

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF
HUMANITIES EDUCATION**



**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO**

08th to 10th February 2006

Review Team :

Prof. Swarna Jayaweera

Prof. Chandra Gunawardena, Open University of Sri Lanka

Prof. H. H. D. N. P., University of Sri Jaywardenepura

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1. SUMMARY OF THE PURPOSES AND AIMS OF THE SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

The main purpose of the subject review is to evaluate the quality of education in the discipline of Humanities Education and in particular, of the Postgraduate Programmes in the Teaching of English as a Second Language, conducted by the Department of Humanities Education.

The process of academic review was used to make judgments using specific evidence, focusing on the quality of the student learning experiences and student achievement, according to the aims and learning outcomes which the Department aspires to achieve. The review attempted to identify good practices, the constraints and the strategies that can be used to overcome the constraints faced by the Department.

The following activities were carried out by the review team for the peer review:

1. Study of the self-evaluation report submitted by the Department and the presentation by the Head,
2. Discussions with the Dean of the Faculty, Head, academic staff and visiting lecturers of the Department,
3. Discussions with the students following the IT course (PGDE – English medium), PGDE and MTESOL courses,
4. Observation of the student participation in the IT course (PGDE) in the computer laboratory and three teaching learning sessions (B.Ed., & PGTESOL),
5. Perusal of university handbook, the programme brochures, curricula and relevant by-laws, learning materials, question papers, a random sample of assignments and dissertations, annual reports for three consecutive years and the publications of the academic staff.

2. THE UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES EDUCATION

The University of Colombo became a full-fledged University in 1968. In 1972 it became a Campus of the single university of Sri Lanka but once again became an independent university in 1978. The Faculty of Education of the University of Colombo was formed through the amalgamation of the departments of education of the Peradeniya,

Vidyalankara and Vidyodaya Universities in 1975. The Department under review, Humanities Education, is one of the four Departments in the Faculty of Education.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE PROVISION, AIMS, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PROGRAMME DETAILS

The vision of the Department is stated as, ‘to be a partner in the endeavour of making humankind more humane thereby facilitating the advancement of new vistas of knowledge and practice in education’. It considers its mission as contribution to the development of competent, committed and innovative professional educators for teaching, research and service to the nation through humanities education.

The review team feels that the vision could be re-formulated to ensure that it reflects the role of humanities education in achieving excellence in the pertinent field.

The two main academic courses conducted by the Department are, the Postgraduate Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) and the Masters course in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESOL). It assists the Faculty by offering a number of subjects which are components of other courses – Philosophical bases of Education, a compulsory subject in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (English and Sinhala media), the Bachelor of Education, and four Masters courses.

The aim of the PGDTESL course is “Promote academic and professional development of teachers, teacher educators, principals of school and other personnel in the field of education especially in the teaching of English”. The Learning Outcomes stated for the PGD TESL course, cover a range of competencies (conceptual understanding, and relevant skills such as application of knowledge in classroom teaching, adaptation and use of ESL learning materials, facilitation of child-centered learning, use of effective evaluation procedures and adaptation to change) needed by teachers of English as a Second Language.

The MTESOL course is one of the four courses offered under a restructured Master of Education course. Its aims are not stated. The course states objectives rather than Learning Outcomes. These are (1) Enhance the professional development of the participants through an understanding of the theory and practice of TESOL, (2) Enable the participants to critically appraise their own practices in relation to theory, (3) Assist long-term career development in language teaching, materials, design and course

evaluation in TESOL, (4) Enable the participants' ability to work autonomously in a specific area of interest to the in TESOL, and (5) Contribute to the dissemination of new knowledge in the field of TESOL.

The expected Learning Outcomes of the Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education are (1) explain the concept and definition of Education, (2) describe the evolving nature of Education, (3) analyze the philosophical bases of Education, (4) Explore the dynamics of Education, (5) Develop the role of the teacher towards professional excellence, and (6) Promote national integration among different social forces and groups in society.

