

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN SRI LANKA: ORIGIN, CURRENT STATUS AND WAY FORWARD



NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION

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BAUDDHALOKA MAWATHA, COLOMBO 07, SRI LANKA

International Schools in Sri Lanka: Origin, Current Status And Way Forward



National Education Commission
2023

Published by

National Education Commission, 2023

1st Floor, Block 5, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka

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ISBN: 978-955-9448-12-9

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Design and Printing

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Preface

The National Education Commission (NEC), established under the National Education Commission Act No. 19 of 1991 is a body corporate with the primary mandate to function as the apex policy formulation body of the education sector, and to engage in policy analysis and research, review the ongoing programme and plans with respect to education and undertake research on issues of importance as a prelude to formulation of national education policy at periodic intervals.

This volume deals with the International Schools, a topic widely discussed globally and nationally in many forums. International Schools which were originally established in the countries worldwide to provide education in an international framework that often follow a curriculum different from the host country, catering mainly to foreign students, such as children of expatriate communities, international businesses or organizations, diplomatic missions, or missionary programs. Many International Schools adopt a curriculum from programs and organizations such as International Baccalaureate, Edexcel, Cambridge Assessment International Education, International Primary Curriculum, or Advanced Placement.

The first International School in Sri Lanka, the Overseas Children's School was originated for the same pragmatic reason as in the international scenario, to cater to the educational needs of the children of the diplomatic community. It was inaugurated in 1958. Since the adoption of the open economic policies in the late 1970s, many International Schools came into operation with the approval of the Board of Investment (BOI) and registered with the Registrar of Companies, under the Companies Act No 17 of 1982. These schools do not come under the regulatory control and oversight of the Ministry of Education, and as such in the absence of a steadfastly imposed regulatory framework, it appears that the International School sector has expanded in an unregulated manner over the past few decades.

At present, International Schools have become an important segment of the general education in the country. Yet many educationists and administrators argue that as the International Schools operate in the general education sector only with the registration of Registrar of Companies or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance, the requirements to be fulfilled by many such schools are limited to the conditions stipulated in the Companies Act or Business Names Registration Ordinance, even though the purpose of establishment of such schools is to provide quality early childhood, primary and secondary education for students in the country.

Considering the above context, which draws parallels with the international scenarios, it is vital to establish and implement a proper regulation mechanism that encompasses all aspects such as registration, governance and management, and education standards, and monitoring and certification system so as to ensure these International Schools properly adopt the national education policy and framework and standards, and thereby promoting better integration into the national education system. As a first step, towards this goal, the NEC has decided to undertake a research to ascertain the current status of International Schools in Sri Lanka with the view to propose the way forward.

Prof. Harischandra Abeygunawardena

Chairman

National Education Commission

October 2023

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1. Introduction

The concept of International School education is subjected much discourses both in Sri Lanka as well as world over. It is a relatively ill-defined model and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. With no single body to regulate the use of the term 'International School', it has become a self-adopted title for many schools around the world^{1,2}. In the past, International Schools mirrored the processes of international migration, with expatriates and diplomats wishing their children to be educated in systems compatible with those of their home countries. However, while few such schools still exist, there is another home grown model has been growing very rapidly worldwide in response to the perceived dissatisfaction with the quality of the education provisions offered by the national education system and the desire by the affluent segments of the society to offer education in internationally recognized language so as to prepare students to live and work in a globalized world. Thus the growing number of International Schools in many countries and their increasing impact on national education systems, together with their likely influence as the force of globalization, it has become important for educational planners and policy-makers to be aware of their place in the provision of education internationally and locally. Some have even argued for the need of facilitating the private bilingual international schooling to become pragmatically 'dovetailing' with national forms of schooling³.

1.1 Growth of International Schools – Global Context

With a history tracing back to the period following the First World War, the International Schools were originally founded 'largely as a means of catering for the children of expatriate diplomats and employees of transnational organizations who followed their parents' in globally mobile professions around the world'. With the dawn of globalization of all aspects of human endeavours, as more multinational organizations require their employees to move around the world for short-term placements in different locations, have led to an increased need for such schools, partly for addressing a pressing need and as well as a response to the increasing perception of education as an international commodity. At the same time, the growing dominance of English in many parts of the world as the main 'international language' has also led to many parents, particularly of affluent classes of local societies to seek English medium education for their children. International Schools have grown in numbers since that time, and have evolved in character, philosophy, curriculum and clientele. As a result, today International Schools are no longer in the periphery of the education field and have gained increasing prominence in national education system of many countries^{4,5}.

¹ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. (2013). International schools: antecedents, current issues and metaphors for the future. In: Pearce R (ed), *International education and schools: moving beyond the first 40 years*. London: Bloomsbury Academic (pp. 3–23).

² Meyer, H. (2019). Interpreting the 'international School' Label and the Theme of Identity. *Cham: International School Magazine*.

³ Poole, A., & Bunnell, T. (2023). Diluting, decoupling, and dovetailing: Considering new metaphors for understanding the changing international school landscape in China. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 22(1), 3-19. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369541191>

⁴ Hayden, M. (2011). Transnational spaces of education: The growth of the international school sector. *Globalisation, societies and education*, 9(2), 211-224.

⁵ Dvir, Y., Shields, R., & Yemini, M. (2018). Three faces of global citizenship education: IB Schools' self-representations in four local contexts. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 66(4), 455-475.

Though the concept of International Schools originated in response to the pragmatic need in some contexts for a form of schooling not available through national systems, there is no concrete definition exists to prototype such establishments. Researchers for many years, have attempted to pinpoint criteria by which schools can be characterized as international or not. The ISC Research⁶ is the leading provider of English-medium K-12 international school data, trends and intelligence and it includes a school in its data collection and analysis *“If a school is privately operated in a country where English is not an official language and it delivers a curriculum wholly or partly in English to some or all of its students between the ages of 3 and 18 or a school is privately operated in a country where English is one of the official languages and it delivers an English-medium curriculum other than the country’s national curriculum”*. In an attempt to construct a more formal definition, Richards (2012)⁷ proposed four characteristics of international schools: i) English is the medium of instruction; ii) standards are aligned with American or European schools; iii) qualifications achieved are internationally accepted; and iv) school is derived from a ‘Western’ educational tradition.

Today, International Schools are a common sight in many cities of the world. Social media and peer pressure can be highly influential amongst young parents, influencing their school choices. These factors, and others, have combined to drive up demand for admission, resulting in a 53% growth in student enrolment over the last ten years, from 4.2 million students attending International Schools globally in 2013, to 6.5 million students attending International Schools today⁸.

As reported by many reviews, the International Schools exist, for the most part, as private schools outside national systems of education. As there is no overarching international body that can grant or withhold approval of a school describing itself as an International School, there are no defined characteristics by an authorized agency that such a school should have in order to be able to use such a title. As such there is so much diversity among International Schools, and this necessitates the need of having standards setting and monitoring procedures at least at individual country level to ensure quality and standards of International School education while giving the assurance to the parents who choose them. This in turn has important implications for management and leadership in the schools as well as for policy planning and implementation in any given country⁹.

1.2 Growth of International Schools-Sri Lankan Context

The first International School in Sri Lanka, the Overseas Children’s School also originated for the same pragmatic reason as in the international scenario, to cater to the educational needs of the children of the diplomatic community. It was inaugurated in 1958. However, the Permission to establish Colombo International School (CIS) was granted subject to several restrictive conditions, such as: a) enrolment of students must be restricted to those over 14 years in the case of non-Sri Lankans and those over 18 years in the case of Sri Lankans; b) employment of expatriate staff must be subjected to the approval of the Ministry of Education; c) institutions must be registered as a company after obtaining prior

⁶ ISC Research. (2020). Retrieved November 09, 2020, from <https://www.iscresearch.com>

⁷ Richards, N. (2012). The emperor’s new clothes? the issue of staffing in international schools. In: Thompson JJ, Hayden M (eds), International Education. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, pp. 173–183. Available at: <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1047957> (accessed 24 January 2022).

⁸ ISC White Paper. (2023). Why more International Schools keep opening? <https://go.iscresearch.com/why-more-schools-keep-opening>

⁹ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. J. (2008). International schools: Growth and influence (Vol. 92). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/international-schools-growth-and-influence>

approval of the Ministry of Education for the Memorandum and Articles of Association; and d) progress reports must be submitted when called for, to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance and Planning. However, these requirements have never been met as those conditions have never been legally implemented. Further, with the educational reforms implemented with the enactment of Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No 5 of 1960 which enable to government to take over the ownership and management of many private schools and training colleges and Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) which banned the establishment of private schools with effect from 1961 have created a legal impediment for the State to frame a regulatory framework for such schools.

Nevertheless, with the educational reforms implemented with since the adoption of the open economic policies in the late 1970s, many International Schools came into operation with the approval of the Board of Investment (BOI) and registered with the Registrar of Companies, under the Companies Act No 17 of 1982. Amidst this these legal impediment, many private schools offering only the local curriculum have also emerged under the category of 'International Schools', and they too appear to operate only with the registration under Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987).

Moreover, the repeated attempts made by successive governments to prescribe and implement conditions under which International Schools should operate have never been successful up until today. Thus, in the absence of a steadfastly imposed regulatory framework, it appears that the International School sector has expanded in an unregulated manner over the past few decades. According to the Ministry of Education data sources, as of 2018/2019¹⁰, there are approximately 395 International Schools catering for well over 143,123 students, with a teacher population of 13,731.

1.3 Research and Public Perception on International Schools

Though, there has been many discourses on this topic in public arena, research in the area of International Schools are very scanty. Nonetheless, there exist few research reports^{11,12}. Some researchers have highlighted perceived advantages that can be offered by a 'good' International School. Contrary to this view, few others argued that International Schools have created a negative influence in terms of the socio-economic context. The proponents of international state that the increasing presence of 'International Schools', could re-create the duality of the education system that existed during the colonial period in Sri Lanka. Hence, they argued for careful monitoring of the spread of the 'International Schools' in Sri Lanka to facilitate the fostering of positive effects, and to prevent the negative effects influencing the process of change. Further, they stated that while public schools are segregated along the linguistic and religious divides, the International Schools due to their all-encompassing nature tend to play a more significant role in fostering pluralism. Contrary to these proponents' view point, few others argued that International Schools have created a negative influence in terms of the socio-economic context. They argued that as the International Schools cater only for a minute group of affluent class of Sri Lankan society, and as such these schools could reinforce

¹⁰ Ministry of Education (2019). Data from Private School Branch (Unpublished Data).

¹¹ Kularatne, W.G. (1995). Economics of International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*.

¹² Wettewa, V. (2016). Postcolonial Emotionalism in Shaping Education: An Analysis of International School Choice in Sri Lanka. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 15(1), 66-83.

and aggravate the disparities in existence between the different socio-economic classes of the country. Moreover, they claimed that there was no uniformity in physical facilities, teaching-learning resources, human resources, and education provisions except the medium of instruction which was English.

Further, many educationists and administrators argue that as the International Schools operate in the general education sector only with the registration of Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987), the requirements to be fulfilled by many such schools are limited to the conditions stipulated in the Companies Act or Business Names Registration Ordinance, even though the purpose of establishment of such schools is to provide quality early childhood, primary and secondary education for students in the country.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Considering the above context, which is similar to the scenario prevailing in international arena, it is vital to establish and implement a proper regulation mechanism that encompasses all aspects of International Schools such as registration, governance and management, and education standards, and monitoring and certification system so as to ensure these International Schools properly adopt the national education policy and framework and standards, and thereby promoting better integration into the national education system. As a first step, towards this goal, the NEC has decided to undertake a research to ascertain the current status of International Schools in Sri Lanka.

2. Situational Analysis

2.1 Global Context

In the last ten years, the number of International Schools around the world has increased by 52%, from 8,700 schools in January 2013 to 13,190 schools in January 2023¹³. However, this increase varies at regional level with four sub-regions of Asia: East Asia, South-Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, and Western Asia leading the increase of International Schools in both supply and demand.

