



**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT
IN
LANGUAGE STUDIES**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council
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FOREWORD

The work in connection with the development of Subject Benchmark Statements was begun in August 2003 as a part of the overall quality assurance framework that supports academic standards and the furtherance and dissemination of good practice in Universities in Sri Lanka. Subject Benchmark Statements will support and promote quality and standards by:

- Providing universities with a common and explicit reference point for internal and external programme approval and review;
- Guiding and promoting curriculum development, especially in new departments and new universities, and in other institutions of higher education;
- Evolving over time to take account of changes and innovations that reflect subject development and new expectations;
- Providing an authoritative and widely recognized statement of expectations of what is expected of a graduate in a specific (or designated) subject area in a form readily accessible to students, employers and others with a stake in higher education;
- Providing a clear and transparent reference point for External Examiners;
- Assisting international comparison and competitiveness of higher education awards and student achievement.

SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT

LANGUAGE STUDIES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Subject Benchmark Statement- Scope and Purposes

This subject benchmark statement focuses on the attributes of first degree with honors in languages. Many degrees in languages are offered as single honors programs but this is no longer the prevailing model as a single language can be offered in general degree programs as well. In Sri Lankan university education language studies are becoming more and more popular. One language could be offered in conjunction with other languages or with other disciplines, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Many programs now recognize the capacity of competence in a foreign language to enhance the career and employment prospects of their graduates. In Sri Lanka, among the undergraduates, demand for languages, especially modern languages such as French, German, Chinese, Korean and Japanese has been rising and, as a result some of the national universities are providing new courses or course units to meet this demand.

Departments and institutes of higher education may draw upon this *statement* differentially depending on whether they are offering a single honors degree, a general degree or a certificate. General or Honors degree programs will include the name of the target language or languages in their title, but there are also other degree programs, and course units, where the focus is on languages but where the title of the program makes no explicit reference to languages. For example, honors degree programs in Sinhala and Tamil may require the students to take courses in Sanskrit or another Indian language and the students offering English for an Honors degree may need to study French, German or another modern language. Language studies are interdisciplinary by nature and they have the potential to become interdisciplinary as well.

In the preparation of this statement, the benchmark group was conscious of the need to emphasize the breadth and diversity of the subject area. The subject covers both classical and modern languages of the world. However in the preparation of this statement, only the foreign languages offered by the Sri Lankan universities have been taken into consideration. The national languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English have not been focused on, as separate bench mark statements will be issued on them.

Defining principles and level of teaching:

Undergraduate study of languages is concerned with the development of competence in one or more foreign languages and with the in-depth understanding of another culture, or cultures through the medium of the target language[s] concerned. In general, instruction will be given in the target language. However, official medium of instruction in each university may be used at the initial stage of instruction, or in teaching classical languages such as Pali, Sanskrit and Prakrit etc.

which are not spoken. The intercultural nature is the inherent, key characteristics of the subject.

This nature of the discipline helps learn the aspects of one's own culture. Thus language teaching should focus on equipping the learners with oral and written communication skills as well as cultural awareness to communicate with the native speakers in everyday life and be part of the global community.

The benchmark statement seeks to identify some of the components that are common to all language study programs as the subject range is extensive. Some of the common components are:

- The focus on the acquisition of competence in the target language;
- Wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills- subject specific and generic;
- Studies related to the culture and society of language studied;
- The focus on the fluency in speaking the language studied.

The study of languages encompasses the following complementary dimensions:

- Languages are a medium of understanding , expression and communication;
- An object of study in their own right;
- A gateway to related thematic studies such as knowledge of the cultures, communities and societies;
- A means of access to intercultural awareness and understanding.

All programs in language studies may attempt to access and integrate these aspects.

Level of Teaching

The study of a language involves the practical competence in the use of that language. Practical competence in a particular language may focus on the main skills of reception such as listening and understanding, speaking and writing, interpreting and translating. The nature of language study requires interaction with small groups and native speakers. Further, it needs advanced educational technology such as language laboratories, multi-media and other computing facilities. Residence abroad i.e. in countries where the target languages are spoken would be an advantage for mastering a foreign language. This may be implemented through academic exchange programs, vacation work, teaching assistantships or travel grants.

The study of a language comprises learning the basic structure of the language itself and the social, historical and cultural contexts in which it has been developed and used. The curriculum will include lessons on the script, alphabet, vocabulary, syntax and other linguistic as well as literary aspects. Language courses leading to honors degrees will concentrate on skills in both written and spoken language. The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of language studies is reflected in the study of language that permits access to various bodies of knowledge and methodological approaches. To achieve these objectives, focus will be mainly on the literature and society of the target language. Methodological approaches and techniques gained through other disciplines may be used by students working in these areas. Students of languages can study subjects such as history, geography, sociology etc. and primary and secondary source material in the target language to

achieve the expected knowledge. It is believed that the in-depth knowledge of a language enhances students' understanding of a broad and varied range of subjects, disciplines and areas of study.

