

A STUDY OF A FEW RECOGNIZED EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FACED BY SRI LANKA AT PRESENT

Rev Minuwangoda Gnanawasa
Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
Email: gnanawasam@busl.ac.lk

Abstract

Many critics emphasize that the tertiary education in Sri Lanka is in a state of crisis. Therefore, the aim of this study is to make a deep probe into such selected educational issues related to the tertiary education in Sri Lanka. The major issues can be listed as follows:

- Disparities in access to quality education,
- Lack of an effective linkage between secondary and tertiary education and general education,
- Inadequate management capabilities that constrain decentralization,
- Inadequate teacher development and management,
- Declining government expenditure on education,
- Limited public private partnership,
- Inability of the university education of Sri Lanka to meet demand and failure to supply a quality education,
- Lack of responsiveness of the education system to labour market requirements,
- Lack of technical education and vocational training, etc.

Many examples can be found in the field to prove that the above listed issues are visible in the education system of Sri Lanka.: Our graduates, especially those graduating with Art degrees are mostly unemployable and have lack of marketable skills and of low quality; universities are overwhelmed with radical politics and unnecessary disputes; the curriculums in the tertiary education institutions are outdated; etc.

Many standards prescriptions also have been planned and implemented to manage these issues: strengthening university-industry relations, updating curricula into a certain level to meet the needs of the labour market, public private partnerships, internationalization of the education , promoting more marketable study programmes, encouraging universities to offer financially sustainable and self-financed study programmes, introducing ICT, soft skills, English programmes in an accepted level, expanding science and technology studies while limiting the expansion of the art and science subjects in the secondary level introducing a new subject stream to the schools. These are some of the major prescriptions that have been introduced and often implemented. Even after the implementation of such innumerable programmes, the authorities and the responsible institutions still struggle to find solutions for these issues, as none of above listed programmes weren't able to bring remedies to those issues.

The attempt of this study is to recognize and marginalize three of above major educational issues faced by Sri Lanka especially regarding the tertiary level with the intention of making suggestions for the remedial measures as follows.

- (i) Lack of responsiveness of the education system to labour market requirements,
- (ii) Disparities in access to quality education.
- (ix) Lack of technical education and vocational trainings.

It is expected to collect data referring to the library and E- library. The data from the primary and secondary sources related to the field collect through the libraries from Sri Lankan universities. What are the Issues related to the Tertiary Education in Sri Lanka at present?

Keywords: Education, Tertiary, Issues, Crisis

1. Lack of Responsiveness of the Education system to Labor Market Requirements

Addressing the mismatch between the skills acquired through the education system and the requirements of the labor market has been a central concern during the last decade. The Education Reforms of 1997 sought to change this situation, but there hasn't been any considerable step to solve this problem in the educational policies of Sri Lanka.

In this context, the government has clearly stated that participation in the higher education system will be opened up to the non-state sector, allowing foreign universities to set up affiliated universities in Sri Lanka (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010, p. 75), however, this mismatch in which high unemployment among school leavers coexisted with a growing need for skilled and semi-skilled workers is there. Most of the young school leavers found themselves ill-prepared, having neither enough academic nor vocational training to fit into the world of work.

With the new reforms in 1997 it was expected that the employment in year 2005 will be about seven million. By 2005, employment in agriculture was expected to about total 20 percent from about 35 percent in 1998 (ADB, 1993, p. 80) but, according to the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey 1st Quarter 2016, the unemployment rate declined to 28 percent in the first quarter of 2016 which is not a considerable amount for such a long period of time. It is very important to note that, there are no statistically significant drops/increases of unemployment rates reported in different time periods starting from First quarter 2013 to First quarter 2016 (Sri Lanka Labour Force, 2016, p. 3).

While the labour force totaled 6.7 million or 36 percent of the population in 1998 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010, p. 75), the estimated economically active population is about 8.3 million in the first quarter 2016 (Sri Lanka Labour Force, 2016, p. 3).

These results extremely denote the fact that a high unemployment rates can be seen through numerous plans and measures has been taken. The insight issue of this is the majority unemployed people are educated youths. 54 percent unemployed people have at least O/L qualifications (ADB, 1993, p. 80).

