

# The Issues of the Planning and Implementation of Reforming the School Education System in Sri Lanka

Handagiriye Sirisumana thero

Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka

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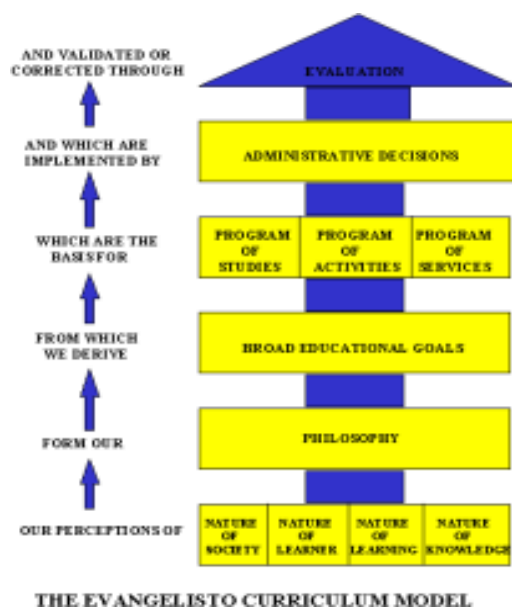
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## INTRODUCTION

Employing well-planned, systematic educational procedures in school education is the main strategy to achieve national goals while properly devising the curriculum to achieve education goals. Hence, an academic curriculum should be designed with proper pre-planning, and the authorities should be well organized to acquire the definite purpose of planning a curriculum. The design of the curriculum should be done according to a recognized curriculum development format and provide the principles for designing the perfect curriculum, which is a scientific procedure. The curriculum should be in accordance with the country and the desires of its citizens. The dynamic aims and purposes lead to an effective curriculum. This research, which discusses the benefits of curriculum development in Sri Lanka, was done referring to the literary works in libraries based on documentary survey techniques.

## DISCUSSION

It is obvious that the failures in education reforms and plans in Sri Lanka are due to issues in the implementation of the curriculum, while curricular planning needs to be organized to achieve specific goals of education. In order to highlight the significance of curriculum design, educationalists have introduced various curriculum development models (e.g., Tyler (1949), Kerr (1968), which provide a framework for the preparation of a full-scale curriculum and are of a certain scientific nature. Factors such as objectives, content, learning-teaching processes, and evaluation are the features that should be given prominence in any curriculum development model.



Evangelisto’s curriculum model is a perfect example of a curriculum development model. It indicates the social nature, the nature of the learners, the nature of learning, and the nature of knowledge as primary factors. It presents a broad view of an educational program, providing substantial educational objectives and

design programs, elucidating activity-based programs, service programs, and making administrative decisions about the curriculum as the latent step. In his curriculum design, Fullan points out that attention should be paid to the specific characteristics, features, and attributes that cause changes in the planning of the curriculum. However, in view of these models, it is evident that there are multiple dimensions that need to be addressed in the curriculum and should be done through a scientific approach with a proper design.

Thus, when composing a curriculum, prominence should be given to:

1. Who is preparing the curriculum for whom?

Where the level of the age, intelligence, needs, desires of the children are considered.

2. Social needs

Attention should be paid to the local needs, social needs, economic and social development.

3. Resources needed for implementation

Persons, equipment, services and teaching-learning tools must be pre-tested.

4. Who are forming the plans?

This is intended to be considered as specialist services.

5. cost

A preliminary inquiry is essential for the costs involved in planning and implementation of the curriculum.

6. Benefits

In implementation of the curriculum, national, social and individual benefits must be considered.

Thus, the curriculum must be aggregated with a definite understanding of the above factors. Further, it is important to study the taxonomy of attention classification by Benjamin S. Bloom. Consideration in the areas of cognitive, affective, and psycho-motive domains provides guide lines for a full-fledged curriculum to create a person with a full personality by giving a balanced education. Thus, curriculum planning seems to be very important. It should be studied in a multi-dimensional aspect via a certain theory. On the contrary, the educational objectives and the national objectives of a country vary with time. It is necessary to plan an appropriate curriculum for the people's aspirations for the country. Once the aims and objectives are dynamic, the curriculum also tends to be dynamic. Therefore, when planning the curriculum, it is important to focus on goals and targets. Curriculum design and its performance are equally important. There are several factors to consider in its functioning.

