the public examinations target the assessment of language knowledge (grammar and vocabulary), reading comprehension and writing. The exam papers do not contain sections on listening or speaking. Immediately, this implies that a number of competences described in the secondary school curriculum are by definition excluded from evaluation through the public examinations.

It can be concluded that the public examinations for English language at both levels suffer from the following weaknesses:

- a lack of standardisation within and across exam papers
- test tasks that do not reflect guidelines of good language test task design as described in language testing handbooks, research, and guidelines for practice by international language testing organisations (e.g. ILTA, EALTA and ALTE)
- inauthentic task input materials and test items
- a lack of transparency on and rationale for the targeted construct
- an unbalanced and narrow testing of a limited construct
- mismatches between the intended construct and construct tested due to task design issues, which also lead to issues with scoring validity and reliability
- omission of listening and speaking in the public examinations negatively impacting on goal of communicative competence in English.

Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka: interviews with stakeholders

We also investigated the perceptions of a range of key assessment stakeholders through a series of interviews (and an alternative questionnaire format). Thirty-two key stakeholders were involved, primarily senior officials from the Ministry of Education, NIE and NCoEs plus secondary teachers. The interview addresses strengths, challenges and priorities for change, which are included in this summary.

English language curriculum in Sri Lanka

Priorities for change include, but are not limited to:

- an increased focus on the skills of listening and speaking, with an integrated-skills element added to the curriculum whereby different language skills are combined (e.g. reading-to-write, listening-to-speak). This would help conceptualise 'English as a life skill' in the curriculum, would make the curriculum more relevant and practical for students, and would 'give them a voice' as language learners
- the English language curriculum should align better with language as used in the world of employment. To prepare learners better for the job market, some competences in the curriculum would need to be 'tweaked'

- the curriculum should align with the CEFR 'because it realistically captures language' and be revised to better reflect current approaches to English language learning and teaching
- an improvement in the links between the curriculum and textbooks and teaching materials with, more specifically, the need for classroom materials that operationalise a competency-based, 'four skills' approach to English language learning and teaching
- ensure effective implementation of the English language curriculum in Sri Lankan classrooms, make the curriculum clearer for teachers, for example, by providing explicit guidance on how to teach according to the curriculum, clearer descriptions of the target competences and the envisaged progression journey for learners, and more supplementary teaching materials Some simplification of the curriculum might be needed as there is currently 'too much to get through'
- an increase in teacher training to support them in operationalising the curriculum and a competence-based, 'four skills' approach. Teachers should also be trained so that they effectively use English as the medium of instruction in their English lessons.

English language assessment in Sri Lanka

Priorities for change include, but are not limited to:
- linking-up of teaching, learning and assessment, including a full reflection of the competence-based approach in the English language assessment in Sri Lanka to enable a match between language use as tested and language use for real-world demands
- the introduction of or increase in the testing of listening and speaking, and their inclusion in the standardised national exams. This would ensure a 'four skills' approach and make a more task-based and functional language-oriented approach possible, leading to better construct representation and higher authenticity. Include rater and examiner monitoring systems

- develop stakeholders' language assessment literacy, including that of item writers, test developers, teacher trainers and teachers. Such training should not be narrowly defined, but cover technical and practical aspects of language assessment, as well as broader pedagogical and ethical dimensions.

Language assessment literacy: priorities for development

Specific priorities for training in language assessment literacy include the following.

Linking the curriculum/syllabuses – teaching – testing: How to translate the curriculum into tests; how to go from what is being taught to testing; additionally, how to develop a 'realistic' curriculum that can be implemented in teaching, learning and testing.

Making use of test results: How to translate test results into strategies for teaching, remediating, diagnosing; how to use test results to inform language education policy.

Practical competence in developing, administering tests: How to develop test specifications; how to develop a (good) test; how to write items; how to select item types; how to do 'proper' test administration; how to build item banks; how to use technology for language testing; how to develop and use classroom-based/continuous/formative/peer assessment.

Broadening the construct: How to assess all four skills; how to develop 'interesting tests in the four skills'; how to specifically assess listening and speaking skills.

Understanding the construct: The nature of the language being tested; how English is used in 'the real world'; what can/should be assessed; how to develop learners' language skills (rather than rote learning).

Scoring and rating: How to develop rating scales for speaking and writing; how to develop standardised assessment criteria; how to rate and grade performances; how to rate reliably.

Evaluating test quality: How to validate tests; how to analyse test results; how to interpret test results; how to use statistics for validation; how to conduct statistical analyses.

Knowledge and awareness: Of key principles and theory in language testing and assessment; of the role of test specifications for valid testing; of the importance of standardisation; of the range of assessment types that are available for use and what they are useful for; of the key potential of assessments as tools for testing language communication instead of pass/fail decision tools.

Understanding impact potential: Why assessment is important; what role testing plays; how assessment can have washback on the curriculum/materials/classroom teaching; how assessment can have an impact on or be utilised for language learning motivation; how to create and use assessments in a fair manner; how to train others in language assessment.

Recommendations

On the basis of our literature review and interview study, we formulate the following recommendations for national English language assessment in Sri Lanka, which resonate with the issues and policy recommendations that were formulated by the National Education Commission in their 2016 proposals for general education in Sri Lanka (National Education Commission, 2016).

1. **Establishing a 'full circle' in English language education (teaching–learning–assessment):** An explicit and comprehensive connection between the English language curriculum and assessments at the relevant level. This requires a systematic mapping of exam content on the curriculum, as well as clear communication to stakeholders on the mapping. Similarly, the textbooks and teacher guides need to be comprehensive reflections of the curriculum for actual classroom practice.

2. **Close collaboration between departments:** To ensure such a 'full circle', it is vital that the institutions responsible for the curriculum (NIE), the textbooks Educational Publications Department (EDP), the exams (Department of Education) and teacher training (NCoE) work together closely as well as communicate to other stakeholders in a coherent manner. This will ensure that the curriculum is interpreted and operationalised in the intended manner in terms of the teaching materials, examinations, school-based assessments and classroom practice. At the same time, textbook writers, teachers and examiners can inform and help shape or adapt the curriculum in terms of what is operationalisable.

3. **Enhancing the development of learners' English listening and speaking skills:** Through equipping teachers with the pedagogic skills and proficiency to teach these language skills, providing hands-on resources to teach these language skills (which can also be effectively employed in rural and low-resource areas), and testing these skills in the public examinations. Our comparative regional analysis indicates that there may be room for larger investment of the Sri Lankan government in education.

4. **Improving the quality of English language assessment:** Implementing the recommended steps for a full test cycle (see e.g., Green, 2014), including the development of test specifications and improvements in test, task and item design, to ensure compliance of the public examinations with international standards for ethical behaviour in language testing (see, e.g. the International Language Testing Association's Code of Ethics, which has recently been translated into Sinhala – https://www.iltaonline.com/page/CodeofEthics – or the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment's Guidelines for Good Practice – www.ealta.eu.org/guidelines.htm). In addition, aiming to improve the quality of exams also requires research on the assessments, especially the high-stakes O-level and A-level English exams, in order to validate them as well as continue to work on them. This will help ensure good construct representation in the examinations, reduce the predictability of the exam, and therefore hopefully result in positive exam washback.

5. Developing stakeholders' language assessment literacy: Language assessment training of stakeholders at all levels of the English language education system in Sri Lanka. While our empirical study indicates that a solid and multi-component basis in language assessment is needed in all stakeholders, higher levels of language assessment literacy are particularly desirable for those in key positions such as at the Department of Examinations or in teacher training. Increased language assessment literacy will benefit the quality of the public English examinations and school-based assessments. It will also help ensure that assessment results are used more effectively as tools that can inform language pedagogy (e.g. to diagnose or remedy second language learning problems), and not simply to award a score or make a pass/fail decision. As put forward by the National Education Commission (2016: 68): 'Assessment information enables the teacher to continuously improve his/her interpretation and to provide a rich learning environment to students.'

