Recent General Education Policy Reforms and their impact on LIS education

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Abstract

This paper briefly introduces the general education system of Sri Lanka and the recent problems encountered with regard to the quality of education. With the objective of eradicating these problems, General Education Policy Reforms were brought in by the mid 1990s. These policy reforms are analysed in the paper together with two major World Bank funded projects which introduced radical changes to the general education system by implementing the recommended policy reforms. A special emphasis is laid on the unprecedented library development activities resulted from the policy reforms and finally the impacts of these General Education Policy Reforms and related activities on Library and Information Science education of Sri Lanka is discussed.

Key Words: Education Policy Reforms; Library Education; General Education Policy; Sri Lanka

1. General Education system

Education system of Sri Lanka consists of four major stages; the earliest stage for the children of ages 3-5 which is almost entirely handled by the private sector, general education which is the second stage consisting of primary grades (grades 1-5), junior secondary (grades 6-9) and senior secondary (grades 10-13) education cycles. Third stage is the vocational and technical education and the fourth stage is the tertiary education and training. Figure 1 highlights the organizational structure of the Sri Lankan general education system.

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General education system of Sri Lanka is dominated by the public sector accounting for 90% of schools and 95% of student enrollments. Overall, about four million school children are enrolled in 9,800 public schools while about 97,000 students are enrolled in 80 private schools. A further 55,000 students are enrolled in about 600 government funded Pirivenas while about 70,000 students are enrolled in around 150-200 international schools. (World Bank 2005).

Figure 1 - The organizational structure of the Sri Lankan general education system
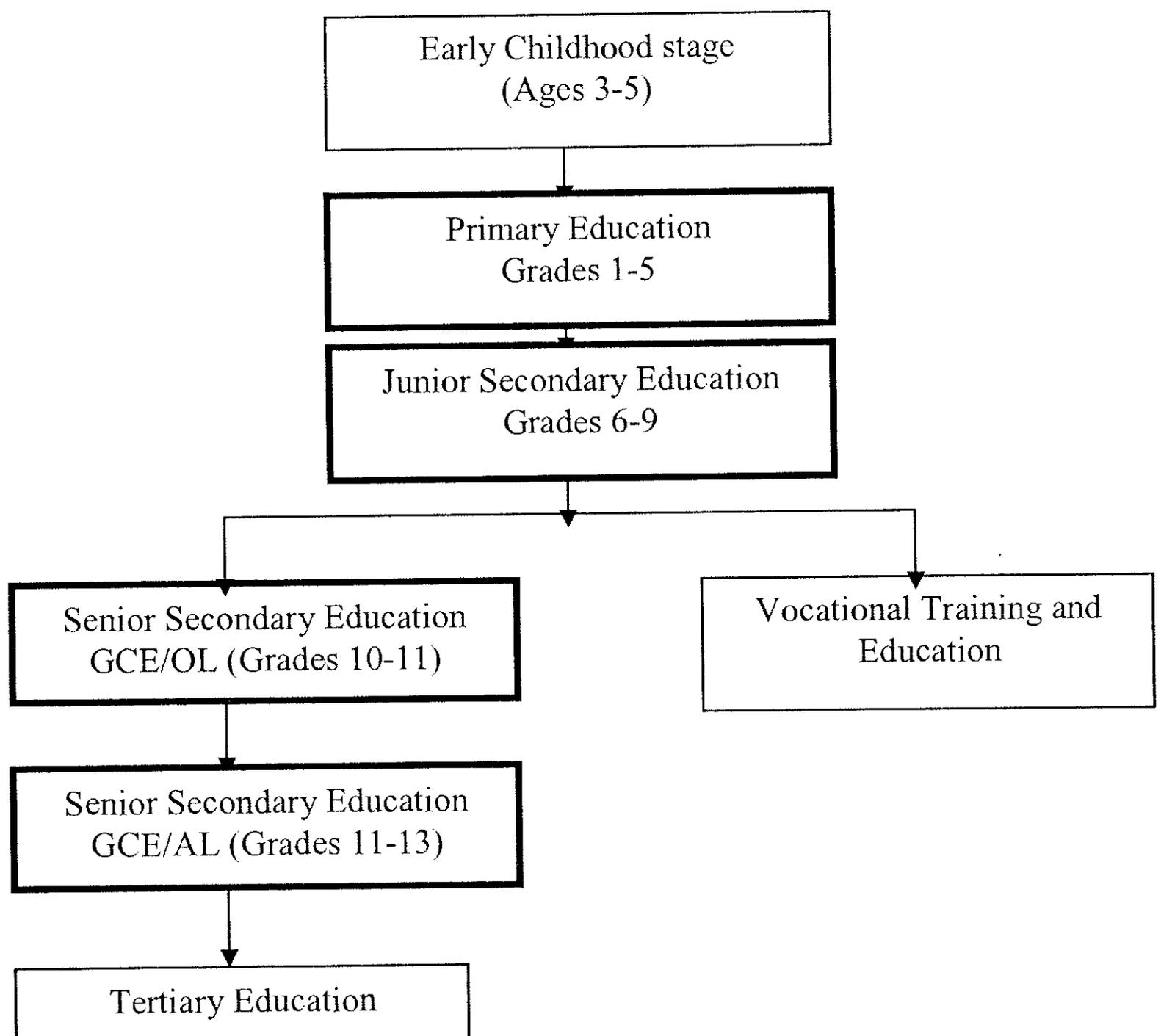
Sri Lankan government schools are classified into 4 types:
- Type 1AB schools with classes up to grade 13 including A' Level Science Stream;
- Type 1C schools with classes up to grade 13 but without A' Level science stream;
- Type 2 schools with classes up to grade 11 and
- Type 3 schools with classes up to grade 5. (Ministry of Education 2005).

