



A review paper on Education history in Sri Lanka

Dr. Senevirathna Bandara¹

සංකෂිප්තය

මින්දාම කේන්ද්‍රයක ඉතිහාසය හැදෑරීම තුළින් අනාගත ක්‍රියාමාර්ග සාර්ථක කර ගැනීමට හැකි වේ. මෙම විමර්ශනාත්මක ලිපිය සකස් කිරීමට අවශ්‍ය ගුණාත්මක හා ප්‍රමාණාත්මක දත්ත ලබා ගත්තේ විවිධ මූලාශ්‍ර ඇසුරිනි. පොත්, විවිධ පර්යේෂණ පත්‍රිකා, අන්තර්ජාල වෙබ් අඩවි වක්‍රලේඛ හා අත්පොත් මඟිනි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවට දීර්ඝ හා ඉතා වැදගත් ඉතිහාසයක් ඇති අතර අධ්‍යාපනය සලකන විට එයට ද දීර්ඝ ඉතිහාසයක් ඇත. මූලින්ම ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ඉතා ඇත අධ්‍යාපන ඉතිහාසය සාකච්ඡා කරන අතර පසුව විවිධ යටත් විජිත යුගයන්හි දී අධ්‍යාපනය සිදු කළ ආකාරය විස්තර කරනු ලැබේ. පසුව නිදහසින් පසු ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ අධ්‍යාපන ඉතිහාසය සාකච්ඡා කරන අතර එහිදී විශේෂයෙන් නව අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රතිසංස්කරණ හා ප්‍රවණතා පිළිබඳ අවධානය යොමු කරන ලදී. 20 වන සියවස අග භාගයේදී ශ්‍රී ලංකාව මුහුණ දුන් බිහිසුණු සිවිල් යුද්ධය හා එය අධ්‍යාපනයට සිදුකරන ලද බලපෑම පිළිබඳව ද, අවසානයේදී වර්තමාන අධ්‍යාපන ප්‍රතිපත්ති හා ප්‍රවණතා පිළිබඳව ද විස්තර කරනු ලැබේ.

ප්‍රමුඛ පද: කෘෂි ආර්ථික ව්‍යුහය, බෞද්ධ අධ්‍යාපනය, පිරිවෙන් අධ්‍යාපනය, නිදහස් අධ්‍යාපනය, ස්ත්‍රී පුරුෂ සමානාත්මකාවය, අධ්‍යාපනය විමර්ශ කිරීම.

¹ Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale. bandarabms@gmail.com

Introduction

This paper reviews education history in Sri Lanka, in review process, different types of sources (books, journals, websites etc) were used to gather valuable, important qualitative information, and finally the paper articulates education history in Sri Lanka highlighting important turning-points of the history.

Sri Lanka claims a long history, as far back as the beginning of the Island's civilization in 2,000 years ago. "Sri Lanka has clear evidence of flourishing civilization over 2,000 years (Bandara, 2010). The remains of ancient art and sculpture show evidence of civilization in a Buddhist environment and the great reservoirs and canal systems which flourished the Agro-economics model of living, bears testimony to the existence of a highly developed civilization" (MOE, 2002, p. 2). During this period, many literacy works were written, which imply a situation of excellent literacy in Sri Lanka at that period. Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka from India by Arahath Mahinda. The ruler of Sri Lanka was the King Devanampiya Tissa (250-210 BC). After the establishment of Buddhism, the monastic institutions were started and education spread through those institutions all over the country.

In this ancient time, printing was not known and knowledge was transmitted through generations via verbal and memorisation by pupils. Sometimes they used an Ola leaf to write, and written knowledge on Ola leafs were collected in Buddhist temple libraries. In addition, there were Buddhist institutions, called Pirivenas (Buddhist Monastic colleges), which can be compared with the present universities (MOE, 2007b; MOE, 2002).

Western influence on the Sri Lankan education system

In 1505 AD the Portuguese invaded the coastal area of the Sri Lanka and they ruled the captured areas from 1505 to 1658 AD. Under the Portuguese period, the Sri Lankan education system was operated in established missionary schools, and the main intention was to spread the Roman Catholic religion. Then the Sri Lankan education system was influenced by the Dutch from 1658 to 1796 AD. During this period, schools were assisted by civil administration and trade. The significant event in that period was the expansion of the opportunities for education through the increased number of schools. However, preliminary intention of the Dutch was also to promote their religion.