1. Implementation of the curriculum in the school
2. The teacher-factor
3. The Student's factor
4. Resources
5. Management

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM IN THE SCHOOL**

The curriculum is designed and implemented in a formal system called the school. Hence, the curriculum

should be based on the needs of the school, which is the ideology of the critics. However, in Sri Lankan curriculum planning, which occurs at the ministerial level, the NEC prepares the policy. The National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka develops curriculum materials. The Ministry of Education monitors curriculum implementation, transfuses downwards, and functions as a common curriculum at the national level. Thus, in practicality, the curriculum is confronted with a variety of issues, and it is evident that the planning of the curriculum has been a failure.

- Inflexibility of the Circular

When implementing curriculum, circulars lead to a common process. A term plan should be prepared for a specified number of dates for a commonly arranged term during which a specific segment of the course should be covered. The problem with the functioning of the curriculum is that it does not meet the needs of the school and the environment. If the permission is granted to adjust the curriculum to the needs of the school by the circulars, the curriculum can be operated in par with the school based ideas. In addition, the curriculum circulated to the school for extra-curricular activities can also be seen as a barrier to the implementation of the school curriculum.

- Mismatch of regional diversity

The schools face many hardships due to the lack of regional diversity when designing the curriculum. The geographical location of the region should be considered, and the curriculum should be made to suit the culture of the local community too. Within the Sri Lankan context, a notable segregation can be seen in urban and rural schools. If a curriculum is composed as a common curriculum befitting the urban school system, it will not be applicable to the rural school system, while a system developed focusing only on the culture of rural schools is inappropriate for urban schools. Thus, it is also difficult to design a suitable common curriculum for both levels. Therefore, attention must be given so as to leave space for the school to plan and implement its own curriculum that suits its own regional diversity.

- Parents/ Student/School intentions

If the curriculum has been set up to suit the needs of parents and students, practicality can be easily achieved. Since there is no sturdy interrelationship among schools, problems arise in the implementation of a common curriculum. If the common curriculum can be carried out in conjunction with the school-bound curriculum, the student can reach the objectives of the curriculum. Nevertheless, it seems that schools take less effort to plan the curriculum according to their needs, and it has become merely a list of subjects and subject matter and an exam-oriented curriculum. The main reason for this is that the school curriculum is incompatible with their own objectives.

- Exam oriented curriculum

It is important to note that the curriculum is exam-oriented. Since the curriculum has thus been planned, it should be covered within a specific period of time under any circumstances. Although it seems fitting from a certain perspective, rural schools undergo many problems pertaining to school factors, teaching factors, and resource anomalies. Arrangements should be made to design curricula to minimize such disparities when implementing a common curriculum.

- Completion of the curriculum and the time factor

In the completion of the curriculum, the school and the teacher face the issue of time limitation as the content of the curriculum is so broad as not to align with the intentions of the school. Furthermore, the extra circular issued by the ministries in addition to the academic curriculum is also a reason. Therefore, consideration should be given to proper management of time when compiling the curriculum.

- Teacher skills

Teacher skills are also an important factor in the implementation of curriculum, and these should be updated through in-service training programs. This will ensure the smooth functioning of the curriculum. Some of the curriculum reforms have resulted in failure due to the absence of such training programs.

## THE TEACHER FACTOR

When studying the teacher factor, knowledge on updating the curriculum, issues with flexibility, anomalies in the number of teachers in rural and urban schools, not updating the teaching methodologies, issues with in-service training, and less usage of technology can be identified as the problems in contemporary school systems. Commission reports reveal that in Sri Lanka, there are issues related to recruiting teachers, teacher positioning and transfers, pre-service teacher education and training, in-service teacher education, and development courses for teacher instructors and educationalists. These issues have a significant impact on the failure of educational reforms.

## THE STUDENT'S FACTOR

Pertaining to student's issues, student missteps, student absenteeism, lack of literacy, lack of favorable student-teacher interaction, outbid conditions, health problems, and nutritional problems can be identified as limitations for the proper application of curriculum.

These problems can worsen due to the less attention paid during the planning and implementation processes.