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 Education policy reforms

Many attempts have been in past to reform the general educations system but one of the shortcomings was the ad hoc introduction of changes without a proper study of the situation. In 1991, a National Education Commission was constituted to advise the government on overall education policy covering all aspects of education. The Commission performed detailed studies on a variety of aspects of education and produced a series of documents;
- Final report of the Commission – 1992

- An action oriented strategy towards a national education policy – 1995
- National policy on general education – 1997
- National policy on university education –1996
- National policy on technical and vocational education – 1996

The National Education Commission 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 (NEC 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 and the National Policy on General Education (NEC 1997) presented the recommendations;

- 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 in 1996, a Presidential Task Force was appointed to implement the policy recommendations, 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 university education and technical and vocational education by two other groups of experts and similar task forces were appointed for the implementation of these recommendations.

The reform proposals presented strong arguments for a major shift in the educational goals and practices and a far-reaching and harmonized approach to change. The principal elements of this shift are "self realization, lifelong learning with emphasis on learning to learn, inculcating humanistic values and emphasis on stimulating the balanced mental and physical growth of the individual." (NEC 1997, p.3)

3 World Bank projects in support of policy Implementations

In order to implement the policy recommendations the government of Sri Lanka sought aid from foreign missions and the World Bank agreed to provide credit under two major projects; General Education Project first and second phases ((GEP1 and GEP2) and the Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment (TETD) Project.

Libraries component of GEP2 and Upgrading Teacher Education programmes of TETD are two significant initiatives, which introduced a radical change to the libraries and library education of Sri Lanka. These two components will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.1 Second General Education Project (GEP2)

This project started in 1997 and ended in December 2005. Total project value is US$ million 70. The objectives of the GEP2 were 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 component**, to prepare a strategy to implement a sequential and cyclical curriculum in all subjects for grades 1-9, to improve curriculum management and to train teachers;
2. **Textbooks/educational publications component**, to improve textbook content and physical conditions, to allow re-use and a multiple textbook option, to increase private sector printing, and to continue private sector delivery;
3. **School facilities rationalization component**, to increase equitable and cost-effective allocation of educational facilities and libraries;