Asia as a total region currently represents 57% of the entire market for the number of International Schools and 64% for all student enrolment. In the last ten years (between January 2013 and January 2023), Asia has seen a 59.6% increase in its number of International Schools and a 62.4% increase in student enrolment. In comparison, Europe represents 18% of the entire market for the number of International Schools, and 9.5% for all students. In the last ten years, Europe has seen a 32.3% increase in its number of International Schools and a 23% increase in the number of students enrolled.

As of literature¹⁴, different countries adopt different policies with regards to International Schools: some countries adopt a *laissez faire* attitude and letting things to take their own course, without interfering: their numbers are so few, their fees often so high, and the pupils' families so influential, and it is not really worth spending a lot of time regulating them when many other schools require more attention; other countries adopt a more regulatory attitude and fix the norms and conditions that such schools have to comply with before being approved.

As highlighted in literature¹⁵, two powerful forces, namely globalization and accompanied government policy and socio-economic advancements in many countries have contributed to the growth and expansion of International Schools across the globe. Globalization has created the demand and necessity for international education; one delivered predominantly (though not exclusively) in English. In the globalized world, all governments have requirements that relate to foreign direct investment as well as private school and international education business development. These requirements vary significantly from country to country and, in some countries, change these requirements more often than in others. As such most of the governments in some developing countries are actively supporting the expansion of International Schools, and their access to local as well as expatriate families. Nonetheless, some governments restrict the attendance of their host national children to the International Schools present in their country. In a few countries, this is a complete restriction, while others placing some restrictive conditions such as limiting the maximum percentage of local children per school, and in other countries it is limited by a certain type of International School (e.g. those not offering a bilingual education that includes the host nation language, or those with foreign ownership). Some governments are currently easing such restrictions while others are tightening them.

Besides the impact of globalization, the socio-economic advancements taking place across all countries over the past few decades that have led to the growth of the global middle class has also

¹³ Hingston, T. (2023). What's driving growth within the international schools market? ISC Research. <https://iscresearch.com/the-new-international-school-data-for-2023/>

¹⁴ Machin, D. D. (2020). International Schooling: A story of growth, growth and growth (so far...). Medium. <https://medium.com/eddi-educational-digest/international-schooling-a-story-of-growth-growth-and-growth-so-far-e32d67c78c8f>

¹⁵ ISC White Paper. (2023). Why more International Schools keep opening?. <https://go.iscresearch.com/why-more-schools-keep-opening>

creating increasing demand for international school education. The overarching socio-economic factors that influence growing demand for International Schools include, i) ability of more families to afford private schooling (in many countries, particularly of Asia, education is considered a priority investment by many families who can afford it), ii) desire by more young people to enroll in higher education opportunities beyond their home country (as of data from the OECD suggests that the number of students studying at a university outside their home country will grow from 4.5 million in 2012 to 8 million by 2025), iii) desire of young children and parents for schooling that offers the qualifications recognized and valued by respected universities and employers around the world, and iv) desire of children and parents for schooling that offers English as the language of learning.

2.2 Characteristics of International Schools

As highlighted in literature¹⁶, the International Schools which are diverse and growing rapidly in response to both emerging demands (i.e. globally-mobile expatriate families and upwardly-mobile host national families) and socio-economic advances of countries that led to creation affluent class of social segments with high expectations for offering education focused on encouraging young people to become 'global citizens'. Although in principle, International Schools may offer education through any language of instruction, in practice the largest growth has been - and seems likely to continue to be - in those schools offering English medium education to children of English-speaking expatriates and others who believe that allowing their children to become fluent in English will provide them with an advantage in later life.

Some International Schools fall largely at one end or other of the two demands and needs mentioned above, while many fall somewhere in between, essentially responding to a, in doing so, offering a form of education that appears to prepare young people for adult life as responsible and capable international citizens of an increasingly globalized world.

Because of the diversity in International Schools that makes it difficult to generalize about their characteristics, as articulated by Hayden and Thomson (2016), there are, nevertheless, a number of areas in which they clearly are distinctive when compared to national schools. These include the following:

- **Curriculum:** they invariably offer a curriculum that is other than that of the host country in which the school is located.
- **Students:** their students are frequently non-nationals of the host country (though more recently, increasing numbers of such schools in some countries are catering largely for children of affluent host country families).
- **Teachers and administrators:** they tend, in many cases, to be staffed by relatively large numbers of expatriate teachers and administrators.
- **Management, leadership and governance:** their status within the local context, the curriculum offered and the nature of their student and teacher populations raise particular issues for management, leadership and governance.

¹⁶ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. J. (2008). International schools: Growth and influence (Vol. 92). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/international-schools-growth-and-influence>

2.3 Implications of International School Concept on National Education System

The question of whether the continued rapid growth of International Schools is desirable and appropriate form of educational provision in national systems has been raised in many countries. There have been many reviews in this context and few pertinent discourses are discussed below.

Research conducted in Indian context by Prasad (2011)¹⁷ points out that the numbers of International Schools are rising due to globalization of the Indian economy, recent economic growth, perceived value of international education and elitism. He argues that due to huge profits in International Schools, many existing private unaided schools are adopting the international curriculum. The distribution of International Schools in India is closely related to the economic hubs. However, due to the high cost of international education, the quality of education is expected to be better only for the people who can afford it.

Reviewing the situation in Asia, particularly in mainland China, Poole and Bunnelle (2023)¹⁸ state that *“major development in recent years concerning the growth of ‘private English-speaking international schooling’ has been the transition from a ‘traditional’ mode of activity towards a ‘non-traditional’ context. This is especially the case in Asia, where the majority of international schools now reside. Moreover, it stated that in Mainland China two-thirds of the (approximately) 900 schools that might be thought of as international schools are now perhaps better classified as ‘internationalised schools’, catering largely for Chinese nationals and being taught by a largely local teaching force whilst delivering a fusion of international and national curricula in a profit-driven paradigm”*. This paper offers a new imagery for discussion by using metaphor taking mainland China where models of private bilingual international schooling are evolving that are pragmatically ‘dovetailed’ with national forms of schooling, fusing cosmopolitan sensitivities with the nationalist needs of the state. As highlighted by Poole & Bunnelle (2023) *“this metaphor is now ready to be developed and adapted in China and beyond”*.

Reviewing the situation prevailing globally, Hayden and Thomson (2016)¹⁹ pointed out that the *“international schools themselves have increased not only in number and geographical distribution but also in diversity of style and ownership, so have a range of complex issues arisen relating to their fundamental purposes, the curricula that they choose (what should be taught and what should be learned), the nature of their organization (including leadership and management), and their potential contributions in responding to a perceived global need and in influencing the promotion of international education in national systems of schools”*

As highlighted in the foregoing sections, growing numbers of globally-mobile children are being educated in International Schools which fall outside national systems of education and, in some countries, rapidly growing numbers of socio-economically advantaged families are choosing an International School education for their children as a means of establishing social and human capital and providing a competitive edge in university and employment contexts. To date, the growth, which has increased markedly in recent years, has been relatively *ad hoc*, unplanned and unstructured.

¹⁷ Prasad, D. K. (2013). Rise of international schools in India. *International Journal of Education Economics and Development*, 4(2), 190-201. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2173051> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2173051>

¹⁸ Poole, A., & Bunnell, T. (2023). Diluting, decoupling, and dovetailing: Considering new metaphors for understanding the changing international school landscape in China. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 22(1), 3-19. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14752409231160710#con2>

¹⁹ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. (2016). International schools: the developing agenda. In *International schools: current issues and future prospects* (pp. 9-16). Symposium Books.

Therefore, a pertinent question is *“What might be the implications of rapidly growing international schools for national systems of education and for policy-makers and will continued rapid growth raise questions about the desirability and appropriateness of educational provision in national systems?”* These are clearly questions that need to be addressed by policy-makers and planners alike of all the countries, particular by those in developing part of the world.

2.4 Origin and Development of International Schools in Sri Lanka

As stated in Chapter 1, the first International School in Sri Lanka, the Overseas Children’s School or Colombo International School (CIS) was inaugurated in 1958 to cater to the educational needs of the children of the diplomatic community (NEC, 2003). However, the permission to establish this new form of educational provisions was granted subject to certain conditions, such as;

- a) Enrolment of students must be restricted to those over 14 years in the case of non-Sri Lankans and those over 18 years in the case of Sri Lankans;
- b) Employment of expatriate staff must be subjected to the approval of the Ministry of Education;
- c) Institutions must be registered as a company after obtaining prior approval of the Ministry of Education for the Memorandum and Articles of Association; and
- d) Progress reports must be submitted when called for to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

However, it appears that these requirements have never been met by the CIS or by any International School that came into operation subsequently, as those conditions were never legally implemented. Further, there were key educational reforms implemented with the enactment of Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No 5 of 1960 which enable to government to take over the ownership and management of many private schools and training colleges and Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) which banned the establishment of private schools with effect from 1961, that made legally prohibitive to establish private schools. This legal impediment, compelled many private schools offering only the local curriculum to emerged under the category of ‘international schools’, and they appear to operate only with the registration under Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987). Moreover, the attempts made by the successive governments to amend the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) act or to repeal it with a new act and/or to prescribe and implement conditions under which International Schools should operate have never been successful up until today. Thus, in the absence of a steadfastly imposed regulatory framework, it appears that the international school sector has expanded in an unregulated manner over the past few decades.

As of the information available at the Ministry of Education²⁰, there exist three categories of International Schools: i) schools following an international curriculum; ii) schools offering both

²⁰ Ministry of Education (2019). Private School Branch (Unpublished Data).

international and local curricula, and iii) schools offering local curriculum only. Almost 50% of the International Schools are in the Western Province and another 17.5% are in the Central Province. It is also noteworthy that one-fourth of the International Schools are in Colombo District. According to the Ministry of Education data sources, as of 2018/2019, there were 395 International Schools catering for well over 143,123 students, with a teacher population of 13,731. In terms of the number of students per school, out of the 395 schools for which data was available, there was one school with more than 5000 students, three with 2501-5000, and another nineteen with 1001 -2500 students. At the other end, there were 250 schools with students between 100 -1000. Further, 113 schools had less than 100 students. As the number of students increased, the student-teacher ratio too has increased. Surprisingly, for 147 schools out of the 395 schools there was no information was available for on the curricula that they used.

2.5 Policy Proposals and Past Attempts Made to Regulate International Schools

2.5.1 Policy proposals

The National Education Commission, being the foremost organization in national education policy formulation, mandated by the National Education Commission Act No. 1991, has continuously made several seemingly rational and pragmatic policy proposals in this regard. In 2003, the National Education Commission (2003)²¹ has pointed out that the practice of permitting the establishment of schools under the BOI and registration under Companies Act is unacceptable. It proposed that the appropriate authority for granting permission for opening and registration of schools should be the Ministry of in-charge of Education. It recommended that the Section 25 of the assisted schools and training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act no. 8 of 1961 or the entire Act should be repealed with a new Act thus allowing for establishment of schools in the non-government sector, including International Schools to meet the burgeoning demand. Further, this policy made wide ranging recommendation as regards to the conditions under which approval for establishment of such schools be granted and emphasized the need of all private/International School to conform with the requirements laid down by the Ministry in-charge of Education. Further, this policy recommended desirability in working in partnership in resources sharing between the private sector and the government sector where possible.

Subsequently, in 2019, under the National Policy Proposals on General Education in Sri Lanka, 2019²², the NEC recommended that the standards of education need to be equivalent in all public and private educational institutions, and the conditions relating to the quality of education should also be equivalent. In 2022, the National Education Commission in its most recent national education policy document, titled the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)²³ devoted one Volume (NEPF -2020-2030; Volume VIII) for International School sector. National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) has proposed a national policy and recommended a strategic activity framework for International Schools aiming at

²¹ National Education Commission (2003). Envisioning education for human development: Proposals for a national policy framework on general education in Sri Lanka.

