



# Introduction of a School Based Assessment Programme in Sri Lanka

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## Introduction

**T**he introduction of a School Based Assessment Programme is a felt need. In the attempt of achieving the objectives of Education for All and providing compulsory, general education on a free and equity basis, the task of improving the assessment procedures and designing them to suit the present day needs, has to be given the highest priority. This article is to discuss on some of the background factors that influenced in designing a such programme, its main features, the implementation efforts and what future expectations it has.

## Some of the Background Factors that Influenced in Designing the Programme

The identification of the need to provide compulsory, general education on a free and equity basis and launching suitable programmes to meet this basic need is an explicit trend evident throughout the world. Education is a human right. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) describes this as "a right of every citizen. At least the Primary or Elementary Education has to be given by the state, free of charge. Primary or Elementary education has to be made compulsory." The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in its Articles 28 and 29 states that "the state must recognize the right of the child to education on the basis of equal opportunities,

provide compulsory and free primary education to all, and access to different forms of secondary education, to educational and vocational information and guidance and to higher education according to capacity, take measures to promote regular school attendance and reduction of drop-out rates and to ensure school discipline that is consistent with human dignity. The education provided must promote personality development, respect for human rights, fundamental freedom, cultural identity and national values and prepare the child for responsible life in a free society".

The World Declaration on Education for all (1990) highlights that "every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basis learning needs. Basic education should be provided to all. Basic education services of quality should be expanded and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities. For basic education to be equitable they must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. The focus must be on actual learning acquisition and outcome. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is therefore necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programmes and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement." (Articles 1,3,4) In the guidelines agreed upon by the member countries for implementing the World Declaration on Education for All, it is clearly stated that "improvement in learning achievement such

that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (eg. 80% of 14 years olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement" is one of the main targets that have to be set and reached. It was envisaged at the Jomtein Conference (1990) that

- (i) Assessment capacities have to be utilized to improve learning
- (ii) Assessment of learning achievement includes both formative and summative activities and should always incorporate a feedback mechanism to promote proper use of the assessment results by teachers and education managers.
- (iii) An assessment system, which incorporates classroom-based, school-based and external models, has to be evolved.
- (iv) Assessment needs to incorporate, where feasible psychomotor and affective results as well as cognitive outcomes.

When considering all what is said above, it is quite clear that a well planned, properly structured new assessment procedure has to be implemented at the level of classroom, school, provincial and national.

In Sri Lanka, various measures taken by the government, in order to provide compulsory, general education on a free and equity basis is evident through out the last six decades. Providing free education from Grade 01 upto University level, making Mother Tongue (Swabhasha) the medium of instruction in schools, bringing all the schools under government control, providing free mid-day meals, uniforms and text books to all the students are some of the landmarks in its attempt to achieve the objectives. The 1972 educational reforms movement has to be considered as a





major contribution in this process. The constitution of Sri Lanka states that "the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels" (Article 27) is one of the directive principles of state policy and fundamental duties of the state. The government has enforced a law from January 1998 making education compulsory for all the children, who are in the age group of 5-14 years. This really is an attempt to achieve the objectives and targets agreed upon by the member countries (including Sri Lanka) who gathered at Jomtein in 1990. The educational reforms movement introduced in 1997, gives a high priority for Classroom Based Assessment frame works which leads to assessment of competency levels throughout the learning-teaching process.

After analyzing the various encounters in achieving the objectives of education for all goals, and needs to be fulfilled in providing compulsory, general education on a free and equity basis an assessment programme paying more attention on the learners needs and the procedures in the classroom, has been designed and implemented throughout all the schools in Sri Lanka by now.

#### Features of the School Based Assessment Programme

##### (a) The Concept

This is a process aimed at developing a balanced personality in the students. In order to lead them on to expected mastery levels, the teachers have to identify abilities and inabilities, help them and work along with them in learning tasks carried out in the classroom. It is a process that leads to the development of each student and not a process of comparing students according to levels of intelligence or placing them in order of abilities.

##### (b) Objectives

There are four main objectives in the School Based Assessment Programme.

- (i) Improve students' learning process
- (ii) Improve teachers' teaching process
- (iii) Improve assessment process in order to make teaching and learning more efficient and effective
- (iv) Transform the school environment from an evaluation culture to an assessment culture

##### (c) What should be assessed?

The factors that are to be assessed can be divided into two broad categories. The first category consists of factors associated with the development of balanced personality in the student viz. Cognitive abilities, affective traits, psycho-motor skills, social skills and personality traits (that are) associated with learning. The second category consists of other factors affecting students learning. They are, intelligence, motivation, rate of learning, levels of expectation, physiological differences, entry competencies, learning abilities and socio-economic background.

##### (d) When to Assess?

It is best to assess students when they are engaged in learning in the classroom. But it is possible to assess students even in learning situations outside the classroom. The assessment should be done only at teacher's discretion and not on a pre-determined time schedule. Students may be assessed a number of times during a term. In assessing, special attention should be paid to student's readiness, his ability to be engaged in work, his achievement levels and his ability to make use of the learnt things in real life situations.

##### (e) The Assessment Tools

Assessment tools used in the SBA programme need not be identical to those of achievement tests used at Public Examinations. Public Examinations

go by the method of achievement testing. SBA Programmes have to make use of Performance Assessment Strategies. Tools like short written tests, observation schedules, check lists, assignments, projects, oral tests, picture-based tests, reading tests, writing tests, activities, portfolios etc. can be used at the classroom level. They will be much more profitable in assessing the child's strengths and weaknesses and help him then and there to achieve mastery in the related theme.

