CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL POLICY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS: A DESIGN APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Constructing policies that serve future generations requires approaches that are not only inclusive and forward-thinking but also grounded in the lived realities of their primary users, in this case, children. In 2023, the National Consortium for Children's Books (NCCB) was established in Sri Lanka to address challenges in the children's literature sector and fulfil national educational objectives. A central goal was the development of the National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB). This paper discusses the collaborative, design-driven approach utilized in formulating NPCB content, highlighting the innovative integration of design thinking into national policymaking. The process, structured through five iterative action research cycles, employed convergent and divergent thinking to identify systemic gaps, redefine stakeholder roles, and introduce specialized professional titles, such as 'Art Director', 'Creative Consultant', and 'Editor'. Ultimately, a unified publishing framework was crafted, specifically tailored to Sri Lanka's unique socio-cultural context, integrating fields like marketing, child psychology, design, and law to elevate the quality of children's books. One major outcome was the identification of essential policy content, articulated under eight goals that encapsulate the principles and values guiding the creation and distribution of children's books. This study illustrates the transformative potential of integrated design approaches within policymaking, providing a replicable model for similar global contexts. With the public review of NPCB launched in September 2024, this initiative represents a significant milestone in embedding design into the development of national policy frameworks towards a sustainable future.

Keywords: Action Research; Children's Books; Design Thinking; Policy Development; Publishing Ecosystem

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing national policies, performing research, and creating detailed guidelines are essential for enabling developing countries to address developmental challenges—such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education according to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and United Nations Children's Fund (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009; Wagner, 2014; World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). However, sustainability often eludes these initiatives due to fragmented approaches within national book ecosystems (Altbach, 1993; Garzon, 2005; Jacobs, 1998; Hallewell, 1992). Countries like Sri Lanka face significant economic

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constraints that hinder the establishment and growth of robust publishing industries, which are further exacerbated by a limited market size, underdeveloped commercial infrastructure, and linguistic diversity (Garzon, 2005). Sri Lanka's challenges reflect broader trends in the Global South. For instance, South Africa experienced brief periods of publishing growth in the mid-20th century but did not achieve sustained success. Similarly, in Brazil, figures such as Juracy Feitosa Rocha attempted systemic change (Altbach, 1993), yet such initiatives often remained isolated. Economic instability, insufficient state planning, and inadequate cultural production channels consistently obstruct sustainable publishing industry development (Garzon, 2005).

Despite its adult literacy rate of 92.4%, Sri Lanka's local publishing industry faces compounded challenges, including inconsistent and fragmented policy efforts. As a developing country ranked 73rd on the Human Development Index, Sri Lanka also faces significant economic constraints (Knoema, 2024) that hinder sustainable book publishing efforts, despite its adult literacy rate having steadily increased from 2001 to 2021. Historical initiatives, such as the establishment of the 'Book Trust' in the 1960s under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, failed to achieve their full potential and were eventually abolished by government authorities. Furthermore, UNESCO's global efforts between 1966 and 1972, through a series of regional meetings focused on book development, underscored the critical need for books—termed "book hunger", highlighting their importance for literacy and as essential tools for educational, scientific, technological, and socio-economic advancement. As a result, the meetings recommended the establishment of National Libraries among UNESCO member countries (Barker & Escarpit, 1973). Following these recommendations, the National Book Development Councils were established under the Ceylon National Library Services Board Act No. 17 of 1970 (Ceylon National Service Board Act, 1970). It was through this legislative framework that the National Library of Sri Lanka was later officially established on April 27, 1990. The Ceylon National Library Services Board was tasked with promoting library services and a reading culture across the country. Over time, this board evolved in function and structure. In 1970, it also facilitated the establishment of the Sri Lanka National Book Development Board, which focused specifically on promoting the publishing industry and book development. Later, through Act No. 51 of 1998 (National Library and Documentation Services Board Act, 1998), the original Ceylon National Library Services Board was restructured and renamed the National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB). The National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB), operating under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for developing and coordinating library services, documentation, and information management across Sri Lanka. Since 1984, the NLDSB has managed the Publication Assistance Project, aiming to support authors and enhance the quality of local publications (National Library of Sri Lanka, n.d.). Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka National Book Development Board was re-established in 2018, aiming to revive and consolidate efforts to support national book development, publishing standards, and stakeholder coordination. However, in 2022, the Sri Lankan government formally dissolved the National Book Development Council, citing concerns over its performance and aligning the decision with a broader national agenda to streamline and restructure state institutions, following a cabinet directive (Ministry of Education, 2022). This move reflected persistent political challenges in maintaining a cohesive and sustainable national book development policy framework.