²² National Education Commission (2019). National Policy Proposals on General Education in Sri Lanka. www.nec.lk

²³ National Education Commission. (2022). National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). In National Education Commission. Department of Government Printing. <https://nec.gov.lk/national-education-policy-framework-2020-2030/>

promoting better integration of International Schools into the national education system. This policy framework besides proposing many policies and strategic activities frameworks in all aspects of International Schools, has recommended the establishment of a proper regulation and monitoring mechanism under the purview of the Ministry of Education that encompasses key aspects such as registration, setting minimum standards for physical and educational resources, education provisions, and monitoring and certification.

2.5.2 Attempts made by the ministry in-charge of education and other ministries including parliament select committees under successive governments

Several attempts have also been made by successive governments to prescribe and implement conditions under which International Schools should operate. However, these attempts have never been successful up until today.

In 2004, as an attempt to regulate the International Schools sector, the Management and Quality Assurance Unit of the Ministry of Education (2004)²⁴ prescribed the criteria for international and English medium private schools. These included the; i) Criteria to decide the type of the school, grade wise, ii) Criteria to decide the suitability of human resources (principal's qualifications, number of teachers, teacher qualifications, non-academic staff), iii) Criteria to decide the suitability of physical resources and the norms/procedures for i) Particulars on school management, ii) Performance of students, iii) Community Relationships, iv) Welfare activities, v) Financial resources and expenditure and vi) Procedure to be followed for accreditation. Unfortunately, this attempt never succeeded.

In April, 2018, the Minister of National Policies and Economic Affairs presented a Cabinet Memorandum on Registration of International Schools. Memorandum commented that the Cabinet Decision No.42²⁵ had directed the Ministry of Education to take steps to bring in legal provisions to regulate International Schools but the required action had not been taken. It stated that *"International Schools continue to mushroom around the country haphazardly and that most of these schools are of low quality"*. It specifically mentions the following issues; i) Ministry of Education or any other Government agency is not involved with the establishment or monitoring of these schools, ii) there are significant issues raised about the facilities available in some of these schools, iii) there are significant concerns about the quality of teachers employed in these schools, and iv) if such a school is closed down, there is no repository of student records of the school maintained elsewhere, if required for future certification of students' achievements or qualifications. Nevertheless, on a positive note it stated that *"though these schools charge relatively higher fees they tend to bring good practices to Sri Lanka and have the capacity to be trend-setters and they play a key role in attracting foreign investment to the country by catering to the children of the expat community"*. It also emphasized that the management of these schools should understand that religion, culture, values and traditions are the value propositions which give Sri Lanka its pride and that they should be preserved at all times. As means of rectifying the situation, the proponents of this Cabinet Memorandum recommended that an Authority/Bureau/Working Group is created to register all schools that are currently not under the purview of the Ministry of Education. In addition, 5 specific

²⁴ Ministry of Education. (2004). Ministry Circular Letter-Ins/1/2004 Quality Assurance of Schools/ Criteria for accreditation of international and English medium private schools.

²⁵Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs. (2018). Cabinet Memorandum on Registration of International Schools.

recommendations have also been given regarding registration as a private school and the conduct of programmes, teaching staff, and students.

Following that the Sub-Committee appointed on the Registration of International Schools (2019)²⁶ has made several seemingly rational recommendations on International Schools. These include;

- i) The definition for International Schools is proposed as *“Schools that provide education to any national from the age of 5 years to 18 years (both years inclusive) according to a foreign or local curricula in the medium of English or any other foreign language and invested and operated by the private sector”*.
- ii) The government body authorized to register the International Schools is the Provincial Ministry of Education of each Provincial Council.
- iii) Regulations governing the registration and monitoring of International Schools must be formulated by the Hon. Minister of Education under the provisions of the Amended Assisted Schools and Training (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961 or under the new Act as appropriate and published.
- iv) Regulations to include conformity to specific norms in respect of national curricula at Primary and Secondary levels and teaching of national languages to Sri Lankan nationals. These norms will be determined by the Ministry of Education in consultation with the National Institute of Education and the National Education Commission.
- v) Regulations should also include the need to conform to requirements of (i) suitability of location, (ii) adequate classroom facilities and infrastructure facilities, (iii) adequate facilities for teaching of subjects and co-curricular activities, (iv) staffing norms and qualification and training of teachers, (v) quality Assurance Framework, (vi) financial viability and inspection of schools by the Provincial or the Central Ministry of Education.
- vi) Establish a Quality Assurance Unit in the Ministry of Education of the Central government to design and assist implementing a Quality Assurance Framework, (QAF) for International Schools. This unit is to work closely with the Provincial Ministries to ensure provision of high-quality education and educational infrastructure that adheres to standards that has been set in the framework uniformly across the country. Existing Management and Standards Unit may be expanded to serve this function.
- vii) Include two new domains, Governance and Financial Viability in the proposed Quality Assurance Framework in addition to the suitably amended eight domains, identified by the presently practiced quality assurance system for public schools.
- viii) Provincial Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education together with the Quality Assurance Unit in the Ministry of Education to conduct periodic quality assessment reviews of International Schools based on the set QAF and perform regular monitoring functions.
- ix) Provisional registration for a period of two years is granted to the existing International Schools that broadly satisfy registration criteria, after an initial evaluation and satisfy the 10 point QAF during this time to qualify for full registration. Schools not complying with this requirement should be discontinued. Students of discontinued International Schools should be provided placements in public schools or find placements in other International Schools on their own.

²⁶ National Education Commission. (2019). Report by the sub-committee on the registration of International Schools. National Education Commission, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

- x) Establishment of new International Schools should require prior approval after satisfying the registration criteria, before the students are admitted.

In 2020, Report of the Parliament's Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security²⁷ recommended that *“both the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No 5 of 1960 and Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) should be amended so that the government can have more powers to monitor and regulate International Schools. The report recommends that all International Schools registered and run under the Companies Act at present, and the new International Schools to be opened in future, should be registered under a new Act which shall be implemented by the Education Ministry”*. The Committee Report stated that *“even though the teaching of the mother tongue and history had been made mandatory by the Education Ministry, the teachings of these subjects at International Schools are at a poor level, because these schools are registered under the Companies Act and not under education laws”*. The Committee had also raised concern over a group of schools registered as International Schools that would not enroll non-Islamic students under any circumstances. Another observation made was the mushrooming of such schools in towns with a large Muslim population. Accordingly, the Committee had recommended all International Schools registered and run under the Companies Act at present, and new International Schools to be opened in future, should be registered under a new Act which will be implemented by the Education Ministry. The Committee had also laid out some criteria to be observed in this matter. The Criteria includes: *“providing an education compatible with the national education aims, providing education in the mother tongue, history and comparative religious and cultural education, encouraging children of all ethnicities and religions to be enrolled and considering it illegal to limit only enrolling children of a particular ethnicity or religion”*. Further, the Committee also recommended that *“International School presently named with a religious or ethnic identity to remove those names and rename themselves including providing an education compatible with the national education aims, providing education on the mother tongue, history and comparative religious and cultural education, encouraging children of all ethnicities and religions to be enrolled, and considering it illegal to limit only enrolling children of a particular ethnicity or religion”*.

As stated earlier, all the above attempts have never produced any positive outcome as the seemingly rational recommendations went unheeded by the relevant authorities.

2.6 Research on International Schools

Though, the International School sector has become an important constituent of the general education sector for over 3 decades, very little research has gone into this subject. Nevertheless, an attempt is made below to review the limited literature available to emphasize the findings and recommendations made therein.

²⁷ Report of the Proposals for Formulation and Implementation of relevant laws required to ensure National security that will eliminate New Terrorism and extremism by strengthening friendship among Races and Religions. (2020). In The Parliament of Sri Lanka (p. 247). The Parliament of Sri Lanka. <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/comreports/1582610584075624.pdf>

Positive point of views were expressed by few reserchaers. Gunasekera (1995)²⁸ argued for International Schools for Sri Lanka by listing seven advantages that the writer claims can be offered by a 'good' International School. The writer also defends the allegation that the International Schools propagate an 'elitist subculture' by reminding that such allegations were also levelled against private schools in the past. Similar views were expressed by Jenkins, et al (2005)²⁹. They stated that the increasing presence of 'International Schools', could re-create the duality of the education system that existed during the colonial period in Sri Lanka. Adding to a similar positive point of view, Wettewa (2016)³⁰ who studied four contrasting International Schools from four different provinces of the island in Colombo, Kandy, Matara and Jaffna. She reported as expected since the International Schools teach all the subjects in the English medium, the standard of English proficiency is significantly higher. This, coupled with the introduction of English literature from an early stage allows the International School students to possess a superior command of English. Further, she argued that while public schools are segregated along the linguistic and religious divides, the International Schools due to their all-encompassing nature tend to play a more significant role in fostering pluralism. She, however warns that "*English proficiency and ICT skills allow for a competitive edge in neo-liberal times while grounding oneself in the local culture is of paramount importance for education to be truly international*". Further, she cautions that though it brings some positive effects, these schools are restricted only to a minority that can afford the high fees.

In contrast these positive sentiments, some scholars pointed out several negative influences that the International Schools could bring about, particularly in the socioeconomic context. Kularatne (1995)³¹ argued that "*International Schools cater only for a minute, affluent group of Sri Lankan society and as such these schools could reinforce and aggravate the disparities between the different socio-economic classes of the country*". A study by Gunawardena (1995)³² which covered three 'international' schools and studied the matters in relation to the curriculum, medium of instruction, quality of teachers, physical resources and the total school culture. She showed that the only characteristic that they all shared in common was English medium instruction and concluded that the three schools visited belonged to "*three tiers in the International School structure*" and the 'International' characteristics could only be seen in one school while the other two schools lacked such status. Schools were not uniform except in the medium of instruction which was English in all three schools. It was noted that when the number of foreign students in a school was large especially from developed countries the fees were high and the quality of education was also relatively high. The writer asks a pertinent question as to whether being English medium schools merit the label "International".

Jenkins. et. al. (2005) for their study visited several International Schools in and around Colombo. They had interviewed principals, teachers and a number of parents. They argue that the expansion of a new type of English-medium, 'international' schools in Sri Lanka has significant ramifications for the quality

²⁸ Gunasekera, G. (1995). The case for international schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 28-30.

²⁹Jenkins, K., Berman, J., & Jenkins, B. (2005). A Proliferation of Self-described 'International' Schools in Sri Lanka: A Response to Globalisation. In *33rd Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society, Novotel Pacific Bay Resort Coffs Harbour*. <https://rune.une.edu.au/web/handle/1959.11/4172?mode=full>

³⁰ Wettewa, V. (2016). Postcolonial emotionalism in shaping education: An analysis of international school choice in Sri Lanka. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 15(1), 66-83.

³¹ Kularatne, W.G. (1995). Economics of International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*.

³² Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

of education in both private and public schools, maintenance of cultural identity, as well as issues of equity and national harmony among its people. These new ‘international’ schools are diverse and operate discretely. While agreeing with Gunasekera (1995), the writers claim that the *“increasing presence of ‘international’ schools, could re-create the duality of the education system that existed during the colonial period in Sri Lanka”*. They claim that ‘international’ schools appear to be language-driven responses to globalisation. These changes in education, however, have implications for Sri Lankan society with respect to issues of quality education, cultural identity, social equity and national harmony. Therefore, both Gunasekera (1995) and Jenkins. et. al. (2005) argued for a careful monitoring of the spread of the ‘international’ schools in Sri Lanka is necessary in order to facilitate the nurturing of positive effects while negating negatives from influencing the process of change.

The foregoing analysis identifies several important features of International Schools. International Schools have increased in number due to globalization and perceived opportunities and benefits offered for children in education, higher education and employment, especially in relation to the medium of instruction. At the same time, there are concerns about the curricula, fees levied and equity. As stated in Chapter 1, at present many International Schools operate in the general education sector only with the registration of Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987) and offer education for overseas examinations while some offering local syllabi in the English medium. Further, it appears that there are also some private schools that are non-aided and non-regulated by the Government which offer the local syllabi in the English medium. Unfortunately, there are no statistics available regarding these schools at present.