6. Addressing systemic factors: Optimise connections between the teaching and examinations calendars (including publication of results) to avoid losing precious time for educational development. This will require communication and collaboration between departments responsible for examinations, secondary schools and universities.

The above suggestions are made with two main aims in mind: a 'rounder' development of learners' English language skills and the achievement of higher levels of proficiency through general education; and a better preparation of learners, in terms of English language skills, for communication in the 'real world' of employment and/or further study.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Transitions to employment

Introduction

The starting point for this collection of research is the well-documented skills gap between the knowledge and skills that young people have and those required by the labour market.

There is a mismatch between the ways in which we educate today's youth and the skills the education system equips them with, and the requirements of the job market. The discrepancy is clearly visible in high youth unemployment and underemployment rates in a context where there are labour shortages in priority and growth sectors of the economy as well as the emerging needs of Industry 4.0. Education provision needs to be based on the principles of equity and social justice in that all youth are able to benefit from opportunities irrespective of their social, economic and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it must ensure that education provision responds to market demand. It therefore needs to be relevant to the labour market and will support youth in transitioning to the next phase in their lives.

Careers guidance provision of the general education sector in Sri Lanka: a review and recommendations looks at another key aspect for youth and the implications for education. While it references career development as the need for individuals to manage learning, relearning and navigating employment opportunities, the strength of an effective careers guidance provision is that it allows young people to make an informed choice about their future. The report reflects on the need for careers guidance to be internationally benchmarked, professionalised, explicitly inked to the labour market (through direct employer engagement) and available to all.

English and employability in Sri Lanka looks at the needs of the labour market and the role of English in it through a study that was carried out among employers. A strength of this study lies in how it maps the different sectors in the Sri Lankan economy, the dominant sectors and the roles of English in those sectors. The study highlights that English is seen as a key employability skill, but that there are varying levels of proficiency required for different roles in each of the sectors. Overall all employers acknowledged that strong language skills will support upward mobility of individuals and, as commercial entities, emphasised the role that language skills play in productivity and economic growth.

Careers guidance provision of the general education sector in Sri Lanka: a review and recommendations
Sheila Clark

Background

Career development is a lifelong process for individuals to manage learning, work, and transitions from education to employment and between employment opportunities. This is so they can move forward and participate effectively in work and society. Successful career development is important for individuals' personal and economic well-being and social mobility, and for both economic productivity and social justice.

To undertake the process of lifelong career development, individuals need to acquire skills that support employability, career management and resilience in the face of career change. Career management skills help individuals to develop a positive and resilient mindset; learn about themselves and the opportunities available; make informed and justified decisions and act on these, while networking with people who can support them. For lifelong career development people need access throughout their lives to career learning (education) and personal career guidance/coaching.

The focus of this system review is to assess, make recommendations for and promote the establishment of an effective careers guidance system that supports the transition from education to employment in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government has set an ambitious target to create one million jobs in its Vision 2025. [2] The economy is transitioning from being predominantly rural towards being a more urbanised economy oriented around manufacturing and services.

> 'Mobilising and aligning everyone who has a stake in learning is crucial to making the whole system work.'
>
> *World Development Report 2018* [3]

Key lines of enquiry

Career Connect was commissioned to research the current provision of careers guidance. To ensure that this research was conducted in a focused way, a number of key lines of enquiry were established during inception:

- studying and evaluating existing careers guidance in Sri Lanka through consultation with identified stakeholders, and understanding the case for change
- recommending appropriate and relevant models to establish a national careers guidance system in Sri Lanka
- identifying priorities in careers education in the short to medium term, including: main challenges; teacher recruitment and retention, including plans for the delivery of high-quality teacher training to strengthen the link between education and industry; strengthening of TVET; school to work transition; coverage and capacity, quality and standardisation, including the introduction of a National Qualifications Framework
- introducing a quality framework for careers education, information and guidance services aligned to school/college improvement, communication and sustainable strategies.

Observations from an inward visit to Sri Lanka

An inward visit to Sri Lanka in 2018 focused on careers guidance provision and policy in Sri Lanka and resulted in the findings/reflections presented below.

There was recognition and agreement that there is a need for co-ordination across the various educational institutions. Government plans and targets should also be included in this co-ordination. The need for further, targeted employer engagement with education and a clear understanding of the future demands and opportunities within the labour market was also identified.

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2. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/10/17/vision-2025-sri-lankas-path-to-prosperity
3. *World Development Report 2018*, Main Messages: Learning to Meet Education's Promise.

Discussion took place about the transition from education to employment, including the importance of matching qualifications to learning and work opportunities and making them relevant for such opportunities. It was a matter of concern that, while Sri Lankan education policy continues to offer free education for all young people and the focus is very much on keeping young people in education, there are increasing numbers of young people dropping out of education. There was a general view that co-ordination was lacking in careers guidance activities and that the provision of such services was limited.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that there is a need for quality assurance processes and for the introduction of professional standards to develop careers leaders/guidance counsellors. A lack of consistency in teacher training and standards around careers development and guidance was identified. Also, challenges facing the quality and delivery of careers education and guidance were observed or reported. These challenges include ensuring that teachers are appropriately qualified and have an up-to-date working knowledge of the labour market.

Further research has been carried out by Career Connect using research reports and government documents provided by the stakeholder visits and also using further recommended resources/research publications. Throughout this project, Career Connect has relied on published international research in order to form and put forward recommendations. The research paper *Skills Development in South Asia: Trends in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka* was particularly helpful in setting the scene.

Reflections upon the current provision of careers education and guidance in Sri Lanka

Terminology

Career Connect consultants observed that on several of the visits there was some confusion over the terms careers guidance and careers education. The description provided by the UK sector lead, the Careers Development Institute, as well as the following definitions may help clarify the terms.

Career management skills help individuals to develop a positive and resilient mindset; learn about themselves and the opportunities available; and make informed and justified decisions and act on these, networking with people who can support them. For lifelong career development people need access throughout their lives to career learning (education) and personal career guidance/coaching.

There are two facets of career development:[4]

1. **career learning (education)** consisting of planned and progressive learning experiences throughout an individual's life. Often delivered in group settings, these help to develop the lifelong career management capabilities and competences individuals need for:

   • making informed decisions about learning and work options and participating effectively in work and society

   • learning how to present themselves for employment and learning opportunities, which includes the use of digital media.

2. **personal career guidance/career coaching** provides individualised interventions which help individuals to build on their career education/learning and to decide on their career goals.

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4.   www.thecdi.net/write/CDI_Definitions_FINAL.pdf

This is best understood as a process which enables individuals to consider their circumstances, values and aspirations; confront any challenges; resolve any conflicts; build resilience and confidence; develop new perspectives; justify their thinking and reach a decision in the light of relevant career and labour market information.

Technical and vocational education in Sri Lanka

The introduction of technology labs could make improvements to the 'brand equity' of TVET as a recognised pathway in career development. The TVET visit revealed a great deal of good practice, including a draft publication of the TVET guide and a regular labour market information (LMI) bulletin.[5] There is still a great deal of work to be done to raise awareness of TVET and promote this pathway among young people and their parents as a means to further or higher education.

Employer engagement with education

Developing work readiness via a career development framework would enable students to work on their preparation for work, including how to do research into careers/sectors and prepare and present themselves for interviews. Areas of concern are the lack of written English and comprehension skills, lack of preparation for interviews, and lack of ability in answering competence-based questions and demonstrating problem solving skills. Further desk research at Career Connect recognises these as common issues.

Social considerations

There was clearly a strong desire to effect change but also recognition that there would need to be certain forms of societal shift and a process of (re)education for parts of the population.