The next colonial period was the British period, which started in 1796 AD. The British ruled Sri Lanka until 1948. This period was very important to Sri Lankan education history because a number of important and significant reforms were introduced. One of them was the Colebrook Commission recommendations (1831), which recognised the formal development of the education system in Sri Lanka. The recommendations are as follows:

- A commission to manage education should be appointed.
- English should be the medium of instructions in all schools.
- A college should be started for English education.
- English educated youths should be given government jobs.

During the British colonial period, a Commission was appointed in order to administer the schools. Further, in 1836, the Colombo Academy was established to train teachers in the English medium. At that time,

some educational reforms were proposed in the Sri Lankan education system. For example, Mackenzy later proposed the following reforms:

- Recognise all government schools.
- Link the Missionary schools to the government schools.
- Admit children to all schools without consideration of the religion.
- Take steps to develop vernacular schools, supply books and arrange for translation of books into National Languages.
- Start an institution for training teachers.
- Appoint Inspectors of schools.
- Recognise the School Commission.

During the end of the British colonial period, "The Education ordinance No. 31 of 1939 was enacted after a long deliberation, and it still remains the basic law of Education in Sri Lanka" (MOE, 2002, p.3). Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara was the Minister of Education and at that time his initiatives were very important to the legislation of the above enactment. Consequently Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara has been called as 'Father of Education' of Sri Lanka. The legislations are summarised as: the democratisation of education, the establishment of a Network of Central Schools, the Free Education Scheme, the diversification of the curriculum, the school midday meal, the improvement of the status of teachers, and the establishment of the University of Ceylon (MOE, 2002).

The education system of Sri Lanka after independence

A new era in the Sri Lankan education system started after it gained its independence on the 4th February of 1948; and consequently the massive

development of every area of education began. “There was an improvement in access to education with the expansion of the school network throughout the country” (MOE, 2002, p.5). In the mid-20th century, several important education policies were implemented by the government. Some are summarised below:

- Free education was made available to all children after Sri Lanka gained its independence in 1948.
- The mid-day meal program was expanded to cover all schools in 1950.
- A scholarship program was started in 1952 for the benefit of talented students from economically poor families.
- A Curriculum Development Centre was established in 1960 to develop curricula to suit the future needs of the country.
- The majority of State assisted privately managed schools was taken over by the government in 1962, with a view to rationalizing the school system.
- A change in the curriculum and general education structure in the reforms was held in the early 1970s.
- The scheme of free provision of school text books was started in 1981.
- The National Institute of Education was established under Act No. 28 of 1985 to undertake educational research, curriculum development, training of teachers, as well as to provide training

of educational administrative personnel and the provision of post-graduate education for the same clientele.

- Colleges of education were established in 1987 to provide pre-service educational opportunities to newly recruited teaching professionals.
- The provision of free uniforms to all school children was started in 1993.
- The beginning of the Decentralization of Education through the creation of Divisional Education Offices in 1993, which marked a very important education reform. However, these offices were transferred into Zonal Education Offices (ZEOs) in 1995 (MOE, 2002; MOE, 2004b).

National educational reforms in 1996

In the last three decades, Sri Lanka faced several problems of unemployment, civil war, youth unrest and poverty. Faced with these problems at that time, the government believed that the prevalence of these civil problems was the result of the education system over the last three decades. The education system was not able to meet the demands of modern knowledge, skills and values in order to face the challenges of the new millennium. However, "Total personality development characterized by creativity, initiative, discipline, team spirit, respect and tolerance for others and other cultural values were not aspects that were identified as lacking in the existing system of education" (MOE, 2002, p.7).

Under such a situation the National Education Commission (NEC) was established in 1991 to give advice to the government on an overall policy

covering all areas of education in Sri Lanka. The NEC conducted a study in various aspects of education in the country; consequently the NEC identified many shortcomings in the Sri Lankan education system. According to the NEC recommendations, the National Educational Reforms were promulgated in 1997, and the educational reforms were implemented and extended all over the country by 1999. The national educational reform has included two main objectives, that are, extending educational opportunities and improving the quality of education (MOE, 2004b; Lalitha, 2005).

