

**STUDY ON EVALUATION &
THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN
GENERAL EDUCATION IN SRI
LANKA**



**NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION
NAWALA ROAD, NUGEGODA
SRI LANKA**

Research Series (2014) – No. 03

**Study on Evaluation & the Assessment
System in
General Education in Sri Lanka**

A Research conducted for the National Education Commission

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Dr. Upali M. Sedere (Team Leader)

Prof. Sunethra Karunaratne

Prof. M. Karunanithy

Prof. Udith K. Jayasinghe-Mudalige



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Preface

The National Education Commission (NEC) commenced formulating National Education Policy for its third ten year policy reviewing cycle. As a part of the above policy formulating process NEC has commissioned ten research studies in order to identify the important policy issues in General Education System in Sri Lanka. The research teams were asked to recommend changes to the present policies where necessary and suggest new policies to the National Education Commission based on their findings.

The Standing Committee on General Education (SCGE) of NEC has identified ten different study areas in the General Education System and prepared relevant Terms of Reference (TORs) for these studies after several discussions at SCGE meetings. The research reports published in this study series were prepared over a period of around nine months by ten research teams selected for their expertise in the different aspects of General Education. The draft reports of research studies were reviewed by a panel of reviewers before finalizing the research reports.

The National Education Commission appreciates the support given by the World Bank in allocating funds from the Transforming School Education System as the foundation of a knowledge hub Project (TSEP) at Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils. The Commission also thanks Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) for their services provided in financial administration of the research studies.

It is hoped that the publication of these studies will contribute to the extension of the knowledge base necessary for educational change and will stimulate interest and participation in improving the quality of education in Sri Lanka. These studies can also provide points of departure for future researches.

Prof Lakshman Jayatileke
Chairman
National Education Commission

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present study is to propose education reforms to be implemented in 2015, with a critical analysis of the reforms introduced in 1997 and 2003. The Sri Lanka development programs need to be consistent and supportive of the creation of a “Knowledge Hub”, which is envisaged in the ‘Mahinda Chinthana-Way Forward’ policy document. The assessment and evaluation systems are critical in the development of the human capital to support a knowledge economy. Unless the curriculum and instructional system is not developed along the lines of the development of human capital for a knowledge economy, where collaborative and cooperative learning, critical thinking and creative abilities are transformed to skills, people skills, soft skills, and emotional qualities of students are given utmost importance, assessment and evaluation will continue to follow the decades old conventions and practices. This report was prepared on the given Terms of Reference. It is inadequate to address assessment in a wider scope of a knowledge economy supported framework. Congruence and consistency of curriculum, instructional system and assessment is more important than treating these as separate topics or themes.

Today, the educators have a challenge in best equipping students to adapt successfully in the rapidly changing world, considering not only the local context of the country, but also the world view. Sri Lanka has a history of conducting public examinations of the paper pencil type, closed book examinations focusing on the memorization power of facts or the cognitive domain. At present, there are three public examinations conducted by the National Evaluation and Testing Service of the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education. Its Vision is to ‘provide guidance toward excellence in educational achievement and certification activities using evaluation instruments and methodologies ensuring reliability and validity to suit national needs’. However, the general public opinion is that the Department of Examinations has failed to some extent in achieving this Vision, resulting in releasing of wrong results and incorrect questions in several recent examinations.

The Grade V Scholarship Examination, General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Ordinary Level (O-L) and Advanced Level (A-L) are the three main national examinations conducted by the Department of Examinations. However, none of these national examinations directly focuses on the potential talents, abilities, beliefs and attitudes of a child, since such examinations are mainly focused on evaluation of content. Further, evaluation is basically for selections, to identify how many have succeeded in meeting the targets set by the teacher at the end of a particular period of time. It is necessary to prepare students to understand what they learn so that they can even be successful in the selection process. In light of this, the need to identify talents of students to be used in their learning is recognized.

Along with the Proposals of Education Reforms in 1997, 'School-Based Assessment' (SBA) was introduced to bring up a "total child" from our education system (Hovarth, 1997; Presidential Task Force, 1997). Howard Gardner (1983) has pointed out that the Intelligent Quotient (IQ) fails to fully explain cognitive ability and introduced multiple intelligences which show that each and every student is unique and the way of learning is also different. Furthermore, behaviors of students are also different. Daniel Goleman (1983) states that people with a high degree of emotional intelligence are able to get adapted to difficult situations better than others by developing "people skills" to monitor their own emotions and are able to sense the emotional needs of others. Hence, it is clear that to reflect the real performance of a child, it is also necessary to consider the emotional intelligence of the child to a larger extent.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study was carried out to achieve three main objectives, including:

1. To review the present methods of assessment and evaluation adopted in General Education in Sri Lanka,
2. To inquire into their appropriateness and effectiveness; study the methods used in other selected countries and identify new approaches for assessment and evaluation in General Education which are relevant to Sri Lanka; and
3. To identify the strategies used internationally to measure emotional intelligence as part of the assessment system and to recommend an appropriate assessment and evaluation framework, which would pave the way to measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a more productive and effective manner.

1.2 Research Methodology and Overview of Report

Subject to the constraints in physical and financial resources as well as time, the research team decided to conduct a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the teachers, education officials and in-service advisors of the Education Zones and the school principals for the purpose of gathering data. To facilitate this task, the National Education Commission (NEC) organized three field visits to Education Zones, namely Gampaha, Badulla, Bandarawela, and Galle. Beside this, in-depth discussions were conducted in a number of schools with a set of students from the Grade V, GCE (O-L) and (A-L) classes. The teachers who participated in these FGD were exclusively teaching in Grade V, XI and XIII classes. The Team also met with the Commissioner General of the Department of Examinations to gather his views on the three public examinations mentioned above.

The investigations carried out have revealed that the prevailing secondary education system in Sri Lanka is heavily examination oriented. Hence the first part of the report will examine this phenomena in detail. Subsequently the report will present a comprehensive situation analysis of the different types of assessment practices and examinations in the country and will suggest steps that can be taken to strengthen

the existing system and/or possible alternatives. In section three of the report it will present an area of assessment not utilized in Sri Lanka at present – the assessment of emotional intelligence and will present different instruments used worldwide to assess this. The report will also suggest how to assess EQ or soft skills in the Sri Lanka context. This will be followed by conclusions and recommendations.

2. SRI LANKA: SITUATION ANALYSIS

2.1 Heavy Examination Orientation

The school system is adversely affecting the overall development of the child and has created a largely unhealthy out-of-school coaching culture that has devalued the school and education. Sri Lanka having achieved a very high degree of success in enrollment and completion of general education at different phases of education, public examinations receive too much attention from students, parents and schools. The level of motivation in students, backed by the parents to ensure the student's success at any of the three public examinations, namely the Scholarship Examination, GCE O-L and GCE A-L examination has created too much of stress in students, besides, it has created a culture of heavy dependence on extra coaching by external tutors.

The heavy examination orientation has brought adverse effects on the total development of the student. The overall development of student personality is seriously neglected or ignored by students and parents as students forgo all other co-curricular activities, social activities at school, home and community to attend coaching classes. Further, examinations are loaded with cognitive material and the school system has failed to ensure the total development of the child as envisaged by its broad goals and objectives of the reforms introduced in 1997.

The external coaching culture has devalued the teacher, school and the educational objectives of formal school learning. Further, out of school coaching also has encouraged some of the teachers to give private tuition themselves neglecting their work at school. Also willingly or unwillingly, the regular teacher expects the student to attend out of school coaching classes to complete the respective examination syllabus. This has grown to a sad status in the education sector where even more prestigious schools now willingly or unwillingly allow their students in examination classes to attend private coaching classes during school hours. This has spread into all levels of the education system like a deadly cancer. Extra coaching or learning is not the problem; the problem is clouding of the overall development of the child, its overriding narrow focus; devaluing the school system, and towing the free education policy introduced by late C. W. W. Kannanagara in 1945 to an elitist orientation. Private coaching is expensive. It has become a threat to the common man's child because coaching is a big private business that favors the elite at examinations.

2.2 Heavy Content Orientation, Stereo-type Learning and Examinations and Tests

In the light of the 21st century learning framework, (Partnership for 21st Century Skills), much known in countries such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland, the UK and USA, are taking steps to adopt skills-based on general education in recent educational changes. The 21st Century Framework

integrates skills into the teaching of core academic subjects. It has developed a unified, collective vision for learning known as the Framework for 21st Century Learning. This Framework describes the skills, knowledge and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life; it is a blend of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise and literacies. The Sri Lankan curriculum and examinations continue on the outdated models. As a result, the Lower Order Thinking (LOT) questions still dominate the classroom questioning leading to public examinations.

Teachers frequently spend a great deal of classroom time testing students through questions. It was revealed from teachers that they spend about a week on revision prior to the term tests and for marking another week after the tests. With formative assessments these two weeks could have been used effectively for student understanding. In fact, observations of teachers at all levels of education reveal that most spend more than 90% of their instructional time testing students through questioning. Most of the questions teachers ask are typically factual questions that rely on short-term memory and based on Lower-Order Thinking (LOT) abilities. Higher Order Thinking (HOT) is much neglected, As a result higher order thinking abilities that lead to creativity and meta-cognition are rarely included in tests and examinations. Though there is a revised taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain recently elaborated (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) by 'Iowa State University Center of Excellence in Learning and Teaching' (2009), these developments are not followed or adapted or taught in any of the schools or teacher education curricula.

