
TEACHING OF SECOND NATIONAL LANGUAGE (TAMIL) IN SRI LANKA: RELEVANCE OF CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Sri Lanka as a multi lingual country, it noticed that there is an overwhelming desire among different language speaking groups especially among present generation to become multilingual. However, surveys conducted in Sri Lanka recently revealed that inter-ethnic harmony as a major issue and it is due to not knowing each other's language. In order to meet this national need a policy was introduced by the government of Sri Lanka for teaching Second National Language (2NL) in secondary school curriculum as to enhance social cohesion among ethnic groups. This study focused on inquiring the relevance of curriculum in order achieving the objectives of teaching – learning 2NL in Sri Lankan schools. This study was mainly a document analysis. Additional data and information were gathered a sample of 100 students, 16 principals and 75 teachers from 16schools in western province using questionnaires, focus group interview. Present study revealed that the curriculum used for teaching 2NL(Tamil language) was not effective due to various reasons such as curriculum is very heavy for a 2NL learner, text books are not matching with the needs of students, content of the text books is very heavy and difficult, activities given in the text books are not attractive and classrooms are not equipped with modern teaching learning strategies and to creating conducive teaching – learning environment and mismatch between the curriculum, text book and objectives of teaching 2NL activities to develop communicative skills.

Keywords: 2NL, Curriculum,

1.INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural country striving to maintain its diversity and yearning to forge a national identity transcending its differences. The two major linguistic communities (Tamil and Sinhala) maintain their languages for in- group communication and also use them for official purposes in their territories. Both languages are regarded as national languages by the two speech communities. In Sri Lanka's ethno -graphic mosaic can be divided along ethnic, religious, and geographical lines. The majority ethnic group is Sinhalese, constituting around three quarters of the population. There are three sizeable minority groups: Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Muslims. Geographically, Sinhalese are spread across the island, with few in the North-East, and with a concentration in the Southern half of the country. Linguistic Survey of Sri Lanka (2010) highlighted that nearly 90 percentage of Sinhala speaking people are unable to communicate in Tamil and cannot communicate effectively in English and 70 percent of Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka cannot communicate

in Sinhala. Though these ethnic groups are living together for number of centuries, learning of each other's language was not achieved.

The rulers of ancient Sri Lanka encouraged learning many languages and being a monolingual was treated without respect. In later years learning each other's language was not serious consideration in Sri Lanka especially during the foreign rulers and they

introduced English as the language of rulers. Later English has become the language of the elites in this country. Many of Sri Lankan people did not encourage learning either local languages or English Language. Even after the independence, with the introduction of mother tongue in education and the official Language policy in the constitution of Sri Lanka, gap between ethnic group in learning either Sinhala or Tamil languages has been widened.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution has made Sinhala and Tamil Official Languages of Sri Lanka and English the link language. However, the Population and Housing Census of Sri Lanka, 2001 (cited in Perera, 2007) indicates that the number of Sri Lankans who are competent in the two National Languages as well as in the link language is minimal. Thus, if the language policy mandate is to be successfully implemented Sri Lanka needs people proficient in both National Languages and the link language.

The First Report of the National Education Commission (NEC, 1992) established nine national goals for education in 1991, which still provide the vision for the education system today. The first national goal reads as follows: "The achievement of a functioning sense of National Cohesion, National Integrity, and National Unity". Under this new policy framework, "Trilingual Sri Lanka will promote national harmony and communication across the borders of language and ethnicity."

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) also explicitly expresses the importance of trilingual fluency in the country through the following recommendations:

The learning of each other's' languages should be made a compulsory part of the school curriculum. This would be a primary tool to ensure attitudinal changes amongst the three major communities. Teaching Tamil to Sinhala children and Sinhala to Tamil children will result in greater understanding of each other's culture.

As a result teaching of Second National Language was introduced in all government schools in Sri Lanka as compulsory subject in junior secondary grades (grades 6 – 9) and as an optional subject in Senior secondary grades (grades 10 and 11). A curriculum was developed by the National Institute of Education (NIE) with the direction of the ministry of education and the relevant textbooks were published by the Department of Publication of the Ministry of education and distributed among 2NL learners.