Despite these structural shifts, Sri Lanka has witnessed consistent yet isolated progress in publishing-related efforts. Notable contributions have come from the National Library of Sri Lanka, which has published several guidelines and handbooks. Among these include the handbook titled *"Methodology of Children's Book Composition: A Pilot's Guide to the Layout of the Front Pages, Table of Contents, and Back Pages of a Children's Book"* (Gunathilake & Bopitiya, 2018). Another key initiative was a national research project conducted in collaboration with the School Library Development Branch of the Ministry of Education, titled *"Evaluation of Children's Literature"* (Ministry of Education, 2019). These efforts highlight the relevance of individual stakeholder contributions, although they often function in silos without coordinated alignment.

Similarly, Room to Read – Sri Lanka, an international non-governmental organization (INGO) working in partnership with the Ministry of Education, has made significant contributions to children's literacy through its extensive programmes. These include the publication of high-quality children's books and capacity-building workshops for local writers and illustrators (Room to Read, 2014). However, due to INGO regulations, these books are not commercially sold, resulting in limited distribution and access. In higher education, institutions such as the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) at the University of Colombo, and the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Kelaniya, continue to offer Library Science education that emphasizes the importance of reading, literature, and information management (University of Colombo, n.d.; University of Kelaniya, n.d.). Additionally, the University of Moratuwa offers a studio-based project on book and editorial design as part of its Bachelor of Design Degree Programme at the Department of Integrated Design, within the Media and Communication Design specialization stream (University of Moratuwa, n.d.). While undergraduates frequently develop book concepts and design prototypes, the transition to publication remains limited due to insufficient collaboration with the commercial publishing sector.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Book Publishers Association plays a critical role in sustaining the industry through book production and imports. It also organizes major public events, including Sri Lanka's largest book fairs in Colombo and Kandy, helping to promote reading and generate economic benefits for all member publishers (Sri Lanka Book Publishers Association, n.d.).

Despite these diverse and meaningful initiatives, the lack of integrated collaboration among key stakeholders of the private and public sectors responsible for creation, publishing, distribution, knowledge dissemination, and review continues to hinder the growth of a cohesive national publishing ecosystem. Most critically, these efforts often overlook the most important stakeholder: the child reader, whose needs and perspectives should be at the heart of every publishing initiative. Therefore, the aim of this research is to develop the content and structure of Sri Lanka's National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB) through a design-led, action research methodology, in order to address systemic fragmentation in the children's publishing ecosystem and create a sustainable, inclusive, and child-centred policy framework.

2.   BACKGROUND: NCCB AND THE DESIGN-DRIVEN POLICY APPROACH

In response to the recognized lack of collaboration within the Sri Lankan publishing industry, the National Consortium for Children's Books (NCCB) was established in 2023 with discussion that began in 2022 with the above-mentioned and many other members representing the children's book publishing ecosystem of Sri Lanka (Ministry of Education, 2022; National Consortium for Children's Books [NCCB], 2023). The NCCB is spearheaded by the Educational Publication Advisory Board of the Ministry of Education with Room to Read (RtR), Sri Lanka, which supports children's literature through extensive global experience. Leveraging their expertise and funding support, the NCCB incorporates key stakeholders from various institutions including the National Institute of Education (NIE), the National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB), the Primary Education Branch of the Ministry of Education, and members representing state universities involved in relation to the book publishing ecosystem- University of Colombo, University of Kelaniya University and University of Moratuwa.

The NCCB was established with the aim of enhancing the quality and global competitiveness of Sri Lanka's children's literature by addressing long-standing fragmentation in the sector. A central outcome of this collaborative effort was the formulation of the National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB), which focused on its most essential stakeholder: the child reader.