There was notional recognition of the range of key influencers (e.g. parents, extended family and peers). However, it was also accepted that the views of these influencers would reflect their own experiences and preferences. As such, there needs to be consideration of how an approach to 'educate' the influencers could be woven into the strategy.

There was also a lack of consideration for the transferrable nature of skills. As such, it was generally assumed that a one-to-one correspondence (particularly to degree level) existed between a qualification subject area and a sector/area of work. How certain skills and knowledge can be applied to other sectors needs to be addressed. This would include recognising that vocational career routes, primarily (but not exclusively) in the services sector, have a status on par with recognised academic routes.

Overall, there was a clear desire to develop the careers ecosystem in such a way as to address both current workforce challenges and equip the future Sri Lankan workforce with home-grown skills and talents. However, the status of the careers profession needs to be strengthened and the data and intelligence available need to be optimised in order to drive this change. Using 'ambassadors' or 'career champions' to promote positive personal experiences may be a way of highlighting alternatives to the well-known and commonly understood professions, thus allowing people to consider a wider range of options. This would be in terms of education and learning pathways as well as actual career outcomes.

Finally, although Sri Lanka has made significant progress in social and economic developments over the past decade, the northern and eastern provinces that experienced the brunt of the civil war remain disproportionately poor.

5. www.tvec.gov.lk/?page_id=3424

Recommendations

Introduction of a Theory of Change model

This can be developed retrospectively, following on from analysis of programme documents, consultation with identified key stakeholders and analysis of both destination and LMI data. This analysis will aim to identify, evaluate and reflect on what works and what does not work, helping us to understand the past and plan for the future. Success in achieving the impact identified within the theory of change will require investment and commitment towards systems change from relevant stakeholders. This will initially involve looking at research and identifying who is involved (such as TVET institutions, schools and colleges, government ministries and departments, employers/sector skills councils/public private partnerships/social impact bonds). The collaborators will then identify and agree on interventions. Tools such as audits and surveys can be utilised.

Carry out an employer survey to identify skill gaps, knowledge gaps and labour market needs

Questions involving the links between education and industry, which may be relevant when considering careers guidance in relation to the needs of employers, include (but are not limited to):

- What linkages with education and industry have already been made to communicate LMI opportunities within the growth sectors?
- What are the arrangements regarding corporate social responsibility relating to work with schools/colleges/TVET/universities?

There is a need to develop broader pathways through collaboration, including the accreditation and qualification framework and the development of teaching staff and careers staff working in the broader guidance community.

The development of an Employability and Skills Strategy

The development and publication of an Employability and Skills Strategy, which gives a high-level vision of how an effective skills system can drive aspiration and attainment, is recommended. The strategy will set out how to reform the skills system in order to give Sri Lanka a truly global and competitive advantage. The strategy requires a collaborative partnership approach from a wide range of stakeholders and with the backing of government. It will take shape by using the evidence and analysis of employer surveys, skills audits and one-to-one interviews, as well as consultation with employers, business groups, universities, schools, colleges and training providers.

The Employability and Skills Strategy will help to ensure that individuals and businesses have the right skills to compete and succeed in the 21st century. This is vital to achieve the aim of becoming globally competitive. The Employability and Skills Strategy requires an associated Skills Action Plan to highlight how stakeholders can help to achieve the strategy's vision and objectives.

Sri Lankan stakeholders need to build upon their collaborative work to date and agree on how to work together to achieve this vision. Building on such strong relationships and effective practice will enable stakeholders to deliver the skills that businesses need to be part of a more inclusive economy.

Furthermore, it is also important to consider what the main challenges are and how much focus and consideration has already taken place regarding the skills gaps. In a context where there is major investment, it is important to understand what industry sectors the investment will benefit and the extent to which the government carries out workforce planning to support its sector plans and reflect that investment. In the event of such workforce planning, it is important for the relevant ministries to be informed, so that consideration can be given to the level of expertise required in each of the target sectors in terms of whether they require high-level (graduate) or lower-level skills and whether there is sufficient time to develop the talent pool (e.g. with financial services). It is equally important to assess the expectations of potential investors/end users about the extent to which they have access to a qualified labour market, as this could affect their decision to buy/invest/set up business in Sri Lanka.

Longer-term key outcomes for the strategy include:

- increased attainment in English, mathematics and IT

- an awareness of all pathways, including converting TVET to a mainstream pathway and a route to sustained employment. (This includes changing people's mindsets so that they stop seeing TVET as a 'poor cousin' to HEI routes)

- a focus on work readiness in schools and colleges, leading to increased employability. This includes adapting curriculum learning to opportunities in the labour market and industry as well as soft skills development, for example, communication and problem solving

- a more effective workforce and fewer local recruitment difficulties across all sectors

- employers investing more in the quality and quantity of the skills of their workforce and linking to public–private partnership and build-own-operate, making use of higher productivity and lower incidence of skills shortages across growth sectors

- a more linear, comprehensive and simpler pathway and more joined-up support processes, driven by strategic use of funding. This involves collaboration between industry and education. It also includes examining how the HEI curriculum can reform to reflect the labour market.

The strategy should include a performance framework which details the measures against which the success of these outcomes will be monitored. A large part of this will be the introduction and commitment to the development of a Standardised Qualifications Framework linked to a Framework for Skills.

Development of a Standardised Qualifications Framework

A robust accreditation framework that has clarity and linear progression pathways is required. This needs to develop from a consultation and research exercise with all relevant stakeholders, including employers, skills councils/government agencies, schools/colleges and training providers.

Introduction of Quality Frameworks

In schools/colleges and training providers, there is a need to:

- *develop leadership, management and governance* to include policy statements, clarity of structures and lines of accountability, identification of training needs and skills gaps. This will help to strengthen teaching and ensure effective use of resources (a whole-school approach). Also, there is a need for high-quality and comprehensive programme development, using the intelligence from employer surveys, industry knowledge of opportunities and identified skills gaps/ pathways, as well as 'soft skills' like communication, confidence, resilience, agility, accepting challenges, flexibility and life control

- *focus the curriculum to embed labour market messages throughout* towards an understanding of the tangible opportunities for and career prospects of students

- *develop monitoring and evaluation* from all relevant stakeholders, including analysis of outcomes, destination data and labour market intelligence in relation to matching skills with opportunities. Questions to consider include: What is the analysis of trends in the destination data? Where are students typically transitioning to? Why is this? Is there a clear correlation with curriculum delivery and destinations? Where are the gaps? What are the strengths?

- *carry out an audit* across curriculum areas to identify links to the LMI

- *introduce a Quality Award Framework* to TVET to improve the 'brand equity' of TVET and give it 'parity of esteem' with alternative pathways (like, for example, the apprenticeship route in the UK compared with HEI degree routes).

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/ programmes/education/research

English and employability in Sri Lanka
Tineke Brunfaut and Rita Green

Introduction

This research paper constitutes Output 1 of a research project on English language assessment in Sri Lanka carried out by Lancaster University, funded by the TRANSFORM programme of the British Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka. With this paper, we aim to provide insights into the Sri Lankan economy and labour market, and the role of English within this.

In a study by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2013: 2) on skills development in South Asia, it was stated that '[o]ne of the biggest challenges for South Asian countries in coming years is to unlock the talent potential of the millions of young people entering the workforce.' Skills development was thereby argued to be a key driver for socio-economic development, and, more specifically, so-called 'soft skills' such as English language and communication were considered to be vital to the service-oriented economies in South Asia, in order to 'enhance the competitiveness of workers in key sectors such as business-process outsourcing and hospitality' (*ibid.: 3*).

To gain further insights into the issues outlined above, we conducted an empirical study on the theme of English and employability in Sri Lanka. We opted for a mixed-methods research design, playing to the strengths of different data collection and analysis methods and allowing for data triangulation, in order to gain rich and comprehensive insights into English and employability in Sri Lanka.

