

# Undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka



# Undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka:

*Policy, Practice and Perspectives  
for South Asia*

By

Asantha U. Attanayake

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*To my mother and father  
with love*



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## FOREWORD

Attanayake puts forward a bold and honest analysis on ways to improve English language teaching among Sri Lankan university students. This book is bound to generate constructive debates and further research, as any good book should. While there are complex historical, cultural, and social motivations for the attitudes towards English in Sri Lanka, Attanayake draws attention to teaching practices and teacher preparation. Her study will help us explore how teacher development can be situated in the myriad other shaping influences on English language instruction in Sri Lanka.

Suresh Canagarajah  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor  
Director, Migration Studies Project  
Departments of Applied Linguistics and English  
Pennsylvania State University  
303 Sparks Building  
University Park, PA 16802.  
Telephone: 814 865-6229.  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/asc16/>

## A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

*Undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka: Policy, Practice and Perspectives for South Asia* is my PhD thesis. Despite a request by a local publisher for publication, it sat on my bookshelf for some time. My husband, Col. Adam Barborich, dug it out and pushed me to publish. So, here it is from Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

There have been two main changes in relation to the discussion in the book since its submission as a PhD thesis. First, the civil war that plagued the country for thirty years is over. In post-war Sri Lanka, the budgetary allocation for the war has gone too – so the country can afford university conferences. Sri Lankan universities hold many conferences every year now. Academics can present their papers and listen to others in peace, without fear of bombs. The second change is that local universities offer a number of degree programmes in English Language Teaching (ELT). Such programmes cover Teaching Methodology as an essential component. Even so, what hasn't changed is that when revisions are made to university English language curricula, they lack coherence and grit. The curriculum designers still lack a formal training and thorough understanding of the process. The discourse remains one of 'trial and error'.

I take this opportunity to thank my supervisors, Professor Ajit Mohanty and Professor Santoosh K. Sareen, of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I am indebted to Professor D.P. Pattanayak, founder-director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore for his generous time and discussions during my PhD. If it is not for Professor Tilak Hettiarachi, former Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo, I would not have got the opportunity to read for a PhD. I thank him with all my heart. My sincere thanks to Penny Rendall for her help in editing this book.

I am forever grateful to my mother, father, my sisters, my brother and my brothers-in-law, who have done everything within and beyond their abilities to give me freedom to engage in my studies. And finally to Adam, my husband, for encouraging and supporting me to publish everything I write.

Asantha U. Attanayake  
August 1, 2017

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Prelude

‘Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.’

Noah Webster

Two aspects of English language usage in Sri Lanka are usually discussed today, the teaching of English and the status of English. The first aspect is a compact field of arguments about the failure of English teaching in Sri Lanka and related debates about the causes of this failure and potential remedial measures. The second aspect covers the varieties of English being spoken in the country, including the popular debate about standard versus non-standard nomenclature. Both of these aspects have been clearly demarcated, cleverly articulated and skilfully argued, yet the fact remains that English teaching in Sri Lanka remains unsuccessful and non-standard varieties of Sri Lankan English exist in spite of increasing intolerance. However, there are instances where the aforementioned facts have been unfairly presented together as a case of non-standard English coming into being due to bad teaching.

This study has been designed to deal with undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka. An attempt has been made to widen the scope to encompass the larger picture of language issues in the country. This is with the assumption that some potential root causes for the failures in teaching English as a second language are to be found in the broader society.

Despite having studied English for nearly 10 years during their school careers and being among the best of their generation to have passed the highly competitive university entrance examination, undergraduates face

difficulties in achieving the English language proficiency demanded of them by employers. The end-result of teaching English to students throughout their academic life, commencing from primary school and culminating in the university, has so far resulted in complete failure. The problem of graduate unemployment in Sri Lanka is mainly due to graduates' lack of proficiency in two main areas: English language and vocational skills. One would expect that university English language teachers<sup>1</sup> with degrees in English and vast professional expertise should certainly be able to produce better results with the most intellectually gifted students in a society. With the best teaching and the best learning, one would also expect the mechanisms used for teaching English to work well in the university. Quite disappointingly, this has not been the case.

