

SRI LANKA



Country Report of Sri Lanka

Improvement of Educational practice and Environment for
students with Intellectual Disabilities – For active participation
in society through employment

Prepared for

The 25th Asia –Pacific Intranational Seminar on Special Education

06th –11th November 2005

At the National Institute of Special Education
Yokohama –Japan

By

Miss. D.K.D.Ratnawathi

Introduction

Sri Lanka is a signatory to many international conventions including one that promotes social and educational equality for all. In this context the Sri Lankan schooling sector has adopted the principles of inclusion to develop a dynamic educational approach that responds to student diversity and uses individual difference for enriching learning.

In 2005, Sri Lanka has a population of 19 million comprising multi ethnic and multi religious groups. The Sinhalese comprise 74 percent of the population, Tamil 18 percent and 4 percent comprising Muslim and Burgers. Buddhism is the dominant religion and sits alongside Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

The Sri Lankan economy is based on agriculture, however, in recent years development has focused on other industries under a number of free trade zone agreement including; Homagama, Katunayaka, Koggala and Biyagama. These agreements have generated new export markets for garments and as well increased foreign employment for many nationals.

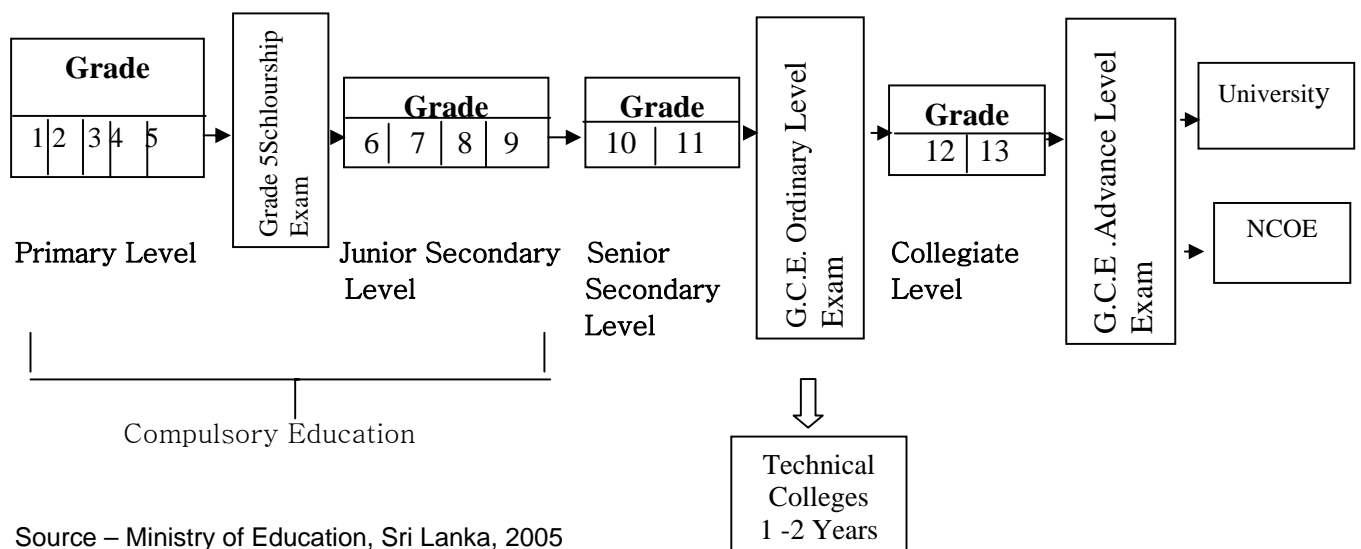
These developments are being built upon a cultural history spanning many centuries. The feudal rule of Sinhala Kings gave way to a colonial period starting with the Portuguese in the 16 century followed by the Dutch and finally the British who arrived in 1796. They governed until independence in 1948.

During the colonial period the Sri Lankan education system was influenced by western missionary school culture. In 1938 the Government introduced free and non-discriminatory education at all.

In 2005, 98 percent of all primary aged students attend school. The compulsory years of schooling apply to all 5 to 14 year olds in a system that comprises the following four levels.

- 01. Grade 1 – 5 - Primary Level (05 Years)
- 02. Grade 6 – 9 - Junior Secondary Level (04 Years)
- 03. Grade 10 – 11 - Senior Secondary Level (02 Years)
- 04. Grade 12 – 13 - Collegiate Level (02 Years)

Figure 01 – School System in Sri Lanka



Source – Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2005

In 2005, 9,766 Government schools cater for 3.875 million students. There are 324 National Schools managed by the Ministry of Education and 9,442 provincial schools managed by eight Provincial Councils. There are a further 561 Pirivenas (monasteries), 25 fee levying assisted special schools, 33 non fee levying assisted schools and 36 fee levying autonomous independent schools. English medium International Schools provide another category within the public & private school system.

Teachers and Students

In 2005 the Ministry of Education employs 186,990 teachers nationally. These teachers have varying levels of qualification. There are 52,176 graduate teachers another 124,026 who are accredited as trained teachers and a further 9, 712 who are trainee or untrained teachers.

