

Introduction of the modern school library concept to Sri Lanka through the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS).

Pradeepa Wijetunge

BA, M.Lib (Wales); Dip. Lib. Inf. Sc.
ASLLA; ALA; FSLLA

Director

National Institute of Library & Information Sciences

University of Colombo, P.O. Box 1698

Colombo 03, Sri Lanka

e-mail: director_nilis@yahoo.com

Fax : +9411 2507148

Tele : +9411 2507150

Abstract

School librarianship is an evolving profession. The components that **integrate** the SLIS with the classroom teaching programme are what differentiate modern SLIS schools from traditional libraries. Successive governments since Independence have made immense contributions to make the education system of Sri Lanka a success. Yet there has been a sharp decline in the standards and quality of education at all levels in the recent past. In 1991, National Education Commission was constituted with the mandate of advising the government on overall education policy covering all aspects of education. To implement the education policy reforms the government sought support from foreign donor agencies and the World Bank provided a considerable amount of credit facilities to improve the general education system of Sri Lanka. General Education Project (GEP) funded by the World Bank has several components and the Libraries component, was expected to provide books, equipment, furniture, and training for staff in library management for 4000 selected government schools. NILIS was established to cater to the training needs of these new school libraries developed under GEP2. This paper briefly discusses the concept of modern school library, the current education system of Sri Lanka and the education policy reforms. It also describes the GEP2 and the library component together with the administrative and academic structure of NILIS. In the final section different types of education and training programmes offered by NILIS with the objective of developing a new breed of teachers librarians are discussed.

1. School Library & Information Services of the 21st Century

1.1 Background

School librarianship is a progressing profession. For many years, school libraries have been considered to be the storehouse of the books. School library personnel have perfected various schemes for organizing, cataloging, controlling, and utilizing the space and collection. Depending on the personality and training of the library staff, the activities have ranged from clerical functions to providing assistance with locating resources.

At a later stage the School Administrators looked at the school library and asked “What is the Programme that is offered here?” As a response to this, the library staff has evolved a collection of independent lessons on materials organization, bibliographic control, reading Programmes, and activities to promote the materials or the services. In the early stages, the library was a support service, an adjunct, a repository. If the staff were friendly, it became a welcoming place for students who had natural inclinations to reading and the love of literature. In previous generations, the focus has been on the instructor, the collection and the facilities.

In more recent times, educators realised that the **integration** of the **SCHOOL LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICES (SLIS) PROGRAMME** into the total educational Programme could lead to many advantages. The most important change in school librarianship has been one of **perspective**. It is now generally accepted that the centre of the school’s educational Programme is **the student**, the needs of the student as a learner, and the skills needed for the learner to be successful in life-long learning. Hence a shift to a student-learner-centred SLIS Programme is the goal.

This paradigm shift will be very distressing for traditional librarians. It will be new for many teachers. Administrators can be lead to appreciate the benefits of such a shift. Leadership in helping staff understand this new perspective on school librarianship is vital. It is not enough to say “What does the school library teach?” But rather “How is the school library becomes an integral part of the school’s educational Programme?”

1.2 The SLIS Programme components

The components that **integrate** the SLIS with the classroom teaching programme are what differentiate modern SLIS schools from traditional libraries. These components demonstrate that a SLIS programme is more than a set of teaching skills. Thirteen significant components can be identified in the modern SLIS Programme.

1. Independent Learning Skills (ILS)
2. Resource-Based Learning (RBL)
3. Cooperative (or Collaborative) Planning and Teaching (CPT)
4. Literacy / Literary and Cultural Appreciation Skill (LCA)

5. Information and Reference Services
6. Materials Production and Editing Skills
7. Media and Electronic Technology Skills
8. Inter-Agency Collaboration
9. Leadership – Advocacy - Communication Skills
10. Organization & Administrative Functions
11. Professional Growth and Development
12. Assessment & Evaluation Processes
13. Research Activities (Brown, Bowden and Wijetunge 2004)

2. Education system of Sri Lanka

The current Sri Lankan education system is comprised of two categories; formal education and non-formal education. Formal education includes three sub categories; general education, higher education and vocational and technical education. The non-formal education system caters to the needs of those who cannot engage in any of the three categories of formal education. A parallel education system, based on Pirivenas (Monasteries) exists for Buddhist monks.