## RESOURCES

When looking at the implementation of the curriculum, resources can be identified as a major factor to be considered. The main resources in the school can be classified as physical and human resources. Further, inadequate teachers in the Sri Lankan school system and the lack of physical resources can also be identified as major drawbacks. Although teachers are numerically sufficient, there are a number of issues arising on the equal distribution of the teachers and resources among the schools. For example, rural schools are subjected to less teachers for science and mathematics and lack of technical tools. Some of the rural schools do not even have the basic physical resources. According to the National Strategy Plan for Education Sector, the percentages of the schools without the basic infrastructure are as follows. [\[1\]](#)

Facility	Percentage
Sanitary facilities	42
water	15
Electricity	13
Phones	69
Labs of G.C.E. O/L	72
Labs of G.C.E. A/L	11
Library	64
Computer laboratories	42

There is a considerable deficiency in the facilities, such as laboratories, libraries, and computer laboratories, in most of the secondary schools, which can also be presented as the main factors affecting the proper

functioning of the curriculum. Moreover, when looking at school resources, classroom traffic can also be described as a related issue in an effective learning environment.

Among 10,000 public schools, there are about 3000 schools that accommodate less than 100 students in each, while about 200 schools accommodate more than 2500 students. The popular schools in cities are considerably larger where there is heavy congestion. There are also few students in type 2 and type 3 schools, as revealed by the government reports. The classroom traffic congestion causes a bad learning environment and affects the irregularities in the curriculum.

## SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

School management is also another factor that affects the implementation of the curriculum activities. Accordingly, weaknesses in leadership, a weak learning environment, and the loss of the relationship of the school with the community have a negative impact on school curricular activities. Hence, various factors are considered when designing a curriculum, and during the implementation process, various shortfalls can arise due to the negligence of these factors. Some of the problems associated with school curriculum management can also be identified as:

1. There is no advisory learning program emerging from the specific objectives of the training.

(A process of counseling is the process of preparing the classroom to empower the Classroom learning-teaching process.)

2. Switching to outside boundaries (curriculum recommendations, circulars) with less flexibility.
3. Currently, only resource management is followed by the schools under learning process management.
4. There is no understanding of the total curriculum for those who implement learning and teaching processes (primary, junior, secondary, senior secondary) in the school stage.

Those who implement learning and teaching processes do not have a complete understanding of the learning stages (primary, junior, secondary, and senior)

5. Aims and objectives identified at the common education system or at the field level are not properly interpreted with those of the school level. [\[2\]](#)

Accordingly,

1. Unplanned curriculum at the school level.
2. The school curriculum as a whole does not reach the level of development at the school level.
3. Not studying the feedback on the curriculum at the school level.
4. Inability to meet the needs of the school through the curriculum. [\[3\]](#)

The failure of curriculum designs can be attributed to the factors mentioned above. The Education Commission in Sri Lanka has identified several issues pertaining to education planning and management. These challenges can be succinctly summarized as follows:

1. Inaccuracies regarding the power and functions between the Ministry of Education and provincial education authorities
2. Weaknesses of the local government structures and their adverse effects.
3. Lack of communication and coordination among inter-state institutions at the mid-level.
4. Lack of professionals in the inter-state institutions.
5. Inadequacy of capacity development programs on education planning and management
6. Failure to prepare future-oriented educational plans with multi-sectoral approach

7. Not receiving information in-time to make decisions regarding the education system
8. Schools are not sufficiently empowered to develop as organizations with clear identities
9. Problems related to modern school structure
10. Problems with the structure of the Ministry of Education
11. Shortcomings in provision for logistics for Educational Services[4]

These issues will be extremely relevant to the implementation of school curricula. Although new curriculum design and curriculum modernization are organized effectively, improper implementation is the most important factor that contributes to failure. According to Michael Fullan, the root cause of the failure of reformatory curricula is the wrong implementation.[5] According to him, there should be a method to assess the implementation of the changes in the curriculum, which enables a review whether the reformed curriculum work properly and how it actually works.[6] Further, Fullan highlights that basically the reformation failure in curriculum occurs due to the lack of effort exerted by the authorities in the implementation and preparation of curriculum without acquiring the school culture.[7]

- Frail efforts by the authorities in the implementation of the curriculum. (Low Dependence)
- Constructing the curriculum without understanding the school culture.