Compulsory Education

Compulsory education is the key element of the education system in Sri Lanka. The legislative regulations for compulsory education are underpinned by a national:

- School Attendance Committee
- Compulsory School Attendance Monitoring Committee.

In recent years specific initiatives through the legislative regulations have been initiated to increase and maintain the participation of children and young people in education.

Through the attendance committees the number of non-school going children is monitored and targeted special programs have been developed and implement through the Non formal & Special Education Branch within the Ministry of Education. These programs:

- Promote inclusion
- Support teachers with additional specialist training and guidance
- Support the work of the School Attendance Committee by monitoring non-school attendance, undertaking media promotions, conducting community learning centres, conducting functional literacy centres as well as “Nanasarana” community residential and learning centres for street children.

Special Education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a long and proud history in supporting people with disabilities. It is recorded that as far back as the 3rd century BC Buddhist emperor Asoka organized care institutions for people with disabilities and under the rule of King Buddhadasa a century later this practice was once again revived (Lope 2-1998).

During the colonial period, missionaries started institutions for children with disabilities. Most of these institutions operated as charities and looked after rather than educated children with disabilities. The first school for students with disabilities was established in 1912 and catered for children with Deafness and blindness. Since then more that 24 special schools for children with disabilities have come into being across the country.

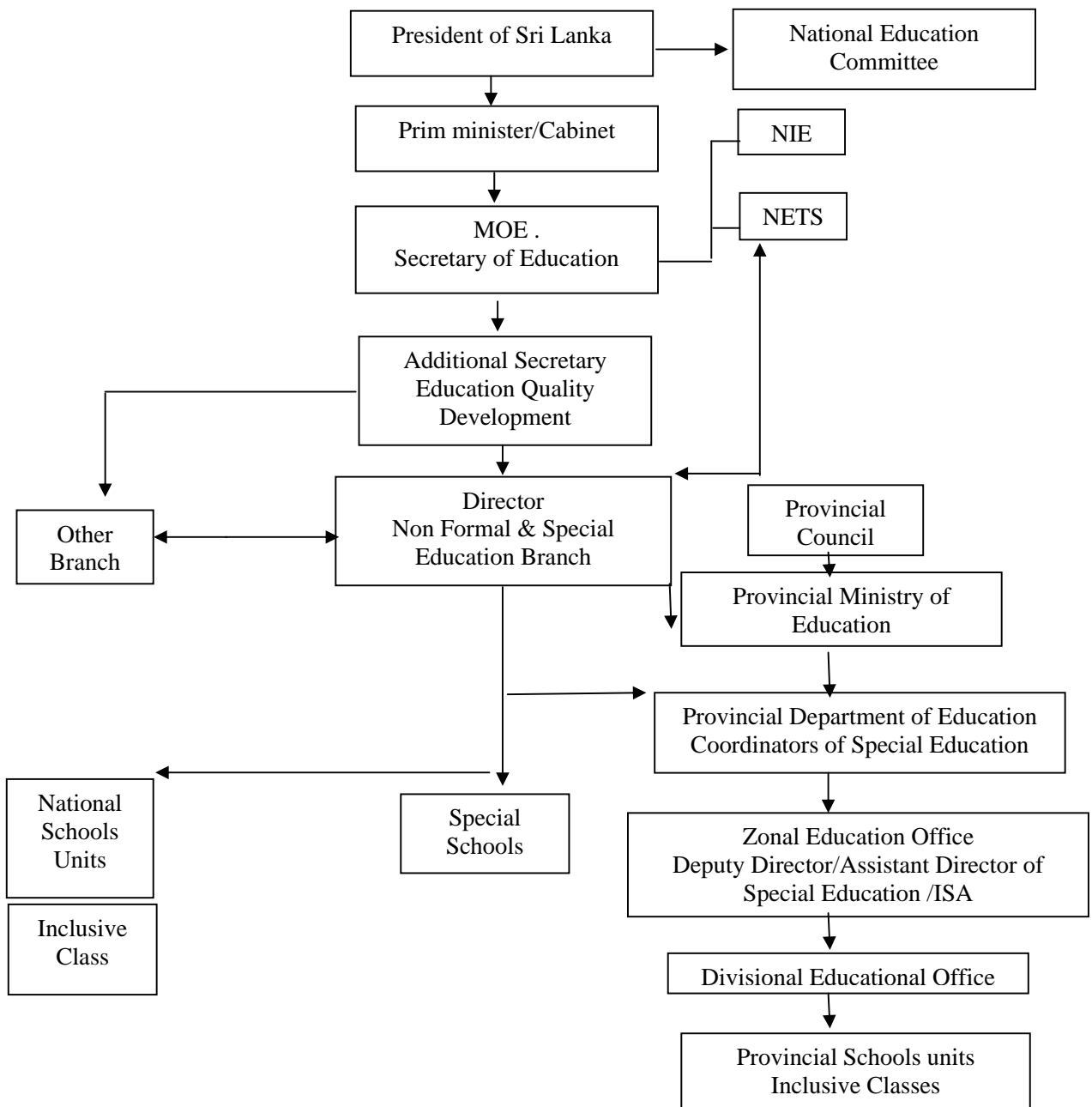
From 1969 students with disabilities have been integrated into regular schools through special classes and more recently through enrolment in regular classes. Early services

focused on students with blindness or visual impairment. In 1972 an integrated program for children with hearing impairments commenced and in 1986 integrated programs for students with intellectually disabilities began.