The answers to the how and why questions behind this phenomenon are generally known, scientifically and empirically proven: the problems are found in the teaching methods, the materials in use or both. There is a broader problem of an environment that is not conducive to learning English, which includes home background, to be dealt with as well. Yet, over the years, we have still not been able to overcome these deficiencies in teaching English to students from all walks of life. Could there be reasons for that beyond the aforementioned deficiencies?

Two chief reasons led to the pursuit of this study and should be mentioned here. The first reason originated from the experience of teaching English first in a state school and later in the university, and the subsequent comparisons that emerged from the two domains. The divergences of the two contexts in the viewpoint caused a teacher to question the *status quo* in university English language teaching (ELT). The second reason was the urge to do away with the panacea of blaming the past (school ELT) for the current failures in university ELT, and to situate and examine university ELT as an independent entity. This may seem unrealistic, yet a flame of hope has been kindled since countries such as China and Russia have proved that foreign students who were capable of following a degree programme were also capable of 'picking up' the languages that were required for these cognitively demanding endeavours. In regard to the first reason presented, the areas of incongruence between school education and university education are put forth in terms of teacher characteristics and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, both lecturers in English language and instructors in English who engage in university English language teaching are referred to as teachers as a general term and in some instances as university English language teachers.



responsibility in order to situate undergraduate ELT as an independent discourse. The second reason that triggered this study, ridding university ELT of the tendency to scapegoat school education, determined the focus of scrutiny.

The comparison between teachers in school versus university contexts in terms of responsibilities and professional training brings out a number of differences: in school education, the professional qualification is often referred to as the ‘training’, and is obligatory for a school teacher of English in present-day Sri Lanka. An average teacher of English, prior to appointment, is given professional training with two years of course work in Colleges of Education and one year of student teaching in schools. In the case of teachers being absorbed into the profession without such pre-service training (which was a common practice until the very beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century), teachers were motivated to obtain the ‘training’ quickly, as non-trained teachers were not considered ‘professional’. In addition, the salary increment for a trained teacher was considerably larger than that of a non-trained teacher and this acted as an incentive. The average teacher of English today gets the opportunity to participate in in-service teacher training programmes which help to empower him/her with current trends in the profession. This may also involve some monetary incentive, duty leave is granted and a certificate is given for participation. In the event of assignment as the ‘English teacher’ to a particular grade/class, he/she is provided with course books, teacher’s guides and a timetable. In addition, the amount of syllabus content that has to be completed is predetermined and teachers simply have to ‘cover’ the syllabus. An instructor at the zonal/provincial level supervises teacher performance in class. The reader should not be misled that such a scenario is as perfect in practice as it is in precept. There are discrepancies in this system, despite such logistics being implemented. However, an average school teacher’s (English) responsibility is largely limited to teaching and paper marking and the rest is shared by personnel at different levels in the school education system.

In undergraduate English language teaching, the picture is quite different. Teachers are involved in every aspect of English language teaching. There is considerable freedom in many aspects from dress code to paper marking, a freedom shared by the university ELT community through collective agreement. In the university profession, one would observe teachers getting together and designing and modifying lesson materials; a senior teacher being titled as ‘academic coordinator’ briefing his/her colleagues; teachers setting their own papers and discussing the marking band; the same teachers taking lesson material to the class, distributing it

among the students and teaching. In the years to come, those who are 'no longer novices' would also be involved in most of the above activities. Mandatory teacher training pertaining to the teaching of English language prior or after appointment to the university is not a prerequisite.<sup>1</sup> In-service short-term training programmes are unheard of. Conferences are few and far between, without, in most cases, any financial assistance available to enable teachers to attend them.<sup>2</sup> There are no supervisors to give performance appraisals. In short, a completely different scenario prevails in university ELT compared to that of the school system.

Given the gravity of the task of teaching English to undergraduates while shouldering all the responsibilities involved in the entire enterprise singlehandedly, one would think of the university English language teacher as having a greater commitment to teaching when compared to the school teacher. Unfortunately, all such labour and commitment seem to have not had any special impact on the end-product, the graduate output. Graduates in contemporary Sri Lanka are criticized as being unemployable. As stated before, one of the chief factors for this unemployability is the lack of English language proficiency. Graduates, predominantly from the Faculty of Arts, are left with little more than a degree certificate that does not qualify them for modern professions.

