

The Effectiveness of the Implementation of the National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka: In Relation to the Role of English in School Level

Dinithi Anuththara Hennayake

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
dinispirit@yahoo.co.in

Abstract—*The 10 Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka (2012-2022) could be identified as a high potential development project introduced recently which upon being successfully implemented and executed could result in many benefits to the country as well as society. However, given the fairly recent implementation, the expected outcome and the overall effect of the plan remain completely hypothetical. Therefore, given the lack of analysis or rather any detailed account on the Effectiveness of the Trilingual Plan, it is the aim of this study to account for the effectiveness of the Trilingual Plan at its current phase in relation to the English language teaching and learning in school level.*

The study follows different methods of data analysis and is largely quantitative in nature. Therefore, the study is based on a field setting of various government institutions, departments, and schools which deal with the execution of the Trilingual Plan. (E.g. - Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, Ministry of Education) The primary sources of data collection are interviews and questionnaires gathered mainly through the above mentioned institutions. The secondary sources of data collection are the various reports, articles, books on the 10 Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka.

The study analyses the many strategies adopted by the Plan to promote English Language in schools and how they are implemented in a practical scenario. And in analysing these strategies the study looks into the challenges faced and drawbacks shown during the execution which hinders the implementation and tries to seek the methods which can be incorporated in order to increase the effectiveness of the Trilingual Plan.

Keywords - Ten Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka, English as a 'life skill', English language teaching in schools

I. INTRODUCTION

With the year 2012 being declared as the Year of Trilingual Sri Lanka, the Mahinda Chinthana Programme initiated the Ten Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka in the said year. It sets the foundation to all the citizens in the country to acquire trilingual skills and competencies in the languages of Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Preamble of the Trilingual Plan states that it aims to create social integration through the spread of languages, while the different groups of people continue to maintain and foster the heritage and ethos of their forefathers. The Trilingual initiative intends to encourage all Sinhala speaking people to learn the Tamil language and all the Tamil speaking people to learn the Sinhala language. At the same time the initiative intends to promote English as a Life Skill to access knowledge developed outside the country and increase employment opportunities among people of all ages, gender and social categories in the country, with the long term objective of steering Sri Lanka towards economic development.

A. English as a Life Skill

As mentioned above English is promoted as a 'Life Skill' under the Trilingual Plan. The concept of English as a Life Skill intends to promote English for its utility value rather than for its social value. This concept was initiated in 2009 with the President Mahinda Rajapaksa coming into power. He declared 2009 as the Year of English and IT and introduced the concept of "English as a Life Skill" by initiating the Eighteen month Road Map to promote Spoken/Communicative English in Sri Lanka. This Road Map programme intended to give a new perspective to English language in Sri Lanka. It aimed to promote English as a skill for employment and a vehicle reaching out to the external world of knowledge and learning. (Kahandawaarachchi 2009)

In order to better understand this concept it is vital to consider the Role of English in Sri Lanka prior to the introduction of 'English as a Life Skill'. In the post colonized Sri Lanka, English language was used as means of exhibiting the social hierarchy. In other words, English became the symbol of the Elitism, High class and Privilege. However amidst the Mass class it also became a symbol of Social Oppression. English was respected without any doubt while at the same time it was feared with vehemence. Fear stemmed from the dislike to make errors in English because unlike in Sinhala and Tamil usage, English was always coupled with the notion that it was a language to be used in the correct manner or there was a high chance of the user being ridiculed for a mistake made in using a language foreign to him. The said approach towards English was one of the main reason for it to be a means of social oppression and thus, attacked by the Mass class in various forms, be it the referring to English as 'Kaduwa' or 'Kadda'(Sinhala word for sword) or the outrage shown during the Youth unrest in 1980's.

Thus, under such circumstances any efforts made in promoting the usage of English Language failed to achieve its aim. Promotion of English for its correct Rule Learning forced the learners to learn the rules of English but when it came to using the language they hesitated. They were so conscious of the rules, pronunciation, syntax, etc of the language that these inhibitions prevented the usage of the language. The continuation of this process for many decades made Sri Lanka a country where millions were spent on learning English language to finally fail at achieving its potential.

And therefore at a time like this a new concept was introduced as 'English in our way', which intended to highlight on the Sri Lankan English. Sri Lankan English is one variety of English among many such as British English, American English, Indian English, etc. At the early Colonial era British English was 'the English Language' because for many of the colonies English was introduced by the British. But as time passed many other varieties of English emerged which are called 'New English', such as Indian English, Australian English, South Asian English, etc. And likewise there is Sri Lankan English (SLE), as another variety of English.