The objectives of the Adult and Continuing Education course are (1) enhance the professional development of the participants, (2) Conduct inquiry which contributes to the practice in adult and continuing education and (3) prepare candidates to hold leadership position in adult and continuing education programmes.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1 Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The review team found that the courses and subjects are of a sufficient academic level. Both the PGDTESL course provides sufficient opportunities for student to obtain knowledge, and skills to perform as competent teachers of English. As all students who complete the PG Diploma do not proceed to the Masters course, the Department could consider whether there is a possibility of including curriculum development in this course.

MTESOL course build on this foundation and further enhances knowledge and skills in certain specialized areas such as curriculum development, teacher development and research. Overall both courses have sufficient breadth and depth to ensure a comprehensive coverage and to achieve expected outcomes. The content in the courses is organized to stimulate students. All the subjects in the two courses are however, compulsory and there are no electives. Considering the background of the potential students, it is worthwhile considering whether electives such as educational management, curriculum development or counseling and guidance can be introduced. Some of the students felt that inclusion of English literature as a subject also would have been beneficial at the Masters level.

Inclusion of such subjects as educational psychology, philosophical and social bases of education has enabled a certain degree of multi-disciplinarity to be achieved. The Department offers Methods of Teaching of Sinhala, Buddhism but not the Methods of Teaching Tamil or Hinduism. As the Department had from its inception the responsibility for the teaching of languages and religions, the current separation in responsibility for the teaching of Tamil and Hinduism tends to negate the concept of national harmony and inclusiveness.

Introduction of IT as a course to provide computer skills is also a welcome addition. The PG courses are designed for practicing teachers and other personnel in the education sector and the question of employability does not arise. In the case of the B.Ed. degree, as the main area of employment in the country is teaching, these graduates have a better chance of getting employment than their peers from other disciplines.

The Department offers some themes for the Foundation Course provided to the undergraduate (first year) students. The reviewers noted that the coverage of these themes is quite wide so that it may not be feasible to teach these themes to the students at this level within the time allotted.

Overall, the subjects, Philosophical Bases of Education and Life-long Education are well-designed. The latter could have emphasized the importance of life-long learning for teachers themselves, perhaps. Some of the titles of the units in the former subject, e.g. education in values, Futures in education can be re-looked at.

The review team noted that there is no professional accreditation body to evaluate qualifications in the area of English language teaching.

The PGTESL course was suspended for sometime due to non-availability of staff and has been revised in 2002. The other courses offered by the Department were also revised in 2002. In the case of the MTESO course, the course was offered for the first time in 2005/06. The curricula of both the two main courses as well as of units offered for other courses in the faculty indicates that they are up-to- date and have taken into consideration the new changes that are taking place in the field.

Level of judgment – **‘Good’**.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

The review team looked at the teaching-learning materials provided for students and student assignments and dissertations, and observed three classes. Learning-teaching materials were assessed overall as satisfactory as they are adequate in quantum and effective in presentation chiefly in the two major courses in the teaching of English.

The materials in the study of the English language and the teaching of English were relatively of high quality with respect to range, diversity and innovation and had the potential to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The team had very limited access to learning materials in courses in the Philosophical Bases of Education, Lifelong Education and the teaching of Sinhala and Buddhism, and to no materials in the teaching of Tamil and Hinduism.

The three lessons observed were good in terms of planning and organization of the lesson, content and use of student centred and individualised learning approaches but one lesson suffered from weakness in classroom management. The team also observed a practical class in computer literacy which was clearly a very useful input in the courses.

Different methods have been used for student assessment and have been integrated in the total process of evaluation. For instance, 30% was allocated for in course evaluation of two assignments, one of which is a written assignment and the other which assesses group work, presentations or other modes of student activities. The assignments that were perused indicated a satisfactory level of performance. Seventy per cent of the final examination score is allocated for written examination papers and a research dissertation. Examination papers include short answer questions and essay type questions. The balance is satisfactory in the teaching of English papers but the question paper on the Philosophical Bases of Education had short answer questions in a subject in which conceptualization needs more space. Examination papers are moderated and marked by two examiners.