Objective of the Study

Main purpose of the study is to inquiring the relevance of curriculum in order to achieving the objectives of teaching – learning 2NL in Sri Lankan schools and the specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine the suitability of second National Language curriculum of junior secondary and senior secondary grades.
- Identify the relevance of 2NL textbooks and other materials used by students and teachers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching and learning of the Second National Languages (2NL) is crucial to Sri Lanka's national integration and cohesion, which is also, exemplified in the first of the National Education goals (NEC Report, 2003). Being a multi-ethnic multi-religious, pluralistic society, it is incumbent upon every Sri Lankan to learn a national language other than his or her own.

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In schools 2NL is expected to be taught both at primary and junior secondary grades. In the junior secondary grades two timetabled periods are allocated to the teaching of 2NL. Under the free textbook policy, the EPD has produced textbooks Tamil as a Second Language (Grades 6, 7, 10, 11) and Sinhala as a Second Language (Grades 6, 7, 10, and 11); new books for Grades 8 and 9 will be produced in future respectively. However, existing research (CESL, 2003; Perera, 2007) claims that in reality 2NL is not taught in all schools. This is mainly due to lack of professionally competent teachers of 2NL.

Further, 2NL is not a compulsory subject at the GCE (O/L) and according to the proposed education reforms (2007) 2NL is grouped with modern languages, and students have to select only one subject from the group. Before 2007, 2NL was an optional subject and only a limited number of students offered it. With the new Reforms there is no guarantee that the number offering 2NL will increase; as a consequence the number of Bilinguals in 2NL will not increase in the foreseeable future. As a result, the achieving of the first of the National Goals is doubtful. On the other hand there is no clear policy regarding the teaching learning of 2NL in the schools (ESCP 2008) and if the 2NL is effectively incorporated in school curriculum it will contribute to the achievement of objectives of Social cohesion and peace education programme.

Curriculum is an organizational pattern for structuring learning. This is the pre-planned direction of the instructional programme. Formulating of school curriculum has been a state monopoly in Sri Lanka. All learning experiences planned organized and implemented by school and enriched by variety of informal experiences in line with the National Education policy comprise the school curriculum. In Sri Lanka, since 1985, the development of national curriculum is the responsibility of NIE. The National Institute of Education (NIE) develops the national curriculum (producing syllabi and teachers guides), and is also responsible for developing teacher training content, and conducting research. Since uniformity imposed on curriculum and textbooks by the centralization and the transfer of responsibility of writing of textbooks to the NIE and the limited time assigned for writing have brought the quality of some textbooks under question and in such situation the textbook is the only resort for the student and there is a need to develop textbook as learning material. For this, a textbook guide would facilitate its usage and it is essential to produce more and more support material of quality. However, in general the textbooks produced as supplementary readers for school children demonstrate a number of deficiencies (NEC 2003) 2NL curriculum is developed with the objectives of social harmony, conflict resolution and foster democratic living in Sri Lanka (Regaining Sri Lanka10–Action Plan, 2002). Final report prepared by the National committee for formulating a New Education Act for

General Education (2009) stipulated the following aspects in developing curriculum and textbooks for schoolchildren 1.) Produce educationally relevant and quality textbooks (2) ensure that they are age appropriate, cognitive attribute, personality development and experiences of the students for whom the textbooks are intended attractive, and (3) reflect current regional and international perspectives

In spite of current educational reforms (2007) which emphasize a student-centered and activity based approach to teaching and learning, teaching is still for the most part heavily teacher centered, relying on traditional 'chalk and talk' techniques. The textbook is very much the central component of the teaching- learning process, with teachers making little reference to the syllabus, to broader pedagogical resources, and to the development of broader competencies beyond the remit and content areas of textbooks.

The quality of contents of the textbooks, where considered by the Ministry of Education to be inadequate. The material in the free textbooks is often poorly written and presented. The subject matter covered is inadequate and somewhat outdated. This is linked to the fact that there is no established cycle for curriculum development or an efficient mechanism for relating reforms in the school curricula into new, improved textbooks. Deficiencies with regard to the 2NL text books prepared for Sri Lankan have been highlighted in several studies. Pereira (2007) stated the 2NL textbooks for secondary school are not very attractive for learners. A study carried out by Simao (2009) revealed that the sections on syntax and vocabulary are too heavy for second language learners and are not recycled. Activities given in the textbooks are also not leading to achieve required competencies. Christian (1998) suggested that while teaching second language cultural aspects of the learners to be taken into consider in the textbook.