The problem begins with the way the curriculum is scoped with its topic content. At the GCE A-L the topic content is dictated by the universities to facilitate university first year teaching. The proposal of the NEC to group the subject topics under key concepts and big ideas would have eased the problem to a great extent. The suggestion is to base the summative O-L and A-L examinations on Key Concepts and Big Ideas, while allowing the numerous other concepts that are used in lesson contexts to be disposed of through SBA. The O-L and A-L examination papers could also include higher order items involving deeper aspects of Key Concepts. The content load manifests itself mainly through the summative examination systems.

Ephemeral subjects/topics introduced into the curriculum from time-to-time, such as conflict resolution, should be disposed of through SBA and not be a part of the summative O-L and A-L examinations. In countries such as the USA the school curriculum allows the inclusion of topical issues. These are attended through student presentations or presentations by invited speakers followed by discussions and report writing. The summative O-L and A-L examinations should have a permanent (within a curriculum cycle) set of topics.

In 2009/10, the NIE had taken initiatives to introduce a Thematic Curriculum to diversify the curriculum to offer many options to the learners of GCE O-L and GCE A-L. This is a way of avoiding heavy content loading and avoiding everyone learning a stereotype curriculum. Today, over 80 percent of the students learn the same subjects that do not allow students to explore various interests and abilities that each student processes. Further, economically it is less productive and the nature of stereotype of learning adds to unemployment. By bringing the culture of

self-learning that links with SBA and out-of-school sources of learning, not tuition, but from the socio-cultural enterprises, the community-based activities, industry and commerce, and innovations, this situation can be changed. This has come to a stop and the NIE continues with the same curriculum model by adding a technology stream to the same model that has created the current stereotypes, heavy examination orientation and tuition culture.

Reduction of the unnecessary content load linked to the summative examinations should be an overall aim. As such, this content load linked to the summative examination results on the one hand in robbing the children of the joys of childhood and on the other hand in producing stereotyped graduates with lower order abilities.

2.3 Assessment Skills of Teachers

Teacher education programs are the key training programs that provide skills to teachers. When the Postgraduate Diploma in Education was given to less than 500 students a year in all Universities, the teachers were given a lot of training on assessment, test item writing and testing and these made the teachers competent in assessment. Today, all Postgraduate Diploma programs in every university has over 1000 students and with no significant increase of staffing, and teacher training simply rests on lectures and hardly supervised practice teaching sessions. Training pays no special attention to developing assessment skills. The bulk recruitment of teachers has made it impossible for any institution to provide higher order of teaching-learning and assessment skills to any teacher. As a result, currently, even a teacher who is designated as a trained teacher has no assessment or test item writing skills. The same old fashion of factual content dominate the question papers and test papers in schools and public examinations is continued and the Department of Examinations does not recognize the need for a drastic change to meet the challenge of preparing of students to meet the knowledge economy or the global changes.

Besides these the National Colleges of Education (NCoEe) and other teacher training institutions have given up the good practices which were an integral part of the teacher education and training, such as community projects, physical education and aesthetic education for all teachers in general to support such culture in general education to facilitate the overall development of the students in school. The present day teacher educators are far below the expectations as they too are selected only by looking at their academic qualifications and not their leadership roles and the overall personalities. Besides, most of the newly recruited teachers and teacher trainers are also products of the same tuition culture and stereotyped education and they do not have any idea of the need to change.

2.4 Quality of Public Exams, Test Items and Item Bank

The general public is concerned over the diminishing quality of public examinations. The GCE (A-L) examination, for example, had several judicially investigations, over

time, on various issues pertaining to setting and evaluation of examination papers as well as conduct and releasing of examination results, which, as of today, had gone to a level that before releasing of the results, the University Grants Commission (UGC) is bound to get the legal clearance from the Attorney General's Office.

This happened due to those failures associated with the current system in use at the Department of Examinations to release reliable and dependable results to the candidates. In a number of occasions, for example, the test papers have had ambiguous test items and flawed test items, and as a result, the Department of Examinations had to authorize granting of marks to all candidates for such items. These are publicly known and the credibility of the examination is rather low in the public eye, although a lot of talking is done by key actors in education to wash the public eyes.

In 1988, the Department of Examinations had a functioning Test Item Bank and the G.C.E O-L examination paper settings were done for some subjects using the Item Bank. This has disappeared over time and the Department of Examinations is using the old style question paper setting panels. All examinations are too much driven toward a university education oriented content than enhancing authentic assessment of skills. Whereas the developed countries such as USA, Canada, Scandinavian countries and Australia strengthened Authentic Assessment, item banks and skill-oriented learning, Sri Lanka continues on the outworn modalities. World Bank funding was allocated for setting up the Item Bank and is now developed by the Research and Development branch of the Department of Examinations and handed over to the Commissioner General to utilize it in developing test items. However, so far, the items of the item bank are not taken for any examinations. Repeatedly the Department of Examinations has failed to produce good test items at public examinations. In the recent years, though not given publicity, in certain subjects such as GCE O-L Science paper awarded a significant number of marks to all candidates as the test items were flawed. The bad publicity that the entire general education system in Sri Lanka gets is mostly because of errors in question papers and corrupt practices. The highly politicized education systems has not made a single change in the responsible examination officials despite serious errors and huge damage done to students and the system of education. In the year 2005 just to cover up errors and bad practices of the GCE A-L examinations over an increase of 5000 entrants was done at university entrance. This was repeated in year 2010. The nation is taken for a ride by a few examination officials, with political blessings.

2.5 Most Common Assessment Practices in the Classroom

2.5.1 Paper pencil tests

The most common assessment practice followed by the teachers in schools is paper pencil tests. The word assessment does not exist in the teacher vocabulary and they use the word 'test'. A recent study (Bandara, 2014) of three schools in Mawanella in the Kegalle District indicates that teachers in Grade XI Science classes rarely use formative assessment but rather concentrate more on note giving and test questions.

This is very common even in a school in the Gampaha education zone. The team observed the lessons in Grade XIII and Grade XI classes (exam-bound classes). It was taking down notes and answers to questions, which are very much examination oriented. The Buddhism teacher of one school in Gampaha was repeatedly referring to the examinations, the topics and the short answers.

There was no questioning of students to see whether they understood the subject, but they were being asked to take down notes or answers for possible questions. However, in the same school the primary school teacher of Grade-five was exceptionally good and she was the type of teacher the schools should have as she was so effectively using formative assessments and also effectively distributed the learning for every student to learn it. She was also achieving the examination objectives but naturally, not coaching for the scholarship examination.

One of the observed teachers in the Gampaha education zone started the lesson in grade 10, saying that for the public examination there will be a question on the topic. Then she showed several past questions and coached how to write the answers for those questions rather than teaching. It was found that not only this particular teacher, but also the emphasis of other teachers was to coach students for the public examination. Similar observations were made in the schools in Galle, Badulla and Bandarawela education zones.

Exploring Malaysian schools, Lim (2009) states that this type of teaching is, “Drill and practice” and teachers do it as it is the most common and expedient way to cover the heavy load of content, but as a result students find learning boring and meaningless. Sedere (2009) reports that the efforts taken to bring public examinations in Sri Lanka to international standards were not successful. This was further proven by the interviews and field visits done in this study.

2.5.2 Home work assignments

Very frequently homework assignments are given. These assignments are mostly paper pencil question and answer type assignments. Rarely does a teacher give an assignment to assess skills and affective qualities of a student. Sometimes the teacher himself/herself marks the assignment and these are mostly paper-pencil type home work. Most of the times, the common..... Practice is that students or his or her friend marks the assignment when the teacher discusses the answers.

2.5.3 Term tests

In Sri Lankan Schools at the end of every school term, a paper-pencil type term-test is given. The tests are collectively prepared test papers by subject teachers or sometimes a test paper given by the division/zone. Then each subject teacher who teaches in the class marks the paper using a marking scheme prepared by the subject teacher, or the division/zone. Usually only the term test paper marks are reported in the report cards. However, teachers rarely follow the listed learning outcomes given

in the Teacher Instructional Manuals (TIMs). Except in Aesthetic subjects, the term test too is a paper-pencil test.

Term Tests have a long history and highly accepted by parents and teachers because it provides an assessment of the student every three months. This if employed correctly is a powerful feed-back mechanism for learning. This could be well utilized as a School-Based Assessment system. Despite SBA providing a better assessment scheme linked to teaching learning, centrally devised and produced Term Tests were given very high priority from about 2006. The Term Tests and the marking process take several weeks out of the time available for teaching-learning. It is usual to see children out-of-school during school hours and loafing about because the teachers are employed in marking papers. The adverse effects of these highly regarded Term Tests need to be taken note of. The entire Term Test scheme being summative, and content loaded, negates the purpose of having SBA to support formative assessment linked to teaching-learning.