Survey on the Sri Lankan labour market

Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire comprised questions on respondents' personal background (e.g. gender, nationality and province). The second section focused on the employment sector the respondent worked in. It elicited information on the size and annual turnover of their sector in Sri Lanka, and of growth predictions and new job requirements for future growth. In the third section, respondents were asked for more information about the company/institution/organisation they worked at: the type of company, its size, its annual turnover and growth predictions, its registration base, its main product/service, its main market, number of sites, the respondent's role in it, and its organisational structure. They were also asked about the levels that employees at the company work at, whether specific qualifications are required, whether the company conducts workforce planning and for what time frames, where they recruit staff from, how big the recruitment pool is, and whether there are particular labour market shortages.

In addition, the questionnaire explored what jobs need filling as a priority, and whether the company has problems recruiting people with specific skills. The last set of questions in this part of the questionnaire focused on staff development support, training and funding for this.

Finally, in the last section of the questionnaire the respondents were probed about the role of English in their company, i.e. whether, what for and with whom employees need to use English at the company, what level of English proficiency is needed for different jobs, how and when levels of English are identified, and the importance of English to the company's growth. The questionnaire concluded with asking for the respondent's views on the benefits of good English communication skills for the Sri Lankan economy and labour market, or the risks of not having these. Respondents were also able to leave any final comments regarding the Sri Lankan economy and labour market, and the role of English within this.

Key findings

Growth: Thirty per cent of the respondents expected growth figures for their company to be more than ten per cent in the next five years. These were companies in the sectors of engineering and manufacturing; IT; property and construction; energy and utilities; and sales, marketing and distribution. Twenty per cent expected 5–10 per cent growth. These were companies in the sectors of engineering and manufacturing, printing and packing, accountancy, banking and finance, and a large conglomerate.

Skills gaps: Seventy per cent of the respondents felt that it is difficult to recruit people with the right skills. The most frequently mentioned skill which respondents stated having difficulty in recruiting people for was communication skills (50 per cent of the respondents). In particular, the respondents emphasised issues with fluency in English – both in oral and written communication, generally low levels of writing and speaking skills in English, and also low levels of confidence when communicating in English (especially for junior level staff). Thirty per cent of the respondents also indicated recruitment challenges in each of the following skill areas: cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking, problem solving and analytic skills), management and leadership skills (e.g. people management and team management), and technical skills (e.g. engineering, aircraft maintenance and printing). One-quarter (20 per cent) mentioned computer and IT skills, ten per cent said organisational skills, and five per cent numeracy skills.

The current skills gap and predicted future skills requirements, unless addressed, may well have a negative impact on growth potential.

English and the workplace

Eighty-five per cent of the respondents stated that employees at their company need some level of English language proficiency to effectively carry out their job (note that the other 15 per cent left the question blank). Of these, 41 per cent said that English was needed for all jobs in their company, whereas 59 per cent said for a selection of jobs, but not all. Respondents in the latter group typically indicated that English proficiency was a requirement for top and middle management, staff in supervisory roles or staff in marketing, HR, business development, IT, engineering and accounts, or for specialised roles such as call centre staff. English was thought to be less crucial for operational roles such as machine operators.

In terms of the required level of proficiency, 55 per cent of the respondents reported that a basic level only was needed for some of the jobs, 60 per cent that an intermediate level was needed for some other jobs, and 65 per cent that a high level of English proficiency was necessary for certain roles at their company.

Eighty per cent of the respondents said that they evaluate employees' level of English at the recruitment stage. 50 per cent also do that as part of ongoing performance development, and 40 per cent at the promotion stage. However, only 15 per cent of the respondents said that the level of English of all employees in their company met their expectations, whereas 65 per cent said that this was the case for only some of their employees (note that 20 per cent left this question blank).

All respondents who completed the question on the importance of English for the growth of their company (80 per cent) felt that it was important: 20 per cent said extremely important, 35 per cent very important, 20 per cent moderately important and five per cent somewhat important (note that 20 per cent left this question blank).

They explained that English was vital to growth in terms of:

- delivering and maintaining excellent customer service
- maintaining and expanding customer base; exports
- maintaining supplier relationships
- marketing products
- winning overseas project bids
- keeping pace with innovations
- improving standards
- competing with competitors
- developing knowledge, intelligence, technology
- developing foreign trade
- developing local entrepreneurship.

As general benefits of having good English communication skills for the Sri Lankan economy and labour market, the respondents gave the following examples:

- international contacts; breaking barriers with the international market; international sales and marketing; reaching international clients (without the need to learn all languages around the world); ease of working within and across borders
- attracting foreign investments
- increasing competitive position
- accessing technical knowledge; ability to use technology
- intelligent and knowledgeable workforce; staff development
- foreign employment opportunities; mobility of Sri Lankans
- communication across ethnic groups within Sri Lanka.

As risks of not having good English communication skills, the respondents identified the following issues for the Sri Lankan economy and labour market:

- diminished attractiveness of the market to foreign investors/clients/customers; Inability to attract foreign investors
- loss of job markets and sales to other countries; lack of international competitiveness
- overdependence on local government jobs/in-country jobs
- lack of or fewer jobs for local workforce; lack of local competitiveness and lower sales
- inward-looking, outdated approaches; lack of modernisation
- inability to use technology and e-communication; poor knowledge among workforce; unemployable people
- limited development opportunities
- lagging behind in expectations of the individual and the employer
- increasing gaps with privileged few
- communication difficulties with clients and suppliers
- decline in tourism.

As a final comment, three of the respondents emphasised the importance of English and the need to improve the learning, teaching and assessment of English in Sri Lanka. One specifically urged that schools be assisted to increase the quality and quantity of English language education, and another respondent recommended mandatory English testing for specific job roles. One respondent cautioned, however, to also take into account in-country sensitivities and not use English as 'a tool to judge people and to segregate people into different social classes or groups'.

Interviews on English in the workplace in Sri Lanka

A second set of insights into the Sri Lankan economy and the role of English within this was gained through interviews with employers in Sri Lanka. This paper focuses on the insights gathered on English, with detail on methodology and participants given in the full report.

Language use guidelines

The majority of the represented companies have no formal language policy in place, except for two which require the use of English in 'front house'/customer communication and one where English is stipulated as the 'preferred language'. All other interviewees, however, reported that there were informal guidelines/practices at their companies with respect to language use. The choice of language was often also simply pragmatic, i.e. depending on the language background of the client/customer/colleague with English, Sinhala, Tamil or a blend being used as necessary.

English and the interviewee's job

In their own professional role, the default language for the majority of interviewees was English. Two interviews said that they 'couldn't operate without it'. This was reflected in the fact that 56 per cent of the interviewees reported using only English for their job, a quarter reported using it 90–95 per cent of the time, and one said 70 per cent. Only two interviewees, active in the textile and garment sector, reported lower usage of English (40 per cent and 20 per cent of their time).

English and other jobs in the company

With regard to the English language proficiency of staff at their company, the interviewees acknowledged that there was variation between people in different professional roles (and also in the need of English for those roles). For example, several mentioned that head office, top management staff typically had a higher level of English proficiency. Some also judged that people in

support services, innovation and so-called 'front line' workers tended to be more proficient. On the other hand, they thought that lower-level jobs, technical staff, stewarding and 'behind the scenes' staff (e.g. kitchen personnel) were generally less proficient in English. At the same time, several interviewees commented that there were also differences between staff in similar roles, with some being more and others less proficient in English. Most interviewees seemed to agree that colleagues were often better at reading and especially listening ('enough to do the job') than in producing oral or written English. One-third of the interviewees specifically raised issues around colleagues' writing ability in English, pointing to problems with grammar, spelling, word order and style. Similarly, one-third of the interviewees expressed concerns regarding colleagues' speaking ability in English, raising issues around fluency, pronunciation, appropriateness of tone and confidence to speak.