Eradication of illiteracy is a key policy of the Constitution of Sri Lanka and successive governments since Independence have made contributions to make this a reality. Yet there has been a sharp decline in the standards and quality of education at all levels. Several major related issues have been identified;

- A mismatch between skills provided by the education system and labour market requirements.
- A reduction in the quality of education due to the deficiencies in curricula, types of teaching methods, etc.
- A reduction in the quality of the teaching strength, particularly due to lack of proper training and the ad hoc recruitment of teachers irrespective of basic requirements.
- Widespread regional disparities in educational facilities.
- Poor quality educational infrastructure in rural areas.
- Shortage of teaching personnel in rural areas, particularly for science, mathematics and English.
- Difficulties in access to quality primary and secondary education in rural areas exerting more pressure on urban popular schools.
- Continuous inadequate resource allocation to the education sector.
- Insufficient resources available to improve supportive facilities required to raise the quality of education, due to the high wages cost on the overall expenditure on education.
- A lack of abilities to monitor performances and to institute a well-designed legal framework for international schools. (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1998)

2.1 Education policy reforms

In 1991, a National Education Commission was constituted with the mandate of advising the government on overall education policy covering all aspects of education. The Commission conducted detailed studies on a variety of aspects of education and produced a series of documents.

The Commission also identified a set of Overall National Goals and also prepared a list of Educationally Relevant Goals, which are derivatives of these overall national goals. It also identified a set of basic competencies, which are essential for the attainment of educationally relevant goals. These basic competencies are;

- Competencies in communication
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Graphics
- Competencies relating to the environment
 - Social environment
 - Biological environment
 - Physical environment
- Competencies relating to ethics and religion
- Competencies in play and use of leisure
- Competencies in learning to learn (National Education Commission 1995)

“An action oriented strategy towards a national education policy” (NEC 1995) presented the following five significant policy areas, which fall within the general education, which cover the school education system from primary to senior secondary level;

- Extending educational opportunities
- Improving the quality of education
- Developing practical and technical skills
- Education and training of teachers
- Management of resource provision.

When this document was submitted to the President, a presidential task force was appointed to implement the policy recommendations in 1996, and 1997 was declared as the “Year of Education Reforms”. While the "Action oriented strategy towards a national education policy" dealt with the general education of the country, similar documents were prepared for higher education and technical and vocational education by two other groups of experts and similar task forces were appointed for the implementation of the recommendations.

2. 2 Second General Education Project (GEP2)

Government sought support from foreign donor agencies to implement the education policy reforms and the World Bank provided a considerable amount of credit facilities to

improve the general education system of Sri Lanka. Second phase of the General education Project (GEP2) started in 1997 and is expected to be completed in October 2005. Total project value is US\$ million 70. The objectives of the GEP2 are to improve the quality, access, management and financing of existing education Programmes, and to increase education's responsiveness to economic needs and to reducing poverty. There are nine components of this project;

1. **Curriculum development**, which prepares a strategy to implement a sequential and cyclical curriculum in all subjects for grades 1-9, improves curriculum management, and trains teachers;
2. **Textbooks/educational publications**, which improves textbook content and physical conditions, allows re-use and a multiple textbook option, increases private sector printing, and continues private sector delivery;
3. **School facilities rationalization**, which increases equitable and cost-effective allocation of educational facilities and libraries;
4. **Quality inputs**, which supplies educational materials and equipment matching the curriculum for elementary and junior high schools;
5. **Libraries component**, which provides books, equipment, furniture, and training for staff in library management;
6. **Education management and planning**, which upgrades planning capacity and develops national, provincial, and institutional plans, strengthens quality assurance and financing mechanisms, and defines policies and lines of authorities;
7. **Education financing**, which implements a formula to improve resource allocation, trains staff, and allocates management tools and equipment;
8. **Impact analysis studies**; and
9. **Project coordination** (World Bank 1997)

2.2.1. Libraries component of GEP2

According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1995, out of 8179 schools (excluding schools in North-East Province), 70% did not have school libraries. Several other significant issues also were identified by the survey;