Given the considerable autonomy in planning the curriculum, one would like to explore the reasons for academia's inability to improve English language teaching standards despite unrelenting efforts in that direction. Before the recent bifurcation of the English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) from the Departments of English, undergraduate ELT was completely under the authority of the departments in most of the universities<sup>3</sup>. Yet, even when ELTUs were under their patronage and after obtaining autonomous status, undergraduate ELTUs could not change the image of an average graduate as being incompetent in English.

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<sup>1</sup> For instructors in English, who comprised the largest segment of the ELT community in universities, teacher training is not mandatory.

<sup>2</sup> The situation was such, about 7-8 years ago, when this thesis was written. The scenario has changed significantly at present with at least 4 -5 conferences in ELT being conducted per year in the universities. In addition, a number of ELT related BA and MA programmes are offered by Sri Lankan universities as well.

<sup>3</sup> Only in some universities, e.g. University of Peradeniya, have the ELTUs been independent with no influence from the Departments of English. In some universities, e.g. University of Kelaniya, the Head of the Department of English has been the Head of the ELTU as well.

Helping students to master English within 3–4 years is by no means a simple undertaking with students who come to university with vastly different learning experiences. Nevertheless, the examples of China and Russia teaching their languages to foreign students within six months to follow degree programmes that demand high cognitive skills leave one with a desire to make ‘inquiries’ to discover the secret behind their success and our failure. Is it compulsion that leaves students with no choice but to learn? Is it the intensity with which those languages are taught? Is it the environment that enhances their learning? Though this study did not attempt to compare or contrast English language teaching in Sri Lanka with language teaching in those countries, the latter led to the development of the main research question. Thus, this study was designed to probe undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka with reference to policy, practice and perspectives.

## **1.2. Research questions, aims and objectives**

What are the policies, general practices and the perceptions of undergraduates and university teachers of English in relation to English language teaching in Sri Lankan universities?

The main objectives of this study are given below:

- to reflect on the national and institutional policies in relation to language issues
- to discuss benchmarks for undergraduate English language teaching and to examine the extent to which the curriculum complies with them
- to reflect on the teaching methods used by teachers of English in universities
- to evaluate the lesson materials used in teaching English to undergraduates
- to reflect on the existing system for student assessment
- to examine the issues related to medium of instruction.

Having established the main aims of this study, we wish to list the related objectives:

- \* To reflect on the language policy of the country
- \* To examine the language practices in the universities
- \* To investigate some of the popular notions in society in relation to English

- \* To explore undergraduates' attitudes towards the English language and the culture it represents
- \* To examine undergraduates' perceptions of the content of the syllabus/materials
- \* To examine undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English language teaching methods in use
- \* To investigate undergraduates' perceptions of current assessment practices
- \* To explore undergraduates' views on English medium instruction
- \* To see the differences in perception of the aforementioned issues between the students of the Faculty of Arts and those of the Faculty of Management
- \* To synthesize the contextual differences such as geographical location, age, etc., of universities and their bearing upon student perceptions
- \* To examine the training of university teachers of English as course designers and in the process of making lesson materials
- \* To reflect on the theories university teachers adhere to in teaching English
- \* To investigate teachers' awareness of the language policy of the country and of university language practices
- \* To examine teachers' views on the current assessment practices
- \* To synthesize the differences in perception of the aforementioned issues between the teachers of the Faculty of Arts and those of the Faculty of Management
- \* To investigate whether core subjects have a bearing upon English language teaching and learning.