4. **Quality inputs component,** to supply educational materials and equipment to match the curriculum for elementary and junior high schools;
5. **Libraries component, to** provide books, equipment, furniture, and training for staff in library management;
6. **Education management and planning component,** to upgrade planning capacity and to develop national, provincial, and institutional plans, to strengthen quality assurance and financing mechanisms, and to define policies and lines of authorities;
7. **Education financing component,** to implement a formula to improve resource allocation, trains staff, and to allocate management tools and equipment;
8. **Impact analysis studies**; and
9. **Project coordination** (World Bank 1997)

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

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 and
*   Establishment of the National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (Project implementation plan, 1996)

Under the library component, it was proposed to develop 4000 school libraries and the type of aid provided was of three categories as indicated in the table below.

Table 1 – Types of aid provided for libraries

Type of Library	Definition	Number	Support received
A	Senior schools with grades 10-13	250	Library building, books, furniture, training and AV equipment. 25 schools of this category to received Internet facilities as well.
B	Junior schools with classes from grades 1-9	1750	Library building (either new or renovated), books, training and furniture
C	Middle and small school in rural and urban areas	2000	Books and training

3.2 Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment (TETD) Project

This Project commenced in 1996 and was completed in December 2005. The total project value is US$ million 79.3. The objectives of the Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Project, based on policy initiatives agreed between the government and World Bank over the past year, are to improve the quality, cost-effectiveness and coverage of education in Sri Lanka.

The project will benefit about 4.1 million students in Sri Lanka by improving education quality and it will improve education quality by: restructuring the teacher education pre-service (initial training) programs; consolidating and coordinating teacher education; strengthening and rationalizing the number of training institutions to increase equity; upgrading the academic and management skills of teacher trainers and managers; modifying teacher hiring practices; strengthening the financial management of the teacher training institutions; supporting studies and technical assistance to improve education quality; and supplying funds for better equipment, books, and other teaching materials. (World Bank 1996)

TETD project consists of the following components;

1. Rationalization of teacher deployment;
2. Rationalization of structure and organization of teacher education;
3. Upgrading of teacher education programs;
4. Strengthening of staff and management;
5. Strengthening and upgrading of the teacher training institutions;
6. Strengthening the management of teacher training institutions;
7. Studies and monitoring; and
8. Project coordination. (World Bank 1996)

Under component 3 - upgrading of teacher education programs, seventeen National Colleges of Education (NCOEs) were developed with the project aid to provide pre-service education for teachers. It was planned to introduce, in each of these colleges, Library and Information Science with the objective of catering to the staff requirements of the 4000 libraries developed under GEP2 and also the libraries of other schools and to train teachers to support the student-centred resource based education system, which is a major emphasis of the policy reforms. An international consultant was invited from Tasmania by the project officials under the guidance of NIE in 1999 to draft a curriculum in LIS for NCOEs and this consultant carried out curriculum development activities in consultation with the authorities of the National Institute of Education (NIE). NIE was involved in this process since curriculum development for teacher education is one of their responsibilities.

The curriculum developed by this consultant contained three modes;

Mode 1 - incorporates a general compulsory module of 60 hours designed to introduce libraries and the process of accessing and recording information to all student teachers. On completion of the module it is expected that the participants will be able to access and record the information found in the NCOE libraries. It is also expected that once they are in schools after completion of the training, they will support promotion of reading among school children across the curriculum.

Mode 2 - this is intended for those who are interested in offering LIS as a major with English as a minor subject. The programme consists of 1879 hours (including teaching practices) across two academic years. The specific LIS component consists of 356 hours of LIS and 550 hours of library related projects. This mode is expected to provide a detailed training in organisation, operation, utilization and promotion of the library service within the school community.

Mode 3 - includes the general compulsory component of LIS with an additional 211 hours of LIS as a minor subject with English as the major subject.

The outlines of the LIS minor and major components are given in the tables below.