- Lack of a defined policy on school libraries
- Inadequate management infrastructure to administer public and school libraries and absence of a designated officer with librarianship qualifications or experience within the MOE to be responsible for school libraries.
- Lack of awareness of the significance of reading habit among teachers.
- Lack of space for school libraries, either permanent or temporary.
- Poor quality of library materials
- Lack of use of IT or other modern technologies in school libraries
- Poorly trained or untrained library staffs
- Poor image of the library staff which has led to lack of support for the library by the principal or teachers. (Project implementation plan, 1996)

The Libraries Component of GEP2, to which US\$ 2.74 (3.28% of the total) was allocated from the total amount, was expected to provide remedial measures for these identified shortcomings. As a key activity of the Libraries Component of GEP2, a School Library Development Unit (SLDU) was established within the MOE with the following mandates;

- Development of policies for the school library sector
- Development of 4000 libraries in selected schools throughout the country, which includes construction of new libraries and renovation of existing libraries.
- Provision of books (reference sources, supplementary reading and light reading), furniture and equipment to these libraries.
- Development of the reading habit through “Books in School”
- Development of library management skills of the MOE and provincial administrators
- Development of library staff
- **Establishment of the National Institute of Library & Information Sciences** (Project implementation plan, 1996)

3. National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (NILIS)

3.1 Background

Inter University Committee of Librarians (IUCL) with the intention of establishing a postgraduate institute to train the university library staff, prepared a proposal to seek funds from international organisations, in the mid 1990s.

By this time the Ministry of Education, started the Second Phase of the General Education Project (GEP2). Under this project, 4000 school libraries were being developed to promote resource-based learning. Since there was a severe lack of trained library professionals, it was decided to develop 4000 teachers as teacher librarians at the beginning and the project was searching for an organisation to undertake this responsibility. The proposal to establish the institute was submitted to the World Bank and it agreed to fund the establishment of NILIS on the condition that it trains these teacher librarians. NILIS was established in 1999 by an ordinance under section 18 and 24 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 as an institution affiliated to the University of Colombo.

3.2 Functions

The institute has been given authority by the Ordinance to perform a number of functions and the following are some such significant functions:

- to admit students;
- to provide for instruction, training and research in branches of LIS upon the recommendation of the institute and the university;

- to determine the postgraduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to be awarded in LIS;
- to conduct examinations and award postgraduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions in LIS;
- to co-operate by way of exchange of teachers, students and scholars with universities or institutions in Sri Lanka or abroad, having similar objectives to those of NILIS;
- to institute and award fellowships, scholarships, exhibitions, bursaries, medals and other prizes;

With relation to the library component, Objectives of Establishing NILIS are as follows; the responsibilities of NILIS are defined as follows.

Objectives of Establishing NILIS with relation to GEP2

- To cater to the large number of teachers who require re-training and upgrading.
- To cater to the personnel needs of the public sector and commercial enterprise libraries.
- To establish standards of training
- To accredit courses in Library and Information Science. (Project Implementation Plan, 1996)

With relation to the library component, the responsibilities of NILIS are defined as follows;

Responsibilities of NILIS with relation to GEP2

- Offer intensive short courses for Teacher Librarians
- Design new courses at Cert. Level for re-training teachers
- Develop other medium and short term courses
- Offer courses at Degree and Post Graduate level
- Establish links with regional and international institution. (Project Implementation Plan, 1996).

3.3 Management

University Grants Commission directly controls the institute as far as the fund allocation, cadre vacancies, policies and rules and regulations are concerned. Director is appointed by the UGC upon the recommendation of the Board of Management. Board of Management the composition of which is defined by the NILIS Ordinance consists of University Professors, representatives from the Ministries of Higher Education and Science & Technology and senior LIS professionals. Board of Management is the executive body which controls and administers the property and funds of the institute and determines all other matters pertaining to the institute. Director is the principle academic, administrative and accounting officer. Full time academic staff including teaching staff and the Assistant Librarian is accountable to the Director of the institute.

The Director is further supported by the Senior Assistant Registrar who is answerable to the Director and is responsible for the administrative duties and discipline of the institute, students and the staff. Senior Assistant Bursar who is also answerable to the Director is responsible for all fund management activities and procedures of the institute. These officers are supported by a number of clerical staff members. Staff salaries and some administrative expenses are supported by the annual allocation provided by the UGC, however NILIS is expected to sustain mainly on generated funds.