2.5.4 Preferences in assessment

The Bandara (2014) study also presented 23 different types of assessment a teacher could use in classroom teaching. Students indicated that the most common was the tests, and 90% of the time the teachers used tests in Grade XI science classes. The short written test is the one over 90% indicated as the most common practice of assessment by the teachers. It is a positive thing to observe that 70% have indicated Group work and Practical tests as the 2nd and 3rd most common practices. All other listed assessment methods, selected 23 from the SBA Guidelines provided in 2008 by MoE, received less than 30% and a few such as speech, presentations, projects received less than 20% rating. This was also observed as the same in the FGD which were conducted in Kandy and Kegalle by the PGIS MSc students.

2.5.5 Assessment of projects

The GCE A-L examination has made project work mandatory. Also the GCE A-L examination Grade Card reports a grade for the project on a 4-point scale. Although it is mandatory, no one takes account of the project grades for the awarding of the A-L certificate. The Commissioner General of Examinations also indicated that the Department of Examinations has no faith in the project grade, but they process the examination results. It is well known to all that the projects of the GCE A-L students are not genuinely done by the student. Often these project reports are made by others, and even there are cases where one can get it done for a fee. Therefore, at present these valuable approaches to student learning assessment are all mismanaged, misused and undervalued in the process.

2.5.6 Assessment of skills

Assessment of practical skills is in practice in several aesthetic subjects such as Music, Dancing, Singing and Drawing/Art. Although there are many similar

subjects where the skills can be assessed such as Agriculture, Commerce and Science subjects, these are rarely assessed. Though the GCE A-L science subjects require laboratory assessments for School-Based Grades, these are never seriously done. However, there are schools where many types of assessments are done in the implementation of SBA. Such schools are exceptions and not the norm.

2.6 School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education issued the first circular on SBA on 20th January 1998 with the circular number 98/04 titled, "School-Based Assessment (SBA) program." It states that the program will help bring the results of existing public examinations to a satisfactory level, decreasing the rate of drop-outs and school would be converted to a place where students get enthusiastic about learning experiences. The teacher can stay amidst the students and look into their strengths and weaknesses and inform them the expected level of proficiency. It also mentions that instructions on SBA were issued by the National Institute of Education (NIE) and Department of Examinations (DoE).

Based on the circulars, handbooks and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, National Institute of Education and the Department of Examinations, the objectives of SBA can be summarized (Department of Examinations, 2004) as follows:

- To assess students while learning and teaching
- To assess students on criteria basis
- To make the school a place of effective learning experiences
- To motivate students for learning
- To develop the competencies of the student
- To produce a creative skilled person
- To produce an improved and balanced personality

2.6.1 Implementation process of School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The Circular number 98/42 issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education on 04/11/1998 gave the time frame of SBA implementation, i.e., to start SBA in Grade 6 in 1998 and the cycle to be completed in 2004 by Grade 13. With the implementation of SBA, it was suggested not to conduct 1st and 2nd term tests. Issuing a transcript at the end of grade 9 including 3rd term test marks of grades 6, 7, 8, 9 and SBA grades was also in the 98/42 circular, but it never materialized. The circular number 98/45 on 04/12/1998 provided instructions on the implementation of SBA at junior secondary (6-9) and senior secondary levels (10-11). The handbook issued in 1999 suggested teachers to have a close observation of students at work to identify the levels of students and to provide feedback to bring them to the desired level. The Ministry of Education has issued an instructional manual in 2003 to improve the way of implementing SBA in schools. One of the major aims for introducing these reforms was to increase the validity of the grades awarded for the

assessments. According to the Instruction Manual the assessment should be simple; it should be easy for the teacher to implement in the classroom and it should not be an extra burden to the teacher. The process can be carried out without constantly referring books; the assessment criteria and the method of awarding grades should be very transparent any which the students and their parents could understand easily and the process should be easy to be monitored by the relevant external parties. Some other changes also were introduced in 2003 to minimize the problems encountered when the process was implemented in Sri Lankan schools. Another intention was to make the process simpler so as to make it easy for the teachers to implement it in the classroom. The number of assessment occasions at which the marks should be recorded was reduced so that the teachers had to record marks of assessment occasions equal to the number of periods for a certain subject. In this 2003 instruction manual, instructions were given about the different types of assessment tools which can be used in the classroom. It was instructed to use five criteria to assess the students and to give four marks to each criterion. When the marks were to be recorded the marks should be converted into a ten-point scale and the grades were to be awarded as follows:

Marks	Competency level	Grade
9, 10	Excellent level of competency	1
8	High level of competency	2
6, 7	Credit level competency	3
4, 5	Near competency	4
3	Has not reached the expected competency	5
Absent		(-)

Furthermore, in this instruction manual, instructions were given on the criterion-based assessment process and how to implement it in the classroom. Some assessment tools and some criteria which can be used when using those assessment tools were also proposed and instructions were given on planning assessments. Most important what was expected from principals, teachers and parents were also mentioned.

Several researches informed educators that SBA was not implemented at the expected level. Therefore in the year 2007 again some changes were introduced to the SBA process in the Instruction Manual issued by the Ministry of Education in 2008, it was stated that the objectives of SBA are not achieved to the expected level in Sri Lanka because the teachers have not understood the process properly. Furthermore, many teachers consider SBA as another examination process, not as a process which supports in improving teaching and learning. Researches show that it was due to the instructions given by many school principals and teachers who emphasized conducting term tests along with SBA. Many schools conducted terminal examinations and there were requests from principals to allow them to

conduct term tests. In 2008 a special booklet was disseminated by the Ministry of Education informing the different modalities of SBA and how to conduct terminal examinations in schools without disturbing the principles of SBA. At the focus group discussions principals said that the first term test is conducted by the school, the second term test by the education zone and the third by the province. This was confirmed by the responses of directors, in-service advisers and teachers. The test papers should be prepared according to the given structure. The first question of O-L, A-L examination papers and all term test papers should be about an assessment tool used in SBA (Hand book issued by Ministry of Education, 2008 a & b).

Therefore, it was recommended in the hand book (2008) to conduct term tests along with SBA and to do so at zonal level. Although these guidelines should be followed by all teachers at secondary level, Karunaratne (2012) reports that there is a very low percentage (15%) of teachers who implement SBA successfully. There was no improvement in the successful implementation of SBA throughout the country. However, SBA is used as a very effective and flexible tool in the process of teaching, learning and assessment in many countries such as Australia, Canada, UK and Finland. Since 1978, Hong Kong has been using SBA as part of the public education system (HKEE website).

2.6.2 SBA: Assessment modalities

Assessment modalities were introduced to be used in classrooms to identify levels of learners in multiple ways. The circular number 2003/13 issued on 31/03/2013 by the Ministry of Education introduced 12 SBA modalities. The handbook SBA/RD/2003/06 added “speeches” to the existing list of modalities. Then the handbook SBA/RD/AL/2004/01 added 8 more modalities. The booklet issued by the Ministry of Education (2008) has introduced 23 modalities of SBA to be used in classrooms from grade 6-13 as follows:

1. **Assignments:** Specified tasks or amount of work undertaken as assigned by the teacher to develop the ability to identify a problem and to find solutions within a given time.
2. **Projects:** Task/topic/event/problem engaged in by a student or a group of students to supplement and apply classroom learning.
3. **Surveys:** Examining a condition, situation or value to query (someone) in order to collect data for the analysis of some aspect of a group or area.
4. **Discoveries:** Gaining knowledge of or ascertaining the existence of something previously unknown or unrecognized.
5. **Observations:** Using prior knowledge and theory, students gather information about a given part of a subject using the five senses.
6. **Demonstrations/Presentations:** Display of a collection of what students learned through drawings, posters, graphs, grids, models, slides etc.
7. **Field trips:** A study carried on according to a plan in an external place with the guidance of a teacher based on the objectives of a part of a lesson unit and submitting a report at the end.

8. **Short written tests and structured essays:** A short written test basically measures the knowledge and memory of the student and a limited number of skills. A structured essay can measure the abilities of organizing and creativity skills of students.
9. **Open Book tests:** Given opportunity to answer an event or a problem by using relevant books.
10. **Creative activities:** Engaging students in activities through the developed competencies where students can display their talents.
11. **Listening:** Listening activities to develop skills of comprehension and active listening.
12. **Practical activities:** Application of theoretical knowledge. Students can do self-evaluation.
13. **Speech:** Speech abilities of students in classroom, school activities
14. **Collection of own creations:** Collection of what a student has done for classroom activities in a term/year (Records from portfolios)
15. **Group activities:** Collaborative activity of a group of students in collecting information, recording, writing and presenting on a given task to reach a learning objective.
16. **Concept maps:** A strategy that can be used in teaching, learning and assessing to identify the understanding of concepts. When students are introduced to a new concept, they undergo a process in making sense of the concept and construct meaning consciously or subconsciously integrating the new knowledge with the existing body of knowledge. It could be used as a self-evaluation and peer evaluation tool.
17. **Double entry journal:** Teaching learning strategy to improve the students' ability to read a text and express their thoughts about the material at the same time. Students select what is important to them and respond with their own ideas improving their comprehension. Engagement in doing these journals is helpful in personalizing and deepening the quality of learning by integrating knowledge gained from different sources.
18. **Wall paper:** Opportunity for students to display what they learned in a particular topic creatively on a paper hanging on a classroom wall.
19. **Quiz programs:** On-going assessment tool that could be used at the beginning of a lesson. Using new technology in quizzes can build up the interest of students in their learning.
20. **Debates:** Oral confrontation between two groups. Facts presented by one group on a topic are argued by the other group following the rules.
21. **Panel discussions:** A group of students works together to gather information (on a controversial issue) and presents it as a team. It is designed to improve skills of research, logical organization of ideas and, the ability to present these ideas clearly and effectively.
22. **Instant speeches:** Without prior notice students are given a topic to make a short speech.
23. **Role plays:** Dramatic representation of what students learned in a particular content where students take part in performing different roles.