English and the Sri Lankan economy

The interviewees emphasised the advantage and importance of good English communication skills for key existing sectors in the Sri Lankan economy such as tourism, the private sector and finances – acknowledging that the economy was importantly based on foreign visitors (within the country), as well as exports (clients/customers abroad), and also depended on imports (e.g. supply chains from abroad). In the case of multinationals, they also recognised the importance of English to be able to work with their mother company and other international branches. At the same time, a number of interviewees argued that English was vital to expansion, not only within the existing sectors, but also to attract and develop new sectors (e.g. Sri Lanka as an IT hub). They discussed the role of English in international communication and as the language of business and corporates. One interviewee labelled English 'the common language'. This ranges from the ability to attract foreign investors, do business across the border, learn and improve through international consultancy, or avoiding mistakes and 'getting things done more quickly and accurately' without a 'language barrier'.

Apart from oral and written skills in English, two interviewees also highlighted the importance of good reading skills in English, since this for example allows employees to keep up to date with trends and innovations in industry, for instance via information that is made available online. In other words, they said that English is key to staff development, and by extension companies and the economy. Another advantage of English, as argued by two interviewees, is that the language can unify across ethnic divides within the country, and thereby help maintain a stable environment for business and increase efficiency and productivity within and across businesses and sectors. English acts as a lingua franca that helps respect diversity in Sri Lanka.

Several interviewees furthermore put forward advantages at the level of the individual. Namely, being proficient in English would mean having vital transferable employment skills such as presentation skills, ability to communicate, leadership skills, team work, general knowledge and ability to initiate conversation. One person called it 'a primary skill'. In this manner, English could increase one's employability chances and enable one to do all aspects of one's job (e.g. note taking/ reporting for labourers). Without sufficient English, one interviewee argued, one would not be able to reach one's full potential as one would not be able to express ideas on the work floor. In addition, one interviewee argued that, from an HR perspective, lack of English hindered talent identification.

Increasing English proficiency of the Sri Lankan workforce

Several interviewees problematised potential employees' English language ability. Some of these argued that the O-level and A-level English training was only rudimentary, and that certification in English in practice clearly was not necessarily equal to ability to communicate in English. One interviewee also felt there is a lack of language teaching quality within the country, and the government needs to make the teaching profession more attractive. Others also recommended that the

government gives more attention to the development of young people's English proficiency in schools and universities.

Two interviewees also talked about the need for action regarding awareness of young people about the role of English for employability and the labour market. They emphasised that students need to be given a clearer idea of how important English is for their future careers and prospects, and that outreach programmes should be set up to explain the importance of being proficient in English.

A number of interviewees proposed running on-site English courses for their employees (or were already doing so), ideally sponsored by the company and offered during working hours or immediately after that. One interviewee also referred to online English courses. Many also talked about the need of such courses to be tailor-made and relevant to business, with some recommending that the government allocates resources to English for business purposes development.

Summary

This research paper reported on an empirical study, using questionnaires and interviews, which aimed to provide insights into the Sri Lankan economy and labour market, and the role of English within this.

The findings represent data from 21 different employment sectors, ranging from very small sectors (less than 1,000 employees) to the largest employment sectors in Sri Lanka (up to one million employees). Approximately 40 per cent of the companies represented in the study are branches of international companies, whereas about 60 per cent are Sri Lankan companies. For about half of the companies their main market is at the international level, while for the other half it is at the national level. They typically employ people across the job hierarchy, ranging from unskilled workers to top- level managers, and have conventional company structures.

Particular growth is expected in sectors such as: engineering and manufacturing, energy and utilities, IT, property and construction, ready-made garment industry, education, and Sales, marketing and distribution. Consequently, the sectors and companies represented are developing new job requirements in areas such as: R&D, engineering, manufacturing and construction; ICT and AI; digital commerce, and sales and consumer services. However, companies appear to struggle considerably with recruiting people with sufficient communication skills, and also in many cases with the 'right' cognitive, management/leadership, and/or technical skills.

While in some companies English proficiency is needed for all jobs, in others English is needed for a selection of jobs only – typically more so for higher-level jobs, and, in those roles, comparatively higher levels of English proficiency are also required. Participants' examples of what English is used for on the work floor illustrated that all four skills are needed, although it seems 'standard' to particularly use English in formal business communication (oral and written), in recruitment contexts, and in international contexts. Also, English is used for company-internal as well as company-external communication (e.g. with customers, suppliers, guests, business partners, regulatory bodies – whether national or international). At the same time, hardly any companies have a formal language policy. Instead, staff adopt informal guidelines and practices, whereby a pragmatic stance is often taken, i.e. the language used being dependent on the language background of the client/customer/colleague.

In terms of employees' level of English language proficiency, there is variation between people in different professional roles, but also between people in similar roles. Gaps seem to exist particularly in the productive skills (speaking and writing), and employees' limited English proficiency was reported to sometimes cause issues or extra work, and risks having a negative impact on companies' image and reputation. Participants expressed the need to increase young people's English language skills, as well as their awareness of the role of English for employability and the Sri Lankan labour market. Good English communication skills were not only seen as key to Sri Lanka's existing economic sectors, but also for expansion of the Sri Lankan economy and labour market (existing and new sectors). In particular, English skills could enable delivering, maintaining and expanding in terms of customer service, international trade, foreign investments, supplier relationships, marketing, overseas bids, innovations, standards, competitiveness, etc. It could also enable talent identification and play a neutralising role in cross-ethnic communication within the country.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Social inclusion

Introduction

The last piece of this collection of research focuses on the underpinning thread in education of social inclusion.

The debate on social inclusion is extremely complex in Sri Lanka, extending beyond the more familiar domains of gender, disability and marginalised communities to encompass ways of integrating peace, social cohesion and reconciliation into mainstream education. Although Sri Lanka's social and political fabric has undergone tremendous changes during the last decade, its education system has not transformed in ways that align with the changes Sri Lanka as a country has gone through. While education reforms have been introduced and successfully implemented, they are not of the magnitude of the changes that have taken place especially at the end of the three-decade-long conflict.

The papers in this concluding section touch on softer aspects to social cohesion and peace through education. The first paper, *Developing a gender and social inclusion strategy: from theory to application,* takes as its starting point international resolutions that address gender, violence against women and girls, and discrimination. It highlights ways in which this affects education and makes recommendation on how a gender and social inclusion policy can be mainstreamed in education, from policy through to its implementation.

The second of the two papers, *Arts and Reconciliation: Possibilities and Challenges,* provides a case study of how the arts can be mobilised to support reconciliation. The research engaged with two theatre companies, exploring in depth issues such as their practice, authorship and ownership, archiving, engagement with communities, language and learning.

Developing a gender and social inclusion strategy: from theory to application
Lesley Abdela

Introduction

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strongly encourage countries to focus on both achieving inclusive and quality education (SDG goal 4) and gender equality (SDG goal 5), putting the poorest and most marginalised women and girls at the forefront of development efforts. Each of the SDGs have a list of accompanying progress indicators. Gender equality in education also has a multiplier effect impacting future opportunities and outcomes in relation to economic growth, good health, well-being and poverty reduction. The government of Sri Lanka is focused on inclusive growth, good governance and private sector development. Useful interventions are taking place, but real change for women's equality can only be brought about when these initiatives are upscaled and made sustainable.

The British Council Sri Lanka's education work, the TRANSFORM programme, is underpinned by a strong gender and social inclusion approach. The aim is that all young people benefit from learning opportunities provided by a fit-for-purpose and relevant education system, enabling young women and young men to fulfil their potential, achieve their aspirations and contribute to Sri Lanka's economic and social development and growth.