Academic Committee, the composition of which is also defined by the NILIS Ordinance, makes recommendations about the academic activities of NILIS. This consists of the Director, representatives from University of Colombo, LIS professionals as well as reputed IT personnel. There are several Boards of Study i.e. Education, IT, Management and Library and Information Science to design curricula under the leadership of the Director. Qualified academics in these special fields hold membership of these boards. Legislation Committee of the university approves the By-Laws of all the education Programmes conducted by NILIS while the Examinations Committee of NILIS approves the results of final examinations, to be submitted to the Senate. Examinations Committee consists of university academics and a select number of board members. All academic affairs are finally approved and recommended by the university Council and the Senate of University of Colombo.

Co-ordinators appointed to be in charge of all administrative functions of each and every course directly function under the guidance of the Director. Course co-ordinators directly communicate with the lecturers as far as the course administrative issues are concerned. Assistant Librarian supports them by providing teaching and learning resources necessary for academic activities

3.4 Education Programmes

A society, which is well informed and knows how to use the information for the betterment of that society, is the 'Knowledge Society'. Attaining the knowledge society has become the central theme of the education policy reforms of Sri Lanka as in national policies in almost every nation. In the process of achieving this knowledge society through Life Long Learning, teacher Librarian plays a significant role within the school community. School children should be a part of this knowledge society. They should be ready to cope with the changes in the society. For them to be recognized and to survive in this society, they should be able to become life Long Learners. An essential element of Life Long Learning is the ability to become independent learners. In order to promote independent learning, the Sri Lankan education system is now emphasizing Resource-Based Learning (RBL) within schools.

“Resource based learning will require more resources than what is available in the school library. This will call for the librarian to move out of the library building especially through information technology in search of relevant information. The

librarian will not only have to search for information but train the teachers as well as the students in searching, evaluating and retrieving information contained in a variety of formats. In order to encourage lifelong learning and learning to learn, schools will be using more participative learning strategies. Teachers will be planning self-study projects to a greater extent for students and the teacher librarian will have to collaborate with the teachers and school administrators in satisfying the information needs of the students.” (Wijetunge, 2002:254p.)

The concept of "Teacher Librarian" is still new in Sri Lanka and it is being used for the first time in relation to the 4000 libraries developed under the GEP2.

“Traditionally, the person in charge of the school library has been called the school librarian; today, however, since all roles in education are being redefined in the light of new trends and priorities the term Teacher Librarian has become more acceptable. A qualified Teacher Librarian is defined as a person who holds recognized teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. These qualifications ensure that the Teacher Librarian is both an educator and an information manager with integrated understandings from both of the areas. As a result, knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning styles is combined with knowledge of resources and information access systems. This enables Teacher Librarians to undertake an active role in curriculum design, support and implementation.” (Jayasuriya, 2003:2p)

NILIS has designed most of its education and training programmes targeted at the school library sector keeping in mind the skills and competencies required by the teacher librarian who could cater to the changing needs of the school community. There are two types of courses conducted. Short-term Programmes (workshops, seminars, lectures, short training Programmes and certificate courses) for which, certificates of participation are awarded by NILIS. Secondly, Diplomas and Postgraduate Programmes for which the University of Colombo awards the certificate. Following courses are conducted at present.

1. Certificate in School Librarianship – a six months course for school library staff who have had no training in librarianship before.
2. Certificate in Teacher Librarianship – a six months course for school teachers who have had no training in librarianship before.
3. ICT for School/Teacher Librarians – A two months course for school / teacher librarians.
4. Diploma in Teacher Librarianship – a 300-hour diploma course for trained teachers.

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

All these programmes are offered in Sinhala and English medium depending on the student numbers. A detailed portrayal of these education Programmes will be provided in a later chapter.

1. Five-day training workshops

For the teachers identified to become teacher librarians, a series of five-day workshops on "Organising and managing a school library" were conducted at provincial level. In each province (eight in all) there were about 500 such teachers. NILIS prepared a training manual and about thirty professional librarians drawn from university libraries, the National library and other libraries received training in conducting these workshops using the manual. By these workshops, teachers are given a basic understanding of the role of the teacher librarian, collection development, cataloguing, classification, library management, reading promotion and developing information skills of students, circulation and other reader services and methods of evaluating school library services. The manual which was written in English was translated into Sinhala and Tamil as well. Conducting these workshops was funded by the GEP2.