To formulate the required content for the National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB), it was essential to identify root causes and systemic gaps within the publishing ecosystem, while prioritizing the needs of child readers. To achieve this, the appointed Editor-in-Chief of the NPCB—who is also the author of this paper—collaborated in a series of workshops using both divergent and convergent thinking techniques. These workshops involved discussions, focus group activities, mapping exercises, and iterative content drafting. Initiated in July 2023, these activities are still ongoing. However, this paper focuses specifically on the process leading up to the public review of the NPCB, launched in September 2024 (National Consortium for Children's Books, 2024; Presidential Media Division, 2024; Onlanka News, 2024). Drawing on her background as a design educator and member of the NCCB, the Editor-in-Chief approaches the identification and development of policy content as a 'design problem.' Design is fundamentally understood as a problem-solving activity, encompassing cognitive processes such as creativity, iteration, and analogy (Meslec, Graff, & Clark, 2020; Wiltschnig, Christensen, & Ball, 2013). Accordingly, this paper frames the development of NPCB content as a response to an authentic human need, shaped through innovative, interdisciplinary, and adaptive design approaches. As Victor Papanek asserted in Design for the Real World, design must serve as a highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool capable of addressing genuine human needs effectively (Amir, 2004).

3.   METHODOLOGY: A DESIGN THINKING FRAMEWORK

Design emerges as a critical tool for bridging theory and practice (Holmström, Ketokivi, & Hameri, 2009; Nijhawan, 2017). Often described as both a verb and a noun, design encompasses the processes of planning, creating, and adapting means to achieve specific ends (Buchanan, 2001). This dual nature underscores design's problem-solving, creative,

and cognitive dimensions, making it an ideal approach for addressing systemic challenges in policy-making (Amir, 2004; Cross, 2001). In this study, the aim was to identify and develop policy content framed as a 'design problem' within the fragmented children's book publishing ecosystem, placing the child as the key stakeholder and end-user.

To solve the defined 'design problem'—which also served as the core research question—a series of three residential programmes and a pilot training initiative in children's book creation (focused on picture books) were conducted from July 2023 to August 2024. These initiatives began with a series of workshops aimed at identifying and defining the problem, followed by the development and delivery of practical solutions. The overall design application was implemented through five iterative action research cycles. Each cycle served a distinct purpose: (1) Identify and Review, (2) Formulate and Clarify, (3) Define, (4) Map, and (5) Establish (see Figure 1 for an overview of the five cycles of action research). These phases align with the foundational structure of action research—identifying a problem, planning, taking action, observing outcomes, and reflecting for improvement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). However, this research reframed those steps through a design thinking lens, aligning each cycle with the needs of the children's publishing ecosystem and the developmental focus of the policy.

4. THE ITERATIVE PROCESS OF THE FIVE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

The five action research cycles were conducted as iterative, participatory inquiries, each structured around the core phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cyclical framework allowed the research to remain responsive and grounded in stakeholder input.

4.1 CYCLE 01

Focused on identifying and reviewing existing content relevant to the development of the NPCB. This involved a literature review conducted by two working groups: Group 1 focused on the author, editor, and content development perspective, while Group 2 examined illustration and design aspects of children's books.

The outcome of this stage resulted in two distinct presentations. Group 1 systematically structured the content and outlined key aspects for inclusion in the policy, such as the definition of a child, book types and genres, social and cultural context, forms of editing, knowledge of literature, specifics related to Sri Lanka (including the Sinhala and Tamil communities), language use, and more. Meanwhile, Group 2 highlighted gaps in the literature on aspects like remuneration, illustration styles, the need for specialized editors focusing on visual and narrative elements, the necessity of a standardized or fair payment plan, agreements between publishers and authors, inclusivity of gender and culture, involvement of various stakeholders, and the requirements of children as the end users of the books (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023).