The quality of teaching is affected by the availability of qualified academic staff and access to adequate physical facilities. The Department has only two senior members staff, the Head of the Department and the former Head, both Senior Lecturers. Three Probationary Assistant Lecturers have been recruited two or three years ago. There is an unequal division of work with an unconscionable work load borne by the Head of the

Department who however manages despite time constraints to combine her role of administrator, coordinator, research guide, teacher and supervisor of practical teaching successfully with commitment and ability. Five experienced Visiting Lecturers assist the Department in the areas of Educational Philosophy, teaching of English, Buddhist education and aesthetic education. Two cadre vacancies, the Chair and a lecturer in the teaching of English remain unfilled. These vacancies need to be filled early as the lack of adequate human resources affects the work of the Department adversely.

The Head of the Department has a doctoral degree. The Senior Lecturer has a Master's degree and has gained qualifications in several specialized fields. The three Probationary lecturers are engaged in their postgraduate studies. The research output of the Department staff is poor. The Head is involved in the research programmes of the National Evaluation and Research Centre of the Faculty of Education. The Senior Lecturer has authored a large number of books and pamphlets that have made a valuable contribution to the dissemination of knowledge and information and a probationary lecturer has produced similar publications. Staff members function in an advisory capacity in other educational institutions and Ministries. Nevertheless, a blatant weakness is the absence of research or the creation of new knowledge which is an important function of an university.

The staff and students of the Department have access to the Main university library, the resource centre in the Department, the Faculty computer laboratory, computers for staff and audio-video facilities. Lack of a separate lecture room, a language laboratory, facilities to use Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) and Internet facilities are hampering the academic activities of the Department.

The physical facilities available to staff and students, however, are inadequate with respect to space for staff and for learning activities.

Level of Judgment – **‘Satisfactory’**

4.3 Quality of Students, including Student Progress and Achievement

The Department offers the main courses at PG Diploma and Masters levels. The student numbers in the main courses and the subjects in the other courses conducted by the Department in 2005/2006 and the student numbers in each of these are given in Table 1.

Course	Subject	Student Number
B.Ed.	Philosophical Bases of Education	66
	Buddhist Education	14
	Methods of Teaching Sinhala	41
	Methods of Teaching Buddhism	33
PGDE	Philosophical Bases of Education	117
	Life Long Education	22
	Buddhist Education	06
	Methods of Teaching Buddhism	08
	Methods of Teaching English	05
	Methods of Teaching Sinhala	44
	Methods of Teaching Aesthetic Studies	05
PGDTESL	English Language & Applied Linguistics	38
	Methodology of Teaching English	38
	Language Arts	38
	English Literature	38
	Teaching Practice	38
	Dissertation	38
Masters in TESOL	Psycho-social aspects of TESOL	19
	Curriculum management in TESOL	19
	Teacher development in TESOL	19
M.Ed. (all 5 courses)	Philosophical Foundations of Education	110
M.Ed. (General)	Adult & Continuing Ed.	26
Total		774

The students' entry qualifications vary with the course they enroll in. For example, the B.Ed. students pass GCE (A.L) and gain entry to the university on merit, while PGD students are selected from among graduates who teach English as a subject or are work as professionals in the area. Of the 38 students in the PGDTESL course, there were four instructors and University lecturer. Masters students are chosen from among the PGDTESL completers with high performance (6 B passes).

Students' performance in the PGDTESL examinations for the past three years has been commendable with no failures and two students being referred. The current batch for MTESOL was the first and they had not yet completed the course.

Level of Judgment – **‘Good’**

4.4 The Extent and use of Student Feedback Qualitative and Quantitative

The reviewers observed that several revisions of the curricula of the courses offered by the Dept were done at the special requests of the students. The Department had used a structured questionnaire to obtain student evaluation about the quality of the teaching. Similarly, a post course evaluation questionnaire is used to get feedback from the students of the M. Ed. and MTESOL programmes with a view to improving the programmes further. This is a comprehensive questionnaire covering many aspects such as students' objectives, the extent of fulfilling their expectations, rating contents of the courses, rating the delivery of the courses, degrees of interesting nature and difficulty of the courses, assignments and their markings, and dissertation guidance.

There is a practice of self evaluation about the lecturer's job performance and a suggestion box kept in the class room.

Student representatives participate in the Faculty board meetings and an open door policy that allows students to meet any academic and also the Dean and Heads to discuss their grievances is also practised.