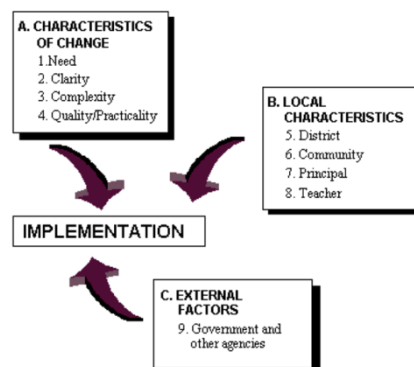
Two main points can be observed that affect the functionality of the curriculum.

1. Compliance and mismatch of mutual expectations
2. Compliance and mismatch of mutual expectations[8]

Compliance is the disparity between the aims of the stakeholders who upgrade the curriculum and the implementing agents. The goal of the curriculum is to make improvements without anomalies, which should be a friendly adaptation.[9] For this purpose, the curriculum needs to be tailor-made for the needs of the users, and thereby, it will be welcomed by the stakeholders who are implementing the curriculum. Similarly, if the objectives are not mutually exclusive, it will be rejected once they are applied. Also, the curriculum reforms need to be examined in multidimensionality.

Unless otherwise stated, examining them from a narrow-minded perspective makes it a failure. A positive and progressive perspective on the curriculum helps to implement a better curriculum.

It's important that principals, teachers, students, and parents concentrate on the different aspects of a curriculum. Thus, if the curriculum is to be successfully implemented, it is clear that those who implement the curriculum must make it authentic. Michael Fullan's Education Change Model[10] is also important when considering the implementation of the curriculum. In this case, an interactive model of curriculum has been introduced, which has activities with three variables.[11]



Michael Fullan emphasizes that stakeholders such as education administrators, teachers, students, school committees, community members, and the government are important in implementing the curriculum and describes the functionality of the curriculum as more important than the distribution of new materials to implement the new curriculum. He also stresses the importance of understanding the people who are

affected and their roles in the implementation of the curriculum. Action should be carefully planned, but it should not be too hard. And must be flexible. Also, Fullan believes that the curriculum activity must be smoothly maintained and continue with a system of reliability.[12] Compared to Fullan's Curriculum Function Model, it is clear that the proposed education reform in Sri Lanka has failed due to the weak implementation process. There are many reasons for those failures. Some define the education system as a failure to meet the requirements of the job market, which denotes a failure criterion of the system.[13]

#### • Reform of primary education – 1997

This reform would prioritize identified national skills, while curriculum and teaching strategies are rebalanced to three stages.

First major stage (1-2 grades)

Second major stage (3-4 grades)

Third Main stage (5 grades)

This was proposed to initiate education with sports and methodically direct the students to formal education. Teaching should be done based on activities, setting aside the seated in-class approach. However, the intention of the curriculum developers has diminished due to the continuation of learning and teaching methodologies in the traditional in-class environment. Also, it is a major issue that, though it is said that the school, furniture and equipment, classrooms, and school grounds would be well adapted to the activities, they are not implemented as expected. One of the reasons for this is the disparity in the resources of rural schools.[14] The issue in urban schools is a lack of facilities for activity-based learning. Classrooms are full of a huge number of students. Thus, it seems that the implementation of the curriculum is complicated and failed.[15]

he awareness of teachers and the uncertainty of some issues also contributed to the failure of the routing. The specific purposes of the reforms have not been developed in order to achieve them. Disparities in the experiences of the students, the misdiagnosis of the student's literacy, and anomalies in the teacher's attitude and the principal management roles are also evident. A prominent feature is that the student is not given the required activities and the focus is given only to the scholarship examination, which compels the students towards seating activities from the initial stage. The only expectation of the teachers, students, parents, and principal is to make the students pass the scholarship exam without paying attention to their physiological and psychological requirements. Thus, failure of the curriculum occurs due to improper interaction with the curriculum and its partners. It has been revealed through research which involved students from grade 5 in 10,000 schools that although many teachers were aware of the nature of the reforms, the principals were not knowledgeable accordingly, which was another reason for the failure of this reforms.[16]