Overall, this stage identified a wide range of content to be included in the policy and recognized the undocumented nature of stakeholder roles and publishing practices in Sri Lanka's children's book ecosystem. This insightful discovery necessitated the next approach.
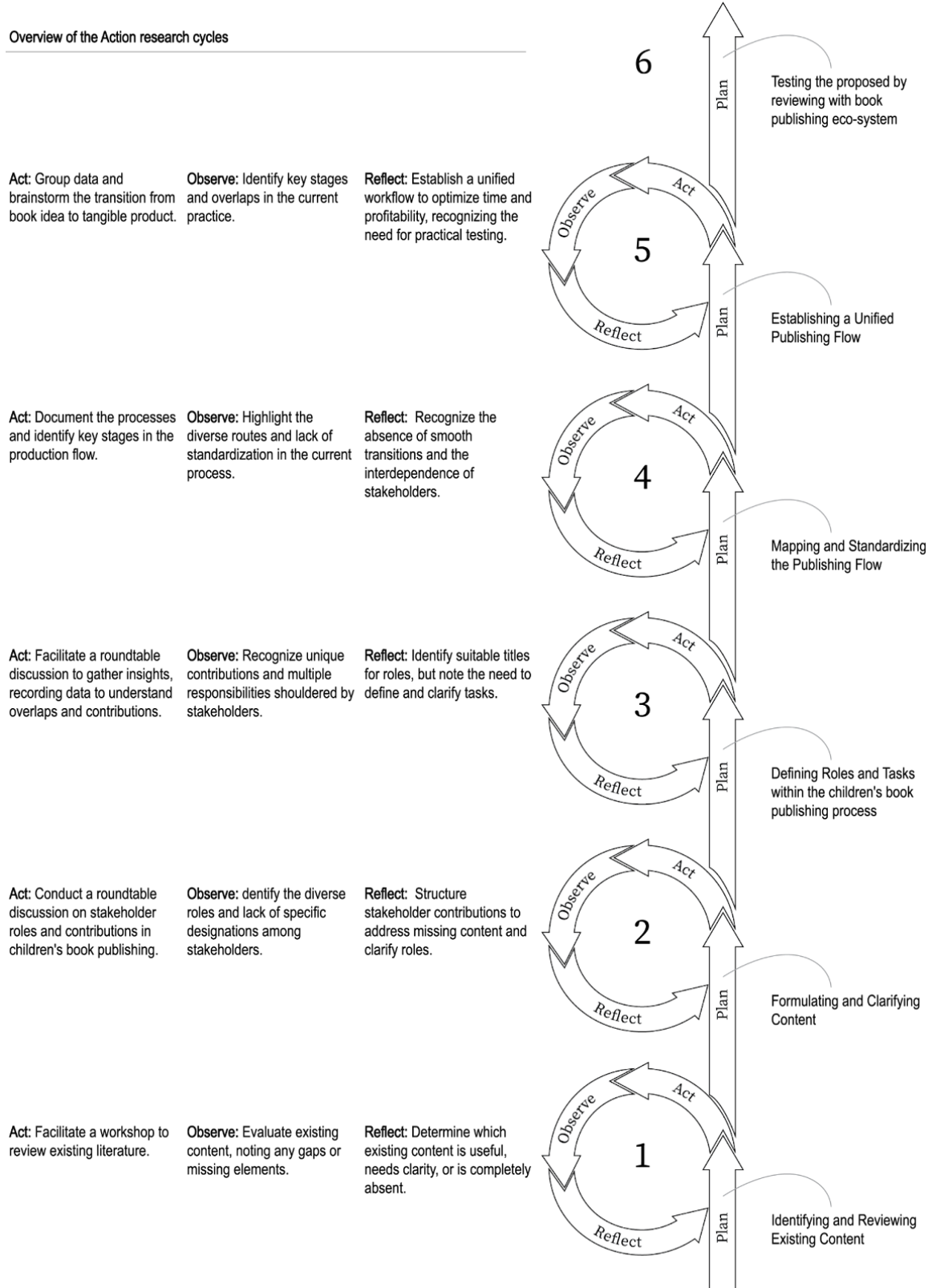
Overview of the Action research cycles

6

Plan

Testing the proposed by reviewing with book publishing eco-system

Act: Group data and brainstorm the transition from book idea to tangible product.

Observe: Identify key stages and overlaps in the current practice.

Reflect: Establish a unified workflow to optimize time and profitability, recognizing the need for practical testing.

Observe · Act · Reflect **5**

Plan

Establishing a Unified Publishing Flow

Act: Document the processes and identify key stages in the production flow.

Observe: Highlight the diverse routes and lack of standardization in the current process.