Despite having had seemingly rational policy recommendation and making repeated attempts to regulate the international education sector, the desirable outcome has never been achieved. Yet, many educationists and administrators continue to make a case in many forums for State intervention in International School sub-sector through implementation of regulatory and monitoring mechanism. They argued that the so-called “International Schools” operate only with the registration of Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987), the requirements to be fulfilled by many such schools are limited to the conditions stipulated in the Companies Act or Business Names Registration Ordinance, even though the purpose of establishment of such schools is to provide quality early childhood, primary and secondary education for students in the country (NEC, 2022)³³.

As a renewed attempt towards this national goal, the NEC through its national education policy document, titled National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) has proposed a national policy and recommended a strategic activity framework (NEPF 2020-2030 - Volume Vol. VIII: Policy Proposal and Recommended Strategic Activities for International Schools) aiming at promoting better integration of International Schools into the national education system. This policy framework has recommended the establishment of a proper regulation and monitoring mechanism under the purview of the Ministry of Education that encompasses key aspects such as registration, setting minimum standards for physical and educational resources, education provisions, and monitoring and certification. Further, the NEC has reiterated its statutory responsibility in setting standards for education and suggested that the NEC would take steps to formulate quality assurance and

³³ National Education Commission. (2022). National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). In National Education Commission. Department of Government Printing. <https://nec.gov.lk/national-education-policy-framework-2020-2030/>

certification system for International Schools. As a preliminary move towards reaching this goal, the NEC has conducted this study to assess the current status of International Schools in Sri Lanka.

3. Research Design

3.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To assess the current status of the International School sector with respect to the following criteria:
regulation, governance, and management, medium of instruction and curriculum, learners and learning environment, assessment and outcomes, personality development and civic consciousness, human resources, physical resources, and quality assurance and certification.
2. To make policy recommendations for way forward for the development of International Schools as an integral part of general education system in Sri Lanka.

3.2 Methodology

For the purpose of this study International Schools are defined as “Schools that provide education to any national from the age of 5 years to 18 years (both years inclusive) according to a foreign or local curriculum in the medium of English or any other foreign language, invested and operated by the private sector” (NEC, 2019)³⁴. For the study, it was decided include entire population of International School operating in Sri Lanka for primary data collection.

A mixed-method research approach was used in this study as it allows the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in a single study. *Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e. g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration*³⁵.

The study includes three phases: Phase I: Collection of secondary data from the database of MoE; Phase II: Collection of primary data obtained through a questionnaire, and Phase III: Verification of data collected through the questionnaire survey by making field visits to a sample of International Schools.

Phase I: Secondary data collection

Secondary data on International Schools were collected by referring to the database of the MoE. The data obtained from the MoE had been collected informally, and hence considered as unpublished data. The basic data collected were the numbers of International Schools, and their distribution by

³⁴ National Education Commission. (2019). Report by the sub-committee on the registration of International Schools. National Education Commission, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

³⁵ Johnson, B. R. & Christensen, L. B. (2017). Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches. SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/educational-research/book259335>

province-and district-wise, the number of students and teachers of International Schools and the curriculum type and medium of instruction.

Phase II: Primary data collection

Sampling procedure: The International Schools which are non-aided and not regulated by the government which was estimated as 395 in 2019/2020 were considered eligible for inclusion in the study. The eligible schools were identified referring to the available information and relevant statistical records of the Private Schools Branch of the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, the intention of the study team was to cover all International Schools that were functioning at the time of commencement of the study.

Data collection procedures: Self-administered postal questionnaire was used as the tool for primary data collection. The questionnaire was constructed based on the core areas defined for the purpose of formulating National Policy Proposals and Recommended Strategic Activities on International School Education of the National Education Policy Framework 2020-2030 (NEC, 2022). The questionnaire covered elements such as socio-demographic aspects, governance and management, physical resources, human resources, curricula, teaching-learning-assessment practices, personality development and civic consciousness, learner support services, and quality assurance. The draft questionnaire was pre-tested to increase the validity and reliability of the testimonial survey evidence. Based on the feedback received, the draft questionnaire was further refined. The final questionnaire was administered to 278 International Schools out of 395 schools listed in the MoE database as others (117) could not be contacted or traced. The questionnaires were posted to the schools in April 2022. However, the number of filed questionnaires received was only sixty-five. Hence the final sample was limited sixty-five International Schools.

Phase III: Field Visits

Sampling procedure: Originally, a sample representing 65 International Schools covered by the questionnaire survey was to select for field visits through a stratified sampling method adopted to represent all provinces and districts, different types of curricula claimed to be adopted, and the extent of the student population.

Data collection procedure: Data collected through the questionnaire survey were verified by making field visits by observations on physical resources, teaching-learning and assessment methods, human resources, student-staff interactions, etc., and also by conducting informal discussions with the heads of the schools. Though, a sample representing the 65 schools were expected to be covered through field visits, due to the Covid-19 pandemic prevailing in the country at that time, the field visits were confined only to the Western province. A purposive sample of 10 schools was selected from the different categories of schools as indicated in Table 3.1 below.

The team used the filled questionnaire sent by the respective schools and interviewed the administrative officer nominated by the head of the institute, to cross check the validity of the data provided. In order to maintain the anonymity of the schools a number code has been given to each school.

Table 3.1: Details of Sample of Covered by the Field Visits

No	School code	District	Syllabus	No of students	No of teachers
1.	6	Colombo	Local	116	11
2.	22	Colombo	Local	1284	99
3.	28	Colombo	Foreign	201	28
4.	34	Colombo	Local	70	15
5.	44	Colombo	Foreign	241	36
6.	45	Colombo	Local	2996	274
7.	46	Colombo	Local	406	29
8.	47	Colombo	Both	944	115
9.	70	Colombo	Both	4675	493
10.	71	Colombo	Foreign	1685	182

Source: Sample Survey Data

3.3 Data Analysis

All the data were entered into a Microsoft Excel sheet and then exported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20. Descriptive statistics of the sample included frequencies and percentages of categorical variables.

4. Results

Results of the study are elaborated under three categories; i) Number and distribution, and size of International schools based on secondary data, ii) Functional aspects of International Schools under 8 core areas - Regulation, Governance, and Management, Medium of Instruction and Curriculum, Learners and Learning Environment, Assessment and Achievements in Extra-curricular Activities, Personality Development and Civic Consciousness, Human Resources, Physical Resources, and Quality Assurance and Certification, and iii) Findings of the Field Visits and Issues confronted by the International Schools.

4.1 Number and Distribution, and Size of International Schools

4.1.1 Number and distribution of international schools

According to the secondary data analysis conducted referring to the Ministry of Education data sources (unpublished data) as of 2019/2020, there were 395 International Schools in Sri Lanka., As indicated by Fig.4.1, out of that almost half of the total number (49.37%) of ISs were in the Western Province, 17.5% were in the Central Province, 12.15% were in the North-Western Province, 7.85% were in the Sabaragamuwa Province, and 5.57% were in the Southern Province while the North-Central, Eastern, Northern and Uva Provinces each accounting for less than 3% ISs. The lowest number of schools (1.0%) are found in the North Central Province.

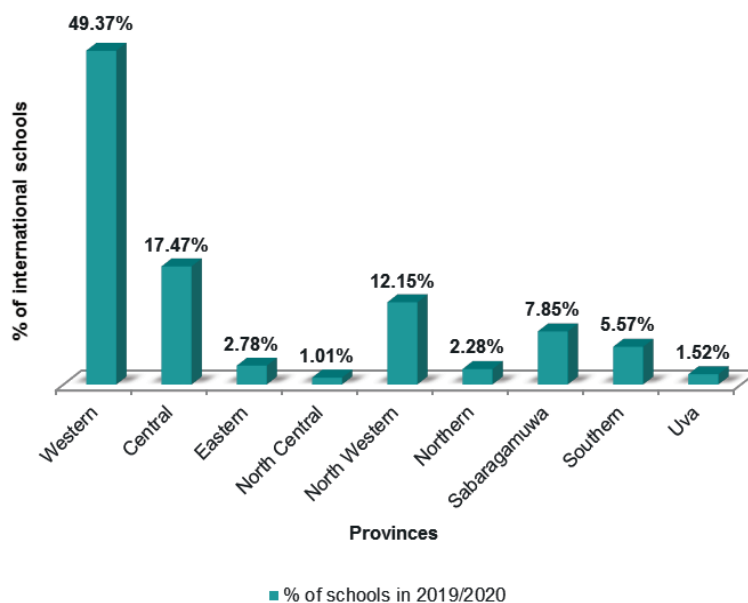


Figure 4.1: Distribution of International Schools in Sri Lanka

4.1.2 International schools by student number

All the schools were categorized under four categories based on the total number of students; schools with < 100 students, 101-500 students, 501-1000 students and > 1000 students. As depicted in Fig.

4.2, 6% of schools were catering for more than 1000 students, 15% of schools were catering for student numbers ranging from 501-1000, and another 49% of schools were having student numbers ranging from 101-500 students. On the other end, there were 30% of schools were having less than 100 students by 2019/2020.

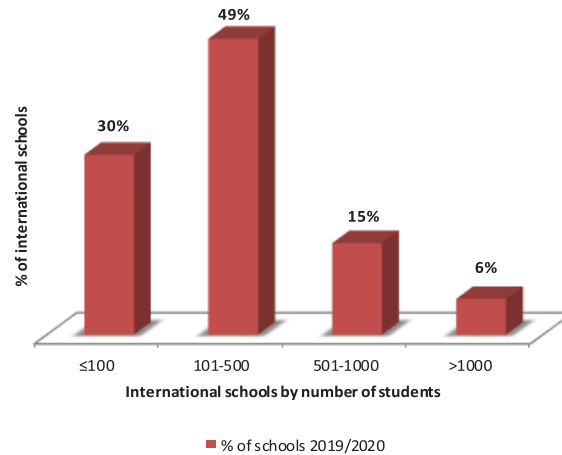


Figure 4.2: International Schools by Number of Students

At the commencement of the postal survey in early 2022, all 395 schools listed in the MoE data sources were contacted for data collection. However, the letters addressed to 117 schools out of this number were returned, and they could not be contacted via the telephone, suggesting that about 30% of schools appeared to be temporarily suspended operation or shifted to another location, or closed down permanently. When analyzed by the number of students, a majority (46%) of schools which was appeared to be closed or suspended operations belonged to the category of schools carrying less than a hundred students while another 40 % of such schools were with 101-500 students. No school in the category of >1000 was closed down/suspended operation.

4.2 Functional Aspects of International Schools

The functional aspects of International Schools are presented under 8 core areas, namely, i) Regulation, Governance, and Management, ii) Medium of Instruction and Curriculum, iii) Learners and Learning Environment, iv) Assessment and Achievements in Extra-curricular Activities, v) Personality Development and Civic Consciousness, vi) Human Resources, vii) Physical Resources and viii) Quality Assurance and Certification.

4.2.1 Regulation, governance and management

As of the information obtained from the Private School Branch of the MOE, there is no prescribed procedure in place for the registration of International Schools. Therefore, in the absence of a laid down procedures prescribed by a regulatory authority, preferably by the MoE, the International Schools have resorted seek approval to establish and operate their schools from various entities. Table 4.1 given below lists the regulatory/administrative authorities under which these schools have been registered. The majority of preschools were operating with the registration from the Registrar of Companies (72%), 18% of schools were operating with the registration obtained from Divisional

Secretariats, while few schools had been registered in other institutions such as BOI (1.5%), Provincial Councils (1.5%), etc. Surprisingly, there were 3% schools which have not registered with any State institution/authority.