The success of SBA depends on the use of different modalities and developing criteria for each assessment by teachers using the five point scale given by the Ministry of Education handbook. Iddamalgoda (2013) has integrated assessment with 8 assessment modalities in developing a lesson plans to teach a biology unit “Engages in prevention of diseases related to the main systems in the human body” for tenth graders. She reports that students were able to develop many skills and they became active learners and, teachers also developed positive attitudes toward SBA. Alahakoon (2013) reports that 62 Mathematics teachers were made aware of the concept of SBA in the quality circles conducted in the Gampola education zone and asked them to use lesson plans with embedded assessments to teach “Area of plane figures.” He recommends that regular monitoring is needed for the successful implementation of SBA.

Teachers in the present study in the four education zones (Badulla, Bandarawela, Galle and Gampaha) stated that they develop criteria and students are assessed based on their involvement as a group such as the involvement in the activity, contribution made in completing the task, accepting ideas of others, how tolerant in listening to discrepant ideas, how empathetic in listening to others and so on. Although teachers stated that they develop these criteria and use different modalities in assessing students, there was no evidence from classroom observation to support their statements. Surprisingly, a teacher in the Bandarawela Education Zone has maintained portfolios of third grade students compiling student work. Each student had a separate folder and the teacher said that she uses them in discussing the student learning with the parents.

It was observed that teachers have the practice of asking low level oral questions which measured only recall. This shows that they are aware of how assessments are to be done in theory, but not in practice. In probing further the same teachers mentioned that they develop criteria for some assessments, but as it is time consuming they tend to assess students by giving a question to answer. As Majid (2011) reports this is exactly the situation in Malaysia in implementing SBA. Teachers were aware of SBA, but were uncertain about the role they need to play. Many wanted to change, but they lacked a good understanding of the characteristics, benefits, requirements and operation.

Some issues suggested by Lim (2009) to be considered in strengthening the implementation of SBA are given below:

Issue 1: Overemphasis on public examination performance

- a) “Teach to test” syndrome
- b) Rushing to finish the syllabus content
- c) Learned paralysis (Straight “A”s are good at regurgitating information thrown without understanding concepts, no soft skills, lack of creativity and innovative skills)

Issue 2: Mismatch between the intended and the implemented curriculum leads students to have,

- a) Boring and meaningless lessons
- b) Not promoting mathematical thinking or communication among students

The Malaysian school curriculum aims to develop students to think mathematically by developing:

- a) Problem solving in mathematics
- b) Communication skills in mathematics
- c) Reasoning in mathematics
- d) Mathematical connections
- e) Application of technology

It is necessary to consider teaching approaches such as cooperative learning, contextual learning, mastery learning, constructivism, enquiry-discovery to help develop the above mentioned skills.

2.6.3 Recommendations for the strengthening of SBA

Since the introduction of SBA in year 1998, it has continued up to now. However, the discussions with senior teachers as well as the Commissioner General of Examinations indicated that SBA was practiced better from 2002-2005. In year 2003, the Department of Examinations prepared guidelines and guidebooks for each and every subject of the GCE O-L examination and distributed them to all schools. Every school had an assigned designated teacher who was in-charge of the SBA activities. Teachers had to provide grades to the SBA Coordinator in school on time. Similarly the zonal office and the district office have SBA coordinators designated and these officials were responsible of monitoring and supervision of the SBA activities. These were seriously done and the SBA grades were better validated and were more reliable. However, after year 2005, the administrative structure that supported SBA collapsed and although SBA is in place, its seriousness, validity of assessments and the reliability of grades assigned seriously declined to its present status. Measures can be easily taken to strengthen SBA:

1. Modification in supervision and monitoring is needed in view of ensuring validity and reliability of SBA and reintroduce the system that prevailed a decade ago with more refined statutory status than mere circulars;
2. FGD discussions indicated the student numbers in a class, often over 45 in bigger schools, in a class and work load of teachers are major constraints for the effective implementation of SBA. However, when the current Teacher Pupil Ratio of 1:16 and the number of classrooms available in a school are taken to consideration, at any given school period, in most of the bigger schools, over 50% of the teachers are free and mostly in the staffroom. This indicates that the present workload requirement of 25 periods a week, out of 40 periods in a week, could be easily redefined and allow teachers to attend to SBA activities and also to assign a senior teacher or a deputy principal for

SBA activities and establish procedures, a code of conduct, and follow valid and reliable strategies in the implementation of SBA;

3. The poor deployment of teachers and the highly politicized nature of teacher's deployment have to come to a stop and necessary measures have to be taken for effective deployment of teachers ensuring all schools have the subject-wise, qualifications-wise needed teachers for primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels to enable SBA to work at school level;
4. Quality of assessment of learning is stereotyped paper-pencil tests and teachers need to be trained in the utilization of various assessment modalities in workshops with activities. These provide opportunities for the teacher to make assessments and judgments, not only of the students cognitive abilities, both lower order and higher order traits, but also emotional qualities, people skills and the 21st century skills that are widely recognized by the developed countries. It is required to have serious changes in the perceptions of teachers in their own role in relation to their students and classrooms;
5. Teaching and learning and assessment in Grades 6 - 9 are heavily neglected. Since there is no public examination at these grades, the school-based assessment process can be strengthened. The grade 6-9 period could be used to develop other skills such as social skills and emotional intelligence in students. Today even the assessment marks of SBA for grade 6 - 9 are never used in reporting. These need to be redefined and teachers made to utilize SBA grading more effectively to change parent's perceptions towards school-based assessment;
6. The FGD indicated that the instructions given by In-service advisers (ISAA) and the instructions available in Teacher Instructional Manuals (TIMs) are different on SBA and assessment. There should be congruency in instructions and National Institute of Education (NIE) and Department of Examinations (DoE) must work together to make SBA work well;
7. DoE complains that the SBA marks/grades currently awarded by teachers are biased. Transparent and reliable procedures need to be introduced such as in the aesthetic subjects to have out-of-school panels be duly constituted jointly by the Department of Examinations and the Zonal Director/Officials to make assessments at reasonable intervals and acceptable frequency, may be at the end of three terms. DoE and NIE must train School-Based Assessment Panels at every Division and Zone to bring reliability, validity and transparency of grading to win parent's and students' confidence in SBA;
8. With the initiative taken by the Director General of NIE in 2006, together with MoE, NEC and DoE there were 21 sessions with all subject Directors and key officials on SBA and a scheme was near to be completed to be adopted for all subjects at GCE O-L and A-L. Further all subject syllabuses were analyzed

into three categories to identify the subject units with Higher Order Abilities to be assessed under SBA under the new procedures which were emerging through the work of the key officials. This can be revived.

Davison's (2007) states that, "In fact, the SBA guidelines asked teachers to set their own time limits according to the needs of the students, but this was interpreted through the prism of teachers' existing experience – many schools used buzzers and stopwatches to allocate an identical period of time to each student, with the result that in some schools students' stress levels were high and their "performance" very contrived and/or rushed. As an outcome-oriented standards-referenced system, SBA is a significant cultural and attitudinal change, not only for teachers but for the whole school community, including students and parents. Hence, it is not surprising that fairness was a deep-seated socio-cultural, not just political concern"

2.7 The Three Public Examinations

2.7.1 Grade Five scholarship examination

The Department of Examination (DoE) conducts the Grade Five Scholarship Examination annually in August with the twin objectives, to provide bursaries to the economically handicapped bright students to have access to continue education in better schools and, to accommodate bright students in popular schools. In year 2013, 322,455 candidates took the test at 2386 centers nationwide. A total of 32,617 candidates or 10.12% were selected for placement. This examination does not conform to any technical parameters. Students are coached from early grades to get high scores at the examination through the assistance of tuition masters retained by the parents. Administering a test to select students without knowing the test item behavior is a crime. Students are the guinea pigs. When a test that is not pre-tested or standardized is used for selection that test will not be able to bring any reliable selection. Although the mandate of the National Testing and Evaluation Service, still named as the Department of Examinations, with Asian Development Bank loan investment, was to develop Assessment Services, the Department functions in the same old modality basically running the three public examinations. The Scholarship Examination is supposed to test General Ability but the truth is that Sri Lanka does not have even a single standardized Intelligence or Ability Test in place; whereas our neighboring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have achieved these and use such instruments successfully.

Even after 50 years of holding Scholarship Examinations, the Department of Examinations has failed to produce a nationally accepted highly reliable assessment system to identify primary school children on multiple measures and have concentrated only on the 'Test'. There had been instances where the same test item was there in the Scholarship Examinations and the selection test to the Sri Lanka Administrative Service.

