

SRI LANKA

Enhancing a Child- friendly Learning Teaching Process Computer Assisted and Activity Based Approach.

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1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean with high Bio diversity and full of natural beauty. It is a multi cultural country which can proudly claim to aim at CRC in teaching and learning process.

The government of Sri Lanka ratified the Child Right Convention on the 12th of July, 1991. Since then it has taken measures to enhance the child rights in the country. The National Child Right Protection Authority (NCPA) was established in 1998 and it aims to ensure the psychosocial well being of the children who become victims of all forms of Child abuse and children those who are in need of care and protection. Furthermore, the NCPA has also introduced a special telephone connection 1929 for the children known as “Child Line” to give information on child abuse and harassment in order to provide protection and treatment for those who become victims of such abuses. The legal system regarding women and children was also amended in order to enhance the rights of the children and women in the country.

Sri Lankan education system has derived from the British Colonial System. Yet with the ratification of CRC some prominent changes occurred in the field of education in order to reach the global standard

For example, the main concepts of CRC known as 3P's: Provision (access to food, health care, education, social security), Protection (from maltreatment, abuse, neglect & all forms of exploitation) and Participation (having the right to act and to be involved in decision making) are highly applied in the education system of Sri Lanka to enhance the rights of the child.

In Sri Lanka, education is compulsory for the children from age five to sixteen. The free education for all from kindergarten to the completion of the basic degree, free text books, free uniforms and free meals for some selected schools are provided by the government to uplift the equality of education and to encourage the students' attendance

of the students in the school carrier. A scholarship system has also introduced for the students in Grade 5 and for the under graduates those who gain low income. In order to obtain these scholarships the students have to pass the national level examinations conducted by the Department of Examination.

The NIE (National Institute of Education) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education has also introduced a fruitful teaching learning approach with the aim of establishing a more child centered teaching learning environment that ensures the maximum participation of the learners.

The primary education which lasts for 5-6 years plays a major role in the education system of the country. It plays an essential role in the life of an individual because most of the mental processes occur during this age. The small children are always active and they should have chances for that. Therefore the syllabus introduced for the primary students is fascinated with lots of activities. The educationists have introduced number of activities for each and every lesson to give the concepts in an attractive manner, for the little minds.

Sri Lankan students learn Mathematics, English, Language Sinhala and Tamil, religion, environmental studies and aesthetic subjects in their primary grades. Normally all these subjects are taught by the class teachers. From Grade 3 onwards, specially trained teachers are assigned to teach English Language. Teacher Training programmes, consultative workshops and seminars are conducted regularly for the teachers who teach for the primary classes in order to educate and guide them to build up a good rapport with the students.

In order to create a more child friendly education system, the Ministry of Education recently introduced an official web site called 'e- thaksalawa' to promote the computer assisted learning process in the classroom. The lessons in "e-thaksalawa" which is known as the 'National e-learning Portal for the general education' are available in three languages; Sinhala, Tamil and English and the lessons for primary classes are completed and the lessons for the secondary classes are being completed.



Image 1. The first page of e- thaksalawa

Furthermore, the government has also launched a project called ‘Thousand schools project’. Through this, fully equipped IT laboratories, known as “Mahindodaya Technical Laboratories” are provided to thousand schools in the island to promote child centered education through e-learning. These laboratories consist of all the modern facilities including internet connections.

Almost all the teachers in Sri Lanka are given a special training regarding the use of computers effectively in their teaching learning process. For example, the Ministry of Education has launched a number of computer training programmes such as CAL (Computer Assisted Learning) and ICDL (International Computer Driving Licence) to improve the computer literacy level of the teachers.

The government of Sri Lanka places great emphasis on the implementation of modern technology in the education system, in order to ensure that the students in the whole country have an equal access to e-learning.



Image 2. Some photographs of Mahindodaya Technical Laboratories

2. Frame of Reference

Though the child centered education is being introduced through various means implementation of it is not achieved up to the level of the expectations of the system. Most of the teachers in the island still compel to carry out their teaching process in a traditional manner that is to follow the conventional top down approach due to many reasons. Such as lack of resources (in some schools), lack of motivation, less adaptation and willingness etc.