Table 2 - Outline of LIS minor component

Length of module	Subject	No. of hours per week
	Semester 1	
17 weeks	• Project: Promotion and display • Teaching & Observation practice	3 hrs/week 15 hours
	Semester 2	
16 weeks	• Interpersonal communication • Teaching & Observation practice	2 hrs/week & 1 hr tutorial 60 hours
	Semester 3	
16 weeks	• Multimedia equipment and presentations • Teaching & Observation practice	3 hrs/week 60 hours
	Semester 4	
16 weeks	• Conducting research projects • Conservation & preservation of materials **OR** • School library management • Teaching & Observation practice	2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 60 hours

Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 1999

Table 3 - Outline of LIS major component

Length of module	Subject	No. of hours per week
	Semester 1	
17 weeks	• Libraries in society • Organisation & storage of library material • Project 1 • Project 2	2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 3 hrs/week 3 hrs/week
	• Teaching & Observation practice	15 hours
	Semester 2	
16 weeks	• Interpersonal communication • Organisation of knowledge: cataloguing • Organisation of knowledge: classification • Project 1 • Project 2	2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 4hrs/week 4 hrs/week
	• Teaching & Observation practice	60 hours
	Semester 3	
16 weeks	• Multimedia equipment and presentations • Reference services • Project 1 • Project 2	3 hrs/week 3 hrs/week 5 hrs/week 5 hrs/week
	• Teaching & Observation practice	60 hours
	Semester 4	
16 weeks	• School library management • Conducting research projects • Conservation & preservation of materials • Project 1 • Project 2	2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 2 hrs/week 5 hrs/week 5 hrs/week
	• Teaching & Observation practice	60 hours

Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 1999

First mode was implemented in all NCOEs and the second and third modes were introduced in to three NCOEs. Two groups of student teachers completed their courses and joined the Teacher Service in 2003 and 2004.

4. Impact on LIS education

The library component brought about unprecedented developments in the school library sector and library education. Following sections will discus the impact on training of teacher librarians, training of ministry officials, establishment of NILIS and reading promotion project.

4.1 Training of Teacher Librarians

In 1998 a national consultant was appointed for a period of three months to develop a school library policy and standards and the prepared documents were submitted to the MOE for acceptance.

Several suggestions were made to develop school library staffs; from the 2000 personnel identified as working in school libraries only about 350 has had any library qualifications. A three-day refresher course was planned for these library staff. Training another 250 librarians at certificate or diploma level was recommended for Type A libraries. It was also suggested to provide a 3 months training for one teacher from each of the 1750 Type B libraries. The major focus of the project was on retraining teachers for these libraries instead of recruiting library staff. (Project Implementation Plan 1996).

However resulting from a political decision, actions were taken in 1998 to staff the 4000 libraries which came under the Library Component of GEP2, with 4000 fresh graduates recruited by the government. A consultant was invited from the UK to prepare a training programme for these 4000 personnel designated as Library Development Officers (LDOs). The consultant designed a five-day training workshop and developed a corresponding manual. A group of about 50 library professionals selected from the university libraries, national library and some special and public libraries were given a short training in using the manual to train the LDOs. National Library and Documentation Services Board and the SLDU co-ordinated the implementation of this series of five-day training programmes at provincial level covering all 4000 LDOs in 1998 and 1999.

Nevertheless, recruitment of new staff was against the initial agreement between the World Bank and the government of Sri Lanka and they disagreed with this initiative. As a result Ministry of Education was compelled to remove the LDOs from the school libraries and assign them to school offices.

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In 2002, upon a decision made by the then Minister of School Education, a teacher from each school which received library support under GEP2 was identified to be in charge of the school library. Another five day training programme was planned by NILIS with a review of the previous manual to include more teacher librarian aspects than traditional library aspects. These five-day programmes were conducted throughout the country by NILIS in collaboration with the provincial education offices. A total of 2800 teachers were trained and they were assigned the responsibility of the school library in addition to classroom teaching.

