



## **An Overview of Curriculum Development of English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka Over the Past Six Decades**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper provides an overview of how English language teaching and learning have developed in Sri Lankan state schools over the past six decades. To give this review, secondary data are used such as previous research articles, reports, reviews, and circulars published by the Sri Lankan government throughout the years. This article informs and explains an idea about the developments and changes in ESL teaching and learning.

Keywords: Curriculum, English language, Sri Lanka, Teaching.

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### **Introduction**

“Curriculum takes content (from external standards and local goals) and shapes it into a plan for how to conduct effective teaching and learning. It is thus more than a list of topics and lists of key facts and skills (the “input”). It is a map of how to achieve the “outputs” of desired student performance, in which appropriate learning activities and assessments are suggested to make it more likely that students achieve the desired result.”

(Wiggins and McTighe, 2006, p.6)

Hence, the term curriculum is widely considered the whole activities which are conducted in the process of teaching and learning in the system of education particularly at schools, colleges, universities, etc. In that respect, this present review provides a brief discussion about the curriculum development in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Sri Lanka over the past sixty years of education.

The wide range of development occurred in many countries which are situated in South Asia due to the colonization of Britain. In the Sri Lankan context when the British governor Hon. Frederic North controlled the island in 1796, the English language was introduced to the people of the nation for communication. In that British era, Sri Lanka faced massive changes, especially in the system of education and politics. According to the noticeable changes in education, the English language played a significant role, particularly in the curriculum, and school education started with the medium of English which was the most important equipment during the period of the Colebrooke Commission in British colonialism.

After the independence of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in the early 1950s, the English language has become one of the subjects in the school curriculum due to the education system with the instruction and medium of one’s mother tongue. According to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the 1978 constitution, the Sri Lankan government first announced Sinhala as the official language, later on, Tamil was added, and English also became a link language to connect two ethnic groups (Sinhala & Tamil) to maintain good relationship among them.

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### **Noticeable Curriculum Development of English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka Over the Past Six Decades**

It is very important to consider the curriculum changes which are mostly dependent and connected to the textbooks that have been used in the schools throughout the years from 1960 to 2000. Because the materials; that we use in teaching; influence the learning process, particularly in the second language (L2) context. So, in 1953, there was the famous book for teaching English known as “An English Course for Ceylon and Oxford English Course for Ceylon”. The Ministry of Education’s English Unit in 1960 advised to develop the preparation of ESL textbooks with the Graded Structural - Oral - Situational Approach. This unit then imparted the “Syllabus and Scheme of work for teaching English as a second language in 1961. This, with the concept of a local writers’ panel, was appointed to prepare the textbook for ESL school students. A new series of “An English Course” then introduced in 1965 and 1970. This course book was preceded by a special structure.

- **Language Practice:** spoken language practice through drills, tables, charts, and dialogues.
- **Reading Activities:** comprehension with questions.

→ **Language Exercise:** learning points to enhance writing skills.

However, the whole materials and pedagogy did not succeed as the content of the materials was not related to the real-life situations of ESL learners. Therefore, the Ministry of Education's committee had decided to publish the textbooks which should be related to the day-to-day life experience of the students (1970). At the same time, English had become the key element to opening up the "International Business" and "relationship" due to the open economy system of Sri Lanka in 1980 and the process of ESL teaching and learning had been changed from the structural system textbook into communicative teaching methodology on English for a specific purpose with the introduction of "English for Me," English Every Day "and" An Integrated Course in English" for A-Level.

### 1. English For Me (1985)

This was the book; series for the primary section especially from grades 3 to 5; which consisted of a set of learning materials with a Pupil textbook, Workbook, set of recorded cassettes, and Teacher's guide.

- The Pupil Textbook is mostly related to the learner's motivation to push them to communicate with each other in the English language by using dialogues.
- The Workbook is mostly emphasized to read and write.
- The Cassettes are connected to learn the pronunciation through listening and practice.
- The Teachers' Guide had the whole explanation of the teaching process with guidance for making the student-centered ESL classroom more successful and it guided to accept the language errors and the mother tongue usage.

### 2. English Every Day (1982)

This was the book; series for the secondary section up to grade 11; which also contained the package of learning materials such as a textbook, a set of cassettes, and a teachers' guide. Also, each unit in the textbook indicated eight sections as follows: *Roleplay, Finding out, Grammar in action, Listening, Word study, Writing, Learning together, and Everyday conversations.*

### 3. An Integrated Course in English for A-Level (1986)

This was the book; series especially for grades 12 & 13; with the approaches of four skills to make our students communicate in their second language English and provide opportunities for better jobs and salaries in the job market. As well as there was flexibility for teachers to create and produce more effective and efficient activities related to the lesson.

Although there were several changes and chances to build up English language proficiency, it was so difficult to engage the A/L students in learning ESL due to the lack of motivation, workload of other subjects, and teachers' irresponsibility.

During 1990, the need for communication especially in English became stronger as enormous developments occurred around the globe towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The new textbooks; were published by the involvement of the National Institute of Education (NIE); named "The world Through English" which was the book for the secondary section from grade 06 to 11. This book also included the pupil's text, workbook, and teacher's guide; and these materials were provided with the appropriate themes which are connected to the real-life environment. In addition, the students and teachers had opportunities to learn new ideas for their creative thinking than the language focus. Although, "The world Though English started each session with specific themes; such as science, technology, health, environment, and entertainment; it was followed by grammatical learning points, language functions, and lexical features.

After some years approximately in 2004, the book "The World Through English" was not in the process of teaching and it was replaced with "A Journey Through English," which was introduced for grade 6. On the other hand, in the case of A- Level textbook, "General English for A-Level Classes" was introduced to the A/ Level curriculum by "A Special Advisory Committee in 1999. This particular book encompassed a textbook, a set of cassettes, and a teacher's guide. As well, this book also describes and discusses daily life conversation (face to face), conversation over the phone, writing letters and genres, speech, facing interviews, etc. However, this book also had some issues with success due to the lack of pedagogical approach of teachers especially in the rural areas' schools. Again in 2017, the A-Level English textbook entitled "General English" was presented with some editing and the book has the contents of current affairs which are closely connected to the Sri Lankan context. Also, the book is still in use at the government schools.

Furthermore, the consideration of the Primary English Language Project (PELP), the book "Let's Learn English "which is for primary children from grades 3 to 5. This series consisted of a pupil's book, workbook, teachers' guide, set of supplementary readers, and video training manual. This particular book explained the topics that are closely connected to the children's world such as clothes, games, food, festivals, and toys with colourful and attractive pictures to get the kid's attention in the process of ESL learning. Moreover, at present, the all-text books entitled (2014) "English" for both grades 3 to 11 with little changes for enhancing the four skills of the English language.

Thus, the curriculum with the textbooks has been developing and changing nearly eight times since 1960 by the involvement of The Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. Whereas, the book series of "English" for primary and junior secondary up to 11; and "General English" for A-Level are still used in the school curriculum. This present curriculum currently used in Sri Lankan schools also needs a massive change with a prime focus on listening and speaking skills of the English language according to the contemporary world where communication skills are highly expected.

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