The National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) points out that due to the centralization of reformation processes, many issues have arisen, such as the tendency for the curriculum material to be uniform and too student-centric, thereby impeding the creativity of the students and the teachers, and that no sufficient attention is paid to the better-caliber students while drinking water and electricity facilities are not provided. Further, there are complications regarding the skills of the teachers in the application of the curriculum, and the expected changes in teaching and learning are not explicit.[17] Moreover, many classroom activities are limited to the table, blackboard, book, and teacher, which do not allocate enough space for creativity and kinetics. The same teacher teaching for both grades 1 and 2 and requesting grade 6 students to help grade 1 students are the least accepted resolutions given under reformations.[18] Similarly, a lack of productive regulations and supervision at the regional level can be seen as a weak aspect of the reformation.[19] 1995 and 97 junior secondary education reforms have weakened as a concept and

implementation in terms of a lack of clear competence and discretion. There is a lack of experimentation for this dilemma or a lack of planning based on reports received from the school system.[20] This renovation was presented to Grades 6 and 9 in 1999 and Grade 8 in 2001 without any pilot study. Problems have arisen over the preparation and submission of new grades and teacher manuals in Grade 6 on a thematic basis, which was implemented in violation of the proposed curriculum of the National Institute of Education (NIE) without a comprehensive consultation on the existing curriculum or feedback (Mettananda, 2003). The study of the environment, which was presented without any clear objective, and the study of social studies have failed due to the lack of skilled teachers to teach the subject. In the same way, under this reform, the subject of science, as science and technology, has swiftly and artificially adapted according to the curriculum developers, and it's confusing even for the teachers as to how technology was entered into science. Thus, this reformation has failed in that sense as well.[21] In 1997, the main objective of these reforms was to make education a platform capable of achieving the common goals of the country.[22] However, the transformation of the teaching-learning process has failed in the implementation of all the reforms introduced for the Primary, Junior, Secondary and Senior Secondary Grades at various stages.[23]

#### ● **Revision of *General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Advanced Level curriculum – 1998***

Under the Education Reform program in 1998, there was a revision of the G.C.E. Advanced Level curriculum, which reduced the number of subjects from 4 to 3, and covered topics such as science and mathematics. In these phases as well, some issues can be observed. It is problematic whether the curriculum is integrated with a systematic method. Karunaratne (2003) points out that while practical sessions of science subjects were restored as an integral component of the curriculum, there were only a few students who completed those practical sessions. The failure is also aggregated due to the lack of adequate equipment, trained laboratory assistants and no supervision of the Regulatory Board to ensure the validity of the assessments.[24] Also, two projects were compulsory for the students as individuals and groups, which has many issues in practice. Further, the implementers of the curriculum were not properly communicated about the purpose and importance of the assignment; thus, it has become a trend among the students to rewrite the project reports that were already presented, and in some cases, pre-formulated projects are also purchased and submitted. Accordingly, it is clear that there has been a failure in practicality. The lack of common criteria to evaluate these projects is also a major weakness.[25]

#### ● **1998 – School Based Assessment (SBA)**

The education reform of school-based assessment in 1998 in Sri Lanka was also another unsuccessful reform. Its goal was to develop the students' learning process, the teaching process of the teachers, the evaluation process of the school, and the culture of assessment in the school (Banda, 2000). According to Fullan's interaction model, the reasons for the failure of this system can be pointed out as the lack of awareness programs for the teachers as well as the principals. One of the main issues with the curriculum is that it is not properly perceived to make it practical. Currently, it can be seen as activated merely on a nominal basis. The main reason for this is that the Fullan interactivity model interacts with those variables. Further, the inter-awareness process between curriculum and stakeholders is inadequate. Depending on the loss of teacher awareness, the student has concentrated more strongly on the use of the most comprehensive assessment methods.[26] Educational Commission reports illustrate that these written trials should be replaced with observations, effective interrogations, practical inquiries, assignments, and tests. [27]

It is also a problem that the majority of the teachers do not have enough skills to evaluate the students productively.[28] Although the school-based assessment has proved successful for grades 10–13, for grades 6–9, they have not been quite successful.[29] This has been considered an extra burden on teachers, limiting the time for their teaching.[30] Thus, it is possible to assume that this program is unsuccessful due to the implementation flaws, although it is presented as a method for evaluating student performance.