Table 4.1: Place of Registration

Institute	% of schools
Registrar of companies	72.3
Divisional Secretariat Office	18.5
Registrar of companies and BOI	1.5
BOI	1.5
Provincial Council	1.5
Other	1.5
Not given	3

Source: Sample Survey Data

4.2.2 Medium of instruction and curriculum

According to the results, 95% of the schools used English as the medium of instruction while 3 % of schools were using both English and Sinhala or English and Tamil. Further, very few schools were using Sinhala (<1%) or Tamil (<1%) as the medium of instruction as the medium of instruction.

As shown in Fig. 4.3, there exist three categories of International Schools in terms of the curriculum they offered: i) schools offering local curriculum only; ii) schools offering an international curriculum and iii) schools offering both international and local curricula. It is noteworthy that, out of the sixty-five schools the majority of 60 % of schools were offering the local curriculum, with another 32% local and international curricula. 8% of schools were offering only international curricula. Those schools that offer international curricula have adopted British curricula such as Cambridge Assessment International Education, Pearson Edexcel UK, and English National Curricula (UK).

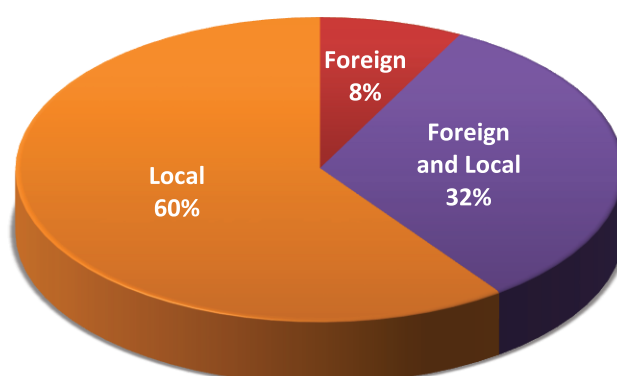


Figure 4.3: International Schools by Curricula

The results showed few out of those schools which offer local curriculum claimed to have had informal linkages with authorized local educational institutes such as the National Institute of Education (NIE) and Zonal Education Offices. Out of the schools which offer local curricula 60% provide textbooks for the students while 5% of them claimed that they use educational publications published by the NIE. Another 2.7% had specifically mentioned that they use NIE-prescribed lesson plans and manuals, and 8% of schools reported that they had contacted Zonal Education Offices for arranging training for teachers. However, during field visits some schools claimed that they found it difficult to obtain NIE prescribed material and attend seminars conducted for teachers by the Zonal Education Office due to lack of information provided to them.

4.2.3 Learners and learning environment

In terms of the student profile, as shown in Fig. 4.4, approximately 97% enrollments were local students while 3% were from expatriate community, and out of total number registered, 56.1% of students were male and 43.9% female were female.

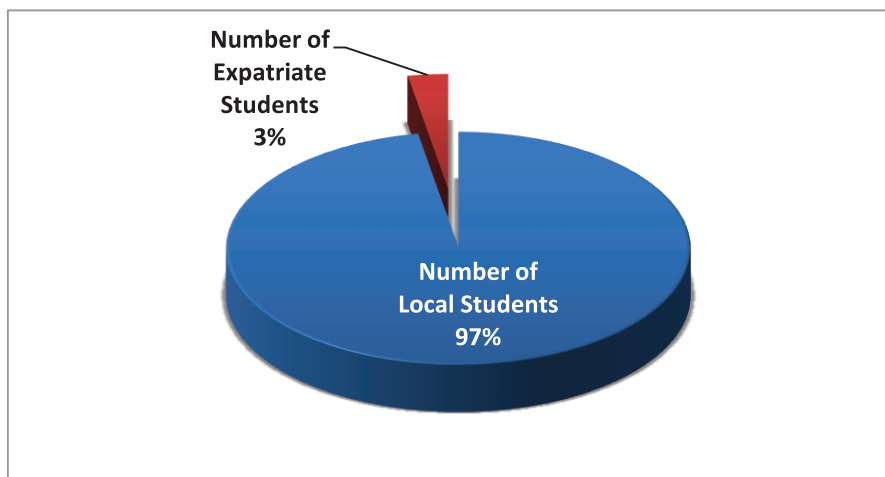


Figure 4.4: Distribution of Student from Local and Expatriate Communities

The distribution of schools in terms of ethnicity is given in Fig. 4.5. As shown the majority 72% were Sinhalese schools, 22% were Moor schools and 5% were Tamil schools. In terms of the religious affiliation of students, the highest number of students (67%) were Buddhists and 24% were Muslims, 4% of Hindus and 4% of Christians.

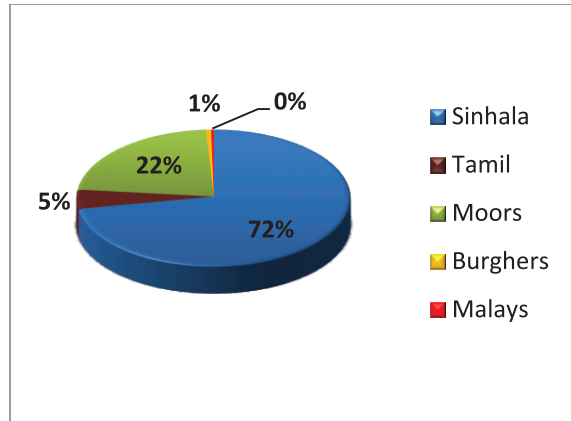


Figure 4.5: Number of Schools by Ethnicity

The types of teaching-learning practices adopted by these schools are depicted in Fig. 4.6. With regards to the teaching-learning practices, most schools (81%) adopt teacher-led or teacher-centered teaching-learning approach. However, while practicing teacher-centered teaching-learning approach, the majority of schools claimed that they adopt more student-centered activities such as assignments/projects (54%), student activities (79%), collaborative activities (77%). Further, majority of teachers encourage questioning (94%) and students' responses are often rewarded with appreciations. Further whenever assignments/projects activities or formative assessments are conducted the students are provided with feedback promptly (85%).

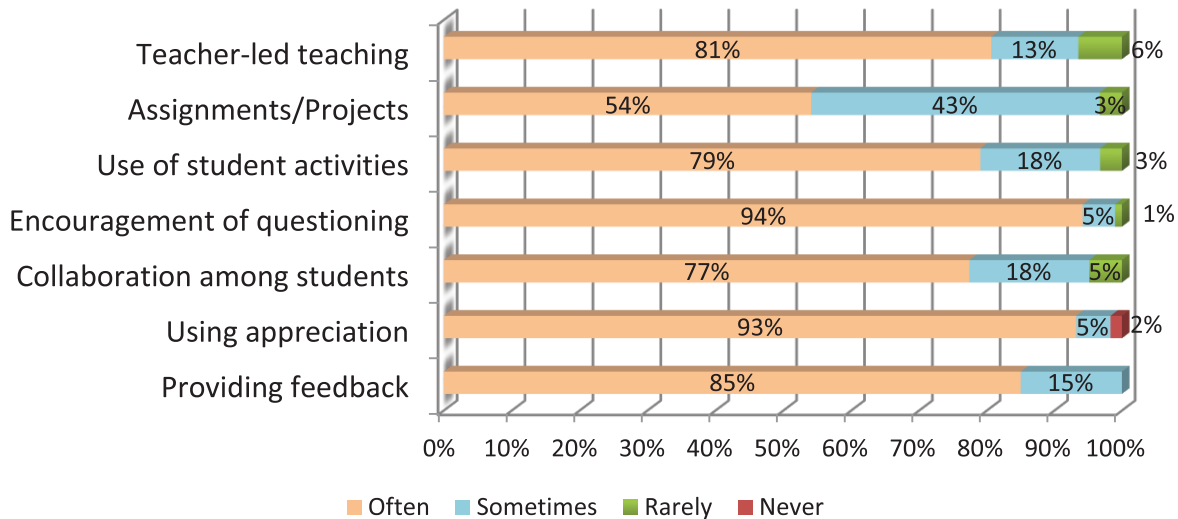


Figure 4.6: Types of Teaching Practices

In terms of teaching strategies, as indicated in Fig. 4.7, the use of an interactive whiteboard (82%) was found to be the most often used strategy by the schools. Further, 71% of schools reported that they often used inquiry-based instructional strategies. In addition to that, 47% of schools claimed that they often allocate learning tasks according to students' abilities (i.e. simpler tasks to the low performing students and complex tasks to the high performing students) as a teaching strategy while 37% of schools stated, they use such approach only occasionally. and 10% of schools never adopted such practice.

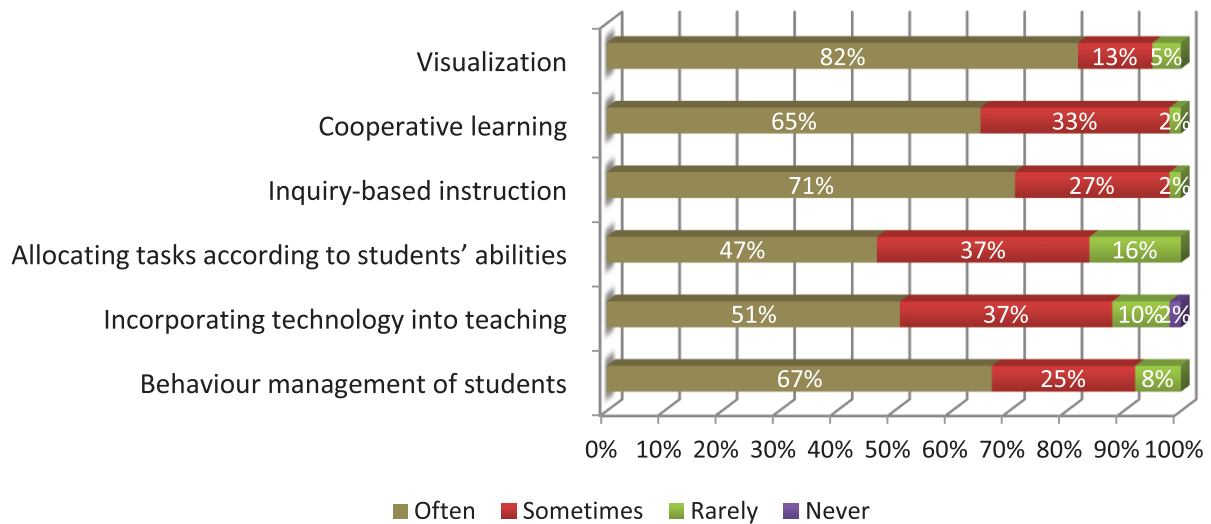


Figure 4.7: Types of Teaching Strategies

4.2.4 Assessments and achievements in extra-curricular activities

The results revealed that formative (continuous assessment) and summative (end-of-term assessments) are the two most often used types of assessment by these schools. Ninety-five percent of schools reported that they were using formative assessment to assess students' progress in learning and attainment. Out of them, the majority (69%) of schools had conducted formative assessments once a month, while 15% had conducted formative assessments once a week. Seven percent of schools stated that they were conducting formative assessments bi-weekly. Further, regarding the summative assessment, 98% of schools were conducting summative assessments and providing feedback to the students through several modes. Among them, a majority (45%) of the schools claimed that they provide feedback in both verbal and written modes. Further, almost every school appears to provide feedback on assessment outcomes to the parents.

As regards to extra-curricular activities, only few schools appear to be providing opportunities for sports (such as athletics, chess, karate, netball volleyball, basketball, football) and other extracurricular activities (such as literary competition, orchestra, art and dancing competitions). As shown in Table 4.2, 20% schools submit students for Inter- International School competitions while 32%, 25%, 28% and 14% schools stated that they submit students to Zonal, District, National and International level competitions, respectively.

Table 4.2: Achievements in Extra-Curricular Activities

Level of achievement in extra-curricular activities	% of schools
Inter- International School Level	20
Zonal Level	32
District Level	25
National Level	28
International Level	14

Source: Sample Survey Data

4.2.5 Personality development, and civic consciousness

The personality development of students was assessed by inquiring about the routine practices adopted to promote the inculcation of personality attributes such as punctuality, communication skills, attitude, willingness to learn, friendliness, teamwork and leadership, honesty and integrity and etiquette. About 95 % of schools reported that they attempted to develop these attributes in students through various activities such as leadership development programmes, sports, dancing and music activities/programmes, and through community services.

