

# Chapter 10

## A SoTL Journey in Sri Lankan Higher Education: My Academic Journey Towards SoTL

**Vindya Perera**

*Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter underscores the transformative potential of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in addressing challenges within Sri Lankan higher education. It draws on the experiences of a senior lecturer in Microbiology at Sabaragamuwa University. The lecturer's commitment to SoTL, driven by a dedication to improving teaching and learning in a resource-limited setting, has led to significant professional development. Engagement in professional workshops and conferences ensures that teaching practices remain current. Innovative approaches, such as incorporating technology and employing online lectures and formative assessments, have enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. Promoting student-centered learning and harnessing AI tools like ChatGPT for personalized education have further enriched the educational experience. Reflective practice has been pivotal in fostering transformative changes. The lecturer's SoTL initiatives have influenced educational practices, demonstrating the importance and potential benefits of SoTL in advancing higher education in Sri Lanka.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Lifelong learning, the ultimate aim of university teaching, encapsulates not only the acquisition of knowledge but also embodies the diverse array of graduate attributes essential for success in the modern world,” as articulated by Biggs et al. (2022), this statement underscores the profound significance of lifelong learning as the overarching goal of higher education, intertwining with and encompassing various attributes that are fundamental to the holistic development of graduates. In this context, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) emerges as a fundamental mechanism for promoting and nurturing lifelong learning within the higher education landscape. Since Boyer’s (1990) introduction of the Scholarship of Teaching, the practice of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has evolved into a well-established field in many educational institutions. SoTL adopts a systematic, research-driven approach that enables educators to critically examine their teaching methods with the aim of enhancing

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student learning. Teacher engagement in SoTL improves student learning outcomes, course experiences, and satisfaction, while promoting innovative, student-centered teaching strategies (Brew & Ginns, 2008). By actively participating in SoTL, educators contribute to the development of essential graduate attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills, adaptability, and resilience.

In academic contexts, educators assume various roles to fulfill both teaching and administrative responsibilities. Within the SoTL framework, these roles can be understood through frameworks like Harden and Crosby's Twelve Roles of a Teacher. Although originally designed for medical educators, these roles apply broadly across disciplines, including being an information provider, a role model, a mentor, a learning facilitator, an assessor, a curriculum planner, and an evaluator.

As a senior lecturer in the Department of Microbiology at the Faculty of Medicine, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL), my academic journey began after earning a Bachelor of Veterinary Science and working as a veterinary surgeon. I transitioned to academia in 2011, starting as a lecturer at the University of Peradeniya and later becoming a lecturer and coordinator at the South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine in 2012. I pursued my PhD at the University of Colombo in 2015 and, after completing it in 2022, took on the role of Head of the Department of Microbiology at SUSL.

In addition to ongoing professional development through workshops and conferences, I serve as Secretary of the Sri Lankan Society for Microbiology, where I organize academic events. In my roles as Secretary of the Medical Education Unit and Coordinator of the Faculty Quality Assurance Unit, I collaborate with other academics to improve teaching, learning, and administrative skills. Central to these efforts is the SoTL approach, which addresses challenges in higher education by promoting evidence-based practices and continuous pedagogical improvement. In the Sri Lankan context, academics like myself apply SoTL-informed strategies to improve teaching quality, foster professional development, and support institutional growth. This chapter provides a brief overview of my journey in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a higher educationist in Sri Lanka. It explores the application of SoTL in Sri Lankan higher education through several case studies, focusing on key objectives: to examine SoTL's impact on pedagogy, present examples of its practical implementation, and reflect on the lessons learned from these initiatives.

## **My Journey as a SoTL Practitioner**

As Aspin et al. (2012) stated, *“We are now living in a new age in which the demands are so complex, so multifarious and so rapidly changing that the only way in which we shall be able to survive them is by committing to a process of individual, communal, and global learning throughout the lifespan of all of us.”* As societal demands continue to evolve, higher educationists must remain updated and equipped with the up-to-date knowledge and skills to effectively prepare our students for these demands. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) emerges as a crucial aspect of academic life, enabling educators to investigate emerging demands, identify challenges, enhance pedagogical practices, devise solutions and share insights within the academic community. Providing quality education with limited resources in both human and physical resources is one major constraint the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. The problem remained a chronic issue for years (Dundar et al., 2017).

As a teacher in Microbiology with over 10 years of experience, my journey into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has been deeply intertwined with my professional background and academic pursuits. While my academic roots lie in Microbiology, my passion for teaching and academia led me down the path of higher education.

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