## 2007 – Education (Curriculum) Reforms

When implementing the 1997 Education Reforms, as a result of the weaknesses in the methodology, some problems arose.[31] These problems are mainly related to the teaching methods.[32] As a result, Dr. I. L. Ginige et al. presented a competency-based curriculum and expected to provide it based on the skills. According to Ms. Ginige, It is important that the allocation of 90, 120, and 180 minutes be a must since 40 minutes are not adequate as time slots for individual subjects.[33] Based on the argument that the capability could be displayed as a group rather than individual presentation, the method-based approach was suggested to be presented in the curriculum, and the learning method was based on the 5E method of constructivist learning.

1. Engagement
2. Exploration
3. Explanation
4. Exploration
5. Evaluation

Several failures can be observed when analyzing the curricular reformation based on skills. It is a problem to implement the activity-based 5E method in urban schools in terms of variables such as local characteristics based on the curriculum development model of Fullan. Due to the large number of students and limited space in the classroom, there was no room for activity-based learning.

Further, noise disturbances also occurred. Accordingly, teachers did not conduct an activity-based curriculum but expressed their unwillingness. At the same time, the problem arose with the implementation of the reform of this curriculum in rural schools due to a lack of adequate human and physical resources. Classroom learning was also used in the usual manner, in which the planned activity did not provide the resources needed to implement the baseline curriculum. The main reason for the failure of the reform was the lack of sufficient quality inputs required for the activities. Also, the knowledge of the principal and the teachers is an issue that should be emphasized here. Lack of awareness programs on the part of teachers was one of the main hindrances, while there was a lack of understanding among the parties involved. Another problem is the inflexibility of the teachers in the implementation. In addition, the experience of the students according to the local requirements varies from one to the next. Furthermore, there is a vast difference in the experiences of students in urban schools and students from rural areas. Therefore, general competency is a problem. Hence, it is possible that this has failed due to the lack of regional diversity.

As an organizational feature, there is a shortcoming in the transfer of knowledge on teaching based on the 5-frame model from the Department of Education to the divisional offices. It seems that since they did not have proper guidance, they were unable to infiltrate schools, revealing issues in the activation process. Another factor is the lack of principals and teachers who are capable of teaching on the basis of competency. Obscurity and complexity felt by the parties are another major factor. In practical implementation, there are many difficulties imposed by several factors, such as the student factor, the teacher factor, the subjective nature of the subject, and the limited resources. Also, this method, which is a teaching method, cannot always be used for all subjects. Especially teaching aesthetics was a problem. On one hand, this is not the only method of learning. Learning many subjects using the same methodology or teaching different modules under one subject using the same methodology is not feasible. A teacher should be given the space to teach in different styles in accordance with the nature of the subjects and their different modules. For this reason, the reform was criticized by the teachers. Accordingly, it is possible to indicate that this reform has failed due to the lack of competency-based activities.

## 2012 – Educational Reforms – Introduction of the technology course curriculum

The objective of presenting the technology course curriculum as a curriculum in A/L was to provide the student with thorough knowledge in the technical field. Also, according to statistics, as there are an excessive number of graduates in humanities, the ministry is expected to reduce the number of students who opt for humanities subjects. However, at present, these objectives are being challenged while the reformation diminishes. Under this reformation, science was made compulsory for the technology stream, and from the subjects available under engineering technology and bio-systems technology, students can select two subjects according to their preference. However, due to many reasons, the ambition of the introduction of the technology stream is fading away. According to Fullan's interaction model, though the curriculum has been designed with the identification of social needs, it has not been successful in its implementation.

One of the issues related to this is the expanded curriculum, such as technology, science, and engineering. Also, a lack of teachers is another hindrance. Accordingly, there is no recruitment of sufficient numbers of teachers for the implementation of this curriculum, and many schools have to outsource teachers in order to teach engineering. Lack of physical resources to teach these subjects are another impediment. As the students are not aware of the subject streams, students who are qualified to follow the science and math curriculum also opt to select this stream. The issue arises as the degree offered under this category does not receive the same recognition as engineering degrees and science degrees. It produces below-average technicians, which is considered a lower-status degree than a technological degree. Thus, a number of problems can be identified in the implementation of curriculum reform.

## CONCLUSION

As a whole, the failure of the education reforms in Sri Lanka can be seen as a result of many educational issues, such as no preliminary inquiry into the issues arising from the implementation of the curriculum, failing to study and modernize the curriculum, failing to conduct a regulatory inquiry, the failure to identify preliminary research findings, a lack of awareness programs, weaknesses in training, and inequality in resource distribution.

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