### **1.3. The relation between experimental design and the problem**

A variety of data-gathering procedures and a number of sources are required to get a realistic picture of the status of undergraduate English language teaching in the country. Interviews, questionnaires, legal documents, etc., have been designed as tools to procure data. The study is to deal with three aspects of undergraduate English language teaching: firstly, from the policy angle, the study sought to examine the provisions given and the restrictions imposed by state policy for language issues in the Sri Lanka in general and in the universities in particular. In addition to this, the study aimed at exploring the areas where state policy was not

active, yet popular notions determined the use of languages. This may happen without having clashes between the above two, namely state-controlled policy and community-controlled practice. Yet, there could be areas where the above two collide. There is a need to find out the reasons behind the large-scale societal demand to study English and the inability of graduate output to meet the expectations of the employment sector. This may be the result of a belief that controversies exist between governmental policy and societal needs. At the same time, the study aimed at looking at the kind and degree of freedom universities as autonomous bodies enjoyed and the stances that university administrations took in relation to language issues: what was the influence that flowed from the top strata? How were decisions arrived at in deciding language practices in universities?

Secondly, the viewpoints of university English language teachers were deemed vital for the study for two main reasons: (a) The university teacher is the prime agent of curriculum development. They are the main contributors to undergraduate English language programmes. (b) Teachers are aware of the fact that the educational reality is different from what has been planned and what takes place in the classroom. The notion that planning equals teaching and that teaching equals learning is naïve (Nunan, 1988). The study sought to find how teachers viewed the discrepancy between what they planned and what they taught. Moreover, it was relevant to know how they perceived and responded to the responsibilities on their shoulders as course planners, preparers of material and evaluators. Having to face the dual impact of being course planners as well as teachers in the same programme necessitates reflection upon their tasks in the face of graduate inefficiency in the use of English language. The study took an interest in discerning the teachers' views in terms of this duality.

Thirdly, since goods are to be delivered to the needy, how would students receive that which has been planned and taught? Research shows that students, as recipients, do not necessarily learn what is taught (Allwright, 1986), although this does not mean that they do not learn anything and that teaching is wasted. However, due to the criticism of graduates as unemployable, with a lack of proficiency in English being one of the main reasons, it was of paramount importance to find the causes for our national failure. Is it the unsuccessful delivery of what has been planned? Or is it that deficiency in planning blunted effectiveness even with efficient teaching? Or are the failures due to the drawbacks in both? The answers to these questions from the students' viewpoint were deemed necessary.

A reader may find this research to be diagnostic, exploratory and descriptive. The intention of examining the *status quo* regarding English language teaching in the Sri Lankan universities was geared towards finding out facts about the prevalent situation. In other instances, the effort was to dig deeper into certain areas to find causative factors. Descriptive analyses have been provided in certain areas to better understand the situation. This study has made no attempt to find solutions to the diagnosed problems. However, based on the findings, it is possible to point out areas that are particularly problematic and to delineate the scope of future research pertinent to undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka.

This study is problem-oriented rather than theory-oriented. The discussion is based on pragmatic concerns acquired from the perceptions of those who are involved in the discourse. There is no particular over-arching theory available in ELT discourse to encompass the three main areas under scrutiny, namely, policy, practice and perspectives applicable to undergraduate ELT. Relevant theories have been used to describe various aspects of ELT, as and when required, in terms of their ideologies.

#### **1.4. The organization of the study**

The remainder of this chapter briefly touches upon English in Sri Lanka and discusses in detail the three universities that have been selected for the study in terms of their characteristics such as age, geographical location, culture and sub-culture, etc., to justify the selection of them for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study: it includes current theoretical perspectives on communicative language teaching; the theoretical assumptions behind teacher training; the theoretical basis that had gone into the past planning of undergraduate English language teaching in Sri Lanka; recent local research and other aspects such as learner needs and perceptions, lesson materials, student assessment, motivation, English and culture, etc., that are related to English language teaching. Chapter 3 discusses the policy aspects of language and language teaching. This includes a description of language policy in the country and its implications, standard language practices in the universities and some of the popular notions regarding graduates' English language proficiency and the graduate unemployment problem. Chapter 4 examines the students' perceptions of the current undergraduate English language programme. Information about the expectations, affective needs and attitudes of students are used to find out if the existing English language

programme has been able to fulfil them. Chapter 5 deals with teachers' perspectives of the programme. It includes teachers' views on student performance, teaching, assessment practices, the medium of instruction and the language policy of the country and that of universities. Chapter 6 attempts to weave together salient aspects of the previous three chapters. Further, it examines the significance of the outcome for undergraduate English language teaching in particular and English language teaching in the country in general.