In addition to that, several specific activities had been used in these schools to develop civic consciousness in their students. Action projects on improving the environment, identifying issues related to poverty in the school neighbourhood and possible remedial actions, encouraging students to discuss issues/problems faced by them and arrive at collective solutions to help themselves and others, organizing role plays and simulations to enable students to instil civic consciousness and etiquette, etc., were some of the commonly mentioned activities. Further, some schools claimed that they have used religious and cultural programmes to promote inter-ethnic cohesion and understanding and appreciation of cultural differences among the students.

4.2.6 Human resources

There were 3,204 teacher populations among these sixty-five Intentional Schools. As described in Fig. 4.8, understandably, the teacher population was higher in schools with larger student numbers and as such a majority of the teacher population (54%) represented schools where there are more than 1000 students.

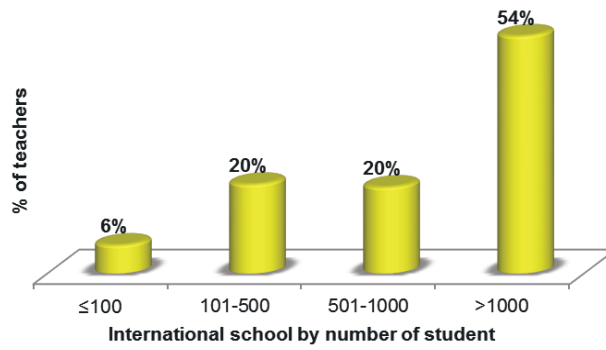


Figure 4.8: Distribution of Teacher Population

Student-teacher ratios according to the student number are given in Table 4.3. As shown in Table 4.3, the schools with less than 100 students, recorded the lowest student-teacher ratio, and as the number of students increased, the student-teacher ratio too has increased. According to the data, as shown in Fig. 4.9, the majority of teachers were between 25 - 40 years of age. Further, 8% of teachers (8%) belong to the age group of above fifty-five years.

Table 4.3: Student-Teacher Ratio (based on sample)

Student number category	Student Number	Teacher Number	Ratio
≤100	1157	206	6:1
101-500	6470	647	10:1
501-1000	8008	627	13:1
>1000	18750	1724	11:1

Source: Sample Survey Data

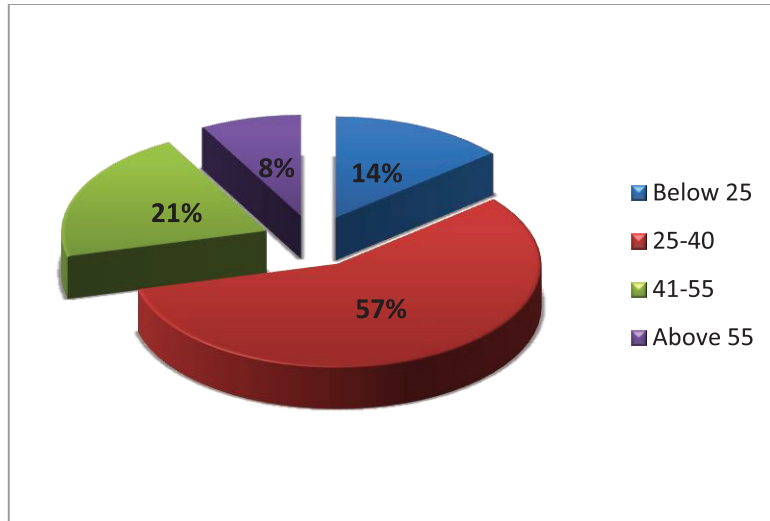


Figure 4.9: Age Group of Teachers

In terms of teachers' academic and professional qualifications, the Diploma level was the most common academic qualification that had been achieved by the majority of teachers (Fig. 4.10) while a few percentages of teachers appear to be had bachelor's level qualifications and postgraduate level academic qualifications. As shown in Fig. 4.11, Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching was identified as the main professional qualification achieved by the teachers while few had gained other post-recruitment professional qualifications such as Diploma in Education and Teacher Training Certificate.

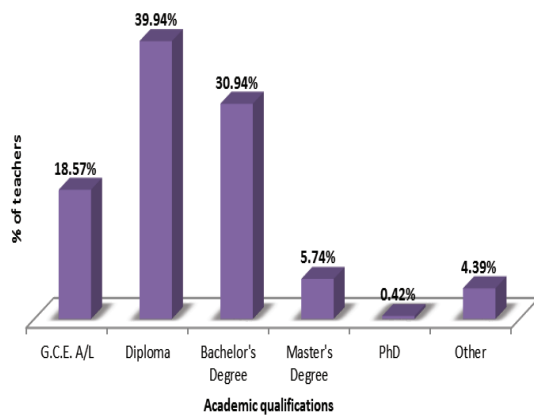


Figure 4.10: Number of teachers by highest academic qualifications

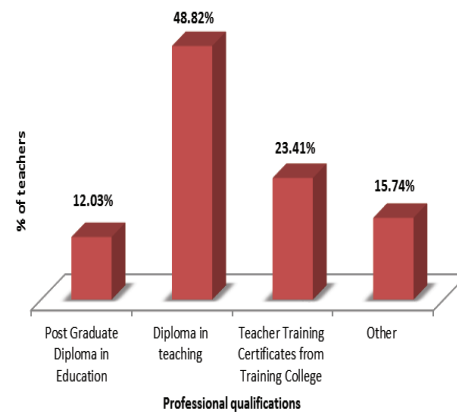


Figure 4.11: Number of teachers by highest professional qualifications

Moreover, 90 % of schools claimed that they had provided in-service training programmes for teachers. Out of this percentage, 12 % of schools were arranging in-service programmes conducted by external (local and foreign) entities such as Zonal Education Office, Provincial Department of Education, Pearson Edexcel, UK and Cambridge Assessment International Education UK, while 88% were conducting internal training sessions, seminars and workshops for their staff. Interestingly, one school reported that they have an academy of teacher education for training teachers and improving their professional qualifications.

4.2.7 Physical resources

In terms of space, the results showed that the majority of International Schools were located in very small land areas. As shown in Fig. 4.12, a majority of schools (60%) were located in land areas of less than 100 perch while 40% had more than 100 perch of land space.

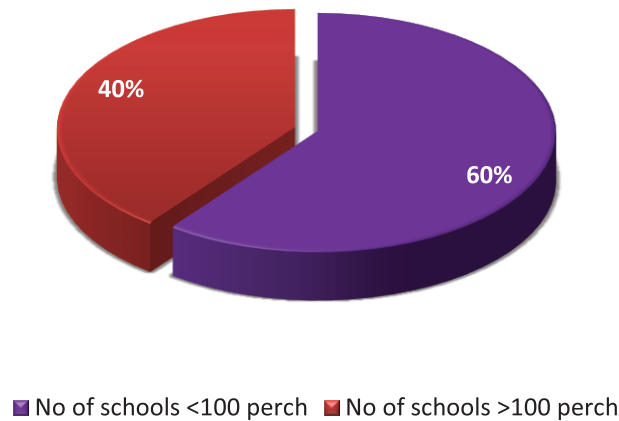


Figure 4.12: Land Space

As shown in Fig. 4.13, it appeared to be that there was a significant difference in the distribution of infrastructure among the school categories. In particular, some physical resources such as the school library facilities, sick rooms and playgrounds are more available in the schools where there were over 1000 student population. Further, some physical resources such as auditoriums, conference rooms, hostels, swimming pools, and basketball courts were available only in the schools with more than 1000 student population.

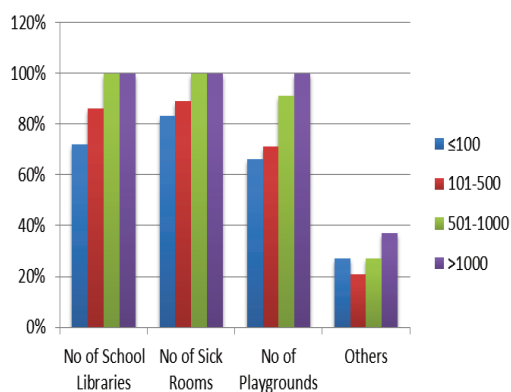


Figure 4.13: Infrastructure and Physical Facilities

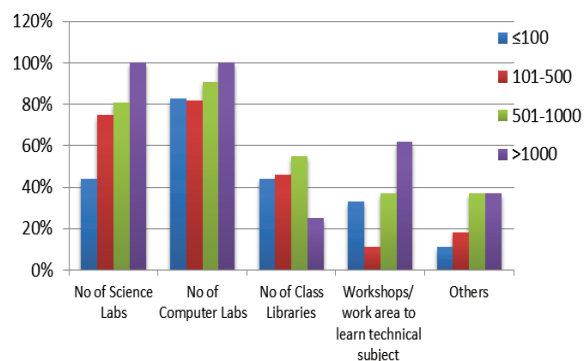


Figure 4.14: Teaching and Learning

Moreover, the findings reflected that there was an unequal distribution of teaching and learning facilities among the schools. Especially, facilities such as science labs, computer labs, class libraries and other facilities (such as Smart digital board room, STEM lab, Media room etc.,) were mostly available in the schools with more than 1000 students.

4.2.8 Quality assurance and certification

It appears that there is no formal quality assurance system adopted by the majority of International Schools. A small number of schools claimed that (9%) of schools had an affiliation with foreign agencies such as Pearson and Cambridge Assessment International Education, and as such, they claimed that their school are regularly monitored by such international bodies. The majority of schools (66%) claimed that they were adopting some internal mechanisms and checks and balances such as exams, monitoring and performance reviews of teachers by supervision panels (heads of the schools, the principal and senior teachers). Another 27% of schools indicated that they did not adopt any formal internal or external quality assurance procedures.

Interestingly, the majority of 81% of the schools indicated their desire to come under the purview of a formal quality assurance system operated by the State. Further, they suggested that there should be an acceptable system of monitoring which would provide guidelines and standards for their operation and regular inspection coupled with certification and ranking. However, few schools stated that they do not want to come under a formal regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms operated by the State as such mechanisms may lead to excessive external interferences.

4.3 Findings of the Field Visits and Issues Confronted by the International School

The purpose of the school visits was to cross check the data provided in response to the questions of the questionnaire. Field visits were conducted in 10 schools selected among the 65 schools that responded to the questionnaire. It was a purposive sample as the main criteria for selection was the willingness of the school to allow the NEC team to visit the school. However, the efforts were made as far as possible to include the schools representing the different categories of schools. There were four schools which had more than thousand students. One schools had less than hundred students and the others had between hundred to five hundred. As the Table 3.1 of Chapter 3 indicates there were schools in the sample offering both the local and international curricula as well as schools offering only local curriculum while some offering only the international curriculum.

One of the common features of these schools were that they were all registered with the Registrar of Companies as business entities. It was revealed that in all the schools the data pertaining to student numbers and staff had changed. Some of the bigger schools claimed that the numbers had increased while in smaller schools the numbers had declined due to various reasons mainly due to the economic situation in the country. Since most of the school administrations were reluctant allow the study team to observe the classes room learning sessions, and as such it was not possible to cross check the learning environment in the classrooms or the teaching strategies adopted by the teachers.

Regarding physical resources, it was found that in two of the bigger schools' classrooms were congested and there was no garden space at all for children to come out of their classrooms even during the interval time. Although sports activities are conducted outside normal school hours, they are done mostly in rented out sports grounds. Compared to the bigger schools, the smaller schools had more physical space but the opportunities for participation in sports activities were less due to lack of facilities for sports and personnel to train the students. With regard to teacher professional development it was revealed that the quality varied across the schools. In smaller schools the

administrations claimed that retaining teachers once they gain experience was also a problem. In general, it could be stated that the study team was able to verify most of the findings of the questionnaire analysis.