So, the concept of 'English in our way' deals with the said variety of Sri Lankan English. Although Sri Lankan English had already existed prior to this concept given the inevitable natural adaption

process of the foreign language to the Sri Lankan culture, the accumulated attributes such as words, dictions, pronunciation were not given due attention or acceptance.

However when it comes to the promotion of English as a Life Skill, the concept aims to make the Sri Lankans accept the 'Sri Lankaness' of the English in Sri Lanka. The acceptance of English language as a part of the Sri Lankan identity would prevent the negation of English by the majority of Sri Lanka because the attitude towards the language would change and thereby people would begin to see English as a skill rather a liability.

Being implemented only in 2012 the Ten Year National Plan could be called relatively new. However despite being new, the National Plan has high potential and upon successful implementation would benefit Sri Lanka in the national arena as well as in the international arena. Therefore, this study which is based on the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning in schools under the National plan could be a good measure at predicting the outcome of the plan at the end. Also this would be a guide to decide on the drawbacks of the programme upon its implementation and thereby they could be dealt with to achieve the necessary outcome.

By the current year of 2014 the National Plan is in its Phase I which continues till 2016.

II. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

At the initial stages of promoting English as a Life Skill, it was identified that one of the main drawbacks of the policies that were implemented till date (prior to the Road Map Programme in 2009) was their inability to make the students use English to converse. As Dr. Sunimal Fernando expresses many times the programme identified this inability and decided to deal with it accordingly. And as a result the programme opted for a fresh approach, namely a new point of view to look at the teaching methods of English. Programmes were designed especially to uplift the oral skills of the English language user. While grammar, reading and writing too would be improved under the new policies it was the oral skills that were highlighted upon. This was due to the common vision of the policymakers, in which they recognized the importance of English language in the International arena as a link language.

Table 1 – The Programmes implemented under the Trilingual Plan

Goals of Stage I	Steps Introduced to implement
Training of Trainers	-Master Trainers programme.
Teacher recruitment & Training	-The ten day training provided by the Master Trainers.
Restructuring language courses	-Introduction of a separate 'Life Skill' period for Grade 6-13. -Introduction of a separate Teacher Guide.
New Textbooks, Activities & Materials	-Introduction of Teacher Guide. -Distribution of Toolbox of Activities 2013. -Distribution of Activity book with Listening CDs for Grade 6-9 students -The English Speaking School (TESS) programme. -Rupavahini Telecast activities. -Dinamina and Thinakaran lessons. -Establishing English Activity rooms.
Examination Reforms	-Introducing Listening and Reading in GCE O/L.
Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation	-Monitoring process conducted by Master Trainers. -Monitoring process conducted by ISA officers.

When analysing the policies implemented via the Trilingual Plan it should be noted that most of the policies presented are a continuation or an upgrade of the policies, presented through the Road Map Programme in 2009, which first marked the promotion of English as a Life Skill. Therefore, the data gathered presents information about the implementation process from 2009.

As shown in Table 1 below when analysing the implemented policies, first the focus shall be drawn towards the various programmes that had been introduced to implement the proposed steps of the Stage I of the National Plan. The Presidential Task Force on English and IT under the coordination of Dr. Sunimal Fernando, Ministry of Education, Directors of Education, Regional English Support Centres (RESC), In-Service-Advisors (ISA) and Master

Trainers and teachers play vital roles in implementing the following steps in Island wide schools.

However, initially the goals aimed were rather difficult to be achieved given the lack of necessary resources, especially Human resources. Therefore, the first step of the project was to accomplish capable resource persons. And as a result, steps were taken to 'Train the Trainers'. In other words, the trainers who are now called as Master Trainers were hired in order to strengthen the capabilities of the English teachers all over the Island.

A. Training of Trainers

Master Trainers who were selected among the teachers, RESC officers, NCOE officers covering the Island on an application basis, were sent to the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad for a special training at the initial stages of the programme.

Till date three batches have been thus trained as Master Trainers and according to the Ministry of Education statistics currently, there are 122 Master Trainers spread all around the Island. And they act as Trainers for other English Teachers in the Island as upon their arrival they were appointed to initiate the Ten day Teacher Training which was a step proposed under the 'Teacher training and recruitment'. And according to the Ministry of Education statistics, it is clearly evident that the execution of this step (Ten Day Teacher Training) had been successfully implemented. And this is further analysed in the following sections.