In recent days the scholarship examination has been at the centre of discussion on media as well as in public. Many views have been expressed and some suggested the

examination to be abolished, some suggested the examination to be conducted at Grade 7, not Grade 5; some suggested it should be reformed and improved. However, the majority, almost all at Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted at Bandarawela, Badulla, Gampaha and Galle education zones indicated not to abolish the Scholarship Examination but to find better ways of doing the selections.

2.7.1.1 Structure of the examination

The examination has two papers, Paper I and Paper II. Paper I is to assess the candidates' Learning Abilities and Potentialities and 14 constructs are identified to set up the 45minute paper-pencil test. Paper II is expected to cover the whole Grade Five syllabus including all school level learning activities. The test is an achievement test of 75 minute duration.

However, in practice Paper II covers First Language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies. The only subject left out at the Scholarship Examination is religion.

2.7.1.2 Significant variations across districts

Generally about 10% of the number above a cut-off point are placed in popular schools. The cut-off points vary across the 25 administrative districts and the population quota. However the percentage of selected candidates above the cutoff mark varied from 4.91% to 13.29% respectively between the Mullaitivu and Hambantota districts in year 2011; from 4.93% to 13.36% between the Killinochchi and Kurunegala districts in year 2012 and from 5.92% to 13.89% between the Nuwara Eliya and Hambantota districts. There is a significant inter district variation of the percentages.

2.7.1.3 Significant disparity across zones

There is a much higher degree of disparity in the passing percentages across the education zones. The national lowest is Vavuniya zone (4.18%) in the Anuradhapura District and highest is Gampaha (17.26%) in the Colombo District.

2.7.1.4 Significant variation by income levels

Of the number (318416) sitting for the examination in 2012, 68% belong to the lower income category and 32% belong to the higher income category. The passing rate shows that 55% of the higher income category and 45% of the lower income category passing the cutoff scores. 100% students belonging to the lower income group received bursaries (DoE, 2014). It should be noted that the real number passing in the real lower income group is much less because many who declare as lower income really do not belong to that category.

2.7.1.5 Some important issues

Though the scholarship examination has been conducted since 1952, under different names, the Ability Test had been a part of the examination; there is no standardized ability test that could be more objectively utilized in the selections. Some available expert compiles the ability test. Though the research in recent decades advocates assessing multiple intelligences in primary school children, the Scholarship Examination in Sri Lanka continues to assess only cognitive abilities (Sedere et al., 2009).

2.7.1.6 Criticisms

The current practice of conducting the scholarship examination was criticized by the directors of education, principals and teachers at the focus group discussions held in the Western, Southern and Uva provinces. They do not want to abolish the examination as it provides opportunities for many children to find a better school for further education as many students who have succeeded in getting the scholarship have followed higher education in prestigious schools. However, the main objection was due to the heavy work load imposed on the students and the stress caused. Today many children do not have time to enjoy their childhood, because they are sent by the parents to private tuition classes and coaching at home. It has become an examination for parents to boast about their children. Due to the pressure exerted by parents some children have become mental patients as they were unable to meet their parents' expectations.

The Predicative Validity of the Scholarship Examination is also questioned. Two officers gave examples of higher achievers at the scholarship examination that could not show good results even at the GCE advanced level. They said that there is no correlation with the scholarship examination and university entrance.

Many teachers and officials also mentioned to take action not to exhibit photographs of winners of examinations in front of schools. These measures taken by media and supported by the Ministry of Education and Government are creating wrong images of education in children and have contributed to high competition as well as making many students frustrated.

2.7.1.7 Standard Error of Measurement

In the recent days there was a suggestion to reduce the testing time of the scholarship examination by amalgamating the two papers into one. This is technically wrong. It will significantly increase the standard error of measurement. The theory of measurement advocates having multiple measures to increase reliability and reduce the standard error of measurement and lengthen the test and have a battery of test items to increase reliability. There are no short cut answers to good assessment of abilities other than developing technically sound ability tests and making assessment more transparent to all. Sadly, the basic technical properties

of a test are ignored when decisions are taken. The recent announcement of shortening the test is one such technically incorrect decision. By reducing time the competitiveness and the stress will further increase. It contributes more to incorrect selection of students. The reliability of the test and the Standard Error of Measurement relates very much to item statistics and test item behavior. In a test if the item behavior is not estimated, such test items should not be used in selection tests because they contribute to standard error and make assessment less reliable.

2.7.1.8 *Alternatives to the scholarship examination*

In the above context it is advisable to assess children over the year in Grade V, in all three terms, over all subjects and co-curricular subjects, using more valid, reliable and practical assessment methods. If the test is to facilitate social mobility, the test should be fair by the schools catering to the children of the socioeconomically weaker ones. If the test wishes to assess the highly intellectual students in order to provide those better schools, then the test should be to assess higher order abilities. Either way in a situation where there are no standardized tests in place for identification of High performing high IQ students, neither test is done in favor of the students of the socioeconomically weaker ones, but both of these can be achieved, using two different strategies, through a well-designed, School-Based-Assessment system, that is well managed, unbiased, highly valid, reliable, and transparent.

2.7.1.9 *Placement of good students from weaker socioeconomic backgrounds*

Schools in the weaker socioeconomic band could be granted a reasonable number of places to transfer a few of the best performing students from weaker to better recognized schools in their own educational zone. However, if the on-going one-thousand schools concept is properly implemented this situation may not arise in the medium term.

2.7.1.10 *Placement of high performing students*

The outstanding overall high performing students could be given scholarships to enter better schools across the nation by not conducting a scholarship test. It will be an assessment method of identifying the deserving students with consistent performance over the year in Grade V, assessed using reliable, valid and transparent assessment techniques on the whole school curriculum including co-curricular subjects. If a student is identified as skilled in sports, running, throwing, games and so forth he/she should also be given the opportunity to get to a better school. A student good in Music, Dancing and aesthetics should also be given a chance to move on to better schools; not only the students who do well in academic subjects. These selections should take note of Multiple Intelligence theories and practices. These are being done well in many developing countries such as USA by selecting Merit Students who achieve GPA of 3.5 or above in National Testing. Such students

in Grade Five have the option to get to a Magnet School and in Grade 9 such students could get into Specialization Schools that offer Advanced Courses.

According to the Education Minister, the Grade-V scholarship examination will probably be scrapped from 2016 and, it will be replaced by an evaluation which is a result of the secondary school development project.(Daily News, 05/05/2014)

2.7.2 General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level)

The GCE O-L Examination was introduced in year 1962 and since then there have been many revisions. Curriculum Structure has three clusters for optional subjects, given in the Examinations Guide RD OL 1, May 30, 2008 by the Department of Examinations.: The G.C.E O-L Examination has six core-subjects, which are compulsory for a candidate, and a candidate could select three other optional subjects, one each from three clusters of subjects. The six core subjects are Religion, First Language, Mathematics, English, History and Science.

2.7.2.1 Number of subjects and question papers

The DoE has to prepare G.C.E O-L examinations for 49 subjects. Although Religion is one subject, under which there are 06 religions and treated as six different subjects in the curriculum material as well at the examination. Under Language and Literature there are three subjects. This means under core-subjects the DoE has to prepare examinations for 12 subjects. Under Cluster One there are 13 subjects, Under Cluster Two there are 13 subjects and under Cluster Three there are 11 subjects. All core-subjects, all subjects in Cluster One other than Classical and Modern Languages, all subjects in Cluster Two and all subjects in Cluster Three have two papers as Paper 1 & Paper 2. With all these combinations the G.C.E O-L examination runs into over one hundred question papers. The number of candidates who sit for the G.C.E O-L has increased over the years and over 500,000 take the examination and of them nearly 400,000 are school candidates.

Further in 1998, the G.C.E O-L Examination included 'School-Based Assessment' (SBA) in all subjects. This is an integral part of the curriculum and the examination framework for G.C.E O-L. The result sheet of the G.C.E O-L examination reports SBA grading as well. However, the SBA is not utilized effectively due to shortcomings that exist in the scheme and at implementation.

2.7.3 General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examination

G.C.E A-L examination has become too competitive due to the limited space for higher education at the national universities. Over the last two decades, due to the intensity of the competition to limited places for university admissions, particularly

in the medical and engineering fields, out-of-school coaching has devalued the school system.

There is no clear curriculum structure at the A-L. However, as selections of candidates to national universities is based on G.C.E A-L results, a candidate who wishes to seek entrance to a particular faculty of studies such as Agriculture, Architecture, Commerce, Dentistry, Aesthetics, Engineering, Home Economics Management, Medicine, Law, Liberal Arts and Science has to have the pre-requisites satisfied at G.C.E A-L. Accordingly, schools generally operate in several curriculum streams such Arts, Bio-Science, Commerce, Aesthetics, Home Economics, and Physical Science and candidates select subjects accordingly. The university entrance also requires a candidate to obtain a minimum standard for English Language and General Knowledge and all candidates who seek university entrance with the G.C.E A-L sit

for these two core subjects. All subjects of the G.C.E A-L have two papers as Paper 1 & Paper 2. With all these combinations the G.C.E A-L examination runs into over one hundred question papers.

