

Factors Affecting to Distract the University Students' Education in Sri Lanka

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***Abstract**— The Government of Sri Lanka enrolls and provides free University education to approximately 20,000 students annually. Suitably qualified students are admitted to 15 Universities, 03 Campuses and various other higher Government affiliated education institutes. A majority of the students admitted are suppressed by certain internal, external and influential factors which alter the attitude and the behaviour of the students resulting in an unhygienic environment to the university life and the public. To counter this issue, universities along with responsible ministries have launched many programs facilitating financial assistance and basic welfare measures to needy students. More than 50% of the students admitted yearly are benefited with these programs but to date the students unrest have not been mitigated nor a concrete solution have been established. The recently introduced Leadership Training Program conducted by Military Institutes enhance the personality of Students but is not sufficient or the best answer to the matter in question. This paper identifies the factors affecting to distract the university students' education in Sri Lanka as a National Issue and possible solutions to encounter the situation.*

Keywords— Distract University Education Sri Lanka

I. INTRODUCTION

Government Universities in Sri Lanka are institutes which offers free university education in all disciplines to local students who attain higher aggregates and Z scores in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advance Level (A/L). The free education system was started since the Independence to Sri Lanka and with the visionary of Mr CWW Kannangara, a minister of education at that time. According to Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, as at year 2013, there will be approximately 4,500,000 students enjoying the free education in over 10600 government schools in Sri

Lanka. Out of above, over 250,000 students sits for university entrance exam every year and approximately 20,000 qualifies themselves to be admitted to universities in different disciplines. The qualified students have the option of entering to 15 state universities and 03 campuses which are approved by the University Grant Commission (UGC) according to their order of merit, Z score and the stream of education. The students who do not pass the margins of above category have the option of admitting to various non UGC but public institutes providing university or higher education. These institutes are governed by ministries such as Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training. Students who do not qualify for both above have the option of entering to institutes which are either foreign university affiliated, independent, private, non-profit or profit venturing and charters. The products of latter have a better chance in completing the desired academic qualifications in time which are job focus and be admitted to private sector employments with a higher salary offerings. This paper discuss on the Factors Affecting to Distract the University Students Education and focus on students in the UGC approved universities

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to the UNICEF Data of 2008, Sri Lanka has an adult literacy of 92% and the youth literacy is in between 97% to 99%. The reasons for this achievement is, Sri Lanka being the only country in the globe which provides education, reading materials, uniforms and a reasonable day meal free of charge to all students up to university entrance exam level. As per the records of Department of Census and Statistics, in 2012 the total population of Sri Lanka was 20,328,000 and the total no. of students up to A/L was 4,186,808 which the percentage is 20.6%. According to the 2014 updated official web page of Dept. of Census and Statistics,

the following table depicts the relationship between Schools, Students and teachers in the year 2001.

Table 1. Schools, Students and Teachers relationship in the year 2001 in Figures

	Public Schools	Private Schools	Piriven	Total
No. of Schools	9887	78	583	10,548
No. of Students	4,184,957	97,262	52,906	4,335,125
No. of Teachers	194,104	4,330	4,601	203,035
School/ Student Ratio	1:423	1:1245	1:91	1:411
Student/ Teacher Ratio	22:1	21:1	11:1	21:1

The number of studentship is high as indicated above since the inception and the below chart made as per the informations given in GCE O/L and A/L results release on 04 April 2013 depicts the number of candidates sits for GCE O/L and GCE A/L in the year 2012. The number of students who passes the GCE A/L qualifying to enter the university in the same year which is drastically a downfall from O/L to A/L and A/L to University. Same time, the government universities can accommodate less than 20,000 student intake at any given time thus is less than 3.7% from those who passes GCE O/L and less than 7.2% of those who passes GCE A/L. Though nearly a 50% of students passes the A/L, only a fraction is accommodated in to the universities.

Table 2. Students sitting for GCE O/L, A/L and qualifying for University education in the year 2012

	O/L	A/L	Qualify for University
Students	542,200	277,671	19,340

Principally, identifying education as one of the rights of people in Sri Lanka, free university education is being given to all the qualified students. Apart from that, understanding there is a considerable poverty rate in Sri Lanka, government institutes and universities have taken actions to provide financial assistance and subsidised accommodation facility for needy students. It has identify that the poverty rate before the year 2009

was 23% and has reduced to 9% in 2009/10 counting to over 1.8 million of heads. But the system has not taken any actions to decrease the sponsorships to students to date.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Out of the total number of students who pass the GCE A/L examination, only the intrinsic worth students with heights "Z" score are being enlisted to the UGC accepted universities. The IQ level, morale and subject knowledge of these students are found to be very high. Those who qualify to follow free university education enlists with a positive mind of completing the studies within stipulated period with flying colours, but once admitted to university, some attains unionized activities before attaining the zenith of education. The activities performed by these misled students disturb the other students who really wanted to accomplish their educational goals and their education whilst degrading the economy, good name and the development of the country. Further snow ball effect is also experienced in students' negative activities which worsen the situation day by day.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Aim

The aim of this paper is to examine the actual facts which change the behaviour of university students, how these changes affect their motives, the extent of disturbances to the society by the results of students' unrest and to give possible solutions to end this issue.