The National Action Plan (MOE, 2002) outlines the five major areas which are considered the inseparable aspects of education. These are:

- Improving quality of education.
- Providing education opportunities for all.
- Developing practical and technical skills.
- Provision of education and training opportunities for all teachers.
- Improving management and provision of resources.

The educational reforms were directed on many areas of the whole education system of the country. Some of them were: pre-school education, primary education, junior secondary stage of education, senior secondary stage of education, pre-university education as well as teacher education.

After gaining independence, the education system of Sri Lanka significantly expanded and developed qualitatively and quantitatively. As a result, at the beginning of the new millennium, Sri Lanka was in a unique situation in many areas in relation to other developing countries.

Gender equality

Among the developing countries, Sri Lanka was in a unique situation in achieving equitable female participation in education. According to the statistics almost all girls completed their primary and secondary education. In addition, the participation of female in university education was equal to that of male. In some areas female enrolment was more dominant than male, especially in humanities, health service and teacher education. Even though female participation is inadequate in the administration sector, for example only 35 percent of school principals are female, this number needs to be increased (World Bank, 1996).

Education access

Since gaining its independence in 1948, the enrolment in general education has increased, although during the 1990s it has shown a decline. The decline in students' enrolment is perhaps due to the decrease in the population growth rates in the 1990s. Consequently, some schools in rural areas had to be closed.

Civil war in North and East Provinces in Sri Lanka

From the 1970s Sri Lanka had civil war and it affected the education output of the North and East Provinces of the country. Consequently, many people were displaced and therefore the drop-out rate of children increased. Over 30 years infrastructure facilities of schools were not developed, and text books, school uniforms and other equipment did not reach schools in remote areas. "Reliable information is not available to ascertain the number of disabled children in the country. Though it is reported that there is a significant number of children with

disabilities in the North and East Province Provinces and owing to the effects of war, these children have not been enrolled in schools” (MOE, 2004a, p.18).

In addition, the civil war affected teacher recruitment and deployment of affected areas of the civil war. Subsequently, teacher development processes were blocked over three decades. Very recently (mid 2009) the war was ended and the Sri Lankan government had to immediately start many in-service teacher development programs, in particular in areas in the North and East Provinces.

After completion of the above mentioned civil war, the Sri Lanka government has been taken many actions to develop equal education opportunities among all provincials in the country. In last decades some special projects and programs were commenced to develop quality of education and basic physical facilities of the education system. Some of them are mentioned below;

- School-Based Management (SBM) concept is strengthen applying new program, which is called PSI (Program of School Improvement).
- SBTD (School-Based Teacher Development) concept is enhanced.
- Reforms in general education has been implemented.
- “Nearest school is best school” concept introduced and selected rural schools are being developed.
- School supervisions are strengthen.

Conclusion

This review paper intended to articulate education history of Sri Lanka, begging of the introduction of the paper, education history in ancient

period has explained, after that, education in colonial period has discussed. After gaining the independence from the British our education system, were changed and applied new policies, aims and objectives according to Sri Lankan national needs. Finally civil war and its effects to the education system and after war the development of the education system in new millennium also described.

Bibliography

Bandara, B.M.S. (2010). *School-based Teacher Development Programs in Sri Lanka*, PhD thesis, Deakin University, Melbourne

Lalitha, H. D. A. (2005). *Development of a Model for the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers: A Qualitative Investigation*. University of Wollongong. Doctor of Education

MOE (2002). *Education For All: National Action Plan: Sri Lanka*. Colombo, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Sri Lanka

MOE (2004a). *Computer Literacy of Academic Staff of Government Schools*, Approved Private Schools and Privenas. Ministry of Education. Colombo.

MOE (2004b). *The Development of Education: National Report. Ministry of Education*, Sri Lanka. Colombo. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org//International/ICE47/Englishreports/Srilanka.pdf>

MOE (2007b). *Historical Overview of Education in Sri Lanka. Ministry of Education*, Sri Lanka. Colombo. <http://www.moe.lk//modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpa...>

World Bank (1996). *Staff Appraisal report Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for a teacher education and teacher deployment project*. World Bank. Colombo.