Further the G.C.E A-L Examination from year 2005 includes SBA grading. However, due to disparities that exist in the assessment at school level and slow progress made in the training of teachers to use SBA in a reliable manner, SBA results are not used in any decision making. Most of the subjects with a practical component have made it compulsory to have SBA implemented.

The team considers that it is essential to fill the gaps in SBA on a priority basis as it paves the way to strengthen schooling and makes assessments and examination more meaningful. The O-L and A-L curricula and syllabuses need to be analyzed indicating which contents and competencies will be assessed at school level and which ones will be assessed at the public examination. These two should complement each other and candidates could pass the examination only if satisfactory performance is demonstrated at both assessments -SBA and examination.

3. INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

3.1 Internationally Accepted Standards in the Process of National Level Examinations and Assessments

The team has carried out internet/web based investigations to understand the current best practices and it has also reviewed a few selected documents which are more relevant to the context and the British heritage in the examination system as is in Sri Lanka. The team examined the examinations in Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, SEAMEO countries - Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Besides these the school education related examination and certification practices in USA and The Netherlands were also examined because those systems are internationally more recognized for best practices. Dr. Thomas Kallegghen, Testing Specialist, Educational Research Institute of Ireland, and a Mission Member of the World Bank Supervision Mission to Sri Lanka also worked in developing internationally accepted standards to the Sri Lankan examination system. Several important aspects of assessment and examinations are identified as best international practices to be introduced or strengthened in our examinations in Sri Lanka (Sedere, 2009):

- a) Transparency of Examinations;
- b) Integration of School-Based Assessment in Public Examinations,
- c) Identification of Minimum Competency For Passing of Exams,
- d) Inclusion of Co-curricular Activities in Assessment

These items are discussed in the following sub-sections assessing the feasibility of implementing these in the context of Sri Lanka; and the coping capacity of the Department of Examinations. Appropriate recommendations are made under each of these sub-headings.

3.1.1 Transparency of examinations

Achieving a high degree of transparency in examinations is the best international practice, which is currently well established particularly in Canada and Ireland, where the examination authorities return the marked scripts to the candidate. Further in Ireland and British Columbia in Canada follow the practice of pre-scrutiny of examination results by the respective schools. Therefore, there are no complaints and examinations have become transparent and the public confidence is safeguarded. These practices are spreading to other countries. In Queensland, Australia such moves are being made. New Zealand is also considering similar measures to be introduced. The South Asian situation is different. In India under graduate students of the University of New Delhi went to court last year demanding that university authorities release their answer scripts back to the candidates. There are two other pending cases demanding the return of the marked answer scripts to the candidates. So, it is a matter of time that similar demands may arise in Sri Lanka.

Issues relating to transparency of examinations have come up several times in Sri Lanka, particularly when public confidence is shattered. When the public is more educated, one cannot deny access to original sources to see how the DoE has managed exams. This matters very much for the image of the examination department. To an extent DoE has lost its image in the recent years, particularly after 2005 GCE A-L results in Chemistry where papers were poorly managed and incorrect results were published. The 2010 GCE A-L examination brought serious controversies. Similar concerns have been raised over the Scholarship Examination, When such concerns arose from time-to-time, the governments did take some steps to sustain the integrity of the institution and arrested such incidents.

In British Columbia, Canada and Ireland the examination marking schemes are published. Then subsequently the tentative results of the examination are sent to schools for pre-scrutiny. Then the marked answer scripts go back to the candidates. These give 100% transparency of the process and prepare the entire examination machinery to adhere to standards and minimize subjective errors in marking. Some of the other examination departments/boards in Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand are introducing similar changes. These concepts could be used in Sri Lanka as well to increase the transparency of examinations.

3.1.2 Integrating SBA with GCE O-L and A-L Grades

Since its basis is sound and could be further improved DoE could utilize the SBA and examination grades in a complementary way to indicate in the result sheet whether a candidate is qualified to enter the next stage of the education ladder that means continuation from GCE O-L to A-L and GCE A-L to enter university. This needs acceptable criteria for making such a decision. These changes are adopted in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada where the British Examination system used to be practiced as it is still practiced in Sri Lanka.

For further Strengthening of SBA Grading: the DoE could compare SBA grades with the Examination Grades of the respective subjects and indicate this to the respective schools and teachers with subjects showing significant disparities for a pre-scrutiny. The subject teacher and the respective student will have to examine these differences and provide a response. If examination results and SBA are too different, the respective subject teacher will be asked for explanations. This will eventually help to increase validity and reliability of school based assessments and make the teachers more responsible for grading in SBA.

In view of the best international practices, we are happy that Sri Lanka too has introduced SBA, in some form, since year 1997. Yet SBA lacks technical support and the best use for strengthening of the school system needs to improve. There seems to have been some unhealthy practices in grading. The MoE also has included project activities under SBA. However, the assessment methods and grading systems also need to be further developed. The team is making recommendations along these lines to establish SBA in a broader framework with a zonal level monitoring mechanism and linking it with the Department of Examinations.

3.1.3 Minimum Competency Test

One of the best practices in School Based Assessments and Examinations in the developed countries is the certification of minimum competence rather than maximum competence. The 'Minimum Competency' should be assessed at SBA and Paper-I of GCE O-L and GCE A-L examinations. The Paper I of the exam should be a 'Minimum Competency Test' that should be sufficient for a student to pass the examination. Content that is needed to certify minimum competence has to be identified from the syllabus and competencies. This will ensure that the larger percentage of students pass the examination. The intention of assessment is not to fail students. The Paper II of the subject examination should target the assessment of higher order abilities and competencies. SBA and Paper I grades would be utilized to certify a 'Pass' ('S' Grade) for a candidate. The Paper II marks will be used to decide whether a candidate gets a "C", 'B' or 'A' Grade.

3.1.4 Assessment of co-curricular activities

One of the best practices in assessments and certification of completion of elementary and secondary education in developed countries is to assess student participation and performance in school-based-co-curricular activities. This is very necessary for the overall development of the child. This is the only way the multiple intelligences could be developed and assessed. Also it is a way of ensuring emotional maturity through participation in service projects and sports. This is a logical way of reducing the heavy examination orientation and empowering school education. School based co-curricular activities viz sports, performing arts, school leadership programs such as societies and clubs, cadetting, guiding and community oriented services add immense value to the total personality development of the child. Instead of being passive observers, students should be active participants to develop psychomotor skills.

Schools in USA and Canada and in all American and Canadian International Schools have set minimum standards for every student to perform. For instance a student should be able to swim 75 Feet (25 Metres) in a set minimum time, should be able to run a mile within a set minimum time, at least should participate and perform in two sports activities. Students must have participated in two community project activities. These ensure the emotional and physical fitness that supports better cognitive performance as well.

3.2 Assessment of Emotional Intelligence (EI/EQ)

3.2.1 Some definitions / concepts

Emotional intelligence is emerging as a critical factor for sustaining high achievement, retention, and positive behavior as well as improving life success. Increasingly, schools and educational organizations are turning to Emotional intelligence (EQ or EI) seeking a systemic solution to improve outcomes-both

academic and social (such as school attrition, student satisfaction, peer relationships, and health).

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. It can also be defined as the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking.

Emotions are seen to be important in the classroom in two major ways:

- First, emotions have an impact on learning. They influence our ability to process information and to accurately understand what we encounter. For these reasons, it is important for teachers to create a positive, emotionally safe classroom environment to provide for the optimal learning of students;
- Second, learning how to manage feelings and relationships constitutes a kind of “emotional intelligence” that enables people to be successful which in turn will create many positive impacts at large.

EQ has been observed to be linked to many positive impacts on school children such as improved academic performance, avoiding risk behaviors, stronger friendships, decrease in violent behavior, staying in school-higher graduation rates, less disruptive behavior; fewer discipline problems, improving health, happiness and life success, which, as a result, make it timely and crucial for EQ to be introduced to school curricula. As a more concise definition, emotional intelligence emphasizes; knowing one’s feelings and using them to make good decisions in life, being able to manage moods and control impulses and being motivated and effectively overcoming setbacks in working towards goals.

3.2.2 Main skills expected to be acquired or enhanced by a student through EI during the schooling period

1. Being aware of one’s emotions

Among the attributes of self-awareness and self-knowledge is the ability to recognize one’s own feelings. The Students’ ability to understand their emotions is linked to greater self-confidence, since this understanding helps them to feel greater control over their inner life and students need support in developing this self-confidence by being helped to learn and identify what they are thinking and how they are feeling when they make decisions.

2. Managing those emotions

Being aware of one’s emotions is only one aspect of emotional intelligence. The emotionally intelligent individual also knows how to manage these emotions. Students will sometimes be frustrated or anxious when they try to learn something

that is difficult. The classroom environment and teacher supervision should help students learn to manage their feelings and resolve their disagreements peacefully.

3. Motivating oneself

Self-motivation, which is the ability to generate feelings of enthusiasm help boost confidence, and persistence, especially during setbacks. Students who are optimistic motivate themselves to expect success. From a standpoint of emotional intelligence, optimism is an attitude that buffers people against falling into apathy, hopelessness, or depression in the face of tough going and is a timely aspect in the curriculum.