1.2 Nature and Extent

The study of foreign /modern languages enables students to understand and participate in the society and culture whose language they study and to live and work within different linguistic and cultural contexts. Language students will be the ambassadors for their own society in foreign countries and societies. Through comparative studies they can promote intercultural understanding and bring in diverse benefits to their countries. Further, through study of a foreign language and translating from and into that language they can develop and enrich their own literature.

In the study of languages, the use of native speakers of the relevant language as instructors is highly desirable. In the absence of such native speakers, persons who have had the exposure to the society where that language is spoken and adequate qualification as language teachers should be employed. The nature of thematic studies is also extremely diverse in languages. Course units may be designed on the literature both classical and modern, history of the language and literature and folklore and folk culture in the society of the target language. In order to gain enhanced understanding of the social and cultural attributes of the language, students should be encouraged to learn some other subjects such as history, philosophy, religion, sociology and anthropology etc. Departments may consider designing new course units for studying the relevance of the target language in subjects such as science, agriculture, business, commerce, management and law. Such varied and interdisciplinary courses will expand the range of transferable graduate skills.

Academic location of the subject may be changed according to the nature of the curriculum and the needs of the society and the institution. Traditionally languages were taught as single subjects in separate departments. However, there's a tendency now to teach several languages under one department under the name of Department of Modern Languages and the Department of Classical Languages. This may be a satisfactory arrangement depending on the number of students offering languages. At present, in the universities of Sri Lanka, the number of students offering classical languages seem to be small. Further there may be the insufficiency in cadre for qualified teachers for some of the languages. Modern languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean are sometimes taught by visiting faculty who may not be having permanent interests in developing the subject. Therefore it is advisable that the universities train a sufficient number of teachers for modern languages such as French, German, Japanese and Korean etc.

Scope of Employment of Learners

Graduates in language studies stand equal chances with the graduates in other subjects in humanities with regard to the scope of employment. Most graduates with Honors degrees find no difficulties in finding jobs in the state sector as well as the private sector. With the rising demand for language studies in schools, language graduates will find it easy to become teachers in government schools as well as in

private international schools. Graduates of modern languages such as French, German, Japanese, Spanish, and Chinese etc. can compete successfully with other graduates for jobs in foreign embassies. Most countries in the world, when they offer scholarships, fellowships and research grants require the applicants to have competence in the languages of their respective countries. Even the graduates of classical languages such as Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Pali etc. will find it easy to compete for jobs and scholarships. Prospects of self employment too are very high for the graduates of languages. They can, if they so choose, become journalists and translators. There is a growing demand for translators in the world today, especially in the European Union. Further, language graduates may find good job opportunities in libraries and publishing companies. More adventurous and independent minded language graduates will find it challenging and profitable to find employment in the tourism industry.

2. SUBJECT AIMS

- Learning a language or languages from beginning to the Honors degree level.
- Studying a language as a medium of understanding, expression and communication.
- Introduction to Language, Culture and Linguistics to all study programmes in the initial stage for all General and Special Degree courses to create awareness of the structure of language, unique and universal features of language, and the importance of understanding the culture and society to be competent in the target language.
- Acquisition of practical experience in language/languages.
- Learning foreign languages is a unique challenge aimed at acquiring knowledge of a new world.
- Studying a foreign language involves knowledge and understanding of the structure of that language.
- Acquiring a sound knowledge of the history and evolution of the language.
- Acquiring critical and comparative knowledge of the literature of that language.
- Training in reading/deciphering the script of a language, if it has a unique script.
- Training students to participate in the society and culture whose language they study.
- Understanding the language as the most important medium of communication and its efficacy in maintaining peace and harmony in the world
- Gaining competence and skills in both spoken and written languages
- Acquiring sound knowledge in the writing, reading and understanding scholarly books, articles etc. in the target language.
- Developing ability to share the cultural experience of the native speakers of the target language
- Language departments will aim to teach, instruct and train the students to acquire in-depth knowledge in the language/languages they offer leading to the Special/ Honors degree, and to equip them with experience and competence to undertake research in the communities or societies where those languages are spoken.

3. SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

The following four key elements typify the knowledge and understanding outcomes of the programs in language studies:

- Use of the target language for purposes of understanding, expression and communication. All language departments aspire to teach languages as media for understanding, expression and communication. The effective use of the target language needs an extensive knowledge and understanding of the cultures and societies where the language is spoken. Language courses seek to maintain a balance of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Explicit knowledge of language: This involves the study of linguistic structures in the context of specific language uses. Further it involves sufficient knowledge of language structure to enable students to observe the norms of sophisticated written language and some awareness of linguistic systems and at a more specialized level, synchronic and diachronic dimensions of language will be studied.
- Knowledge of aspects of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used: Students will be trained to gain access to primary and secondary source material in the target language for this purpose. The students of language studies will explore a variety of approaches to the cultures, communities and societies. The range of these approaches will cover almost all the disciplines in humanities and social sciences.
- Intercultural awareness and understanding: The students of languages will gain the knowledge and ability to compare the world-view of their own languages with the world-view of the languages and cultures they have acquired. The analytical skills they develop will help them compare, contrast and mediate between the two societies they are familiar with. The lived experience of time spent abroad as part of curriculum [if available to students] will further enhance the sense of self and other as products of particular language communities.

4. SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

4.1. Generic Skills

Generic skills of graduates of language studies will fall typically into three categories:

- Predominantly cognitive skills
- Predominantly practical skills
- Interpersonal skills and other personal attributes.

4.2. Subject Specific Skills

Graduates of language studies will have developed a wide range of skills which will be valuable in a number of careers. A period of residence abroad or interaction with the native speakers of the target language will be crucial in developing and enhancing these skills.

The range of subject skills will typically fall into the following four areas;

- **Language skills:** Gaining general knowledge in reading, writing, listening and understanding and speaking a foreign language is the objectives in any language program. Language departments endeavor to enable students to develop such skills as appropriate to the target language and the learning outcomes of the program. The advanced productive skills of writing and speaking in the target language both require knowledge of the grammatical, discourse and pragmatic conventions which govern language use and of the societal factors which make language use effective.
- **Language related skills:** Development of appropriate linguistic tools and meta language to describe and analyze the main features of the language studied. Ability to make effective use of language reference materials to refine knowledge and understanding of register, nuances of meaning and language use. They will be self-aware independent language learners. Their skills might extend from strategies for learning vocabulary to awareness of learning style and the identification of appropriate learning opportunities.
- **Subject related skills:** Subject-related skills are developed through the study of both the language and the related thematic areas. These may relate to the countries or regions in which the target language is used. Students will be guided to be familiar with the literature, culture, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography and social or economic structures of those countries or regions. Study of these will be helpful in developing analytical, critical and specialist skills drawn from the relevant discipline areas. Further, the opportunity to study discipline-specific content in the target language will represent a unique contribution to the students' learning experience.
- **Intercultural awareness:** All students of language studies will have developed sensitivity to and awareness of the similarities and dissimilarities between other cultures and societies and their own. Through their knowledge in the target language they will be able to appreciate the diversity and inter-relatedness of cultures and an attitude and openness towards other cultures.
Following are some of the main skills and attitudes:
 - A critical understanding of a culture and practices other than their own;
 - An appreciation of the uniqueness of other cultures;
 - An ability to explain the contribution that the culture has made at a regional and global level;
 - An ability to appreciate and evaluate one's own culture.

4.3 Attitudes

The students of language studies will develop free, independent, sensitive and generous attitudes towards society and fellow human beings in general and towards life in particular. Through their understanding of and sensitivity towards other cultures, they will develop unique attitudes towards the day-to-day problems in society as well as towards more serious problems in the world. The languages students will be able to understand more deeply and sympathetically the problems, difficulties and suffering of others in their own countries as well as in other

countries. Through competence in foreign languages they will acquire the ability to share the genuine feelings of the speakers of their target language/s. Thus the students of language studies develop far-reaching, generous, genuine, tolerant and humane attitudes. Through constant contact with speakers of foreign languages and knowledge of their cultures, students of language studies, can acquire, in addition to ethical attributes, proactive attitudes which will enrich their characters as team players and resourceful citizens.

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Characteristics of language study

Methods/ strategies in language teaching and learning will vary depending on:

- The students' starting point
- The nature of the language studied

Language learning at all levels is intensive, in terms both of teaching- contact hours and learning resources. Language learning, especially modern spoken languages, involves regular and extended contact with competent users of the language. The use of the target language is a gateway to the study of the societies and cultures in which the target language is used.

Teaching and learning strategies

Development of competence in the target language

- Use of authentic material: use of authentic material in the target language as early as possible. This may include written texts, in a variety of styles and registers. In the case of modern spoken languages it also includes interaction with native speakers both directly and through radio, CDs and DVDs etc. Further students may be guided to make use of electronic media and the internet,
- Focus on demonstrating competence in both spoken and written skills.
- Learning formal grammar taught by qualified instructors and through use of IT resources.
- For reinforcing knowledge gained in class room teaching, additional use of a variety of modern language-learning resources.
- Study of literary and other texts and, encouraging students to interact with native speakers; attend drama and films in the target language.
- Delivery of the courses in the target language itself as much as possible.
- Formative assessment of written assignments, tests, exercises etc. with feedback on grammar and stylistic errors.