Reflect: Recognize the absence of smooth transitions and the interdependence of stakeholders.

Observe · Act · Reflect **4**

Plan

Mapping and Standardizing the Publishing Flow

Act: Facilitate a roundtable discussion to gather insights, recording data to understand overlaps and contributions.

Observe: Recognize unique contributions and multiple responsibilities shouldered by stakeholders.

Reflect: Identify suitable titles for roles, but note the need to define and clarify tasks.

Observe · Act · Reflect **3**

Plan

Defining Roles and Tasks within the children's book publishing process

Act: Conduct a roundtable discussion on stakeholder roles and contributions in children's book publishing.

Observe: dentify the diverse roles and lack of specific designations among stakeholders.

Reflect: Structure stakeholder contributions to address missing content and clarify roles.

Observe · Act · Reflect **2**

Plan

Formulating and Clarifying Content

Act: Facilitate a workshop to review existing literature.

Observe: Evaluate existing content, noting any gaps or missing elements.

Reflect: Determine which existing content is useful, needs clarity, or is completely absent.

Observe · Act · Reflect **1**

Plan

Identifying and Reviewing Existing Content

Figure 1. Overview of the five action research cycles

4.2 CYCLE 2

Focused on clarifying missing data and structuring the previously undocumented elements. It sought to define the roles and contributions of stakeholders within current publishing practices. This cycle was conducted through a roundtable discussion, where participants articulated their tasks, responsibilities, and professional designations within the publishing process. The session featured a diverse range of contributors, including writers, illustrators, language editors, translators, educators, policymakers, publishers, readers, and critics, who shared valuable insights from both local and international experiences.

Participants compared their roles and reflected on overlapping functions in the book production process. A key finding during this stage was the absence of formal education or training programmes in children's publishing in Sri Lanka. The discussions revealed that most professionals in the sector are self-taught, leading to varying skill levels and informal role definitions. For instance, after an illustrator completes their work, files are passed to individuals with titles such as typesetter, layout artist, digital designer, or simply designer, despite differing technical responsibilities. These individuals may be part of a publishing house, a print bureau, or freelance networks (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023).

This stage confirmed the existence of pivotal yet inconsistently named roles in the children's book publishing process. It highlighted the urgent need for formal recognition of professional designations and clearer task descriptions aligned with global standards.

4.3 CYCLE 3

Focused on defining roles and tasks within the children's book publishing process. This stage included a round-table discussion to gather insights and document data, with the aim of clarifying designations and determining appropriate titles for individuals contributing to the publishing journey. Key questions addressed during the session included: What is each participant's role? What professional title do they hold? What is the equivalent international title? What specific tasks do they undertake, especially when fulfilling multiple roles?

The findings revealed that most stakeholders perform several duties across different stages of the publishing process. For example, a publisher might play a central role in the book launch phase but have limited involvement during the creation stage. Similarly, an illustrator proficient in design software may also function as a typesetter during both the creation and production phases. Furthermore, roles such as 'language editor' and 'translator' frequently overlap with other responsibilities due to the lack of formally trained professionals and the prevalence of self-taught individuals in the industry. This multitasking often results in higher compensation for individuals and reduced labour costs for publishers (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023).

As part of this cycle, efforts were made to align locally used titles with international standards. For instance, the role commonly referred to as 'designer' in the Sri Lankan context was mapped to international designations such as 'art director,' 'book editor,' 'book designer,' or 'editorial designer'. Conversely, individuals primarily focused on layout and print production were more accurately described as 'typesetters,' although the broader label 'designer' remains widely used. The discussions highlighted the flexible and sometimes ambiguous use of these titles, emphasizing the need to formalize and

distinguish professional designations, especially in the absence of a regulatory framework in the Sri Lankan publishing sector.

The discussion led to the classification of existing roles and the recommendation to introduce new titles while phasing out those that no longer align with international best practices. For instance, the title 'designer' was proposed to be redefined as 'art director'—a new designation in the Sri Lankan context—while the current use of 'designer' was recommended to be replaced with 'typesetter' to avoid misinterpretation. The finalized list of titles was considered representative of the key stakeholder roles in the Sri Lankan publishing industry. In cases where responsibilities remained unclear, the stakeholder's title was noted for further review.