There are numerous textbooks designed to direct and support Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages, emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “Communicative Approach” CLT is a holistic approach. It doesn’t focus only on the traditional structural syllabus. It takes into consideration communicative dimension of language. CLT provides vitality and motivation within the classroom. CLT is a learner centered approach. It capitalizes on the interests and needs of the learner. In a world where communication of information and information technology has broken new considerable ground, CLT can play an important role in education.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching (Richards and Rodgers 2001). It is based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication. Its primary goal is for learners to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), or simply put, communicative ability. In other words, its goal is to make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. Wesche and Skehan (2002) describe as: Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems. Use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to “real-world” contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels. Approaches that are learner centered in that they take into account learners’ backgrounds, language needs, and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions. With no one particular method or theory that underlies their practical and theoretical foundation, CLT methodologies are best described as a set of macro-strategies (Kumaradivelu 1992) or methodological principles (Doughty and Long 2003). The following section describes such principles in more detail.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) said for many decades the predominant method of language instruction was the grammar-translation method. The Grammar-translation Method was not without its opponents, and the demand for oral proficiency led to several counter and parallel movements that laid the foundation for the development of new ways of teaching. Further the researcher described the principles of procedures underlying the Direct Method in the following way (1) Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language (2) .Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught (3).Oral communication skills were built up in carefully graded progression (4)organized around question-answer exchanges between teachers (5) and students in small, intensive classes(6) .Grammar was taught inductively (7).New teaching points were introduced orally (8).Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstrating, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas (9).speech and listening comprehension were taught (10) .Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

Deficiencies with regard to the 2NL text books prepared for Sri Lankan students have been highlighted in several studies. Perera (2007) stated the 2NL textbooks for secondary school are not very attractive for learners. Students and teachers face difficulties in pronouncing several words and phrases given in the textbooks and the textbooks do not fulfill the needs of students in different grade levels (BESU 2007). Virajith and Hettige (2014) also found that the

textbooks are uninteresting to students. Curriculum used is ineffective and need to be revised and the suggest preparation of attractive textbooks for students and recruitment of qualified teachers in sufficient number.

The Department of publication did not develop any criteria to evaluate the quality of 2NL textbooks produced by them. However, the writers of 2NL were instructed to follow the guidelines such as format, Age appropriateness, cultural aspects, pictures and diagrams, activities and method of assessment in the textbooks.

The following criteria are based on the main points in the guiding principal for quality printed textbook ([http:// www.edb.gov.hk/textbooks](http://www.edb.gov.hk/textbooks) 2012) are given below: To a certain extent these criteria are taken in to consideration in assessing the quality of 2NL textbooks produced for Sri Lankan students

- 1) Conformity with the curriculum aims and objectives in the curriculum guide
- 2) Effectiveness of content to meet curriculum requirement
- 3) Accuracy and relevance of data / information
- 4) Accuracy , clarity of development of concepts
- 5) Balance of depth and breadth
- 6) Appropriate level of difficulty
- 7) Smooth interface between key stages of learning/ year levels
- 8) Presence of multiple perspectives
- 9) Absence of biased information/ discrimination
- 10) Inclusion of suggested references to facilitate consolidation and self-directed learning.

3. RESEARCH MODEL

This study is a qualitative content analysis. Syllabi developed by the National Institute of Education, 2NL textbooks; 2NL Teacher Instructional Guide and other relevant materials were examined.

Descriptive survey design also employed to gather quantitative and qualitative data and information from a sample of 100 students, 16 principals and 75 teachers from 16 schools in western province using questionnaires, focus group interview. Syllabi developed by the National Institute of Education, textbooks, Teacher Instructional Guide and other relevant materials were

examined. In addition, an interview with the officials of the Department of publication, Ministry of Education also conducted.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Developing a suitable curriculum based on national objectives by the NIE is a great effort to meet the country's needs through teaching 2NL in Sri Lanka. The great challenge in this endeavour is to consider multi-cultural of a multi lingual aspect of societies NIE has developed the 2NL curriculum and the Department of publication, Ministry of education published textbooks to enhancing learning 2NL in schools. These textbooks are being used by teachers and students as a basic material to develop their 2NL language competencies in order to achieve the national goals. However, the quality of curriculum material is still in critical. Our observation revealed that the existing curriculum is not reflecting the following dimensions of integration that apply to 2NL language curricula. (1) Integration within the teaching of a specific language by developing all skills and enhancing their status from subject to medium.(2) Integration across the curriculum by providing opportunities to link a variety of content with more than one language as medium.(3) Integration across languages with partial inter- transferability of content and inter linking of forms to promote interdependence. This opinion was shared by the interviewees also.