4. Empathizing

“Empathy” is the ability to recognize emotions in others and to have compassion when others react emotionally. Students who display skills in empathy are good listeners, are sensitive to others’ needs and feelings, and treat others with respect. Thus, students must be encouraged to develop empathy by providing opportunities to put themselves in one another’s shoes, to take on and understand different perspectives, and to take responsibility for their actions.

5. Relating well with others in a group

Positive social relationships in school, working well with others and developing meaningful personal relationships are often associated with positive academic achievement. In addition, students who develop social skills become team players and team builders, which is important both inside and outside of the classroom. The curriculum must, therefore, essentially facilitate positive relationships and effective group interactions.

3.2.3 EI through skills development in classroom

Promotion of EI in the classroom can be challenging. It must strategically be done through skills development. Therefore, further breaking down the five key skills mentioned above into the following domains in students can be expected to enhance and develop them through a well-defined curriculum in the classroom successfully (see, Figure below).

1. **Self-Awareness:** includes understanding negative thought processes, recognizing the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and actions, teaching students a process to interrupt negative thinking.
2. **Self-Empowerment:** emphasizes on identifying limiting beliefs, teaching students a process for soothing themselves and stepping back from a situation, using goal setting and follow up to demonstrate power to change destiny.
3. **Communication Skills:** essentially includes understanding others, paying attention to body language cues, learning models of good communication and practicing active communication.

4. **Group Interaction:** ideally focuses on learning to be a leader, follower and value contributions of all participants, recognizing emotional triggers and following through on commitments.
5. **Conflict Resolution:** a much needed domain which includes stepping out of the emotional spiral, understanding the factors at play in a conflict, identifying wants and needs, managing emotions and seeking an equitable resolution by students themselves.



3.2.4 Measuring Emotional Intelligence

There are some EQ tests that are not available for general use and the reliability and validity of the tests are also not fully accepted. In the developed countries Emotional Development is ensured through mandatory participation of students in selected activities. In the American Elementary Schools, Middle Schools and High Schools for graduation at each of these stages a student has to demonstrate active participation in sports, drama, group events, service projects etc.

There are two main types of generally valid tests for the measure of emotional intelligence:

1. **Specific ability tests** - measure a key specific ability related to EI such as the capacity to accurately identify emotion in faces.
2. **General integrative tests** - measure across a number of specific EI skills to provide an overall picture of an individual's emotional intelligence

These tests specifically measure two types of EI: (1) Ability, and (2) Trait.

1. **Ability EI:** involves actual skills and are, therefore, measured using performance tests (i.e. MSCEIT) that are similar to standard IQ tests. Individuals perform tasks such as identifying the emotions in photographs of faces or art; matching emotions to sensations etc.; deciding how emotions combine to form more complex emotions and how emotional reactions change over time; and selecting the most appropriate responses to manage emotions.
2. **Trait EI:** typically assess via self-report questionnaires, which are viable measures of personality traits and self-perceptions. Individuals are asked to

rate statements using Likert scales. Unlike performance tests such as the MSCEIT, self-report questionnaires assess more subjective internal emotional experiences and are relatively simple to administer and score.

The decision as to which type of test to use with your students is dictated by: (a) the purpose in using the measure within the school, and (b) the practicalities of administration. These two types of EI require different assessment techniques.

3.2.5 Mayer-Salovey-Caruso EI Test (MSCEIT)

The MSCEIT is a performance test that contains 141 items, measuring eight EI tasks, four branches, two areas and global ability EI. However, because the scoring technique does not permit factually correct answers, the test is perhaps better seen as a measure of emotion related cognitive skills, as opposed to a type of intelligence.

The MSCEIT has a specific focus on the assessment of four emotional skills and focuses on a wider range of emotional facets. Thus, there is less opportunity for students to evaluate and reflect on emotion-related transferable skills. However, the MSCEIT does have the added benefit that it assesses real emotional skills and so gives students an indication of their actual rather than perceived level of emotional functioning (perceived levels being the focus of trait EI tests).

3.2.6 Trait EI Test

Because trait EI tests are typically self-report questionnaires, they are easy to administer and score within a brief seminar, workshop or lecture. For all tests, rather than simply providing students with their scores on each subscale of a test (which may be viewed as meaningless by students), scores can be plotted on graphs so students can visually identify their strengths and areas for development.

3.2.7 The Schutte EI Test (SEIS)

The Schutte EI test is one of the most widely used trait EI scales in the literature. This is partly because the measure was one of the first freely available self-report EI measures that mapped onto an existing EI model. The test includes 33 items that assesses global trait EI and four facets, i.e. (i) optimism/mood regulation; (ii) appraisal of emotions; (iii) social skills, and (iv) utilization of emotions. Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Like the MSCEIT, this test has a specific focus on the assessment of four emotional facet means.

3.2.8 Multidimensional Emotional Intelligence Assessment (MEIA)

The 116-item MEIA includes 10 subscales and 3 broader EI factors, rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”: self-orientation: motivating emotions, recognition of emotion in the self, regulation of emotion in the self, and intuition vs reason; emotional sharing: nonverbal emotional expression, empathy, and mood redirected attention; other orientations: creative thinking, recognition of emotion in others, and regulation of emotion in others. The inclusion of 10 subscales to assess varying trait EI facets means that students obtain a broader picture of their emotion-related personality traits than would be gained with the SEIS. The core EI facets are important, but additional components such as “creative thinking” are skills that are vital to success within educational and occupational spheres.

3.2.9 Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT)

The SUEIT uses 64 items to assess global EI and five EI facets: emotional control, emotional recognition and expression, emotional management, emotions direct cognition and understanding of emotions external. Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “never” to “always”.

The SUEIT is similar to the SEIS in terms of assessing a small number of core EI facets, although awareness of strengths and weaknesses on these facets is important for students (as argued in the context of the SEIS).

3.2.10 Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue)

The 153-item TEIQue is a more broadly-defined comprehensive measure that covers all facets of trait EI as postulated by the Petrides and Furnham’s (2001) trait EI framework. The TEIQue includes 4 compound scales that encompass 15 subscales: well-being: happiness, optimism, and self-esteem; self-control: control/emotion regulation, stress management, and impulsiveness (low); emotionability: emotion expression, empathy, emotion perception (self and others, and relationship skills; sociability: social competence, assertiveness, and emotion management (others). Self-motivation and adaptability are the final two subscales, but they do not belong to any of the four broader scales. Questions are rated using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “completely disagree” to 7 “completely agree”.

3.2.11 The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i; Bar-On)

The 133-item Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I; Bar-On, 1997) is a comprehensive measure that is somewhat similar to the TEIQue. However, the EQ-I was developed as a measure of emotional and social competencies that are important for dealing with environmental demands and pressures. It therefore also targets several non-trait EI facets such as “problem solving” and “reality testing”. The test uses a 5-point Likert scale and includes 5 compound scales encompassing 15 subscales: interpersonal EQ (Emotional Quotient): empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility; intrapersonal EQ: assertiveness, emotional self-awareness, self-

regard, self-actualization and independence; stress management: impulse control and stress tolerance; adaptability: flexibility, reality testing and problem solving; general mood, consisting of optimism and happiness.

3.2.12 Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI)

The ESCI uses 70 items to assess emotional competencies, defined as learned EI-based capabilities that contribute to work performance. The test uses a 5-point Likert scale and assesses 12 competencies via clusters: self-awareness: emotional awareness, self-management: achievement orientation, adaptability, emotional self-control, positive outlook; social awareness: empathy, organizational awareness; relationship management: inspirational leadership, influence, conflict management, teamwork, coach and mentor.

3.3. Measures to be adopted on Assessment of EQ (Soft skills) in the Context of Sri Lanka

EQ is better translated today into practical realities of Enhancing Soft Skills. Sri Lanka has no IQ or Ability Scale, after so many years of running an education system on the ability model. So if one expects to have an EQ test developed this will never materialize. Most of the developed countries do not use EQ tests, but have made EQ related programs and performance mandatory for graduations. There are two models available:

The support system of Soft skills Development in Schools demands Standards and Assessments; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; and Learning Environment are to be attuned to facilitate the acquisition of these soft skills by the students. To facilitate the development of soft skills all four domains have to be addressed and provide the requisite standards, curriculum content and instructional methods; professional development and learning environment.

There are three approaches to incorporate Soft Skills. Whichever the set of soft skills is selected to be incorporated with the study program, it is necessary to decide which modality should be adopted in enhancing soft skills. When it comes to incorporating skills, there are several approaches to follow.

3.3.1 The holistic approach:

A holistic approach is used to plan and implement soft skills among students with the combination of several programs and main activities;

- Formal teaching and learning activities (include all curricular and co-curricular elements);
- Support programs (academic and non-academic focused)
- The students' school life - (students' residences and the school surroundings).
- There are three Models which may be adopted in development of soft skills.

3.3.2 Stand alone subject model

This model uses the approach of training and providing opportunities to students to develop soft skills through specific courses that are carefully planned for this purpose.

3.3.3 Embedded model

This model uses the approach of embedding the soft skills in the teaching and learning activities across the curriculum. It does not require the student to take special courses as in the stand alone subject model.