Gender inequality: Sri Lanka baseline context

Sri Lanka is ranked 109 out of 144 countries listed on the Global Gender Gap Index for 2017. Sri Lanka has positive achievements in education and health indicators, but negative developments such as gender inequality in employment, political participation and gender-based violence. Sri Lanka ranks 75 in Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a GII of 0.383.

Employment overview

The unemployment rates of women are more than double that of men at all age levels. A large concentration of economically active women are in unpaid family labour, particularly in agriculture. Women are disadvantaged by the horizontal and vertical gender division in the labour market that excludes them from higher-income-generating occupations and impedes their upward occupational mobility through the 'glass ceiling' to the highest decision-making positions.

Education overview

The provision of free state education supported by extensive incentives such as free textbooks, free uniforms, scholarships, subsidised transport for all, and free school meals for the children of the economically disadvantaged has resulted in a rapid rise in the participation rates at school to over 95 per cent and the achievement of gender parity in enrolment in primary, secondary, and university education.

However, disparities in the provision of quality education facilities and poverty continue to be barriers to available opportunities. Lack of implementation of compulsory education regulations up to 14 years has resulted in a high dropout rate at the senior secondary level. Boys have lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates in secondary education. Girls have higher performance levels than boys at public examinations.

The percentages of female students in universities and non-vocational tertiary education are higher than that of male students. However, wide gender imbalances in enrolment in technological courses including information technology in higher education and technical-related courses limit girls' access to high skilled and remunerative employment in technology-related fields. Sri Lanka has eliminated gender disparities in enrolment in primary, secondary and higher education but has not eliminated them in technical and vocational education or ensured gender equality in the labour market and in access to decision-making positions.

Necessary conditions for girls and boys to obtain a quality education and complete secondary school

While there has been considerable investment in increasing enrolment in primary school, less attention has been paid to quality education throughout the education system for girls and boys to complete secondary education with the knowledge, skills, values and critical thinking needed to become resilient and productive members of society.

An effective policy framework is key to a fully functioning education sector. Such a policy framework also provides an appropriate entry point. It requires the application of a gender perspective at all levels, ensuring that:

- teachers receive adequate initial teacher education and ongoing in-service training throughout their career

- school leadership receives support and resources needed to implement policy and is held accountable

- curricula are appropriate, regularly evaluated and updated accordingly. Changes to curricula are accompanied by in-service training and the resources needed to implement any changes

- school resources are sufficient and in line with the needs of both female and male students

- prevention and remedies against corruption integrate a gender perspective and are in place at all levels of the education system

- schools are child-friendly and safe from all forms of violence and harassment

- communities and families receive information and learn about the policies and rules affecting children's education. They are encouraged to contribute to discussions on school policies, rules and similar through appropriate participation mechanisms (e.g. parent associations and teacher unions).

Towards gender equality in education: policy development

To support the development of a policy on gender equality in relation to the quality of education and secondary school completion rates, the following aspects may be taken into consideration.

Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data

Analysis of the specific context, including existing norms, is essential to understand and identify gaps. Linked to this is gender responsive data collection and analysis to understand the needs and identify appropriate responses, informing policy and tracking progress. It should form the basis of all interventions.

Accountability and transparency mechanisms at the national, local and school levels

Principles of good governance in the education sector are essential to combat corruption generally and gender-related forms of corruption and extortion. These principles ensure practices that conform with the law at all levels. The monitoring of the implementation of policies, regulation, teacher ethics, functioning systems for salaries to be paid on time, etc., are key to promote accountability and transparency.

Gender-sensitive initial teacher training and in-service training

Teachers need to be trained in gender-responsive and transformative pedagogies to ensure equal participation and learning of girls and boys as well as any subgroup of girls/boys requiring special attention within a given country context. Soft skills and interpersonal communication are important, in addition to subject knowledge and didactics. Teachers and school management should be trained in handling sensitive issues including harassment and gender-based violence as well as in negotiation skills and advocacy.

Gender- and girls-empowering situations in the curricula and teaching and learning materials

When curriculum reinforces gender stereotypes it also impacts the perception of how girls and boys should behave and engage also in a classroom setting. Furthermore, it fails to showcase the potential of girls and women as empowered individuals. While ad hoc activities promoting gender equality are important, integrating gender equality generally into the curriculum ensures its sustainability. Textbooks, classroom materials and lesson plans should be gender sensitive in order to ensure their quality and relevance to the lives of all children. Special attention should be given to minority students requiring resources in their mother tongue and other students with special needs.

Child protection mechanisms in schools

In addition to programmes which support the integration of transitioning and returning students, other mechanisms include training to ensure that school management and teachers are prepared to identify and respond to cases of bullying and abuse at an early stage and that school provides education on sexual reproductive health and rights as well as life skills to prevent pregnancy.

Community engagement

It may be necessary in some contexts for parents to embrace attitudinal shifts from deeply entrenched cultural or traditional attitudes and practices. When families feel supported by their communities, they are more apt to change, and such interventions are far more sustainable.

Activities outside of school to complement investment in gender equality in education

Mentorship programmes can provide inspiration for gender equality in education and can be developed in close co-operation with local communities. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, cultural and academic activities that take place outside of school hours are known to }be empowering in various ways and provide another avenue for education in a less formal setting.

More targeted action programmes include introducing or expanding 'second-chance' education programmes targeting adolescents, youth and young adults. Such programmes allow students who missed out on education to receive support in reintegrating into the classroom with some tools to enable him or her to remain in school.

Recommendations for the development of a gender equality and social inclusion strategy for education reform

The following are a selection of the recommendations for steps to take to develop a gender and social inclusion strategy for the TRANSFORM programme and wider education reform.

Visible active and ongoing commitment from top management in each collaborating ministry/institution collaborators

A key factor in advancing fair and gender-equitable mechanisms will be the need for sustained visible commitment from top management to take gender equality and social inclusion seriously. A major challenge is likely to be how to cascade the gender interventions into implementation at national, regional and local levels through the manifold layers of implementing collaborators and other partner institutions and the management capacity needed to make it happen. This can be combined with dialogues/training sessions to persuade men and women engaged in education reform of the advantages of including gender considerations.

Conduct gender analysis for each of the programme results areas

Analyse the gender equality situation in the given context and ensure that the gender analysis is visible in the programme problem analysis and other needs/diagnostic analyses for each of the programme results areas. The analysis will provide a baseline about any inequalities in participation, access and benefits between women, girls, men and boys in the design, implementation, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of interventions. The analysis should reveal any social, legal, security, cultural and financial and regulatory areas and frameworks that may prevent women or men, girls or boys from accessing, information, training opportunities, resources and funding opportunities. It forms the basis for developing a realistic and relevant gender and social inclusion strategy. A gender analysis and gender strategy will have dual roles as tools to help attain identified results and at the same time help to raise gender awareness with local collaborators.

The strategy should be applied to implementation, agreements that are signed through the lifetime of the programme and policies that are approved. There should also be analysis of gender balance and equality in the government departments and education establishments, private sector organisations, contractors and subcontractors and NGOs who may engage in the project.

Develop careers guidance

There is the opportunity to explore issues such as the current gender context in Sri Lanka and the extent to which 'traditional gender roles' in diverse Sri Lanka communities still reflect the facts on the ground or whether they been changed by circumstances. Careers guidance is a key tool.

Avoid stereotyping in employment: Young women/girls may want to broaden their employment opportunities by increasing and expanding their education to have skills to work in different sectors and access to better paid employment which may not have been previously thought of as women's employment.

Career training: Provide access to training in higher-earning non-gender-specific skills such as IT, security, tourism and marketing. Specific provision should also be made to provide training to individuals with disabilities.