When discussing how the training of the trainers affected the upliftment of English language in the country, it should be carefully noted that this had been the first time ever that such reputed foreign training was provided to Sri Lankan trainers. And as India too had been a country where similar policies had been implemented in order to promote oral skills of English language users in the past, the experience and the knowledge gained through the training helped to lay the foundation to the policies that followed.

However, as mentioned the purpose of the Master Trainers were to train the teachers in teaching English as a life skill. And by today majority of the teachers are trained as planned. And with that the duties allocated to Master Trainers have also differed. Today, apart from occasional training

workshops they visit each school in their zone and monitor the process of the Life Skills programme. The questionnaires revealed that Master Trainers indeed plays a huge role in implementing the programmes but Ministry of Education data shows that there are instances where their service could be improved.

For instance according to the data gathered from the Ministry of Education, the Master Trainers' participation in monitoring process shows that a certain amount is not participating. According to the findings this is due to various factors. For example, it could be due to personal reasons such as illness, study leave, etc. , and in some instances it could be due to prior commitment to other duties such as being a RESC. And these neglections ultimately affect the whole concept as Monitoring is rather essential to solve the drawbacks and glitches in the programme.

B. Teacher Training and Recruitment

And proceeding on, when analysing the effectiveness of the 'Teacher Training and Recruitment', Ministry of Education statistics show that majority of the teachers had participated in the Ten Day Teacher Training from the year 2009-2012.

Table 2 – Number of Ten Day Trainings held all around the Island

Province	No. of Teachers	Total Progress 2009-2012		
		Trainings held	Trained	%
Western	4980	129	4613	90%
Central	3180	100	3639	108%
Southern	3278	90	3180	93%
North Western	2856	84	3263	112%
Uva	1532	57	1865	109%
North Central	1159	40	1293	109%
Sabaraga muwa	1921	64	2295	112%
Northern	810	32	1144	141%
Eastern	1519	40	1394	92%
TOTAL	21235	636	22686	107%

Source: Ministry of Education statistics, 2014

Thus, according to the above table, it is evident that the execution of the Ten Day Teacher Training had been a success. This is further proven from the information gathered through the questionnaire as

100% of the sample had participated in the Ten Day Teacher Training during the years 2009-2012.

And according to the Ministry of Education statistics a special training sessions are provided to National College of Education (NCOE) trainee teachers. Thus these trainings ensure the training is continuously provided to all the teachers around the island.

Table 3 – Number of Teacher Trainings held in NCOEs in 2013

2013	
NCOE	Number of Trainings held
Jaffna	2
Uva	1
Pasdunrata	3
Nilwala	5
Peradeniya	4
Siyane	5
Mahaweli	5
Ruwanpura	5

Source: Ministry of Education statistics, 2014

All in all, the training of the Master Trainers followed by the Ten Day Teacher Training programme managed to lay the foundation to the implementation of the National Plan as these steps resolved the problem of lack of human resources to a greater extent. And the Training Programme contributed vastly to the upliftment of English language as it trained the teachers to improve the oral skills of the student.

However, it is observed that the steps taken do not entirely solve the problems because according to the findings made it is evident that when it comes to the proper distribution of these resources there are many factors which had prevented that. For example, the study conducted revealed that even today; there are schools without any English teachers. And it was rather applauding to know that this applied to urban schools such as Colombo schools as well.

The study conducted revealed that there are various issues which caused hindrances in proper distribution of teachers. For example, there are many reputed schools in the Island which have more than the required number of English teachers (per school). While on the other hand there are schools which do not even have one teacher.

According to the observations made, political influence, reputation of the school, benefits available can be identified as the deciding factors of the issue of distribution of teachers. And this has a negative impact upon the effectiveness of the plan because even though there is a high success rate in Ten Day Teacher Training programmes the skills gained through are not properly utilized. Thus, the potential of the programme is impacted.

However despite the said drawbacks the programme finally achieved the Human resources they intended and then moved on to 'Restructure the language course'.

C. Restructure the language course

A separate period for Life Skills was introduced to the school system of Grade 6-13 under the Trilingual Plan. According to the questionnaires distributed among the Western Province school teachers and with the observations made by the interviews conducted for the ISAs it was found that the period though allocated in the school timetables has few issues in execution.