### **1.5. English in Sri Lanka, a brief note**

The history of English in Sri Lanka has been discussed by many scholars in detail. The forthcoming chapters describe English in Sri Lanka with reference to the past and present at length, as such discussions are pivotal to the aspects that are dealt with in each chapter. In order to avoid repetition, therefore, what is put forth here is a brief account of the history of English in the country with reference to some major historical twists and turns. The first encounter that Sri Lankans had with the English language was when British merchants came to Sri Lanka in the 1600s. In 1681, Robert Knox documented the lifestyle of Sri Lankans for the first time in English. In 1796, British took control of the Dutch colony in Sri Lanka and in 1815 Sri Lanka became a British colony. In 1948, Sri Lanka gained independence from the British. Till the Swabhasha policy was introduced in 1956, English was the only official language of the country. During the colonial period, and from 1948 to 1956, English was the language of administration in the higher echelons of the administrative hierarchy. In 1987, with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution, both Sinhala and Tamil were equalized in terms of status as the national and official languages of the country while English was made the link language. From 1956 to date English has been taught as a subject in schools.

### **1.6. English language teaching in Sri Lankan universities**

Some key events that took place in relation to English language teaching in universities are described below:

- 1960s Sub-Department of English (language) was established at the University of Peradeniya.
- 1970s University Grants Commission (UGC) established.

- 1980s UGC Standing Committee on English appointed. Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and MA in ELT at the University of Colombo started.
- 1990s MA at Colombo University was abandoned due to lack of staff. Very little inter-university collaboration. Status of ELT teachers was debated.
- 2000 Resolution of ELT Teacher status. Benchmarks for University English Language Teaching created. MA in TESL at Open University started.

Since the turn of the century, considerable efforts have been made to develop ELTUs, previously known as Sub-Departments, especially with their newly gained autonomy owing to recent bifurcations of English Departments. For instance, a number of projects have been started and benchmarks for University ELT have been decided upon. As specialists in the field recognize, the ELTUs in universities face many challenges: developing professionalism in all aspects of their work, defining content in Sri Lankan terms, recognizing and responding to contemporary modes of communication, i.e. making pedagogical strategies for ELT in universities and creating awareness about the aspirations of learners (Raheem, 2006).

In the light of the above, and with new policies being introduced to make English the medium of instruction in the education system, and with the awareness that there are challenges to face, it is our understanding that the analysis of the existing curricula and pedagogical strategies in relation to ELT in the Sri Lankan university system is of prime importance for improving undergraduate ELT in Sri Lanka. The remainder of this section is on the three universities selected for this research and the rationale for selecting them.

### **1.7. The universities selected for this study**

For this study, we have selected students from six groups in three universities, the University of Colombo, University of Jaffna and Sabaragamuwa University. The six groups consist of the following:



**The University of Colombo**

1. Faculty of Arts
2. Faculty of Management & Finance<sup>1</sup>

**The University of Jaffna**

1. Faculty of Arts
2. Faculty of Commerce & Management

**Sabaragamuwa University**

1. Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages<sup>2</sup>
2. Faculty of Management Studies.

Currently most of the Faculties of Management in Sri Lankan universities use English as the medium of instruction. Their programmes have a career focus built into them. In contrast, the Faculties of Arts in most universities use predominantly mother tongue instruction. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages (referred to in this study as the Faculty of Arts) at Sabaragamuwa University conducts lectures in the medium of English with additional support in Sinhala when required. Most of the subjects taught in the Faculties of Arts do not have an overt career focus. Therefore, it was our intention to find out whether the medium of instruction or/and main subject streams would have any bearing upon undergraduate opinion and teachers' views in regard to the various aspects of English language teaching.