As the statistics indicate in 2016, the highest unemployment rate is reported from the G.C.E (A/L) and above group which is about 7.7 percent (Sri Lanka Labour Force, 2016, p. 3).

2. Measures that could be used to solve the problem

- With the growth of international interest in outcomes-based approaches formal qualifications (Certificates, diplomas etc.) should be increased in structural importance. These should now encompass not only recognition of skills and knowledge, but should include also a strong influence on curriculum content and pedagogy, regulation of funding, judgment of the performance of teachers, institutions and the national system. Target setting in using tests and qualifications have to be mushroomed.
- The qualifications provided and related mechanisms such as qualifications frameworks should include necessary feature of the education and training system. Evaluations by responsible agencies of the performance and impact of these should have a tendency to focus on limited efficiency studies-and should examine whether specific qualifications are meeting their often narrowly-stated aims.
- The UGC should take an immediate action to illuminate the high level of heterogeneity in returns to tertiary-level education and the subjects of degrees. Most of the graduates are produced in the fields of in 'Arts and Humanities' which, raises the question as to why people continue to pursue such qualifications. Therefore, it is important to implement a programme in tertiary level to build shortages of science and technology graduates, in part because the demand for them has been rising so fast that the supply increases have not kept pace. There

is evidence of much international mobility among science and technology graduates. Other than that, the following steps can also be taken:

- A powerful shake-up of institutions of higher education should be implemented to upgrade quality, including.
- reinstating competition as an essential factor for filling faculty posts
- establishing and rigorously enforcing a higher standard of quality for new higher education institutions
- The higher education system should be more diversified and flexible, with more attention given to non-university education, and life-long learning
- Co-operation in higher education system should be strengthened, with priority areas being graduate studies and research and publishing.

3. Disparities in Access to Quality Education.

Although Sri Lanka has managed to achieve high levels of literacy, it has been unable to provide students with high quality educational services. Sri Lanka ranks poorly in terms of science and math education and internet access in schools. Alternatively, India has been able to provide its students with quality science and math educations, well trained staff and well managed schools despite low levels of adult literacy. Sri Lanka's efforts have been primarily concentrated on basic education, particularly secondary, with much less focus on higher levels of education. In order to participate successfully in the knowledge economy, the country will have to increase quality inputs such as IT access, constructive and effective teaching, better math and science education, whilst constantly consolidating existing high levels of literacy (Finance and Private sector development unit, 2008, p. 53).

Children's access to ICT is low: few students and even fewer teachers are IT literate. Even in the elite public schools, access to computer facilities, defined by the student to computer ratio is well over 1:100. Computers alone are not enough to provide students with the comprehensive skills needed to use computers. This training should be supplied by capable teachers who are skilled in not only teaching students how to use them, but also using computers, themselves, in daily lessons and incorporating them into teaching methods. A Department of Census and Statistics census found that nearly 30 percent of schools had computers in working order with National (95.2 percent) and Navodya (90.1 percent) schools considerably better equipped than other government schools (23.9 percent). The availability of land phones was low at 26 percent. Internet and e-mail facilities were only available in 6.4 and 4.1 percent of schools, respectively. The computer-student ratio is 1:137. The study found that more than 60 percent of teachers lack computer literacy skills needed in a modern teaching environment (Finance and Private sector development unit, 2008, p. 58).

To improve the quality of the education, several actions were implemented under the **Education for All National Plan Sri Lanka**. towards universalization of Education through School Rationalization As a major change in the school system of the entire country, it is the exercise of school Rationalization carried-out on a phased - out basis from year 2000. This embraced another facet of the education reforms activities.

4. Primary Education Reform

Several measures are being taken to broaden opportunities for education in information and Communication Technology (ICT) for schools in remote areas (Central Bank of Sri Lanka , 2010, p. 75). Basic strategies identified under Primary the Education Reform were.