This cycle identified approximately 15 stakeholder titles and underscored the need to formalize and expand professional designations to address current gaps in practice. It emphasized the importance of clearly articulating each stakeholder's roles and responsibilities within the publishing journey, laying the groundwork for the next stage of the research (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023).

4.4 CYCLE 4

Focused on mapping the actual publishing routes followed by the stakeholders identified in the previous cycle. A large whiteboard served as the primary visual tool, featuring a sketch of a human stick figure on the far left to represent stakeholders, and a series of illustrated children's books on the far right to symbolize the diversity of existing and potential genres and formats. Participants were asked to envision themselves as the stick figure and narrate their journey toward creating a published children's book.

Data were gathered through both individual reflection and collaborative discussion. Participants described their journey from ideation to final product, highlighting key stages where multiple stakeholders collaborate to achieve shared outcomes. For instance, during the printing phase, although each stakeholder is responsible for a different task, their collective objective remains the same: to deliver a complete, high-quality book.

Through this collaborative mapping process, 16 key stages in the existing publishing workflow were identified. However, it became evident that many of these stages involved overlapping responsibilities (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023). For example, after the initial stages of ideation, plot development, and story sketching, some authors approached publishers directly, while others collaborated with illustrators first. These variations revealed inconsistencies, inefficiencies, and redundancies within the current system.

As a result, this cycle highlighted the urgent need to reduce overlaps and streamline the publishing process by clearly identifying, naming, and sequencing the key stages of children's book production in Sri Lanka.

4.5 CYCLE 5

Focused on establishing a unified, linear workflow that all stakeholders could adopt—thereby optimizing time, improving collaboration, and enhancing profitability. The previous cycle had confirmed that stakeholders within Sri Lanka's children's publishing industry follow different, often fragmented, routes to produce a published book. To address this, the workshop coordinator—who is also the author of this paper—introduced

the concept of transitioning from an intangible product (a book idea) to a tangible, market-ready publication.

All previously mapped and divergent publishing paths were consolidated into a coherent linear process with the active participation of workshop attendees at the third residential programme. A brainstorming session was conducted, during which the five stages of the Stanford Design Thinking method were restructured and expanded into eight clearly defined stages. Each stage was paired with a guiding question to ensure clarity of purpose and to align stakeholder responsibilities. Particular attention was paid to clarifying roles for individuals handling multiple responsibilities (Education Publication Advisory Board & Ministry of Education, 2023).

For example, if an individual functioned as both publisher and printer, this framework enabled them to differentiate their tasks within each stage. In cases where roles such as 'art editor' were previously undefined in the Sri Lankan context, this process also outlined necessary responsibilities and highlighted opportunities for training and professional development.

The outcome of this cycle was the formulation of an eight-stage linear publishing model, ranging from ideation to impact. (1) The Ideation Stage focused on identifying the initial inspiration and exploring the intangible concept of a children's book (What sparked the creation of this book, and how will it fulfil the needs of its audience?). (2) The Refining Stage emphasized evaluating and refining the idea based on child-focused and market considerations (How will the book be developed to align with children's needs and preferences?). (3) Empathizing with Stakeholders involves clarifying the roles and contributions of all participants in the publishing process (Who will be involved, and what additional expertise is required?). (4) The Prototyping and Production Readiness stage centred on finalizing content, illustrations, and administrative requirements (What steps are needed to make the book production-ready?). (5) Empathizing and Testing ensured the book met audience and stakeholder expectations through final feedback loops (What adjustments are necessary before printing?). (6) The Finishing Stage addressed final production checks and market preparation (Are all aspects finalized and have stakeholder concerns been addressed?). (7) Launching and Promotional Efforts planned the introduction of the book to its audience (How will the book reach children, and what promotional strategies are planned?). Finally, (8) Scaling and Impact ensured the book's broader reach. They assessed its effect on children's reading experiences (What impact does the book have, and how is it sustained within educational ecosystems?) (National Consortium for Children's Books, 2024; Presidential Media Division, 2024; Onlanka News, 2024).