In the course of the discussions it was revealed that International School administrations also face many challenges. Most of the challenges are faced by the schools offering the local curriculum in the English medium. During these discussions, the study team learned that presently there are two associations in Sri Lanka with the membership of International Schools; Association of International Schools in Sri Lanka (AISL) and International Schools of Sri Lanka (TISSL). The NEC research team was able to speak to the secretaries of both these associations. According to the AISL secretary³⁶, the association was formed in 1990 and consist of 38 schools scattered around Sri Lanka offering education adopting the national curriculum in English medium prescribed by the National Institute of Education of the Ministry of Education. The secretary said that they have informed the issues they face to the Ministers' in-charge of the subject of education from time to time and even to His Excellency the President. Yet their grievances had not been resolved yet.

Some of the issues highlighted by the two associations are as follows:

1. International School students studying government syllabus in the English medium have to apply as private candidates when applying for G.C.E. (O/L) and G.C.E. (A/L) examinations. The Principal of the school does not have the right to certify the application form and it has to be certified by the *Grama Niladhari Officer*.
2. When the students sit as private candidates, the children of the same school are not assigned the same examination centre and they have to go to different centres.
3. In some areas, the teachers of the International Schools are not informed of the seminars and workshops which are aimed at continuing professional development, conducted by the National Institute of Education or Zonal Education Offices of the Provincial Education Departments.
4. Zonal and District level competitions held by the Ministry of Education are not informed to some of the International Schools.

After several requests to the relevant authorities a letter responding to the first issue, had been sent by the Director of Education, Private School Branch on 05.08.2021. It is stated that *"According to the existing laws, private parties cannot open schools to educate students who are in the range of compulsory education age. Therefore, International Schools are registered under the Company Act/the Business Registration Ordinance as companies/business institutions, and therefore they are not coming under the purview of the Ministry of Education. Only the students, those who are studying in schools functioning under the Ministry of Education are allowed to sit for the G.C.E.O/L and G.C.E (A/L) examination as school candidates. Except them, all other applicants are considered as private candidates"*. Up to now there is no solution to this issue.

TISSL is the Association of the premier International Schools in Sri Lanka since 1987 and it was formed by the Heads of the pioneer International Schools in Sri Lanka. Twenty-three schools are members of this association. While some of these schools offer only the international curriculum there are also students following the local curriculum in the English medium. Few of the schools offer only the foreign curriculum. The secretary of the association confirmed that their students who are following

³⁶ The Association of International Schools in Sri Lanka. (2023). Proposal Re-Monitoring of International Schools.

the local curriculum in the English medium also face the same issues highlighted by the secretary of AISL.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As mentioned in the previous chapters the main objective of this study was to ascertain the current status of International Schools in Sri Lanka. The second objective was to make recommendations for the way forward for the development of International Schools as an integral part of general education system in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, the same criteria used in designing the policy framework for General education was used to assess the International Schools, and hence the discussion and conclusions are presented along the same eight criteria used in the analysis of results presented in Chapter 4.

5.1 Number and Distribution, and Size of International Schools

International Schools have now become an important cohort of the general education system in Sri Lanka. According to the secondary data analysis conducted referring to the Ministry of Education data sources (unpublished data) as of 2019/2020, there are 395 International Schools operating in the country and almost half of the total number of International Schools are located in the Western Province and another 30% are found in Central Province, and North-Western Province with the other 20% are found in Sabaragamuwa Southern, North-Central, Eastern, Northern and Uva Provinces. This distribution highlights the fact that their presence is more so in more affluent regions of the country compared to less affluent regions indicate the preference of more affluent societies to provide education to their children in English medium.

This data also reveals that only 6% of schools out of 395 schools were with more than 1000 students, while one-third of schools were with less than 100 students. One of the notable findings of this present study was a considerable number of schools appeared to have been closed or temporarily suspended their operation during the Covid- 19 pandemic and the immediate aftermath of that. It was also reported that most of the schools that were closed down/suspended the operations belonged to the category of schools carrying less than 100 students while another significant fraction of schools with 101-500 students. No school in the category of students more than 1000 was closed down/suspended operation. This suggests smaller schools do not appear to have the ability to withstand external shocks and sustain their operation. This sudden closure of schools obviously a serious concern for those children who were enrolled in such schools as well as their parents. Further, as the International Schools are not regulated and guided, or monitored, they are not accountable to anyone and it appears that they could open up such schools as well close such schools at will. This finding highlights the need for institutionalizing a proper regulatory mechanism that shall prescribe the minimum requirements to be fulfilled for registering and operating an International School coupled with an oversight mechanism operated by the registering agency.

5.2 Regulation, Governance and Management

As of the information obtained from the Private School Branch of the MOE, there is no prescribed procedure in place for the registration of International Schools. Therefore, in the absence of a laid down procedures prescribed by a regulatory authority, preferably by the MoE, the International Schools have resorted to seek approval to establish and operate their schools from various entities. Table 4.1 given in Chapter 4, lists the regulatory/administrative authorities under which these schools

have been registered. The majority of the schools were operating with the registration from the Registrar of Companies (72%), 18% of schools were operating with the registration obtained from Divisional Secretariats, while few schools had been registered in other institutions such as BOI (1.4%), Provincial Councils (1.4%), etc. Surprisingly, there was one school which had not registered with any State institution/authority.

As discussed in Chapter 4 as the schools are not registered under the MoE students of these schools following the local syllabus are denied the opportunity to sit the G.C.E (O/L) and G.C.E. (A/L) as school candidates, and as such they have to follow many hardships. Further, the students of the International Schools are denied of certain facilities enjoyed by the students of the State schools. According to the MoE International Schools cannot be registered under the Private Schools Branch of the MoE as per the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) which banned the establishment of private schools to educate students who are in the range of compulsory education age with effect from 1961.

5.3 Medium of Instruction and Curriculum

According to the results, almost all International Schools use English as the medium of instruction while a small percentage (3 %) offer education in either English and Sinhala or English and Tamil, as of the choices of students and parents. Only very few schools (<1.0%) offer Sinhala or Tamil as the medium of instruction. These findings are in close agreement with the findings of (Gunawardena, 1995)³⁷ and (Wettewa, 2016)³⁸ who stated that the emergence of International Schools has been primarily a language-driven response to education.

The study also found that the majority of schools (60 %) offer the local curriculum, with another 32% offering both local and international curricula. Most of those schools which offer local curriculum claim that they have informal collaboration with authorized local educational institutes such as the National Institute of Education (NIE) and Zonal Education Offices. This finding while highlighting the desire of International Schools to seek collaboration with the State agencies and institutions, underpins the need for bringing International Schools under the State guidance and supervision through an appropriate regulatory and administrative mechanism. Such arrangement would ensure these schools establish a formal liaison, particularly with the NIE for matters related to curricula and its implementation, such as teachers' guides, textbooks, and other learning resources, and also for teacher training. Further, the liaison with the Zonal Education Office is also a positive aspect as that collaboration would allow the International Schools to become a cohort of the general education system of that local area and allow them to take part in inter-school competitions besides reaping the other benefits that could be accrued through such liaison, particularly to ease the dichotomy that exists between the two systems which were highlighted by Kularatne (1995)³⁹.

³⁷ Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

³⁸ Wettewa, V. (2016). Postcolonial emotionalism in shaping education: An analysis of International School choice in Sri Lanka. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 15(1), 66-83.

³⁹ Kularatne, W.G. (1995). Economics of International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*.

5.4 Learners and Learning Environment

This data also reveals that only 6% of schools out of 65 schools were with more than 1000 students, while one-third of schools were with less than 100 students. One of the notable findings of this present study was a considerable number of schools appeared to have been closed or temporarily suspended their operation during the Covid- 19 pandemic and the immediate aftermath of that. It was also reported that most of the schools that were closed down/suspended operations belonged to the category of schools carrying less than 100 students while another significant fraction of schools with 101-500 students. No school in the category of students more than 1000 was closed down/suspended operation. This suggests smaller schools do not appear to have the ability to withstand external shocks and sustain their operation. This sudden closure of schools is obviously a serious concern for those children who were enrolled in such schools as well as their parents. Further, as the International Schools are not regulated and guided, or monitored, they are not accountable to anyone and it appears that they could open up such schools as well close such schools at will. This finding highlights the need for institutionalizing a proper regulatory mechanism that shall prescribe the minimum requirements to be fulfilled for registering and operating an International School coupled with an oversight mechanism operated by the registering agency.

As regards to teaching-learning approach, many schools claimed that they adopt a full rapporteur of teaching methods ranging from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches amply supported with teaching aids. On the other hand, there were schools which appear to lack essential teaching aids and qualified teachers to adopt the full rapporteur of teaching methods and conduct assessments, particularly formative assessments in a regular manner. As there appears to be a lack of consistency in adopting the good practices of teaching-learning and assessments as these schools are not provided with guidelines and instructions from a national authority. As such the schools and teachers appear to adopt teaching-learning and assessment practices which they feel fit for the purpose. Further, what they stated in the questionnaire survey could not be confirmed during the field visits as many schools were reluctant to allow the study team to observe the classroom sessions.

5.5 Assessment and Achievements in Extra-Curricular Activities

Most of the schools claim that they practiced formative as well as summative assessment methods, and the outcomes of such assessments, particularly formative assessment outcomes are discussed with students while the outcomes of summative assessments are shared with parents. However, the review team could not confirm their claim during the field visits that they conducted.

5.6 Personality Development and Civic Consciousness

A positive aspect identified from the findings of the study was that most schools appear to provide a multitude of co-curricular activities to develop personality and civic consciousness in students. Further, as these schools cater to students from all ethnicities, it appears to create a multi-ethnic flavour in the learning environment. This finding agrees with the conclusion by Gunasekera (1995)⁴⁰,

⁴⁰ Gunasekera, G (1995) The Case for International Schools. *Shiksha*, Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education, January 1995 p 28-30.

Jenkins, et.al. (2005)⁴¹ and Wettewa (2016)⁴², and that by welcoming students from all ethnoreligious backgrounds, these schools also inadvertently contribute to breaking any ethnic barriers. The present study also revealed that these schools had implemented several cultural and religious activities to enhance awareness of the values of different cultures and traditions. This would certainly have a positive impact on promoting ethnic and religious cohesion and social harmony in the country.

5.7 Human Resources

Results of the study revealed that there exists diversity with respect to human resources. Most of them were with the Diploma in Education while a few percentages of teachers appear to be with Bachelor's level qualification and Postgraduate level academic qualifications. This is in contrast to what is reported for teachers in State schools. As of the Annual School Census of Sri Lanka 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020)⁴³, a majority of teachers from government national and provincial level schools in Sri Lanka are qualified at the graduate level. This diversity may be due to the difficulty in finding suitably qualified and experienced teachers or the inability to attract such teachers for employment in International Schools. This confirms the statement by Gunawardena (1995)⁴⁴ "*Selection of teachers to staff of International Schools is based frequently on English proficiency rather than pedagogical knowledge*". Thus, the findings of the current study suggest that if International Schools are to be in par with that of the public education system, a formal mechanism for teacher recruitment and training should be in place so as to improve the quality of training provision offered and reduce the diversity among International Schools.

5.8 Physical Resources

As revealed by the study, a majority of the International Schools were located in very small land areas, and this is more so with the schools catering to less than 100 students. However, some of the schools with more than 1000 students operate in a land area adequate to provide essential elements of a school environment while others with larger student populations were operating in high-rising buildings which were lacking of adequate ground-level space. It is very conceivable that the limited land space available in most schools may limit the provision of a conducive learning environment which allows the free movement of students and engagement in leisure activities. This deficiency was also pointed out by previous studies as well (Gunawardena, 1995⁴⁵; NEC, 2019⁴⁶).