Level of Judgment – **'Good'**

4.5 Post Graduate Studies

As pointed out earlier, the majority of the students enrolled in Faculty or Departmental courses are postgraduates. The PGDTESL course was the first of its kind to have been launched in the Sri Lankan university system. The number of students enrolled is moderate around 35-40 due to the dearth of students who are eligible to join the course. The course had a minor dissertation as one of the requirements. Our examination of a sample of these dissertations indicated that on the whole, except for one, a sufficient academic standard was being maintained. Yet the review team had concerns as to how adequate guidance can be provided to students especially for weaker students, in view of the limited number of staff in the disciplinary area.

The Department had commenced the MTESOL course taking into consideration the demands of the diplomates completing the PGDTESL, which was again a forerunner in the field. The first batch had 19 students. While the students greatly appreciated the opportunity given to them to follow a Masters course, explaining how some of them had

wait for this opportunity for more than ten years, the review team felt that in view of the dearth of staff, sustainability and ensuring the quality of the course would be an issue.

Level of Judgment – **‘Good’**

4.5 Peer Observation

There is a sufficient understanding among the academic members about the importance of peer observation as a powerful tool for improving the quality and quantity of teaching. An attempt has been made to develop a mechanism for peer observation. The teaching of two academics had been observed by another academic and feedback given as an assignment of a teacher training course. There is no written evidence showing the extent to which these evaluations had been used to improve teaching performance. It is evident that there is no formal common mechanism for peer evaluation or the policy, procedures and practice being applied for visiting staff as well as internal staff.

Judgment – **‘Unsatisfactory’** with regard to this aspect.

4.7 Skills Development

Teaching is not confined to lectures and other modalities are used to facilitate learning, skills development and attitudinal change. The following activities were not scheduled for the three days of our review but we commend the use of

- (i) the seven compulsory workshops to develop skills in teaching as well as to promote personality development through activities such as developing confidence in making presentations,
- (ii) the observation of classroom teaching in schools in the vicinity and demonstration lessons by students in these schools followed by sessions to critique these lessons, and
- (iii) the ten week practicum or supervised teaching practice in schools during the second semester which is a crucial component of the preparation of teachers for their role in the classroom.

The strength of the Department, thus, is the ample opportunities it provides for the development of professional skills through classroom based activities, workshops, observation and demonstration lessons and 10 weeks of practical teaching in the real school situation. A research methodology course equips students with skills to engage in

research. One of the seven compulsory workshops is devoted exclusively to personality development while interactive classroom based activities also provide opportunity for personal development . Personality attributes are taken into account in the assessment of teaching practice.

Level of Judgment – ‘**Good**’

4.8 *Academic Guidance and Counseling*

The Department has identified academic guidance and counseling as an important area of student support. The Department, specially one Senior Lecturer is very actively involved in academic guidance and counseling at the Department level, the University level and even the national level. This service seems to be very good based on our limited observation. It was observed that there is a significant positive impact of the service given by the Department on settlement of various academic and non-academic problems of the students. Academic guidance is provided for TESOL students at the inauguration, workshops on counseling prior to teaching practice and during the teaching practice. On-going academic guidance is provided for any student needing guidance by the Coordinator who has a Master’s degree in Applied Psychology. It was observed that so far two TESOL students have availed themselves of this service and they were able to overcome the problems they faced.

For the other students, the Faculty of Education has an academic staff member in the Department of Educational Psychology as a Counselor. Any student who needs the service can go to her. A Senior Lecturer of the Department also provides guidance and counseling to any student requiring such service. A close and positive link exists between the Department and Faculty and the students ensuring the students the possibility to study in a learner-friendly atmosphere.

Level of Judgment – ‘**Good**’.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 *Overall Judgment*

Based on the observations made during the visit by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Satisfactory
Quality of Students, including Student Progress and Achievement	Good
The Extent and Use of Student Feedback Qualitative and Quantitative	Good
Post Graduate Studies	Good
Peer Observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Good

Overall Judgment - Suspended

5.2 *Good Practices*

1. The Department has formulated Learning Outcomes for some of the courses, e.g. PGDTESL course. This enables both staff and students to select appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills that should be developed.
2. The curricula of the courses, in general are, well-formulated, of a sufficient depth and breadth, and is multi-disciplinary. They have been recently revised and updated.
3. Introduction of an IT course for the teacher education courses is a welcome feature.
4. Offering some education subjects in the Foundation Course enables first year undergraduate students to become familiar with the course offered by the Department/Faculty and encourage them to follow B.Ed. degrees.

