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An exploration of the challenges of sustainable and effective professional development for English as second language teachers in Sri Lanka

Sudharmo Rohini Gajadeera

University of Wollongong

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE AND EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN SRI LANKA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

FROM

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Faculty of Education

BY

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2006
University of Wollongong
Australia
2006

Declaration by Candidate

I declare that this thesis
“An exploration of the challenges of sustainable and effective professional development for English as second language teachers in Sri Lanka”, is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education degree, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia. I also certify that this is my original work unless otherwise refereed or acknowledged and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Signed:………………………………Sudharma Rohini Gajadeera Wickramasuriya

Date:………………………………
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved
Father Don Martin De Silva Wickramasuriya,
Mother Nanda Somalatha Wickramasuriya
for the enormous sacrifices made
to offer me a bright future

&

Daughters, Hasini Udara and
Gayasri Kesara Gajadeera
being the pillars of strength in achieving my goals

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Last, but not least, I am deeply indebted to my family for their patience, continuous dedication and unconditional love shared at much needed times of distress. My heartfelt appreciation to my beloved husband Ananda Attanayake and my wonderful daughters Hasini Udara, Gayasri Keasra as well as my son-in-law Dhammika Hikkaduwa for being the strength and driving forces, in my fulfilment of this endeavour.
ABSTRACT

This study explores challenges of sustainable and effective professional development for English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in Sri Lanka. It aims to critically examine how the existing English teacher education system as a whole responds to the wider context of the crisis of sustainability in the quality of teaching and learning. It further aims to investigate perceptions of various stakeholders regarding issues, concerns and constraints of ESL teachers in order to explore approaches, strategies and changes needed to enhance effective and sustainable English teacher education within the system.

In order to capture the complexity of the education system as a whole, ‘Systems Thinking’ paradigm has been adopted. It views the organizational behaviour and its respective environment as a complex whole of interrelating, interdependent parts rather than fragmented entities, which go beyond simple cause and effect relationships. A qualitative research approach has been used to investigate the experiences, opinions, presuppositions, and interpretations of stakeholders in this complex context. The multiple case studies conducted via fifty-seven informants represent the whole education system namely at the higher, middle and classroom management levels. The methods of data collection encompass focus groups, semi structured interviews and analysis of documents. Six key themes emerged from the analysis of data, namely policy and reforms; administration and management; implementation; structure; curriculum development; and working environment and resources. The research findings reveal the necessity for well-documented policies for English teacher education and the need for systemic management and administration with a shared vision, collaboration and personal mastery to establish tri-level development and effective networks. The lack of sufficient resources is found to be a key challenge in promoting sustainable and effective professional development practices island-wide. These findings are also the bases for recommendations and further research to cater for the socio-economic-political and global demands of post-colonial Sri Lanka.
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