In 2005 again newly qualified graduates were recruited by all provincial education departments as well as by the Ministry of Education as Teacher Librarians. This is first time they were directly recruited as teacher librarians.

An evaluative study done in 2004, of the effectiveness of the LIS curriculum of the NCOEs mentioned in section 3.2 brought to light several issues; this curriculum was more biased towards traditional librarianship with more emphasis on library administration, cataloguing and classification. Due to this, the student teachers who offered LIS as a major were experiencing difficulties in undergoing internship in schools. They had no subject content to practice in the classroom as far as LIS was concerned. At the same time it was essential for them to undergo a certain number of hours in teaching practice and to avoid administrative issues these student teachers were teaching English during their internship though their major was LIS.

Emphasis on library administration was not in conformity with the training objectives. On the other hand, the curriculum had been changed to include more IT than the MOE had initially planned therefore and those who qualified in the years 2003 and 2004 have been appointed as IT teachers instead of teacher librarians. A third issue identified was that there was no emphasis on the role of teacher librarian, the role of school libraries and resource centres in the school curriculum or on information literacy. Programmes offered by NILIS strongly emphasised these aspects. Therefore the SLDU and the MOE authorities considered a revision of the NCOE curricula for the general and major modules. The author was appointed as a consultant to review and revise the General and Major LIS curriculum of the NCOEs.

The course outline of the proposed module basically consists of; introduction to the changing general education environment in Sri Lanka, Resource-based learning, Information literacy skills, Library as resource centre, Developing Information literacy skills, Study Tours to leading libraries. After reviewing the curriculum a five-day training was given to a group of lecturers from all NCOEs so that they can introduce the new general module on "Developing Information Skills" to all student teachers. Unfortunately the training of lecturers to implement the major module has not drawn the attention of the authorities despite stressing the necessity

repeatedly. Those who teach the major module has no Masters level training in Librarianship or Teacher Librarianship. Therefore the quality of the major module is questionable.

4.2 Training of Ministry Officials

In order to develop managerial level professionals, GEP2 funded Masters level education of two Deputy Directors of the SLDU at Sheffield University, UK. Ten Deputy Directors from the Provincial Education Offices were funded to obtain MLS from University of Malaya, Malaysia. Three Assistant Librarians from the National Library & Documentation Services Board were funded to obtain MLS from the Universities of London, Sydney and Malaya.

In 2005 a series of three-day awareness programmes were conducted for the principals of the 4000 schools, which received library development support under the project. The objectives of the programmes were to provide an awareness of the significance of libraries in the education system, and the role of the teacher librarian and the training opportunities available for teacher librarians. Two Deputy Directors of the SLDU designed this programme in collaboration with the Provincial Deputy Directors, NILIS and the National Library. Workshops were co-ordinated by the provincial education offices while the resource persons were drawn from the institutes involved with the design of the programme.

4.3 Establishment of NILIS

In 1998 establishment of the National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (NILIS) was started with the construction of the building funded by TETD. NILIS was formally 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.
The institute is given authority by the Ordinance to perform a number of functions and the following are some of 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 and
- to institute and award fellowships, scholarships, exhibitions, bursaries, medals and other prizes;

In 1999 a consultant was appointed from Canada to plan curricula for NILIS. A range of education and training programmes were identified to suit different categories of officers. i.e. school library administrators, principals, teachers, school librarians etc. But a considerable amount of further expansions of these plans were necessary before implementing them.

In 2003 NILIS started its formal education programmes for the first time. Up to 2005 NILIS has conducted many short and long term programmes as indicated in table four. In addition, about 3500 have followed various workshops, including the five-day introductory workshop for teacher librarians, conducted by NILIS covering many aspects of librarianship. Further information of NILIS, its academic and administrative environment and the education and training programmes can be found in Wijetunge (2003a) and Wijetunge (2003b) respectively.