Although a separate period is allocated it is not included or tested in the exams. And also given the various other implementations introduced after Life skills programme such as the School Based Assessments (SBA) focused upon the Results upliftment in schools, teachers find it hard to contribute their time and energy upon the Life Skills period. Therefore, the proper attention that should have been given to the Life Skills programmes is not given thus, affecting the quality of the programme. And although these programmes relate to improving English language, it is not necessarily part of Life Skill Programme. Rather they are part of the school syllabi. In such a situation it can be seen that there are conflicts between adhering to the goals in the Life Skills programme and the goals in the school syllabi. And given the exam-oriented school system in Sri Lanka most of the time more weight is given to the syllabi thus, affecting the implementation of the National plan.

Apart from this complication, the questionnaires also revealed that the teachers faced difficulties in managing the classroom during the Life Skills period. The Life Skill period which is especially designed to enhance the English oral skills of the student, expects the student's active participation. And many of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire revealed that they find it difficult to

manage the classroom at certain times given the limited space available in the classroom and the loud noise of the students. A few teachers explained how certain students still lack the necessary courage to use English oral abilities in the class. Apart from these reasons lack of proper resources too seem to be an issue. The questionnaires revealed that still there are schools which have not got all the resources granted for the Life Skills programme. Thus, activities which require usage of the mentioned resources are hindered.

Another step introduced under the restructuring of the language course is to introduce a separate new teacher guide for Life Skills, promoting vocal English. This teacher guide assisted the teacher to monitor the progress of the students while recommending the activities to be followed in the class. The questionnaires provided revealed that 100% of the sample had obtained the Teacher Guide thus, indicating that implementation of the restructuring of language course is successful in that aspect.

D. New textbooks, activities and materials

Now the discussion will shift towards the logistical aspects of the project. Having restructured the language courses the next aim of the programme was to provide the necessary logistics to acquire the full potential of the plan. Accordingly, the new textbooks, activities and materials introduced were to achieve this purpose. As mentioned in Table 1 under this category several new steps were introduced which were designed to enhance the oral English skills of the students.

All the materials are planned in such a manner that the student even in the absence of guidance of a teacher would be able to learn and practice English oral skills. Especially, distribution of Toolbox of activities which was introduced in 2013 and the distribution of Activity book with Listening CDs for Grade 6-9 students are rather commendable approaches because they are designed specially to cater to students in the absence of the teacher. As mentioned above, given the lack of teachers in some schools these steps could have been rather useful. But the lack of student enthusiasm, lack of proper English language foundation, etc these steps fail to fulfil the intended objectives.

Another step taken to achieve the goals of this programme is the establishment of English Activity

Rooms. According to Ministry of Education, the English Activity Rooms will contain Rs.300, 000 worth equipment such as Computers, Multimedia facilities and DVD players. This step would ultimately assist in resolving the issue of lack of visual aids in teaching. Because as observed through the questionnaires lack of visual aids had an impact in classroom activities. Ministry of Education expects to establish one Activity Room per one division and accordingly has managed to establish 308 in 2011 and another 27 by the year 2013.

TESS (The English Speaking School) programme, which marks a new English Teaching and testing initiative for Sri Lankan school system, was officially launched in March, 2014 and it is one of the newest steps taken to implement the National Plan. The programme was piloted in the Prince and Princess of Wales Colleges, Moratuwa and the Mahinda Rajapaksha College, Pitipana, Homagama. This initiative thus laid the foundation to establish language labs in Sri Lankan schools.

Also, according to Ministry of Education other than TESS, 9 other Language labs will be established throughout the Island covering each province. This project is funded by the Indian government and the Western Province language lab along with Ruwanpura, Jaffna, Nilwala, Bingiriya Teacher Training College language labs have already been established. Adalanchanai and Pulathispura Language labs are currently under construction. Here the aim is to achieve Language proficiency via using technology but given the short time period since its establishment the success of the implementation cannot be measured without further findings.

E. Examination Reforms

Examination reforms are another step proposed by the National plan. And accordingly, it expects to include oral and listening tests to the G.C.E. Ordinary Level exam in the near future. These reforms intend to achieve a better utilization of the English language skills in the practical world and thus could be rather beneficial upon implementation in contributing towards the upliftment of English language. Because then due to the competitive environment more focus would be given to improve oral English skills. And at the same time teachers would pay more importance to Life Skills period in schools.

However, despite the lucrative nature of the steps it seems rather impossible to succeed due to various issues. Although implementing this step would mean Sri Lanka to be the only country that is testing oral capabilities of English Language in a national exam, in a practical sense Sri Lanka does not have the necessary resources to conduct such an exam in a yearly basis. The human resources, technology, cost, etc would all be barriers that would prevent a successful execution. Therefore this reform particularly seems far reaching at the moment.

F. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

After the above steps the National plan has suggested a participatory monitoring and evaluation which would be accountable to the implementation related issues. Generally, Master trainers conduct a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation under the coordination of the Ministry of Education in schools in their Zonal area. The monitoring process closely looks for the students' progress and accordingly makes the evaluation.

According to the findings mentioned earlier as well it is clear that there are certain drawbacks in the Monitoring process conducted by the Master Trainers. However, it should also be observed that these drawbacks are twofold due to the fact that not only the Master Trainers fail to conduct the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, there is also the problem of the teachers who given their high workload, other commitments, etc often tend to neglect the life skill activities.

However, at the end of the discussion it also ought to be noted that the English Language performance of the students have indeed risen since the first implementation of the Life Skills Programme in 2009. Because the statistics show that the performance of the English Language at the G.C.E. Ordinary Level has shown an upwards trend in the recent years. The pass percentage of English Language was 30.6% in 2008 and it has risen to 44.57% in 2011.

III. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted in order to understand the effectiveness of the implementation of the Trilingual Plan in light of English language teaching and learning, especially in school level. The study was based upon the hypothesis that given the potential of the Ten Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka (in relation to English language

teaching and learning at schools), the Plan could bring out a positive outcome in the end and it would be a rather effective promotion of trilingualism in Sri Lanka.

However through the findings made during the study, hypothesis stands to be false to a greater extent. Although initially the plan had immense potential in its policies, the findings show that two years after implementation majority of the programmes introduced seem to be either inefficient or malfunctioned. When analysing these inefficiencies in depth it pointed towards the roles of various resource persons in making the implementation a success. Accordingly, through the data collected it is quite evident that the Presidential Task Force under the supervision of Dr Sunimal Fernando and the Ministry of Education carried out their roles as the main executors of the National plan in quite a commendable manner. The vision they foresaw was to promote English as a life skill focusing on the upliftment of English language for its utility value. And the policies they planned and executed were implemented to fulfil this vision.

The implementation was quite effective at this stage. The executors were focused upon the upliftment process and the Trilingual plan had the government support and blessings. All of these factors combined with the huge budget dedicated for the cause raised the expectation level of the project.

However, the next stages of implementation were rather problematic. The policies introduced by the Presidential Task Force along with the support of the Ministry of Education were then passed onto the Directors of Education in each province and then to Zonal Directors for further implementations. And then ISA, RECS officers and Master Trainers took over from that point onwards and they guided and monitored teachers to finally deliver the lessons to the students. And although majority of the policies were implemented during the whole process, there were more powerful factors which hindered the implementation process. Unequal resource distributions, lack of human resources, social and political factors affecting the smooth running of the process are few examples of such complications.

Thus, in concluding, this study revealed that the Trilingual Policy is failing to achieve the intended outcome at the end of the Stage I of the

programme (in relation to school level English language) due to various challenges and drawbacks occurred during the implementation process. And these challenges and drawbacks prevent the Trilingual Policy from gaining its full potential by having a negative impact upon its effectiveness.

A. Recommendations

The suggested recommendations aim to cure the challenges and drawbacks faced during the implementation of the Stage I.

1) Coordination: A better coordination between the resource persons at various stages of implementation could provide better results. The study revealed that in certain instances lack of coordination was an issue. Various methods being implemented into the school system often tend to impact the effectiveness of the methods implemented till then. But if they are properly coordinated the results could be better.

2) Oral exams: As mentioned competitive exams continue to be a part of the Sri Lankan education system and therefore all (ISA, RECS Officers, Master Trainers, teachers, students, etc) are focused upon the results upliftment. However in the long run it is often seen that having this technical knowledge is rather worthless when compared with the utility knowledge. Therefore a balance should be achieved. And thus having oral exams could be a good solution because that would create the necessary buzz that is needed to promote English oral skills.

3) Classroom Structure: The questionnaires provided revealed that majority of the teachers were not satisfied with the classroom environment when conducting the Life Skills period. According to them the issues such as loud noise, limited space, and lack of resources affect the effectiveness of the Trilingual policy. Therefore, few adjustments in the classroom structure could be helpful.

These are few recommendations which can be implemented to increase the effectiveness of the Trilingual Plan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Mahesh Hapugoda for his valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of this research work. I would also like to thank Dr. Sunimal Fernando and the members of Ministry