In their teaching, normally the teachers prepare the visual aid and use the other methods in the classroom. But in Sri Lanka most of the classes are overcrowded. There are 40 or more than 40 students in a class. Therefore normally the space of the classroom is not sufficient for the number of students in it. It creates lots of problems for the teachers while carrying out the assigned tasks. So it makes a distrust whether the students gain the relevant concepts correctly which the teacher plans to give them. Moreover, Sri Lankan education system is an examination- oriented one. Teachers are bounded by their duty to complete a prescribed syllabus within a given period of time.

So there is a great pressure on the shoulders of the teachers as well. However, under such circumstances, there is no chance to build up a good relationship among the teachers and the students.

In order to minimize the above mentioned drawbacks and to motivate the teachers as well as the students, we as the Change Agents planned to introduce the project ‘Enhancing child friendly teaching learning process through computer assisted activity based approach’ using the lessons provided by the Ministry of education in “e_thak-salawa” along with some other activities prepared by us.

The proposed project is based on the concepts of participation and the provision in the 3p’s. The article 17, Access to appropriate information (part a and part d), the article 28 the right to education (part 1 c and d) and part 3) and the article 29, the aim of education(part 192) in the child right convention were taken into consideration while planning the project.

However, this project will not only provide interesting learning experiences and opportunities, but also it will provide chances for students to share their knowledge with the other members. This will also enable the students to practice the lessons individually in their homes if they wish to do so.

3. Purpose

The purposes of this project are

1. To motivate the teachers and the students to use both computer assisted lessons and activities effectively in their teaching learning process.
2. To convert the age old teacher centered method to a more child friendly and a child centered one that enables maximum participation of the students.

4. Methodology

The goal of the project is to enhance a child friendly teaching learning process through computer assisted and activity based approach. To achieve this goal following activities were carried out from the 3rd week of October 2013 to the end of February 2015.

4.1. Meeting with Authority and Stake holders

The authority in this project is the Directors, the Principals, Vice principals and the Sectional Heads of the two selected schools. The Class teachers, English teachers, the IT teachers, the students and their parents are the stake holders.

At first, there was a discussion with the Principals of the selected schools and got the permission to carry out the project in their schools. Then it was needed to get the approval from the Provincial Director of Education. Before getting the approval we met

the provincial Director and discussed the proposed project plan along with the things we learnt in Sweden.

The next was to obtain the required resources. We met the Director of the IT Branch at the Ministry of Education and made him aware of the objectives of our project that is to use computer assisted learning materials in e-thaksalawa for a child friendly teaching learning process and obtained the copy of that software. We also met the Directors of Information and Communication Technology in the two Zones, the Principals, English teachers and the IT teachers.

We found the necessity of a committee for the fruitful functioning of the programme. Therefore a committee consisting of the Principal, the IT teachers, Class teacher, English teacher and three members of the team was established in both schools.

4.2. Obtaining the teacher's attitudes

Teachers play an important role in the classroom. Therefore before implementing the project it was needed to identify the attitudes of the teachers regarding student centered learning process through computer assisted lessons. A prepared questionnaire was given to the teachers of the primary section of the two schools to find out their attitudes regarding the above matter. (Appendix)

4.3. Fulfilling the basic requirements

The team identified the requirements of the IT laboratory and discussed the methods to fulfill them, with the members of the committee. The team came across, that out of the computers available at the IT laboratories some are not working properly. As the first thing, we took steps to repair them and we were able to repair almost all of the computers.

After that, the new software was installed to the computers and a new web page was created. This new web page helps students to have an easy access to their lessons without using the internet.



Image 3. The New Web Page

4.4. Awareness programmes and consultative workshops

The main objective of these was to make the teachers aware of student centered learning process through computer assisted lessons. As a requirement to achieve the above task, a demonstration regarding how to use the national e learning portal e thaksalawa along with the activities was held at both schools.