Table 4 – Student enrollments at NILIS 2003-2005

Programme	Number of total enrollments
Masters in Teacher Librarianship	71
PG Diploma in Teacher Librarianship	38
PG Diploma in Library and Inf. Science	17
Diploma in Teacher Librarianship	36
Certificate in Teacher Librarianship	74
Certificate in IT for Teacher Librarians	46
Teacher Librarianship Module for B.Ed final year	280
Preliminary Certificate in Library & Inf. Management	127
Total	689

GEP2 related objective of establishing NILIS was to train administrators, teachers and other staff for school libraries. Yet with the removal of LDOs from the school libraries NILIS lost its major target group for training. Even though 2800 teachers were given five day training and in 2005 about one thousand new graduates were recruited as teacher librarians, still their enthusiasm for training is weak because the promotions schemes and other administrative issues of this new post are not formalized yet. As a consequence NILIS which was established to train about 300-400 students a year has not been able to function in its full capacity yet.

4.4 Reading Promotion

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

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

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

A set of English books were distributed to about 7000 schools - except to those which do not have primary classes. These include schools which received library support from GEP2, and schools which did not receive such support as well as Types C schools. Only "Big Books" (large size picture books with limited text designed to teach English language) have been distributed to Type C schools. Books provided by BOBLEP are kept with the school principals or English teachers and are not accessioned in to the library.

When the pilot project was started, eight provincial co-ordinators and eight provincial BOBLEP trainers attended two-week training at Wendy Pye Ltd. in

2001 and 35 teachers from 20 schools were given similar training by staff of Wendy Pye Ltd. in Sri Lanka in the same year. The programme included;

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

During a World Bank Review Mission in 2002 it was recommended that NILIS should incorporate reading promotion activities in its programmes in order to sustain the project after the completion of GEP2. It was also decided by the World Bank mission to allocate funds to provide one-week training to the academic staff of NILIS by an international consultant.

All lecturers of NCOEs were also given training in integrating BOBLEP into pre-service teacher training programmes. Training has also been given to 94 Teacher Training Centre Managers, Additional Directors of Education in English, In Service Advisors and 110 zonal co-ordinators. A second group of zonal BOBLEP trainers attended a short-term training, which was similar to the first two-week training, at Wendy Pye Ltd. New Zealand, in 2004.

The English Library Activities Development Committee established in 2004 to advise on matters relevant to libraries and English activities, decided to instruct the principals to handover the BOBLEP books to the school library and to get them accessioned in the school library Accessions Register and for the teachers to borrow them from the library according to their needs. This decision was made because in certain schools, books were kept under lock and key without being used. By handing over the books to the library it was expected that all students of the school will have access to the colourful and attractive picture books, which will stimulate their reading interests. Librarians and teachers are expected to provide different activities based on the contents of the books to encourage the children to read.

5. Conclusion

The school library sector, which received little attention since independence, received substantial consideration in the new general education policy reforms. The school libraries component of GEP2 pumped in large amounts of funds to develop infrastructures and book collections. Rural libraries, which could not have otherwise afforded such innovations, were given AV equipment as well as computers under the project.

A significant outcome of the project is that a number of personnel from key organisations getting trained in foreign universities at Masters level in LIS. In the local context 4000 graduates were given a five-day training in LIS although they were transferred out of libraries at a later stage, and at a later stage another 2800 teachers were given a similar training. Minor staff of the school libraries is provided a training opportunity by NILIS to upgrade their knowledge. The provincial level officers trained at Masters level are assigned to provinces to support the library development activities. Awareness programme offered to 4000 principals contributed to change the negative attitudes of many principals towards the school library and to perceive the library as a key element in the teaching/learning process.

The most imperative impact of the general education policy reforms can be mentioned as the establishment of the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) under the school libraries component. Although this was funded by the World Bank with the main objective of training staff for school libraries, NILIS is vested with powers to provide education and training for other types of libraries as well and many more innovative programmes are to be offered in future.

There are many shortcomings in the implementation of libraries component but it can be concluded that the general education reforms made a significant impact on LIS education in Sri Lanka.

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