1. The Extension of Education Opportunities
2. Quality Improvement of Primary Education
3. Professionalization of Teachers

4. Management of Education and Provision of Resources

These strategies exhibited a high degree of congruence with the goals of Dakar Framework for action under EFA.

The launch of initial reforms was guided by short - term action plans developed by PTF in 1997. These strategies gave considerable force to the initiation of reforms. The Ministry of Education, realizing the need for long - term plans to ensure the sustained implementation and institutionalization of the reforms, has taken timely action to develop a National Level Five Year Plan for Primary Education with the involvement of all major stake-holders in primary education both at National and at Provincial Level. The programme was sponsored by the Department for International Development (DFID, UK, n.d.).

The ministry of Education has identified 150 schools as "Isuru Schools" with the objective of developing these schools to the level of national schools for secondary education in selected divisional secretariat areas to ease the high demand for admission into national schools. It is expected to increase the number of "Isuru Schools" to 325 by end 2012. Further, the government has taken measures to develop 1,000 full - fledged secondary schools island-wide, with the establishment of a primary school network as a measure to ensure quality education for all. Measures are being taken to establish "Teacher Villages" for teachers to facilitate their livelihood in remote areas so as to effectively address the shortage of teachers in those areas (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010, p. 75).

The ESDFP (2006 -2010) also was organized under four main policy themes, with the intention of introducing the quality education to the system. These are: Theme 1: Promoting equitable access to basic and secondary education; Theme 2: Improving the quality of primary and secondary education; Theme 3: Enhancing the economic efficiency and equity of resource allocation; and Theme 4: Strengthening education governance and service delivery (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 50)

Under these reforms the disparities in the primary sector among the schools were limited to certain extent. But, there is a lack of access to quality of education largely visible due to the factors such as; disparities in the distribution of facilities and resources, inadequate teachers deployment to rural areas, uneven distribution of skills among teachers, inadequate cost recovery in tertiary education, lack of accountability, effective supervision, monitoring, and evaluation, and lack of linkages within and outside the educational system. Lack of resources and teacher shortages are worse for smaller schools mostly situated in rural areas, particularly schools in conflict-affected North and East, in remote plantations, and in less developed provinces. Linked to frequent changes in the organization and management systems, political influence over resource allocation and personnel appointments, and centralized decision-making.

5. The Measures that Could Be Used to Solve the Problems

- The government should pursue policies to expand access to all levels of education system, with a special emphasis placed on primary education because it directly benefits the rural privileged people. The Universal Primary Education should be implemented through those policies.

- a) Making basic education accessible to the learners and relevant to their needs as well as meeting national goals;

- b) Making education equitable in order to eliminate and disparities and inequalities;

- c) Establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary resource development;
 - d) Initiating a fundamental positive transformation of society in the social, economic and political fields; and
 - e) Ensuring that education is affordable by the majority of Sri Lankans by providing initially, the minimum necessary facilities and resources, and progressively the optimal facilities, to enable every child to enter and remain in school until they complete the compulsory school education cycle.
- Central government should decentralize public service in education. The authoritative rights of educational system, and nursery, primary schools, special schools and technical schools should fall under the administration and management of local governments and the authority to formulate, and execute its own development plan.
 - The government should make a commitment in assuring the universal access to the education as the highest priority, points to the removal of financial impediments and pay particular attention to regional equity.
 - It is important to explore alternative sources of funding for regional education of a greater quality. For this purpose, the existing administrative and financial regulations would need to be reviewed.

6. Lack of technical education and vocational trainings

TEVT has a long history in Sri Lanka. In 1893, the technical collage now known as the Sri Lanka technical collage was established in Maradana.

In 1997 MOVTRI was established with responsibility for VT.

In 1997 NITE national institute of technical education was established.

In 2013 a new A/L subject stream has been introduced to the schools as technology stream.

And many other vocational and technical training courses were established all over the country.

Instead of that the technical and vocational education sector continued to expand during the year of 2010. The National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education was finalized during the year and the policy implementation plan was presented in December 2010. Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), with the association of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Sri Lankan branch, designed a customized policy framework especially for the provision of skills training for vulnerable groups (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010, p. 77).