Teachers are key persons in the implementation of the above introduced project. So they should at least have the basic concepts of CRC principles. So they can practice it during their classroom activities to promote more child friendly learning environment in their classrooms. More over it was emphasized that a wide knowledge of CRC helps the teachers to practice the Rights of the child in the classroom while they are engaging in the above type of activities.

Another awareness programme was held for the parents of the selected groups of students.



Image 4 & 5. Awareness program for the teachers. **Image 6.** Awareness program for the parents

4.5. Launching the programme

After conducting the awareness programmes and the consultative workshops, the three Change Agents discussed with the IT teacher and the English teachers, regarding the alternations to be made in their time tables to get the help of the IT teacher for the English lessons. In order to create a child friendly atmosphere, the IT lab was rearranged in a nice and attractive manner.



Image7. Newly arranged IT lab

Secondly three of us got together and prepared a schedule to visit the pilot schools. Each member was assigned some fixed dates enabling each one to visit the pilot schools once a week. During those visits sometimes we did model lessons or assisted the teachers to carry out the lessons effectively.



Image 8. Student centered approach and active participation of the students

While implementing the project we encountered a major problem due to lack of computers. That is to find an effective way to provide equal opportunities for each student to use the computer. There we had three options. Namely, to increase the number of computers, let students to bring their own laptops to school and thirdly to divide the class into groups and assign different activities along with computer lessons.

The first and the second options were really challenging because as Change Agents we have no power or authority to increase the number of computers and on the other hand, parents too objected to let their kids to bring their own laptops. So the third option seemed more effective and practicable.

So we divided the class into two groups. One group was assigned to do computer lessons, the other group was again divided into sub groups and they were given some prepared activities. They could select those activities according to their wish. The activities

given were planned according to the levels and the needs of the students. The activities were designed by the English teachers under the guidance of the Change Agents in order to cover all the four skills; namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and Vocabulary. Warming up activities, Language games, Simulations, Role plays and songs etc were also included in the lessons in order to make them more interesting and enjoyable.



Image 9. Children are learning very happy

5. Results

As a whole it is a pleasure to mention that we have succeeded in achieving the two main purposes of the project.

Through the interviews and the questionnaires provided to the teachers, we found out that the majority of the teachers have a positive attitude towards the newly introduced concept, that is to use both computer assisted lessons and activities in their teaching learning process.

Moreover, it was evident that the data collected through the interviews and the questionnaires have become a reality, because we observed that the teachers and the students work enthusiastically throughout the period in the real classroom setting.

As change agents, our vision was to transfer the existing top down approach into a more child centered, rights based approach that ensures maximum participation by observing the lessons, and we found out that this new method has provided ample opportunities for the performances of the students by empowering CRC principles. The observations also proved that it has enhanced the relationship among students by

providing opportunities for the students to learn together and from each other in an enjoyable manner.

Furthermore it was interesting to notice that the students were waiting eagerly until they get the next opportunity to come to the IT laboratory for their English lessons. Teachers also cheerfully talked that they were able to achieve their targets easily and effectively through this new method.

At the same time, we encountered some unexpected outcomes as well. The first one is the need of the improvement of the governmental materials as we had to face problems due to the scarcity of some activities provided by the ministry.

However, we are happy because we were able to raise interest and motivation not only from the learners' side, but also from the teachers' side as well as the parents' side too.



Image 4. Students engaging in the lessons cheerfully.

6. Discussion and Reflections

The reasons compelled us to select the pilot school are as follows.

1. Mahamaya College is a well reputed Girls' College, situated in the heart of the Kandy town and any high official can easily observe it. (Being a pilot project, we wanted the higher officials to visit it). Majority of the students have their own computers/ laptops. Thus they can practice the lessons at home as well. They have

the exposure to English Language and often encounter with foreigners. Therefore, we thought that it would be a motivation for the other schools as well.