B. Research Hypothesis

It is hypothesised that internal, external and influential factors affect the behaviour of the university students.

C. Scope of the Study

The study was focused on the university students of UGC approved state universities in the year 2014.

D. Choosing of the Sample

The universal population of the study covered students of all the universities in Sri Lanka. The researcher randomly selected 25 students from Colombo centred universities and 25 from rural universities.

E. Method of Data Collection

Since the research is a field study to find the factors affecting to distract the university students education in Sri Lanka and possible solutions to rectify the same, required data were gathered through a questionnaire disseminated to selected sample. 02 weeks were given to respond and same was further extended by additional 02 weeks to collect maximum responses.

F. Data Analysis

Data were analysed manually.

G. Limitations.

Out of 50 questionnaires disseminated, only 38 responded even with extended time period given to them to response. The freshers to universities were keen in answer but senior students were reluctant to respond.

V. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY STUDENTS ON ENLISTMENT

The students entering to universities are not from a homogeneous society but belongs to different cultural, economic and social groups with a common vision of a respectable degree within a stipulated time period and an elevated lifestyle after graduation. Since the day of admittance, many of the students from the rural and or lower income families faces many difficulties in their university life. For this study, these difficulties are categorised in to three factors namely internal, external and influential factors. The internal factors are congenital and the external factors associate with the results of internal factors. Influential factors are associate with the experience the students gain during their university life. So much the efforts made by authorities, at a later stage the students' behaviour is changed with the influence of third factor which above identified as Influential factor.

a. Internal Factors

This paper consider Language barrier, inferior personality, lack of vision, Depression, Home sickness, Poor Time Management, and Social Status associate with deprived socio-economical background which inherited to students at the time of enlistment are considered as Internal Factors herein.

b. External Factors

Food, clothing and shelter are the main cost factors of a student during university period and ability in fulfilling these cost factors motivates them to concentrate towards study. Inadequate economic strength to fulfil these requirements leads male students to earn by way of working in petrol pumps and security companies performing night shifts whilst certain female students reluctantly but compelled to work in Spas and at times as sex workers. These factors are identified as External factors to this study.

c. Influential Factors

The new society, sub groups and the culture students get in to, Political affiliations and teachings, Uncertainty of the future, Influence from senior students, and fear and obligations have identified as Influential factors in this study.

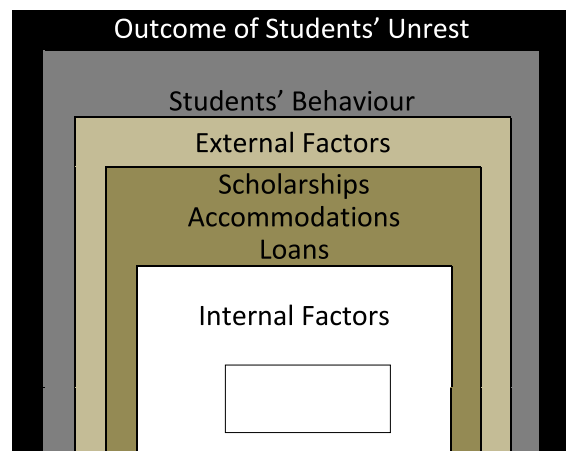


Figure 1. A diagram of factors affecting students' behaviour

The above diagram depicts that the student are suppressed by internal and external factors and directly affected by these factors. To smooth the effects of these factors, universities along with the government have launched programs which have identified by students as not so effective or insufficient. Anyhow these programs have a limited effect at the beginning of the university life and at threshold, students behaviour is being severely affected by Influential Factors.

VI. STUDIES CONDUCTED IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Various countries have conducted studies to find out deriving issues of students of those countries. It was observed that some of the issues faced by

those students are very much similar to what our students face here. Anyhow it was pragmatic that there are some factors which are non-similar to University students of Sri Lanka. It was identified that non-similar factors are mainly due to cultural indifferences and the education system they are in. Factors such as Alcoholism, Relationships, Parting, eating disorders, Sexual Assaults and Harassments, Childhood Issues and Traumatic Events are Cultural bound and choosing a Major, Study, Job and Wealth, Lack of Exercise, and Sleep Disorders are Education System bound. Anyhow the outcomes of the students due to all the factors in other countries are not similar to Sri Lanka as many Universities in the foreign soil provide University Education on payment and many students have an obligation to the education they have as it had been done on their cost.