In the University of Colombo, the English language teaching programme is designed to group students according to their English language proficiency by way of a placement test upon their entrance to the university. Those who are weaker are absorbed into the English Language Proficiency Course, which has levels I to III with the weakest placed in level I. Students with higher marks are placed in the Certificate Course which has two levels in it, namely Certificate Course Part I and Part II (equivalent to levels IV and V respectively). The English language course is not for credit and attendance is not compulsory for the undergraduates. Those who study in the first year gain five marks for 80% or more

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<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, Faculty of Management & Finance of the University of Colombo and the other two Faculties of Management in the University of Jaffna and Sabaragamuwa University have been referred to as Faculty of Management as a common term for easy reference considering the similarity of subject streams offered in these faculties of the three universities.

<sup>2</sup> In this analysis, Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages has been referred to as Faculty of Arts as a common term for easy reference considering the similarity of subject streams offered in these faculties of the three universities.

attendance. The only requisite is that students have to pass the level they have been initially absorbed into, in order to obtain their degree certificates.

In the University of Jaffna, students are grouped according to a system similar to that of the University of Colombo. The English language programme is for credit (one credit is allotted) for first year students only. For all others it is non-credit but the undergraduates have to pass all three- or four-year English papers in order to get their degree certificate.

In Sabaragamuwa University, the students of the Faculty of Arts are similarly grouped according to proficiency level at the placement test upon entry. The course is non-credit. However, in the Faculty of Management, English language teaching has been incorporated into the Business Communication course and is therefore a credited course.

In the following section, a description of the three universities are given in terms of their establishment, missions and visions, contextual features such as age, geographical location, sub-culture, student population, etc.

### ***The University of Colombo***

#### ***Establishment***

The University of Colombo, the first university college in Sri Lanka, is a well-established institution located in the heart of the island's *de facto* capital and commercial capital, Colombo.<sup>1</sup> Being the oldest campus in Sri Lanka, the University of Colombo is a sprawling complex occupying over fifty acres of prime land in the heart of the city:

The history of Higher Education in Sri Lanka is closely linked with that of the University of Colombo which traces its beginnings to the establishment of the Ceylon Medical School...in June 1870. In 1880 the School was raised to the status of College permitting it to award the Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMS) and in 1889 the College was recognised by the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom when holders of its license became eligible to practice in Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte is the Administrative Capital of Sri Lanka since 1982. Colombo is the Commercial Capital in the present Sri Lanka. (Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Jayawardenepura-Kotte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Jayawardenepura-Kotte) on 05.03.2008.)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cmb.ac.lk/> retrieved on 28.02.2008.

The University of Colombo has six faculties all of which have English medium instruction apart from the Faculty of Arts. The Faculty of Arts is currently at a transition stage with some departments having English medium instruction as an option and others reconsidering the medium of instruction with students being given the option to sit examinations in the medium of English but without English medium lectures in some subjects.

The making of the University of Colombo was influenced by eminent scholars at the time:

The academic re-organization of the new University was largely based on these recommendations made by Professor Thistlethwaite to the NCHE (Sessional Paper XXVI of 1967)...The academic structure of the University of Colombo proposed in the Thistlethwaite report has been modified, but in planning and developing its curricula the University of Colombo continues to follow his wise exhortation that 'Colombo should capitalise its position as the University in the heart of the country's metropolis. It should draw strength from and contribute to the characteristic activities of the capital city; government, and administration, diplomacy and international relations, law, finance, trade, commerce and communications. It should specialise in the education of recruits for these occupations; and it should draw upon specialists from these occupations for expert part-time teaching ...' and to maintain its position as the 'metropolitan University, modern and international in outlook and character'. Colombo endeavours to meet this challenge.<sup>1</sup>

## **Vision and Mission**

### ***Vision***

The University of Colombo, as a metropolitan national University with historic links to the First University College, strives to be a centre of excellence of regional and international repute, that will create new knowledge and sustain a culture of learning and critical inquiry, and foster a spirit of service and commitment to national development and democratic values in a plural society. (University of Colombo Handbook, 2007)

### ***Mission***

To be a centre of excellence in teaching and research, with commitment to producing men and women of high ethical standards and social responsibility who are capable of creative, analytical and independent thinking, and facilitate the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cmb.ac.lk/> retrieved on 10.03.2008.

contribute to national development through partnerships between staff, students and relevant sectors of society. (University of Colombo Handbook, 2007)

### **Geographical location**

The University of Colombo, being a metropolitan university, is constantly influenced by the urban culture. Its six faculties are situated in three locations in Colombo.