Menu of options: Careers guidance should present a menu of options for income earning based on market needs. Women and girls may be unaware of the wider range of options and opportunities so need advice and information on wider income-earning opportunities and career options. These should be based on a labour market assessment of job opportunities and job options.

Mainstreaming gender

Based on the gender analysis, select as appropriate from the three approaches, which can be used separately or together, to achieve gender equality results:

- *integrated interventions* of gender equality into programmes and projects (gender mainstreaming)
- *targeted activities* – targeting specific groups or issues with specific interventions
- *dialogues* – with partners on gender-sensitive issues and aspects on gender equality.

Include sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators for planning, implementation and evaluation

Include sex-disaggregated data in all proposals, reports, action plans, organograms, budgets, monitoring and evaluations and results log-frames. Use gender-sensitive indicators and markers to measure progress. Gender-related questions should also be addressed at all stages of preparation in the logical framework and also in the risk assessment strategy.

Review materials and communications

Review text, pictures and illustrations in all training materials and websites to pay attention to portrayal regarding gender-sensitive vocabulary, ethnicity, age, rural/urban, disability and sexuality. Ensure that the sample reflects the target group/population and review how under-represented groups are presented. Also review whether any groups portrayed in a way that may reinforce stereotypes.

Ensure fit-for-purpose staffing policies

Staffing policies for each school, higher/further education institute, and government department should minimise any form of discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, social or political conviction, gender, age and family status background.

Ensure that there is no invisible sex discrimination, which takes place when systems or procedures unintentionally give advantages to one sex more than the other. Examples include equal pay, either men or women having unequal access to career promotion opportunities, education opportunities, job training, recruitment, enhancement of career opportunities for women and girls. Each education institution should generate a gender policy including equal opportunities, equal pay and flexible work conditions.

Monitoring and evaluation

Sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators are needed for measuring results on gender equality. Gender indicators can indicate trends and allow for tracking progress towards intended results. Gender indicators are critical for effective monitoring and evaluation, and they help to improve decision making for ongoing programme and project management. Gender targets need to be defined and indicators chosen that will allow progress towards the respective targets to be monitored. They measure gender-related changes over time in a given context and can be used for advocacy to help make the case for action by highlighting key issues, backed up with statistics and other evidence. Consider participation, balance of power, beneficiaries and access.

Themes for indicators for TRANSFORM might include, but not be limited to:

- balanced presence of women and men/girls and boys – reflecting the composition of society, and human experiences, actions, views and concerns
- fair portrayal of women and men, girls and boys in teaching materials and websites in vocabulary and visually through elimination of stereotypes and promotion of inclusive multi-dimensional representation/portrayal
- coverage of gender equality and equity issues as an important and integral part of the TRANSFORM programme
- evidence of gender consciousness in different types of programme content and across the spectrum of subject areas
- evidence of accurate and holistic understanding of internationally recognised human rights.

Conclusion

Gender and social inclusion considerations in TRANSFORM are underpinned by a number of international resolutions. By building on the principles of these resolutions and developing a strong gender and social inclusion strategy and action plan, TRANSFORM will contribute to ensuring equity of access and opportunity for all young people to a quality education system. Review of the recommendations with a view to adoption is the first step.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research

Arts and Reconciliation: Possibilities and Challenges
Harshana Rambukwella

Introduction

Arts and Reconciliation: Possibilities and Challenges was a year-long project funded by the British Council in Sri Lanka to conduct research into various aspects relating to peace and reconciliation in the country. The importance of the arts – particularly live and performative forms of art such as theatre – for fostering positive social change is often taken for granted. This is especially so in the field of conflict transformation. However, there is relatively limited empirical evidence and limited research into how the arts can contribute to progressive social change.

The research project was framed around a set of broad questions:

1. What role can the arts, and more specifically theatre, play in terms of reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka?

2. How can socially engaged theatre be archived and what are the conceptual and methodological challenges of such archiving?

3. What kinds of restrictions and constraints shape socially engaged theatre?

Further areas for consideration included language inclusion and was the role of arts in education and its use in fostering social cohesion within the school environment.

The project focused on two theatre groups with significant histories of social engagement in the country: the *Janakaraliya* (Theatre of the People) group and the Stages Theatre Company, focusing on an in-depth study of one theatrical production from each theatre company – *Thittha Kahata* (Bitter Nectar) by *Janakaraliya* and *Dear Children Sincerely* by the Stages Theatre Company. These plays were chosen because they were currently in production and the research teams could study both the dynamics of their creation and also performance and audience impact. However, though these two plays were the main foci, the research project attempted to place these productions within the context of the history of the work done by the two theatre companies and also within the larger context of arts, theatre and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Given Sri Lanka's long history of post-independence ethno-nationalist violence, art has particularly been seen as a pedagogical tool with significant potential for mainstream reconciliation in the country. Both theatre groups that were studied have used various forms of applied theatre such as forum theatre within educational contexts such as universities to promote critical dialogue about issues surrounding various forms social exclusion – particularly, ethnicity and culture with the inherent dimension of language. The two specific productions that were the focus of the research project directly deal with issues of social exclusion.

Thittha Kahata deals with the historical and contemporary predicaments of the plantation Tamil community which has been the site of severe economic exploitation and social and political marginalisation. Devised by the *Janakaraliya* group, which includes dramatists from the plantation community, the play is highly effective in discussing difficult social issues through satire.

Dear Children Sincerely is another devised production which is based on a large number of oral histories collected from Sri Lankans born in the 1930s. It provides an oblique and satirical view of key moments of Sri Lanka's post-independence history such as the Official Language Act of 1956, which was a key piece of discriminatory legislation that contributed to the country's 30-year conflict. The play invites audiences to critically reflect on divisive and socially exclusionary mainstream historical narratives and to think of Sri Lankan history in more inclusive terms.

The scope of the project was modest, given that only two specific productions by two theatre companies were investigated within a much larger field and history of socially committed artistic interventions in Sri Lanka. However, the intent of the research project was not to make expansive or representative claims about arts and reconciliation but to have an in-depth understanding of the two specific case studies selected and through them offer some insights into the broader questions that framed this research project. The study adopted and adapted a range of qualitative approaches to research to capture the nuances, contradictions and vicissitudes of how theatre engages with social change. A large number of interviews, field visits, observations of rehearsals and performances and interactions with audiences were carried out by the research team and this data has been collated and archived.

The audience interviews, questionnaires and interviews with artists, policymakers and educationists suggested there is a strong correlation between socially engaged artistic work and the promotion of socially inclusive reconciliation practices. However, the research also pointed out that the sustainability of such initiatives depended on larger issues such as institutional support, the ability to integrate such theatrical experiences into the curriculum and access to institutional spaces. Without such a conducive macro environment the impact of the theatrical experiences can be short-lived and ephemeral in terms of their ability to communicate themes of reconciliation to a wider audience. However, the research also pointed out that deep and sustainable change can occur within the hearts and minds of those engaged in the devised theatre process where they themselves confront prejudices, long held beliefs and begin to unlearn various implicit and explicit internalised socially exclusionary behaviours.

This summarised report provides an overview of the project and the key activities and outcomes of the project in addition to two profiles of the artistic groups that were studied under the project and stimulating interviews by the founder directors of the two theatre ensembles that were the main focus of the research project. The two interviews provide rich insights into the multiple potentials and challenges of doing progressive and socially committed artistic work in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Project overview and key outcomes

Data collection and research database

The research component of this project involved collecting primary and secondary data specifically on the two theatre groups and in general on the context of Arts and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The objective of data collection was to provide a rich archive of information for research as well as to create a rich database on the subject for other researchers to use in the future.