Teaching and Learning strategies which language studies have in common with other disciplines in humanities:

- Directed study of primary and secondary texts and other cultural products
- Commentaries on extracts from texts or documents
- Data collection and evaluation
- Written and oral presentation of the individual research –findings
- Pair and group work in the preparation of presentations
- Seminars for group discussions
- Creative writing or creative productions such as drama
- Supervised independent study leading to the final year dissertation

6. ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Assessment Methods

Broadening of mental horizons which the programs in language studies aim to foster involve a multiplicity of knowledge, skills and understanding, not all of which will necessarily be explicitly assessed.

Assessment of language competence:

Regular and detailed formative assessment is an essential element in language learning. Assessment is necessary for teachers and learners alike to monitor progress at every stage in the learning process. A wide variety of types of assessment covering the range of coursework, examinations and peer and self-assessment is available to the instructors in languages.

Assessment of skills in the target language can be made through a range of methods:

- Receptive skills [listening and reading]
- Productive skills [speaking and writing]
- Mediation skills [translating and interpreting]

These may be tested by one or more of the following forms of assessment:

- Oral presentations
- Participation in structured oral discussion
- Listening comprehension tests
- Transcription and dictation
- Grammar tests
- Summarizing and paraphrasing
- Essay or projects written in the target language
- Report writing based on target language texts or recordings
- Portfolios of evidence, participation in individual and/or group projects

7. MAINTAINING STANDARDS

In Sri Lanka a range of languages may be studied at different levels leading to either General Degree or Special Degree. Some universities and institutes of Higher Education may offer Elective, Certificate or Diploma courses in languages. The following statements of standards apply principally to degree programs in languages:

- Comprises at least one third of the total study load;
- Is undertaken consecutively in all years of the program;
- Is recognized in the name of the award.

Program objectives, method of assessment and learning outcomes will be determined according to:

- The nature of focus of the degree program i.e. General or Special
- The student's starting point; the nature of the language/s studied
- The purpose for which the language is being studied,

And will be set out in the individual program specification.

Some conventional but well established methods of maintenance of standards such as second marking of test papers by an external examiner and the presence of an

expert/external examiner or a native speaker when available, at the oral tests too may be adopted by the departments of languages.

8. STUDENTS ATTAINMENT AND BENCHMARK LEVEL

Student attainment is the achievement graded from the minimum acceptable knowledge and skill level in the discipline of language studies specified in this statement [Threshold Level] to an excellent performance where graduates have demonstrated range of competencies and skills at an enhanced level [Good Level]

The Benchmark Levels proposed below are for both Honors [Special degree] and General Degree in language studies. Graduates in the discipline of languages will be expected to:

| Threshold Level | Good Level |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve communication skills in the target language[s] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate fluently and appropriately, maintaining grammatical accuracy in the target language |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be able to understand materials written or spoken in the target language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be able to understand for a variety of purposes and, as appropriate to contextualize a broad range of materials in the target language |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be able to use their language skills in a professional context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be able to apply effectively their language skills in a professional context |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the structures, registers and, as appropriate, varieties of the target language[s] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the structures, registers and, as appropriate, varieties of the target language |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the linguistic principles of the target language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the linguistic principles required to analyze the target language. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate knowledge of the cultures of the country of the target language[s]. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate a broad knowledge and a critical understanding of the cultures and societies of the country or countries of the target language[s]. |

Note:

The following terminology for the assessment for Attainment level and Benchmark skills recommended by the Common European Framework for References [CEFR] , which is the accepted Benchmark standard for language teaching and learning today too may be considered;

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Basic User | A1- Breakthrough A2- Waystage |
| Independent User | B1= Threshold B2 – Vantage |
| Proficient User | C1 – Effective Operational proficiency C2 – Mastery |
| Certificate and Elective courses | – A1/A2 |
| General Degree | = B2 at exit point |
| Special Degree | - C2 |

9. ANNEX1. MEMBERS OF THE BENCHMARK GROUP

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Prof. Udaya Meddegama | University of Peradeniya |
| Dr. W. M. S. K. Wijesundara | University of Peradeniya |
| Dr. Saman Chandra Ranasinghe | University of Sri Jayewardenepura |
| Mr. M. T. M. Rizvi | Eastern University of SL |
| Ms. Ruby Valentine Francis | Eastern University of SL |
| Mr. M. Ravi | Eastern University of SL |
| Dr. Hemantha Sirisena | University of Kelaniya |
| Prof. Upul Ranjith Hewawitanagamage | University of Kelaniya |
| Dr. Neelakshi C. Premawardhana | University of Kelaniya |
| Mr. M. S. M. Jalaldeen | South Eastern University of SL |