The structure of this research aligns with the Double Diamond framework, which outlines a design process through phases of divergent and convergent thinking. The first diamond—composed of Cycles 1 and 2—focused on discovering and defining the policy problem through participatory exploration and clarification of stakeholder perspectives. The second diamond—encompassing Cycles 3 to 5—emphasized the development and delivery of a coherent policy solution, culminating in a unified publishing framework. The visual model below (Figure 2) illustrates how these five action research cycles map onto the Double Diamond process, demonstrating the transformation of fragmented publishing practices into a structured national policy framework.

This stage concluded with the confirmation of a finalized linear production flow, offering a replicable model for the Sri Lankan publishing industry. It also marked the transition to a critical next step: identifying and articulating the scope of the policy across four key areas— (1) Producing Quality Books Over Quantity, (2) Understanding the Child Reader's Psychology and Development, (3) Standardizing the Publishing Process, and (4) Defining Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders. These thematic areas were then expanded into eight clearly defined goals, which collectively serve as the foundation for formulating the mission and vision of the National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB).
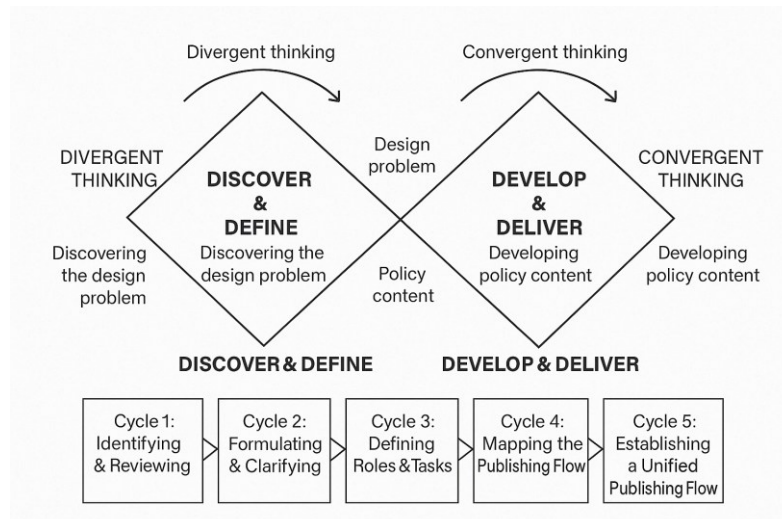
Figure 2. Mapping the five action research cycles to the double diamond framework

5. DISCUSSION

The formulation of the NPCB content was grounded in a design-led methodology, which unfolded through five iterative action research cycles. Each cycle served as both an exploratory mechanism and a diagnostic tool to respond to the fragmented publishing ecosystem, but also as a diagnostic tool, highlighting challenges that demanded policy-level interventions.

Table 1 summarizes the five action research cycles and how each contributed to the scope, goals, and vision of the National Policy for Children's Books (NPCB). Rather than emerging from abstract or predetermined frameworks, the policy goals were developed organically from the issues identified within each action cycle. This ensured that the goals addressed practical publishing gaps and stakeholder needs, while remaining anchored in the developmental requirements of the child, the primary user.

Cycle 1, Identifying and Reviewing Content, revealed a lack of cohesive content frameworks and underscored the scarcity of child-focused, culturally relevant, and developmentally appropriate materials. For instance, while some existing books promoted literacy, they lacked systematic attention to genre, age appropriateness, and Sri Lankan socio-cultural identity. These insights directly contributed to the articulation of the goals: Enhancing Quality and Accessibility and Supporting Child Development. The need to shift from quantity to quality, and to ground publishing decisions in developmental psychology (e.g., Piaget's stages), also emerged from this cycle.

Cycle 2, Formulating and Clarifying Stakeholder Roles, uncovered blurred and overlapping professional responsibilities. This ambiguity highlighted the need for a goal focused on building a Collaborative Ecosystem and another aimed at Promoting Inclusivity and Equity. The process of clearly defining roles, while advocating for the equitable inclusion of both formally trained and self-taught professionals, responded directly to these structural gaps.