5. Students are provided with learning materials, adequate in quantum and effectiveness in many courses.
6. Teaching-learning takes place with sufficient student participation.
7. Varying methods of evaluation such as assignments, presentations, teaching practice evaluation and final examination are used for evaluation of student performance.
8. Assignments and dissertations indicate a satisfactory level of achievement.
9. The quality of students conforms to acceptable university standards and their rate of completion is also satisfactory.
10. Student feedback on courses and teaching is obtained using questionnaires and other means such as a suggestions box also attempt to maintain effective staff-student communication.
11. The Department had taken steps to launch a Masters course in TESOL considering the demand from their alumni.
12. A major emphasis in the English courses is skill development and workshops, demonstration lessons, observation and a ten-week practicum are used to develop skills.
13. Academic guidance and counseling is provided to students who need the service by competent and qualified staff members.
14. The Head of the Department is qualified, competent and committed. She discharges her various duties effectively despite heavy workload that this entails.

5.3 *Identified Weaknesses*

1. Some of the courses (e.g. MTESOL and Adult & Continuing Education) have given objectives and not learning outcomes implying a certain amount of teacher-centeredness.
2. Some courses do not cater to areas in which students need to be developed (e.g. curriculum development in PGTESL).
3. The range of options available to select subjects according to their interest and/or need in MTESOL is limited as all subjects are compulsory.

4. Some of the subjects related to languages and religions which should ideally be located in this Department have been handed over to another.
5. The type of questions set for some courses does not match the level of conceptualization expected from postgraduate level students.
6. Examination scripts are not marked by external examiners.
- 7 The quality of teaching is affected by the availability of qualified academic staff and access to adequate physical facilities.
- 8 The research output of the staff in the Department is poor and impinges on the creation of new, pertinent, local knowledge.
- 9 The physical facilities available to staff and students, however, are inadequate with respect to space for staff and for learning activities.
- 10 The evaluation questionnaires have not been refined.
- 11 The lack of qualified staff for research guidance affects the quality of the courses.
- 12 The dearth of staff qualified in the subject area could affect the continuation e.g the MTESOL
- 13 There is no formal mechanism or written evidence showing the extent to which these evaluations had been used to improve teaching performance.

5.4 Recommendations

- (i) It is recommended that the aims and Learning Outcomes of each course as well their component subjects clearly stated to enable both staff and students to understand the competencies they should master and the level of mastery.
- (ii) The Department should strive towards enriching the courses by including electives which are demanded by the students, wherever possible.
- (iii) It is recommended that the Department of Humanities resume responsibility for all language teaching and religious education if it is to play the role assigned to it in the Faculty of Education
- (iv) It is essential the Department review the Foundation Course (undergraduate) to select essential content that could provide a 'foundation' for broadening undergraduates' understanding rather than impose a large quantum of subject matter that might not seem relevant for such a course.
- (v) More learning materials and other resources need to be provided for students in the courses on the Philosophical Bases of Education. Lifelong/ Adult Education , and teaching of language (excluding English) and religion.

- (vi) It is strongly recommended that external examiners are appointed for marking examination scripts and dissertations to maintain standards.
- (vii) In the opinion of the Review Team priority should be given to postgraduate studies at the highest level, research and research publications in refereed journals by members of the academic staff.
- (viii) Peer review has to be strengthened and formalized.
- (ix) Staff vacancies need to be filled as early as possible. Specifically the post of Probationary Lecturer in English teaching should be filled without delay in order to reduce the workload of the Head of Department.
- (x) The services of Visiting Lecturers should be obtained only if there is no staff member qualified to undertake the course e.g. Buddhist Education
- (xi) The allocation of space for the Department should be reviewed by the Faculty and space and facilities e.g toilets, provided for staff and students.