VII. EFFORT BY SRI LANKA GOVERNMENT TO MITIGATE STUDENTS PROBLEMS

To cushion these Internal and External factors, Universities along with certain Ministries have made several efforts which the students highly accepted at the beginning of their University Career but highly challenge the same with time. Mahapola Scholarships, Bursary Loans, Endowed Scholarships, subsidised meals, accommodations and Leadership Training are the key elements focused by the Governments to date which believed to be main factors of smoothing students' problems. Mahapola scholarship is awarded to 10,000 students yearly nearing 50% of the university entrance with an annual cost of Rs. 25 Million. Bursary too provides financial assistance to needy students subjected to the approval of UGC. Unfortunately respective authorities have less aware of the Influential Factors thus have paid less attention to cater this issue other than introducing Leadership Training. The present Leadership training have somewhat level the internal and influential factors, but it itself cannot level entire factors which affect students mental shift.

VIII. CREATION OF STUDENTS UNREST

Upon the attempts made by relevant authorities to alleviate the students difficulties, students unrest upsurge time to time with violent behaviour where the established order take apposite actions in means of legal or administrative. Students' Unions of the Universities have acknowledged these

actions as Students' Human Rights violations which they claim as per Students' Human Right Report 2013, that there have been 524 cancellations of classes, 104 external disciplinary inquiries, 67 Mahapola cancellations, 104 Law suits and 44 imprisonments of students in the past year.

IX. STUDENTS ALTERNATIVES / OPTIONS

From the researcher's angle, it is obvious that the Internal and External factors transform the students' attitude and behaviour. This transformation is been strategically used by certain Students Organizations in the universities to take undue advantages in their favour whilst the Government Organizations have partially understood the factors affecting the students behaviour thus given only a limited solutions to demanding factors. The Sri Lankan Culture in the Universities is to seek the possibility in winning rights with unionized actions and this culture is blessed by many students' movements. No solid solution to above identified Internal and External factors leads to poster campaigns demonstrations and sabotages actions.

X. AFFECTS TO ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC

University is supposed to be a Knowledge Development Agency which enhance the intellectual abilities of its customers, the students. Some public view Universities in Sri Lanka as cost centres up to a certain extent and a place which gathers GCE A/L top rankers under one umbrella, create unrest among them and generate social, economic and political turbulence. According to the majority of public view, the following have been identified as possible negative outputs of UGC approved and Government sponsored universities.

- a. University Study is not Job Focus
- b. Accumulation of non-job focus Graduates inventory expecting Government Jobs.
- c. Students expect maximum privileges irrespective of the limits of free education.
- d. University Students encounter authorities over their expected facilities.
- e. Students are being provoked by the actions of the University Authorities.
- f. Shutdown of universities disturbs studios and motivated students' education.
- g. Publicity by media depicts a wrong interpretation internationally.

- h. Creation of Student heroes in the Universities with blind followers.
- i. The actions and reactions by and of students and authorities create public discomfort.
- j. State / Administrative actions to control irruptions leads to greater events.
- k. Loss of students' lives.
- l. Political instability and devastations like in early 1970s.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher found out that there are three factors affecting to distract the students' education in Sri Lanka and they are the main influences to students' unrest. Considering this matter as a national issue, it is mandatory to have a concrete solution to quieten these factors.

The researcher recommends the following as most possible ripostes to end up the students' unrest.

- a. Quality of the education shall be improved with latest technological aids and facilities where students may grasp the essence of the teachings.
- b. University education shall be Job Oriented giving students a clearly articulated and focused future.
- c. All the students are to be given Industry Exposure with a on the job training according to the stream they are in.
- d. Students to be provided with Bank Loans issued by State Banks with lower interest rates.
- e. The recoveries of the Bank Loans shall be recovered once the students are passed out from the universities.
- f. Reasonable accommodation facilities to be provided to needy students adequately.
- g. The cost of the accommodation shall be recuperated from bank loans if students wished to do so and if so to be recovered once they are in employment.
- h. Effective students counselling system shall be introduced within the universality.
- i. Proper system should be introduced within the universities to identify and guide students who needs counselling.
- j. Endeavours shall be taken to create a friendly relationship between University Students and the Lecturers.
- k. A Student and Lecturer Union to be introduced paving a path for more interactive sessions between students and the lecturers.

- l. The leadership shall focus on developing of Soft Skills and creating a vision of the students.
- m. Mahapola Scholarships and bursary must plan before hand and the payments shall effect from the first month of the enrolment.
- n. Must introduce a forum to project their problems.
- o. Universities shall be able to provide efficient and effective solutions to students' vital problems.
- p. Universities must have an efficient job bank with proper coordination with private sector and guide students to possible jobs.

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Author is a retired Group Captain in the Sri Lanka Air force. During his military career, he has served as the Chief Instructor of Junior Command and Staff College affiliated to University of Kelaniya which awards Post Graduate Diploma in Management to Tri Service Officers. He is a National Diploma holder in Human Resources Management of Institute of Personnel Management, graduate of Kotelawala Defence University and a Post Graduate of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. He is reading for MPhil / PhD at Kotelawala Defence University. He is also a lecturer in Management and Occupational Health and Safety (OHAS). His research interests include Job Satisfaction and employee retention. At present he works as the Head of Aviation Security in a Private Airliner