⁴¹ Jenkins, K., Berman, J., & Jenkins, B. (2005). A Proliferation of Self-described 'International' Schools in Sri Lanka: A Response to Globalization. In 33rd Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society, Novotel Pacific Bay Resort Coffs Harbour. <https://rune.une.edu.au/web/handle/1959.11/4172?mode=full>

⁴² Wettewa, V. (2016). Postcolonial emotionalism in shaping education: An analysis of International School choice in Sri Lanka. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 15(1), 66-83.

⁴³ Ministry of Education (2020). Annual School Census of Sri Lanka [Review of Annual School Census of Sri Lanka]. In Ministry of Education. <https://moe.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/School-Census-Report-2020-V3.pdf>

⁴⁴ Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

⁴⁵ Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

⁴⁶ National Education Commission. (2019). Report by the sub-committee on the registration of International Schools. National Education Commission, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

As regards learning resources, it appeared to be that there was a significant difference with respect to the availability of teaching facilities and learning resources among different categories of International Schools. In general, some of the facilities and resources such as the school library facilities, and playgrounds are available in the schools where there were over 1000 student population. Further, some physical resources such as auditoriums, conference rooms, hostels, swimming pools, and basketball courts were available only in the schools which have over 1000 students. In terms of teaching-learning resource facilities such as science labs, computer labs, class libraries and other facilities (Smart digital board room, STEM lab, Media room, etc.,) were mostly available in schools with more than 1000 students. This finding highlights the dichotomy that exists with respect to teaching and learning and sports and recreational facilities available among International Schools.

5.9 Quality Assurance and Certification

Results of the study also revealed that there is no formal quality assurance system adopted by the majority of International Schools. A small number of schools (<9%) of schools claim that they have affiliation with foreign agencies such as Pearson and Cambridge Assessment International Education, and as such, they claimed to have been monitored by such external bodies. The majority of schools (66%) claimed that they were adopting some internal mechanisms and balances such as exams, monitoring and supervision panel, and students' and teachers' performance reviews. But they did not have any formalized system, except for these internal checks. Another 27% of schools indicated that they did not adopt any formal internal or external quality assurance procedure. As pointed out by Hayden and Thompson (2008)⁴⁷ International Schools cannot operate with absolutely no connections to the local setting such as authorization, and quality assurance, and accreditation measures, and as such International Schools must have affiliations with national regulatory bodies. Nonetheless, International Schools in Sri Lanka fall outside the Ministry of Education, and as such there is no oversight mechanism to make them accountable for quality education provision.

Interestingly, the majority of the schools desired to come under the purview of a formal quality assurance system operated by the State. They have suggested that there should be an acceptable system of monitoring which would provide guidelines and standards and regular inspection coupled with certification and ranking. Further, they have pointed out that aligning International Schools to national education quality standards is vital. However, few schools indicated that did not want to come under a formal quality assurance system operated by the State as they do not want to have excessive interferences.

Based on the results from the study, it is concluded that there is a diversity among the International Schools with respect to the place of registration, the curriculum offered and medium of instruction, human and physical resources and quality assurance. As previously reported by Gunawardena (1995)⁴⁸ and confirmed by the findings of this study, the only common element that runs across all International Schools is the medium of instruction which is English. As pointed out by Hayden and

⁴⁷ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. J. (2008). *International schools: Growth and influence* (Vol. 92). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/international-schools-growth-and-influence>

⁴⁸ Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

Thompson (2008)⁴⁹ with respect to international scenario in light of the growing number of International Schools and their likely impact on national systems, and also considering the extreme diversity that exists among International Schools, there is an urgent need for educational planners and policy-makers to consider bringing this important system under the government regulation and monitoring and quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms.

⁴⁹ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. J. (2008). *International schools: Growth and influence* (Vol. 92). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/international-schools-growth-and-influence>

6. The Way Forward

According to the Ministry of Education data sources, as of 2018/2019, there were 395 International Schools catering for well over 143,123 students, with a teacher population of 13,731. In terms of the number of students per school, out of the 395 schools for which data was available, there was one school with more than 5000 students, three with 2501-5000, and another nineteen with 1001 -2500 students. At the other end, there were 250 schools with students between 100 -1000. Further, 113 schools had less than 100 students. As the number of students increased, the student-teacher ratio too has increased. Surprisingly, for 147 schools out of the 395 schools there was no information was available for on the curricula that they used. However, all these schools function as business entities with registration with the Registrar of Companies under Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or with the Department of Business Registration under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (No. 8 of 1938 & No. 7 of 1987), and without any formal registration with or supervision of the Ministry of Education, and operate in a manner which is considered fit for the purpose by those who operate these entities pro-profit basis.

Nevertheless, this segment is now widely perceived as an integral part of the general education system in Sri Lanka. Yet, as highlighted in Chapter 5, this study has shown the existence a noticeable diversity among the International Schools with respect to the place of registration, the curriculum offered and medium of instruction, human and physical resources and quality assurance. As reported by Gunawardena (1995)⁵⁰ and confirmed by the findings of this study, the only common element that runs across all International Schools is the medium of instruction which is English. This paper also highlighted the failures of seemingly rational policies made by the National Education Commission and attempts made by the Ministry of Education in bringing the International Schools under the State regulation and supervision. Nevertheless, in light of the growing number of International Schools and their likely impact on national system, and also considering the extreme diversity that exists among International Schools, there is an urgent need for the political leadership and educational planners to consider bringing this important segment under the government regulation and monitoring and quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms.

It is indeed very clear, as highlighted by many reports the biggest impediment in this regards is the legal barriers posed by two Acts: Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No 5 of 1960 which enable to government to take over the ownership and management of many private schools and training colleges and Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) which banned the establishment of private schools with effect from 1961. This legal impediment compelled many private schools offering only the local curriculum to emerge under the category of 'international schools', and they appear to operate only with the registration under Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, or under the Business Names Registration Ordinance (8 of 1938 & 7 of 1987). Moreover, the attempts made by the successive governments to amend the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961) act or to repeal it with a new act and/or to prescribe and implement conditions under which International Schools should operate have never been successful up until today.

⁵⁰ Gunawardena, C. (1995). Visits to three International Schools. *Shiksha: Journal of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education*, 23-28.

Therefore, the foremost step that the government has to is to take steps to amend or repeal the two Acts namely, *Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No 5 of 1960* and *Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act (No. 8 of 1961)* or replace with a new Act thus allowing the government to regulate and monitor all schools operating in Sri Lanka irrespective of their ownership or affiliation. It is also recommended that until the existing two Acts, are amended or rescinded along with the enactment of new education Act, the Ministry of Education with approval of the Cabinet should establish a separate unit with the Private Education Branch to cater to the needs of the International Schools.

This recommendation is also in line with the recommended policies and strategic activities have been clearly prescribed the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)⁵¹. As a prelude to proposing the policies and recommended strategic activities for International Schools, the NEC has defined the directive principles on which the policy and strategic activity framework should be prescribed. The directive principles stated that that; i) the State recognizes International Schools as a part of the national school system, ii) the State assumes the responsibility of laying down the required legislations and regulations pertaining to registration and monitoring and certification of International Schools, iii) all international schools must provide access to students from all ethnic and religious denominations, iv) all international schools must teach national languages and religions covering Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, and v) the State would not allow any schools to be established in line with religious denominations. Accordingly, the NEPF (2020-2030) has prescribed the policy that states “All international schools are considered as an integral part of the national education system and shall come under the government of regulation and monitoring, and quality control, and recommended a strategic activity framework in line with the prescribed policy. These includes:

- Until the required amendments are enacted to the existing Acts relating to education or enactment of a new Education Act, the Ministry of Education with the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers shall take steps to establish a Specified Authority for International Schools Education (SAISE) for the regulation and overseeing the matters related to of International School education sector.
- The Specified Authority for International Schools Education shall be guided by an Advisory Committee (*such as Advisory Committee for International School Education-ACISE*), chaired by the Secretary of Ministry of Education, and consisting of appointed members by the Minister of Education, including the representatives from International Schools, Board of Investment, and Chamber of Commerce (International Schools).
- The Specified Authority for International Schools Education shall formulate and issue regulations and guidelines pertaining to registration and management of International Schools, specifying the following:
 - All international schools shall comply with government prescribed national education policy, regulations, and guidelines.

⁵¹ National Education Commission. (2022). National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). Volume VIII: Policy Proposals and Recommended Strategic Activities on International School Education. <https://nec.gov.lk/national-education-policy-framework-2020-2030/>

- All international schools shall comply with governance and management guidelines prescribed by the Specified Authority.
- All international schools must be committed to managing the enterprises, not solely as profit-generating entities.
- All international schools shall provide access to students from all ethnic and religious denominations.
- All international schools shall teach national languages (Sinhala and Tamil) and religions covering Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and any other religions as appropriate.
- No international school shall operate only on a particular religious or ethnic line.
- All international schools must get parents involved in school affairs and activities.

The other important step is to design and introduce a quality assurance and certification system. As reported by this study though some International Schools have claimed that they subjected to quality audits by their international partner institutions/agencies, many International Schools at present do not have a formalized quality enhancement and assurance system, driven by an international or local agency. As such the quality of education offered by such institutions is not assured. The findings of this study also suggest that the quality of education provided by these schools may vary significantly among the schools because of the diversity that exists in terms of student number, teaching and learning resources, quality of teaching staff, etc.

This recommendation is also line with recommended policy and strategic activities have been clearly prescribed the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). In doing so, the NEPF (2010-2020) has prescribed directive principles, which should guide the policy and strategic activity framework. The directive principles state that; i) all international schools must adopt nationally prescribed best practices and quality standards and guidelines in the provision of education, and ii) all international schools must seek certification/accreditation from a State designated Standards and Certifying /Accreditation Agency. Going along with the directive principles, the NEPF (2020-2030) prescribed a policy with accompanied strategic activities. Policy statement states that “All international schools are required to abide by the nationally prescribed regulations, standards and guidelines and shall be subjected to review by the national quality assurance and accreditation system. The recommended strategic activities include:

- The National Education Commission as mandated by its Act and in liaison with the Specified Authority for International School Education shall formulate and implement a quality assurance and accreditation system in liaison with the Quality Assurance unit of the Ministry of Education for all international schools with well-prescribed quality criteria and elements, best practices, and standards, coupled with an objective assessment system.
- All international schools shall foster the concept of quality and make efforts to internalize quality culture within the institution by internalizing the prescribed best practices and standards.

- Specified Authority for International School Education shall make it mandatory for all international schools to seek certification/accreditation from the designated quality assurance agency.

In addition to above two key recommendation, the NEPF (2020-2030)⁵² has also prescribed policies and strategic activities with respect to other elements such as governance and management, physical resources, human resources, curricula, teaching-learning-assessment practices, personality development and civic consciousness, and learner support services.

In conclusion, as pointed out by Hayden and Thompson (2008)⁵³ with respect to international scenario, in the light of the growing number of International Schools and their likely impact on national system, and also considering the extreme diversity that exists among International Schools, there is an urgent need for educational planners and policy-makers to consider bringing this important system under the government regulation and monitoring and quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms. It is imperative that the recommendations made herein should be considered as the way forward to 'harmonizing' International Schools with national forms of schooling.

⁵² National Education Commission. (2022). National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). In National Education Commission. Department of Government Printing. <https://nec.gov.lk/national-education-policy-framework-2020-2030/>

⁵³ Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. J. (2008). International schools: Growth and influence (Vol. 92). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/international-schools-growth-and-influence>

7. Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the late Prof. Chandra Gunawardena, Lead Expert on International School Education and Expert Team for guiding us in all aspects of the research study and to Professor Harischandra Abegunawardena, Chairman of the National Education Commission for his critical and constructive advice and guidance. Many thanks go to Prof. Marie Perera, Emeritus Professor of Humanities Education of the Department of Humanities Education, University of Colombo for providing valuable advice and support throughout the study. We are also thankful to Private School Branch of the Ministry of Education for providing information to conduct our study satisfyingly and we would also appreciate all the International Schools that provided their data to succeed in this study. Finally, we place on record our gratitude to our co-workers at the NEC and our families who have supported us along the way.