## ***University of Jaffna***

### ***Establishment***

Established on 1 August 1974 as the sixth campus of the University of Sri Lanka, it received autonomous status as the University of Jaffna on 1 January 1979. According to the website of the university, a full-fledged university has been a long- felt need by the people of Jaffna:

The establishment of a full-fledged University in Jaffna had been a long standing aspiration of the people of Jaffna. This was fulfilled when a campus of the University of Sri Lanka was established in 1974 by an order made by the Honourable Minister of Education.

With the implementation of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, and by Gazette notification dated December 22, 1978, the Jaffna Campus became an independent and autonomous University with the name University of Jaffna with effect from January 01, 1979.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, the campus had been limited to thirty acres of the then Parameshwar College founded by the veteran philanthropist, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and it consisted of three faculties by the time it gained its independent status in 1979. A brief account of the history of the university till 1979 is given below (Table 1.1).

### **Vision and Mission**

#### ***Vision***

Our vision is to be a leading centre of excellence in teaching, learning, research and scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/> retrieved on 11.03.2008.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/> retrieved on 12.03.2008.

### ***Mission***

Our mission is to be a leading centre of academic excellence in producing intellectual, professionally competent and capable graduates by providing quality teaching, learning, and by carrying out research to meet the emerging needs of the national and international community with special emphasis on the social, economical and cultural needs of Northern Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.1: A brief account of the history of the University of Jaffna**

1975	The Faculty of Humanities was renamed the Faculty of Arts and the number of Departments increased to ten.
October 1975	The Faculty of Science commenced offering courses in Biological and Physical Sciences with five Departments of study, namely Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics and Statistics, Physics and Zoology.
01 December 1975	The administration of the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts was brought under the administration of the Jaffna Campus and started functioning as a unit under the Department of Fine Arts.
June 1978	The Faculty of Science was shifted to Thirunelvely premises.
07 August 1978	The Faculty of Medicine was established at Kaithady in the building of the Ayurvedic Hospital at Kaithady. Jaffna General Hospital was elevated to a teaching hospital.
01 January 1979	The Jaffna Campus became an independent and Autonomous University bearing the name <i>University of Jaffna</i> .

Source: website, *The University of Jaffna*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/> retrieved on 12.03.2008.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/> retrieved on 11.03.2008.

## **Geographical location**

The University of Jaffna is situated in Thirunelvely, about 4 km away from Jaffna town. From a small beginning in the thirty-acre campus of the then Parameswara College premises, the university has grown enormously and is today the home of eight faculties with fifty-seven academic departments, several service/academic/support units and centres and a campus at Vavuniya, about 130 km from Jaffna. A few more faculties, departments and centres are scheduled for development and will, in time, further open the university to the public and increase its role, responsibilities and commitments to the region around it.

## ***Sabaragamuwa University***

### ***Establishment***

Sabaragamuwa University had been promoted from Affiliated University status to the National level and is a recently established (7 November 1995) regional university located in a small suburban town. This university has five faculties, all of which have English medium instruction.

The affiliated Universities in Sri Lanka were a new concept for the country at that time. The primary objective behind introducing such a facility to the Island had been to give a chance for higher education to students in the periphery with no opportunity to enter mainstream Universities. It was also meant to provide the less privileged people and institutions in distant corners of the country with higher education, thereby making [sic] the contribution made by them to national development.<sup>1</sup>

The Affiliated University Colleges (AUC) were established with the intention of giving an option to the students who could not enter the mainstream universities by falling 2–3 marks short in the Advanced level examination to either (a) seek employment with a university diploma or (b) seek further education immediately after the diploma up to a degree and later even for higher qualifications (Wijesekara, 2000, p. 5). But this failed and, as a result, the AUC were built up into full-fledged universities. Yet the basic concept of providing job-oriented courses has been adhered to. Recently the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages has introduced Sinhala medium instruction only for the students in the second year (in the first year English medium instruction is compulsory) as an option for the students who find it difficult to cope with English medium instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sab.ac.lk/indextt.htm> retrieved on 28.2.2008.