In 2005 there are 25 assisted special schools in Sri Lanka that are governed by boards of management. These are non-government schools that are assisted by Government grants in aid to fund teacher salaries, school books, uniforms and specialist teaching aids.

The services these schools provide are complimented by 1,000 special classes or inclusion units that operate in regular Government schools. Off these 610 units cater for students with intellectual disabilities. While 290 cater for students with Deafness or hearing impairment. These units work closely with the general education sectors of their schools and provide for many students a pathway to full inclusion. In 2004, across Sri Lanka over 45,000 students were reported to have disabilities who are being educated in regular classes. Many of these students were reported as having intellectual disabilities.

Present Structure of Special Education



Education for Students with Intellectual disabilities

Students with intellectual disabilities study in regular, special classes and special schools. Most students reported to have mild intellectual disabilities are educated in regular classes. Special units and special schools provide foundations skills and knowledge before many of them move into general classroom where they access the regular curriculum. This pattern of study provides students with basic formal education and some general pre vocational training in the areas of living skills.

Students attending special schools access additional vocational training that is conducted outside the regulated school hours. Students accessing education in regular follow the general curriculum and generally do not take part in vocational training through the formal school system. As a consequence their attrition rates in secondary schools are high. Non government organization and private institutions have combined to extend basic and vocational training to young people with intellectually disabilities.

Curriculum

A separate curriculum has been drawn up for students with intellectual disabilities in special classes access a separate curriculum which focuses on basic education and vocational training. Its core areas are:

- Sensory training and integration
- Body concept and motor skills development
- Moral Education
- Basic mathematics, reading and writing skills
- Physical Education
- Daly living skill, pre vocational training
- Drama and aesthetic activities
- Environmental studies

Employment prospects for young people with intellectual disabilities

The employment of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka is under pinned by two Government Public Administration Circulars No. 27/88 and No.1/99. These circulars collectively state that when vacancies in the public service and public corporations are being filled:

- three per sent (3%) of such vacancies should be filled by persons with a disability. These persons need to posses the qualifications for the role and can be assessed to perform their duties without their disability being a hindrance.
- the recruitment process for these positions should be in accordance with the approved schemes of recruitment /services minutes for all public sector and public corporation requirements.

Employment opportunities for people with disabilities favor those who have a diagnosis Deafness or blindness and they generally gain long term secure employment through the private sector rather than the public sector. Most people with intellectual impairment are also employed in the private sector as unskilled workers and they generally receive lower standard salaries. Some non-government organizations operate farms to support people with intellectual disabilities with ongoing employment and an income for their daily living expenses. Data on the numbers of people with disabilities in employment in Sri Lanka is not available.

Educational activities carried out at schools to prepare student with intellectual disabilities for employment.

Data from a survey conducted in 2004 on 610 special education units and 11 special schools supporting students with intellectual disabilities indicated that 305 of special education units and 10 of the 11 special schools conducted vocational training for their students. Compared with regular schools, special schools place a greater emphasis on life living skills, fine motor skills and basic literacy including reading, writing and basic mathematics. Special Units and special school reported that they provide the following vocational programs.

Needle Work	Fabric painting	Gardening
Dress Making	Weaving of chairs	Lanterns Making
Hand Embroidery	Carvings	Ornament Making
Flower Making	Wood work	
Envelop Making	Agriculture	
Knitting (wool & thread)	Packing (foodstuff)	
Printing greeting card	Painting clay pots	

Special education units provide an average of 3 hours per week for vocational training activities while special schools provide 15 hours of training. There is no longitudinal data to indicate the impact these programs have on employment opportunities for young people with intellectual disability.

The Challenges

There continue to be ongoing challenges for children and young people with intellectual disabilities accessing employment and their place in the community. Fundamental to these challenges are the cultural and social attitudes many have towards the inclusion of people with disabilities, an understanding of their human rights and limited available information on the effectiveness of existing programs and services to support people with intellectual disabilities.

Within the schooling sector the continued focus on a rigid academically oriented secondary curriculum coupled with strong community pressure for this type of traditional academic education provision marginalizes many with disabilities from the potential benefits of formal schooling. These challenges are set to dominate debate and actions in this area for some time.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is committed to creating an inclusive education system in which all learners are valued and diversity is addressed. The current schooling provisions accessed by students with disability are the building blocks to creating more inclusive schools through general education.

The challenges for the future are large and focus on harnessing the resources and capacity of both Government and non-government organizations to collaborate, develop and coordinate their respective efforts to improve and strengthen social, vocational and economic opportunities for young people with disabilities. Creating inclusive schools is an important first step in this journey.

Reference:

Lopez, I (1999) Inclusive Education, Sweden, Goteborg University

Ministry of Education – Ministry web site -2005- Sri Lanka
Ministry of Education Sri Lanka circulars -1988