Table 1: Summary of action research cycles and their contribution to policy scope, goals, and vision

Cycle	Purpose	Contributed to Policy Scope	Related Policy Goals	Link to NPCB Vision
Cycle 1: **Identify and Review**	Identified gaps in child-focused content, literature standards, and Sri Lankan socio-cultural representation.	Understanding the Child Reader's Psychology and Development	Enhancing Quality and Accessibility; Supporting Child Development	Rooting content in child development needs
Cycle 2: **Formulate and Clarify**	Clarified stakeholder roles and contributions; addressed informal and overlapping responsibilities.	Defining Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders	Building a Collaborative Ecosystem; Promoting Inclusivity and Equity	Equitably involving all contributors
Cycle 3: **Define**	Classified professional titles and aligned local roles with international standards.	Aligning Roles and Standards with Global Practices	Aligning with Global Standards; Positioning Sri Lanka as a Global Contributor	Elevating professional standards for global relevance
Cycle 4: **Map**	Mapped fragmented publishing flows and identified inconsistencies across stakeholder pathways.	Standardizing the Publishing Process	Sustainable Publishing Practices; Encouraging Lifelong Reading	Creating streamlined, repeatable production workflows
Cycle 5: **Establish**	Developed and finalized a unified eight-stage publishing model with guiding questions and standardized processes.	Producing Quality Books Over Quantity	All eight goals synthesized and finalized	Translating findings into a visionary, actionable policy framework

Cycle 3, Defining Roles and Tasks marked a turning point in role classification. Through guided questions such as "What is your professional title?" and "Which international title aligns with your role?"—participants revealed the absence of recognized professional

standards. For example, individuals referred to as "designers" were often functioning solely as typesetters or layout artists, which diverged from global norms. These revelations informed the goals of Aligning with Global Standards and Positioning Sri Lanka as a Global Contributor. This cycle underscored the value of international benchmarking to elevate the global standing of Sri Lankan literature.

Cycle 4, Mapping the Publishing Flow, exposed redundancies, bypassed stages, and inconsistent workflows. For example, some authors skipped editorial reviews entirely or proceeded directly to print with unstructured manuscripts. These inefficiencies indicated a lack of standardized publishing procedures. As a result, the policy introduced goals related to Sustainable Publishing Practices and Encouraging Lifelong Reading. By formalizing the publishing process, the policy aimed not only to ensure quality but also to support a child's continuous engagement with books from ideation to access.

Cycle 5, Establishing a Unified Publishing Flow and Finalizing Policy Content synthesized the findings of all previous cycles and culminated in the development of an eight-stage linear production model—from ideation to impact. Each stage incorporated a guiding question to provide stakeholders with a clear purpose aligned with policy objectives. This model served as the operational backbone of the NPCB, supporting all eight policy goals, including sustainable systems, equitable distribution, and global competitiveness. Importantly, the conclusion of this cycle initiated the formal articulation of the NPCB's vision, mission, and strategic goals.

6.   CONCLUSION

The five cycles were more than research phases, they were diagnostic, iterative, and participatory processes that applied the core tenets of design thinking. Divergent thinking facilitated the identification of multiple perspectives and overlooked problems; convergent thinking enabled the structuring of these insights into actionable solutions.

By reframing systemic publishing challenges as "design problems," the policy development process became deeply grounded in real needs rather than assumptions. Each cycle acted as a mirror, reflecting the industry's current state, and as a compass, directing the course of reform. The outcome the NPCB's vision and eight strategic goals—is a direct response to these findings, grounded in reality.

This approach demonstrates how design thinking, when embedded into national policy-making, can lead to practical, inclusive, and adaptive frameworks. It offers a replicable model not only for other cultural sectors in Sri Lanka but also for global contexts where design, education, and policy intersect.

With the public review of the National Policy for Children's Books launched in September 2024 (National Consortium for Children's Books, 2024; Presidential Media Division, 2024; Onlanka News, 2024), this initiative marks a significant milestone in embedding design into the development of national policy frameworks. It reflects a forward-thinking commitment to creating a sustainable, collaborative, and child-centered publishing ecosystem—one that serves both current educational needs and the aspirations of future generations.

As this iterative process continues to unfold, the feedback gathered through public consultations and focused group discussions with relevant authorities will further refine and strengthen the policy. Thereafter, the NPCB is on course to be presented for Cabinet

approval, positioning it as a model for policy development through inclusive, design-led innovation.

7.   ACKNOWLDGEMENTS

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