2. Certificate in Teacher Librarianship (CTL)

For the teachers who complete the five-day training workshop, a range of education and training programmes is available. The Certificate in Teacher Librarianship is a six months (part-time) programme consisting of 100 classroom contact hours. The participants are expected to engage in an equal number of self-study hours. This course serves teachers who cannot join the other formal courses due to financial or time constraints. Subjects covered in this course include introduction to librarianship, organisation of knowledge, IT, information literacy etc. Evaluation is done by assignments of different forms carried out by students plus a 5000 word report on proposals to develop their respective libraries. Certificate is awarded to those obtain an average of 50% or above.

3. Certificate in School librarianship (CSL)

While the teachers receive training in teacher librarianship, non-teachers working in school libraries are not forgotten. Department of Library & Information Science, University of Kelaniya and the Sri Lanka Library Association both offer education programmes for paraprofessional level library staff, but there are a substantial number of personnel working in school libraries, who do not possess the basic educational requirements to enroll in these programmes. Hence they do not have any opportunity to receive formal training. NILIS took this into consideration and designed a six-month

(part-time) programme for these library workers. Entry requirement is only a permanent employment position in a school library. The subjects covered in this programme are given in the table below and the evaluation method is similar to that of CTL

4. Information Technology for Teacher Librarians

For teacher librarians who are interested in gaining an introductory level knowledge of Information Technology, NILIS offers a part time four months course. This covers basic aspects of IT as well as specific topics like WINISIS, Internet Resources for teacher librarians. Emphasis is laid on hands on session than theory. End of course Evaluation is done through a specific project and for those who reach the acceptable competency level, the certificate is awarded.

5. Diploma in Teacher Librarianship

DTL programme is designed for non-graduate teachers who have undergone training at a recognised teacher training college. Programme lasts for 300 hours spread across one year and classes are conducted on week-ends. Subjects taught include Introduction to Librarianship, Collection Management and Organisation of Information, Management, Information and Communications Technology and Research Methods. Participants are sent to a recognized library for a work attachment. Evaluation is done through different types of assignments and end of semester examinations.

6. Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship

PGTL programme is designed for the teachers with a Degree in any discipline and selected to work in a school library. The course contents are designed in such a way that they develop an understanding and expertise as a TL through a series of educational experiences. A limited number of students will be selected through a selection test/interview. Priority will be given to the teachers from gep2 funded school libraries. Subjects taught include Introduction to Librarianship, Collection Management and Organisation of Information, Management, Information and Communications Technology and Research Methods. Participants are sent to a recognized library for a work attachment. Evaluation is done through different types of assignments and end of semester examinations. In addition they are expected to submit a report on based on a research project carried out individually.

7. Masters in Teacher Librarianship

MTL course is designed for Educational Administrators and teachers with a Degree in any discipline and PG Diploma n Education. The aim of this course is to prepare graduate teachers to perform at the initial professional level in Teacher Librarianship and to provide the basis for further professional career needs. Subjects taught and the evaluation

schemes are similar to that of PGTL. In addition they have to submit a lengthy dissertation based on an individual research.

References

- Brown, Gerald R. Bowden, Russell and Wijetunge, Pradeepa. (Ed.s) Information Skills for Learning. Proceedings of the International Workshop; 2004 November 01-05. Colombo. IFLA-ALP / NILIS.
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (1998). Economic progress of independent Sri Lanka. Colombo. Central Bank of Sri Lanka.
- Jayasuriya, S.C. (2003). Role of the teacher librarian. IN: Wijetunge, Pradeepa. (Ed). Manual for teacher librarians, 2-6 pp. Colombo: NILIS.
- National Education Commission. (1995). An action oriented strategy towards a national education policy. Colombo. NEC.
- Project implementation plan for component 5: libraries (1996). Battaramulla. Second General Education Project. Unpublished report.
- Wijetunge, Pradeepa. (2002). Empowering students towards a Knowledge Society through a school library development project: a conceptual model for Sri Lanka. IN: Singh, Diljit...[et.al.]. (Ed.) School libraries for a knowledge society. Proceedings of the 31st annual conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, 2002 August 5-9. Malaysia. Seattle. IASL.
- World Bank (1997). General Education Project (02). [on line] (URL <http://www.worldbank.org.lk>). Accessed 10.02.2005.