The database consists of 150 files of secondary data and 100 files of primary data. Secondary data includes journal articles, reports, thesis, images and writings by other scholars on the two theatre groups. The Primary database consists of interview transcripts, clips of performances, audio files, images and audience surveys. Interviews were taken from a cross section of academics and practitioners in the field of arts and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The database is being used as the main data source for the research papers and journal articles produced under the project.

Research symposium: Theatre of Reconciliation, Tensions and Practices

The Postgraduate Institute of English, the Open University of Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the British Council in Sri Lanka, successfully hosted the research symposium Theatre of Reconciliation: Potentials, Tensions and Practices with the participation of nearly 100 veteran scholars, theatre practitioners, activists, theatre enthusiasts and funding representatives in July 2019.

Leading scholars, activists, and policymakers involved in the arts, theatre and reconciliation related activities in Sri Lanka contributed to four panel discussions over two days. Looking at issues of censorship and restrictions on artistic practices in Sri Lanka, censorship was identified as a complex concept in terms of defining and identifying it. The importance of identifying both state and non-state actors of censorship was highlighted, together with comments on a new trend in the context of censorship, where the state apparatus to silence and intimidate artists and their rights to free expression is growing. Certain social groups appear to have the ability to mobilise the state apparatus to censor the artists in this context. Further panels explored: (i) the potential and challenges of archiving and documenting ephemeral art forms like theatre which leave little for the next generations after the live performance is over; and (ii) use of theatre in education to foster aesthetic imagination among the students.

The first day of the symposium ended with the live performance *Bhasha Mowli* by *Janakaraliya* while the activities of day two concluded with Stages Theatre Company performing a segment of their production *Dear Children Sincerely*. The research symposium reinforced the body of knowledge generated through the project on the transformative potential of art by initiating perceptive and timely conversations on the topics of artistic freedom and constraints, censorship, theatre education, the role of theatre in education, and the importance of archiving theatre and reconciliation projects.

Approaches, key challenges, successes and insights

Janakaraliya (Theatre of the People)

Overview of the company

Led by veteran Sri Lankan dramatist Parakrama Niriella, since 2002 *Janakaraliya* has marked its presence as an innovative and avant-garde ensemble in Sri Lankan theatre. From its outset the *Janakaraliya* project had a vision that extended beyond theatre as an aesthetic practice and positioned itself as a group dedicated to social transformation through theatrical practice. Sustained in an organic manner for over two decades *Janakaraliya* began with 25 members. Within this period the group has produced a large body of work which has transcended linguistic and cultural divisions in the country and has won critical acclaim both locally and internationally.

Membership of the company

The *Janakaraliya* model offers many insights into how the arts can bring different people and communities together through the process of dramatic production itself. Over the years *Janakaraliya* has trained many theatrical practitioners from a wide cross-section of Sri Lankan society. It has been particularly successful in identifying talent from different cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and providing them with the theoretical and practical training to become theatrical practitioners on a national scale.

A number of prominent contemporary film and television personalities received their initial training through *Janakaraliya* and have evolved to become professional performers.

Addressing linguistic issues

The success of *Janakaraliya's* training model is also visible in the linguistic and cultural mobility of its performers who develop to become co-creators of theatrical productions. There are many stories in *Janakaraliya's* history, of actors who came from Tamil speaking backgrounds becoming fluent in Sinhala to the point where they are able to perform drama in Sinhala. This is a significant achievement in a country where the education system has struggled to mainstream multilingual education. In a largely ethnically and religiously segregated society, *Janakaraliya* provides a model of how micro-scale ventures can contribute to positive social change. The ensemble has also consistently resisted the allure of mainstream theatre practice, choosing instead to retain its avant-garde identity theatrical practice.

Production challenges and successes

A key challenge that *Janakaraliya* has successfully faced is building a flexible theatrical model that incorporates elements of a proscenium-based traditional theatrical style with elements of street theatre, forum theatre and other forms of non-traditional performative practice. *Janakaraliya* possesses Sri Lanka's only mobile theatre, developed with donor funding, and tours the entire the country with its productions. In a country where space for theatrical performances are limited and the arts in general receive very limited support, either from the state or non-state sources, *Janakaraliya* has been successful in taking theatre to the people. Though sustainability remains a critical challenge for an ensemble of this nature, *Janakaraliya* represent a stable, dynamic and ever-evolving social engaged theatrical model which offers many insights into how theatre can promote, influence and shape social perceptions.

Stages Theatre Group

Overview of the company

Stages was established in 2000 and is led by Ruwanthie de Chickera, who is artistic director of the ensemble. In a largely linguistically and culturally segregated theatre space, Stages has successfully bridged the Sinhala–English divide and is now actively moving towards a trilingual theatrical practice. Historically, though there have been some limited moments of collaboration, English and Sinhala theatres have been largely separate worlds – a separation that characterises not only theatre production but the viewership as well.

Addressing gender

Stages has built a name for itself as an innovative theatrical group which is thematically and methodologically daring. Blending various theatrical and performative styles with a political commitment to socially engaged theatre, their practice is informed by the work of the Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal. One of the key methodological innovations of the group is a consistent use of devised theatrical practices and engagement in detailed long-term research and curation leading to a theatrical production. Many Stages productions arise out of long-term research and co-creation processes which in turn lead to multiple theatrical outputs. For instance, the *Cast as Mother* project saw a large number of prominent female theatrical personalities in the country gather over an extended period to critically reflect on motherhood, its impact on their professional theatrical roles and how motherhood in general frames notions of femininity and female identity in Sri Lanka. While *Cast as Mother* was staged as a separate theatrical production, this in turn led to *Kalumaali*, which took a darkly humorous look at female identity in contemporary Sri Lanka and was staged as two separate productions in Sinhala and Tamil with the same cast.

Addressing linguistic issues

Stages also utilises the visual and performative power of theatre to transcend linguistic and cultural limitations, as in the production *Walking Path* – a non-verbal production that critically explored the culture of urban gentrification in post-war Sri Lanka, within an increasingly authoritarian political culture.

Professionalisation

Stages also works with multiple groups at various levels to professionalise and uplift theatrical craft in the country. The archiving of theatre, maintaining records of production and documenting the theatrical process are a passionate concern for the ensemble. The Stages vision is to contribute to the professionalisation of theatre in the country by building the skills and knowledge base of young practitioners and to this end the group holds workshops and training programmes for youth and children and has also collaborated with overseas theatrical groups and staged its productions in multiple countries and at numerous international theatre festivals. The work of Stages has been critically acclaimed in Sri Lanka and internationally, and the group continues to build new collaborations and partnerships both locally and overseas.

Key findings

The key policy takeaways of the research were:
- arts, and in particular theatre, can be a powerful tool for fostering social inclusion in a post-conflict society
- the wider and sustained impact of art depends on a conducive macro environment where there has to be significant political and institutional support for reconciliation initiatives
- theatre can and should be integrated into pedagogy as a means for fostering reconciliation

- the process of theatrical production, particularly in forms of applied theatre such as Forum Theatre, has significant potential for transformative change in those engaged in theatrical production and therefore the focus needs to shift from output (the performance) to the process
- while theatre (or the arts in general) can be used for social inclusion and pedagogical purposes it is vital that artistic freedom be maintained to avoid art becoming programmatic and utilitarian.

The scale of the impact is directly linked to the investment in the genre. Scientists work for a lifetime with no 'impact' – surrounded by failed experiments and fortified by huge funding. Sometimes all a scientist will do is to prepare the knowledge for the breakthrough that will come after him. We never stop to ask about the impact of such work. We understand the importance of supporting human endeavour, enquiry, pursuit – even if it leads us to failure and wastage because we value the good that we know it can bring us.

The problem with the arts is not the lack of evidence of impact; it is the limitations set on it by prejudice. If you change the prejudice, you will see the space for the impact created. This is what is lacking.

This paper is a condensed version of the full report and references, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.lk/programmes/education/research