3.3.4 Combined stand alone and embedded model:

This allows the schools to introduce special courses if necessary and also to integrate elements as needed to the running program. Diagram 1 illustrates this. The logical step for the NEC is to recommend the soft skills program in all schools as mandatory requirements for the completion of Primary School, Middle School or/and the Junior Secondary and the Higher Secondary Levels.

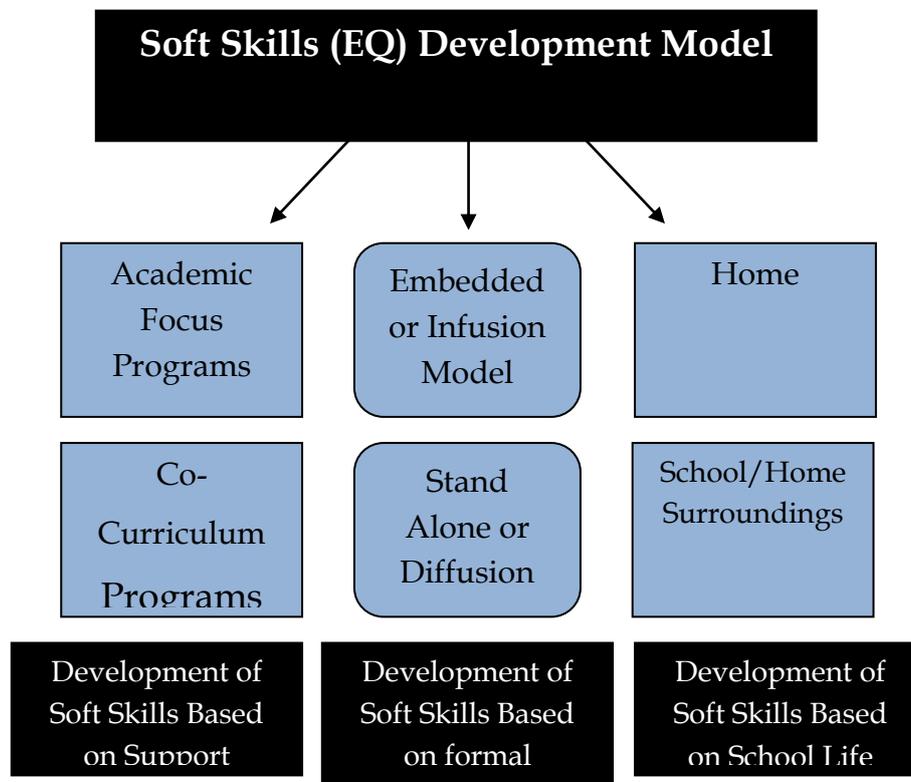


Diagram 1

(Source Sedere, 2013)

3.3.5 A more holistic framework

The work of ten teams needs to be compiled together to develop a holistic well-developed policy framework. Assessments and Examinations alone cannot develop a child for the 21st century. A well-designed school curriculum which matches the child's maturity level will enable developing both soft and hard skills along with the feedback received from continuous assessment. Then only will the education system prepare the child to be a successful member of the knowledge society displaying his/her character and attributes as a good citizen.

Technically, many teachers and students are concerned about validity, reliability and fairness of the SBA component. While teacher-educators and researchers are of the view that SBA will enhance the validity and reliability of the HKCEE theoretically, some frontline teachers and students are skeptical about this.

As for practical issues, teachers raised such concerns as:

- The need for access to appropriate assessment (and extensive reading) resources;
- The need for activities and techniques as models/resources;
- Concerns about the type of recordings of oral performance that they were expected to collect;
- Lack of practical support for teachers at the school level;
- Concerns about the adequacy of professional development in SBA;
- Lack of time to implement and discuss assessments;
- Competing demands and priorities in relation to time allocation (Davison, 2007).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

Sri Lanka is known for its high enrollment and completion of basic and secondary education. However, education has stagnated with stereotype learning and heavy academic and examination orientation. The primary reasons for this is the failure of the system to offer a more dynamic and creative school curriculum and instructional strategy and deviation from the traditional examination culture. Today the entire education system from primary education through higher education suffers from these syndromes. Although the government of Sri Lanka wishes to orient the education system to meet the growing demand of a knowledge society, the paper-pencil based tests and the heavy content loading oppose developing skills and have eroded the value of the school and have cultivated an out of school tuition culture that has further degraded the formal school. The examinations are stressful to all students and even the parents. Yet, those who are passing the examinations continue to remain unemployed as they do not have employable skills. The public examinations as well as school tests contribute to this situation. Moreover, in the last decade public examinations too have failed to maintain reliability and transparency of its examinations due to the repeated failure of preserving important parameters of testing. The time has come for Sri Lanka to deviate from such practices and bring about drastic changes in the curriculum, instructional systems and assessment practices along the lines of international best practices by placing a higher value to school-based assessment and developing a solid school-based assessment system that could gradually reduce examination stress, facilitate the total development of the student, orient the system of education more towards skills enhancement than static content knowledge. This demands the development of valid, reliable and transparent procedures for SBA; training of all teachers and supervisors of effective and efficient management of SBA at school, divisional, zonal and national levels; and incorporating SBA grades with public examination grades rather than reporting SBA grades as standalone grades.

4.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made considering the current situation in the learning assessment and evaluation of general education in Sri Lanka. The situation analysis has identified several key issues to be addressed as follows:

- Heavy examination orientation has brought adverse effects on the total development of the student. Overall development of student personality is seriously neglected or ignored by students and parents as students forgo all other co-curricular activities, social activities at school, home and community to attend coaching classes;
- School curriculum and examinations continue on a content heavy, stereotyped, cognitive learning model ignoring the 21st century framework for

education; and examinations. Moreover the instructional system in schools and outside school is loaded on the Lower Order Thinking (LOT) questions rather than the Higher Order Thinking (HOT) abilities;

- Due to bulk recruitment of teachers, with no screening, receiving 'mass-scale-teacher training', over 1000 trainees in a batch, at all levels with no increase of facilities for intensive training on instructional and assessment skills; and teacher trainers who train the novice teachers also being products of the tuition based education, with no enhanced skills, schools today do not have teachers who are competent in instruction based assessment systems and teachers largely use paper-pencil tests which are loaded with test questions assessing lower order abilities;
- Public confidence in the public examinations (Scholarship, GCE (OL) and (AL)) is seriously diminishing due to the repeated failure of the system to maintain quality and standards poor quality of questions, leakage of tests, flaws in the questions, release of wrong results, lack of transparency etc. and in the last few years examination related judicial investigations were necessary to manage examination results and affected sections of candidates.

The following recommendations are made to overcome some of the issues and concerns discussed above as well as to bring examinations in line with recent advancements elsewhere:

- 1) This report was prepared on the given Terms of Reference. It is inadequate to address assessment in a wider 'scope of knowledge economy' supported framework. Congruence and consistency of curriculum, instructional system and the assessment are more important than treating these as separate topics or themes;
- 2) The assessment and evaluation system need to be revamped making them more transparent, valid, reliable and credible assessment systems. Both the public examinations as well as the School Based Assessment practices need to adopt best practices to increase credibility and public acceptance;
- 3) In order to reduce the Standard Error of Measurement at all selection examinations multiple measures need to be introduced and included in the selection tests. This can be done by incorporating much more refined and developed system of School-Based Assessment that includes all prescribed subjects, co-curricular activities including sports, aesthetics, community based activities etc. on a wider coverage of all domains towards the overall development of the child;
- 4) The School Based Assessment system now in place suffers from many shortcomings and these need to be rectified to make it a feasible system and SBA Coordinators in each school should be trained to manage SBA. SBA assessment panels should be established at Educational Zones and be trained to carry out objective and transparent assessment in multiple domains to make SBA a valid, reliable and credible system acceptable to teachers and parents;
- 5) SBA assessment must be integrated with examination results giving equal weight ages and should not be reported as a separate assessment;

- 6) All teachers need to be given hands on training on SBA and a simplified feasible system of SBA needs to be developed and put in to practice throughout the school year;
- 7) High performing students in the Grade V classes in academic, co-curricular (sports, aesthetics, leadership) should be given the opportunity to enter the more recognized schools in their own school zones;
- 8) The National Institute of Education and the Department of Examinations must jointly identify the subject areas for School-Based Assessment (SBA), Minimum Competency Testing (MCT) and for Higher Order Ability Testing (HOAT) for Grade V, GCE O-L and GCE A-L examinations based on the prescribed syllabi of all subjects and develop an Assessment and Evaluation scheme and grading system based on SBA, MCT and HOAT. The proposed system should be validated with appropriate measures before putting into practice;
- 9) Assessment of Emotional Intelligence must be integrated with SBA and development of soft skills through authentic instructional and assessment methods must be promoted. The SBA reporting system must include assessment of soft skills as a separate category at all stages at all grade levels;
- 10) The Department of Examinations must develop and make use of the Item Banks for all three public examinations and targeted time frames must be given to the Department to comply with this recommendation;
- 11) The Department of Examinations should assess the possibility of introducing pre-scrutiny of examination results rather than re-scrutiny of results to increase transparency of examinations and as a measure of re-gaining public acceptance.

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