

STRENGTHENING OF FORMAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SRI LANKA THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

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Education is one of the important determinants of economic performance. Sri Lanka enjoys a remarkable status, in terms of basic education indicators. However, the present education system faces several major challenges. One of the methods to overcome these challenges in formal education is to use non-formal educational programs and activities. Using non-formal educational activities in parallel with the formal education system will accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals in the education sector in Sri Lanka.

Various methods have become popular in recent years in order to endow individuals with sustainable development in education. One of these methods is field tours to science institutes. Throughout the world, and for many decades, science institutions such as Science Centers, Museums, Planetariums, and Zoological gardens have collaborated with schools to provide professional development support for teachers as well as students. These tours open a new window for teachers and students of the school for conceptual understanding in Science and Technology.

Many school managements promote visits to the Arthur C Clarke Institute for Modern Technologies (ACCIMT) and this paper discusses the adaptation of effective steps which have been practiced from 2015, to improve the non-formal educational programs which cater to visitors in the field of Modern Science and Technology providing hands-on experience. Visitors are basically from three groups which are primary and secondary school children, science teachers, and visitors representing the military. Solar observations through the telescope with different filters and demonstration sessions using the largest telescope in Sri Lanka which has a 45 cm mirror size is the most attractive practical session for the visitors. The lecture materials of the introductory session of the program are based on government textbooks and new techniques and future trends given in reputed websites, media reports, information brochures etc. The flow of the lecture materials and presentations are initiated from known theories in the classroom and finally focus on the future trends and developments in the world. The program has revised continuously from 2015 based on analysis of gathered questionnaire, interviews and feedback from educational specialists, school teacher and students. Rapid improvement of the number of visitors to the ACCIMT in 2017 indicates the success of the adapted steps taken to improve the non-formal activities from 2015.

Apart from this program, the annual donation of a reflector type telescope to the school program from our own financial support was initiated in order to enhance the non-formal activities. This will give the opportunity to share with other colleges who have gained through hands-on experience during our programs. The first program was conducted at the Piliyandala Central College, in commemoration of Sir Arthur C Clarke's death anniversary on 19th March 2018.

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