Present study found that the curriculum used for teaching 2NL (Tamil language) was not effective due to various reasons such as curriculum is very heavy for a 2NL learner. The content of the curriculum is too heavy and difficult for a beginner of 2NL. Student said that their cultural environment in schools was not created to accommodate the dimensions of a new language and the textbooks are not matching to their needs. Responsibility of writing textbooks transferred to a grope of writers without sufficient experience and within a limited period of time may be the main cause these shortcomings. New textbooks published for the grades 6 and 10 in 2015 to a certain extent have minimized these defects.

Teachers (68%) and students (62%) are unable to differentiate between first language textbooks and 2NL textbooks. They did not see much difference in structure of the content, vocabulary and syntax. The content of textbooks has not been designed to cater to the emerging needs of a trilingual integrated communicative approach (I) Content overloading (2) Content mismatch (3) Non localization (4) Lack of support for cognitive development and critical thinking (5) Inadequacy in Vocabulary development

(6) Lack of balanced representation of culture, gender, region etc. (7) Lack of a proper national policy and guidelines on textbook development.

One of the major objectives of teaching – learning 2NL is to develop the ability to communicate in other's Language. Sixty eight percentage of teachers felt that gradual development in the curriculum in accordance with school grades is lacking to ensure

communicative skills and catering to needs of cognitive aspects. As the learners are coming from a different language speaking community they encounter immense of difficulties for a meaningful learning. On the other hand, the activities to develop language skills are neither attractive and nor adhere the modern teaching learning strategies and not take into account the learners ability level. Implementation of curriculum is suffering due to many reasons. Many teachers who teach 2NL are non- native (Sinhala teachers teach Tamil to Sinhala medium students) and their knowledge and experience as 2NL (Tamil Language) teachers also very minimal and also not having enough academic qualification in Tamil Language. This has happened because of no clear recruitment policy with regard to 2NL teachers. The following figures indicate the academic and professional qualifications of 2NL teachers.

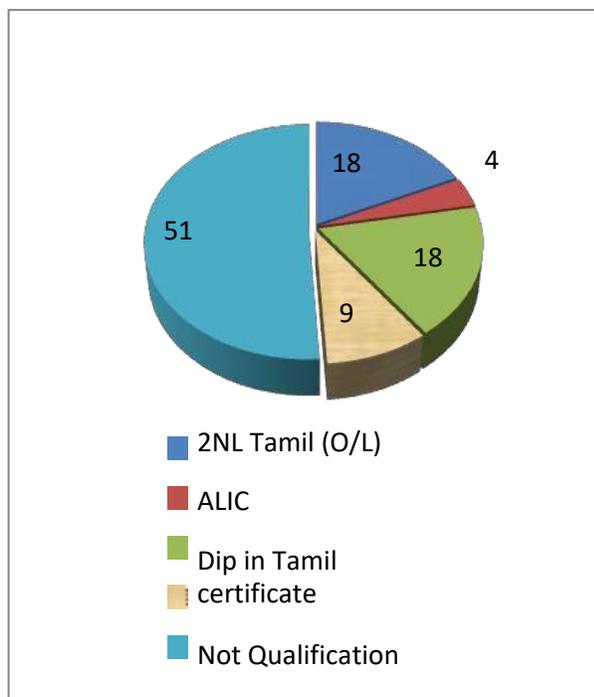


Figure. 1:

Educational Qualification of Non Native teachers in Tamil Language

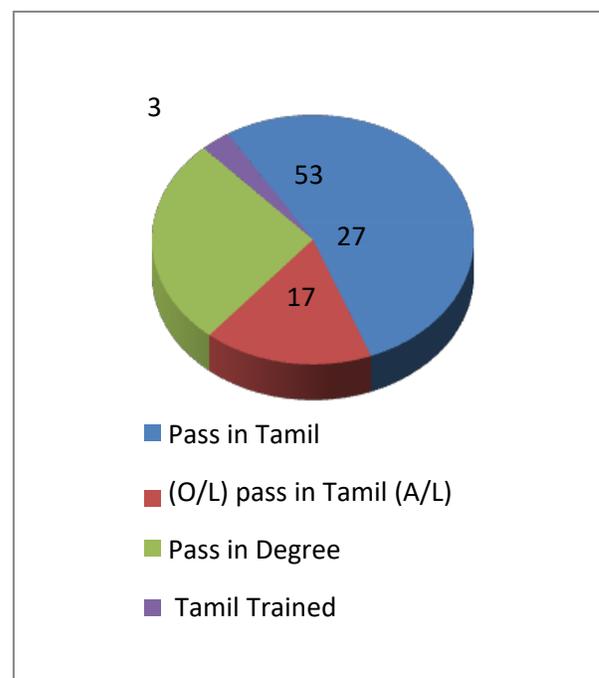


Figure. 2:

Educational qualification of Native Teachers in Tamil

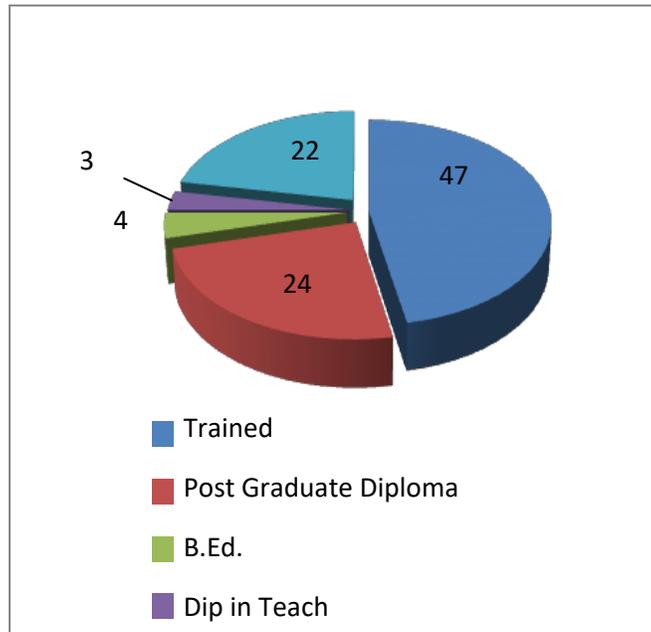


Figure 3: Professional qualification of 2NL Teachers

As these teachers poor in experience they face problems in localising or adopting the syllabus to the expectation of learners. There is a vast difference between native teachers (Tamil teachers teach Tamil Language to Sinhala medium students) and non- native teachers in handling the subject. Sometimes this subject is taught by other subject teachers. Further, the teaching methods also vary according to the experience and competencies of teachers. Considering the teacher professional development courses and short term training programmes conducted by the relevant institutions for the 2NL teachers give less importance to this aspect.

Times allocated in regular school time table for junior secondary students and for senior secondary students 80 minutes and 120 minutes respectively are not adequate for a 2NL learner. Sometimes this period of time is being used to teach other subjects or extra- curricular activities.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The curriculum designed for achieving the national and teaching learning objectives are not quality enough. A comprehensive revision in curriculum is necessary to cater to the needs prescribed in both objectives. If it is revised, number of students offering 2NL at the GCE (O/L) will increase. The number of teachers competent to teach 2NL as well as teacher educators for 2NL will increase. Innovative learning materials for teaching learning 2NL incorporating ESCP will be produced. The number of bilinguals will increase and cross cultural understanding developed. Unity in diversity will be accepted as an ethos of the society (Perera 2007)

Quality of the Textbooks is comparatively less. Though the textbooks are written according to the syllabus developed by the National Institute of Education, the textbooks are not attractive to the learners National Institute of Education and Publication Department of the Ministry of education strengthen collaborative action in producing Quality textbooks. Selection of writers should be not being an ad hoc manner and give opportunity to culturally different experts in the panel of writers.

The purpose of developing communicative skills and related activities are not fulfilled by the textbooks. Incorporate more activities to develop communicative skills in order to achieve competency in those skills.

Academic and professional qualifications of teachers are not adequate to be 2NL teachers. Recruit more qualified teachers and it should be addressed at the recruitment stage and there should be a clear cut policy for 2NL teacher recruitment. Provision of intensive training at teacher professional development programmes at relevant institutions are necessary.

No criteria available at the Department of Publication to assess the quality of the curriculum, syllabi and textbooks. This responsibility is expected from researchers involved in curriculum studies. National Institute of Education and the Department of Publication should take action to develop necessary criteria for the evaluation of curriculum and textbooks and it can be used by the researchers in order to measure the quality of those products.

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