The situation of these training collages has created more of a social demand for vocational training instead of an economic demand for employable skills. The existing TEVT system, in general, is not grate to providing market oriented skills, leaving many graduates unemployed for long periods after completing their training programmes. About 321 courses are offered by the major government VTCs. About 63 percent of these courses are of level 2 categories (basic skills) which are too basic to respond to the skills need of industry of the service sector (ADB, 1993, p. 80).

The informal sector has a lot of potential to create jobs, develop future entrepreneurs and to produce quality and attractively priced products. Unfortunately, there is a consistent lack of adequate and appropriate technical and vocational skills in this sector, this limits its ability to contribute in the creation of jobs and income generating activities and also affects the quality of goods and services produced reducing their competitiveness in a global market. A combination of an ineffective education system and decreasing job opportunities has led to a gloomy situation in which as job opportunities become scarce in relation to the number of applicants students tend to proceed further up the education ladder in attempt to join urban

jobs, however with each passing year, the students join the ranks of the "educated unemployment."

However, the government of Sri Lanka has introduced a new subject stream to GCE Advanced Level as technology stream with the intention of producing the needy and skilled persons for the field. This was introduced through some selected schools in Sri Lanka from 2013 and first batch of students sat GCE A/L examination in 2015.

Students should follow three subjects as follows in the newly introduced stream:

1. Science for Technology
2. Engineering Technology or Bio-system technology.
3. Select the third subject from 10 subjects including English, Information Technology, Economics, Geography, Commerce, Accounting, and Arts etc (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 50).

Furthermore, the ministry of higher education also has designed and introduced a vast variety of degree programmes and diplomas to equip the students with more skills which are internationally recognized, so that the graduates will be able to get employed overseas. Another intention would be producing highly capable self-employed people. However, it's too early to make predictions about the adequacy or inadequacy of the capability of this programme to full fill the asked requirements. But, still this can be seen as a positive move of Sri Lankan education system.

7. The measures that could be used to solve the problems

- There should be a change of the policies in **TVETs** to enhance the quality of the vocational trainings. Today, more than ever the role of training and especially post -primary training is critical because of the changes taking place in the world like rapid technological changes and globalization. These rapid changes in technology development require a continuous learning philosophy. A commitment to training and continuous learning is therefore crucial for the labour force to remain competitive. Thus, there should be a training system that promote and deliver high quality just in time training through the **TVETs**.
- TVET has the potential to curb high rates of unemployment especially among the youth and women. By offering hands-on skills, TVET should have the potential to offer the much needed skills to develop the informal sector. Individuals would then be in a position to develop self-employment thus, reducing pressure from the academic education. By offering skills, especially directed towards rural development, TVET would reduce the surplus labor flocking to the urban areas from rural areas and causing high levels of unemployment.

Additionally, the governments should encourage organizations to participate in providing on the job training by creating incentives for companies by reimbursing training costs, by subsidizing

- Accordingly, it's fair to keep some hopes on the newly introduced A/L technology subject stream as it's a direct syllabus which gives a vast knowledge and marketable skills to the students. Moreover, the students who follow the new stream have the opportunity to follow a Bachelor of Technology (BTech.) degree from the respective universities.

According to the plans, the students who wouldn't score sufficient marks to enter the universities can apply for admission to the University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC), the Ceylon-German Technical Training Institute, Ratmalana or Automobile Engineering Training Institute at Orugodawatte. However, if any student fails the examination under the technology stream, he or she could follow the National Vocational Qualification Level 3 (NVQ 3) certificate course, that they could yet continue their technical education. Still there should be a continuing assessment for the enhancement of the new subject stream. In implementing the teaching learning process, the school management has to face great challenges such as lack of teachers, lack of resources and inexperience of the field personnel. As the new subject stream has been introduced in association with the

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development, National Institute of Education, National Education Commission, Higher Education Ministry and the University Grants Commission, the students would have a vast opportunity to go through tertiary education. Yet, the remedial actions should be taken to make these students to be equipped with the world wide accepted vocational skills: so that, they can easily fit up with the modern world of work.



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