2. St/ Andrew's College, Gampola is also a famous school but it is a mixed school in a sub-urban area. So it seems to be much secluded. Normally the students are not equally developed when comparing to Mahamaya Girls' College. Most of them don't have their own computers or laptops. So using computers for their lessons seems a totally new experience to them. Moreover, being a mixed school, we felt that we can provide equal opportunities for both male and female students.

The students of St/Andrew's College do not belong to well reputed families and they have a less exposure to English. For them it's not so common to encounter foreigners. So we wanted to provide that experience along with the modern technology.

Though we are satisfied with what we have done so far, we had to face some challenges while implementing the programme.

Firstly, while using the provided software we found out that there are some drawbacks in some of the lessons. Teachers also suggested including more facts, as the given content is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the levels of the students. For example, while the students from Mahamaya College found the lessons too easy the students from St/ Andrews College found them too difficult.

Secondly, as change agents, we have no power or authority to make our own decisions. For example, it was very difficult to summon up the parents. Most of them are government officials and they refuse to come on weekdays. So we had to wait until the Principal conducts a parent meeting. Lack of computers and funds were some other major problems.

Thirdly, though we are from the same district, the distance among us caused problems. So we found it difficult to find time to meet, to plan our activities and to work together. As all of us were busy with our own jobs. So monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the project was also became a problem for us.

In spite of all these challenges, the learners of both pilot schools showed a keen interest towards this new method of learning. Though the students of St/Andrew's College do not get opportunities to encounter foreigners they warmly welcomed our mentor, Madam Agneta. For them it seemed a great thing to meet and to talk to her. In both schools, almost all the teachers showed a positive attitude towards the new method and they were willing to support the students.



Image 10. Mentor's visit

7. The Way Forward

The project has already been implemented in the pilot schools, and the observations show that generally the project outcomes have achieved. Yet we hope not to stop our work here. The next steps will be as follows.

According to the plan, we hope to continue the project with the new grade 4 students of the pilot schools, and also wish to promote the effectiveness of the project through regular visits. We have planned to prepare activities which cater to the different levels of the students, because while implementing the project we understood that there are two levels of students in the same class. Furthermore, we hope to provide opportunities for the students to prepare their own activities, by encouraging students to create their own "activity bank". They can write or type their own stories poems, activities etc for others to read or to do. By conducting workshops or model lessons, we hope to guide both the teachers and the students.

Not only that but also we will take actions to expand the project to the other schools in the province.

While discussing the progress of the project with the teachers, we also hope to take remedial measures to overcome the drawbacks.

We have planned to collect the ideas of the students through informal interviews, and thus hope to make the necessary adjustments in order to fulfil their requirements. In conclusion, we, the change agents of the 19th Batch would like to thank the SIDA and all the mentors and the LUCE staff of the Lund University for their immense support. At the same time we appreciate the motivation and the continuous support provided by our mentor in order to make our project a success.

8. List of References

Children Charter

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List of Appendix

The questionnaire given for the teachers.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire for The Teachers

Please tick (√) the cage if you agree with statements and if disagree put the (×) mark

1. How long have you been a teacher?
0-5 years 6- 10 years 11-20 years
More than 20 years
2. The way you teach
 - i. Always I use the lecture method
 - ii. Students are grouped and guide them to innovate
 - iii. Build up the lesson trough questions
 - iv. I use Different methods
3. The resources used for teaching
 - i. Only the text book
 - ii. Resources available in the classroom
 - iii. Prepare teaching aids and use
 - iv. Other resources .Specify.....
4. Do you like to use different methods for teaching and learning process
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
5. Have you noticed the interest of the student for your teaching methods
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
6. Do you like to teach using modern technology(computer based ,e -learning)
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
7. If you use e-learning will it affect to make the lesson interesting.
 - i. Yes I think so
 - ii. No idea
 - iii. Have to check
8. Have you got any training on information technology?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
9. If you have knowledge on IT, as a teaching resource do you like to use computers for the teaching and learning process?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
10. If you are provided the above facilities, how would you use them?
 - i. In the classroom
 - ii. In a separate place