The salient feature evident in relation to these assessment tools is that they are not mere testing tools. They are guiding tools for better teaching, learning and assessing procedures. Assignment is an "activity carried out by students under the guidance and supervision of the teacher". Therefore the assignment gives a guidance for the teacher on how to design the learning activity. It leads the students on how to be engaged in the learning activity. Details given in the assignment highlights how students are to be assessed during the process, how they are to be guided and corrected by the teacher. Observation Schedules give guidelines on the things to be performed by the students, on what is to be assessed during the activity, on how students can be categorized when they are at work. Projects lead the students design their own learning activity, decide on what to do and how to do, what sort of end product they are going to produce, what skills, abilities and traits are to be assessed during the project. Portfolios give a chance for the students to collect evidence in relation to their development and progress in the subject areas they are interested. Picture based tests, oral tests and activities allow the students to prove their abilities and skills when they are engaged in the real learning activity. As





a result, this school based assessment programmes has been able to bring about favourable change in the classroom, making students enjoy learning and making teachers enjoy teaching. The assessment procedure carried out using these various improved teaching - learning strategies leads to a radical change in the classroom. It saves the teaching time. Involvement in-group activities such as assignments, activities etc. makes learning more efficient and effective. What is advocated in the guidebooks issued by the National Institute of Education is to change the learning - teaching strategies to bring about more favourable and enjoyable learning events in the classroom at least during a few periods that they are given for each subject. The teachers are instructed not to have tests at the end of teaching a specific unit. They are guided to teach the unit in a more enjoyable manner, using a new teaching method, allowing the students to work in groups, giving them chances to learn through group interaction, reach expected mastery levels and be better achievers in the classroom. This strategy will save the teaching-learning time and complete the given syllabus with a shorter period. If the teachers do study the given exemplar tools, understand what objectives are to be achieved through these exemplar tools, how they can be adjusted to suit the classroom situation, a significant change can be brought into the classroom to make all the students better learners and achievers.

#### (f) Recording Students Performance

Using Progress Record is the main strategy that can be used in the classroom. It is much more easier and useful if these records are kept by the teacher with the assistance of the students. This is very useful at the classroom level as it can accommodate the levels of mastery attained by the

group of students in the class in relation to various themes in a given subject. If the lines of the progress record are studied it will give a very good idea about the performance of the teacher, what he has been able to teach; what he has not been able to teach, to whom he has been able to teach; to whom he has not been able to teach and on what themes the teacher has to arrange additional learning events or activities. Using a colour code in keeping their record will make the task more enjoyable and fruitful. Developing a profile of each student related to every subject is the other record that is to be kept in the classroom. This will represent graphically how the child is progressing. Polargram is the other method of recording performance. This is a pictorial form that can be used to indicate the total achievement level reached by a group of students in relation to a theme or subject area identified. When the polargram is drawn by naming the axis in the descending order of marks earned by the students, it is possible for the teacher to know the achievement levels of the students, who should be given feedback and how the students could be grouped for further instruction.

#### (g) Reporting of Students Performance

A report on student achievement in relation to every subject (prepared separately) has to be sent to the parents by the subject teachers. This will include information in relation to the child's

- (a) behavioural patterns
- (b) mastery levels achieved in various themes
- (c) profile showing the progress made

In addition there is a space available for a dialogue among the teacher, the student and the parents. This dialogue will direct parents as well as teachers on what they have to do in making the child a better learner.

#### Implementation Efforts

In 1994, this programme was initiated by the Evaluation Department of the National Institute of Education and introduced on a pilot basis in 30 schools selected from Matara and Ratnapura districts. In the following year it was extended to another 20 schools. Within the next few years the number of schools increased annually as 250, 850 and above 1000. By 1997, this pilot programme could cover the whole Monaragala District, North-Western province and Western Province. As a result of the pilot programme, it was possible to develop a Resource Book, a Teachers' Manual a Handbook for trainers and Guidelines containing exemplar test material that are to be used by the teachers in their day to day teaching activities at the classroom.

The Circular No. 1998/04 sent by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education informed all the schools that the School Based Assessment Programme will be implemented throughout the island from 1998. The Circular No. 1998/42 detailed out the time targets and the other relevant measures that are to be taken to make the programme a success.

The National Institute of Education joining hands with the Department of Examinations, Ministry of Education and Provincial Ministries of Education has been able to train a larger number of Education Offices, Inservice Advisors, Principals, Teachers and Teacher Educators on the methods of implementing the programme. The programme started in 1999 in Grade 06 and 09 classes will be extended gradually to all the Grades by Year 2004.





### Future Expectations

With the introduction of the SBA Programme a paradigm shift from the Evaluation Culture towards an Assessment Culture is expected in years to come. The present day evaluation procedures carried out in schools are quite similar to those carried out in Public Examinations conducted by the Department of Examinations. Construction of question papers, administering the tests, analysis of test data are done mainly on the lines of the classical test theory. Achievement testing techniques which suits centrally controlled public examinations are still adopted by the schools and classroom teachers. In the next few years performance testing procedures, will be adopted in the classroom to assess whether the child can apply in real life situations, what he has learnt in the classroom. This deviation from the achievement testing procedures will make way for the teacher to identify what the child is able to do and what he is unable to do; what his strengths and weaknesses are; when and where he needs to be helped. As the assessment procedures in the SBA programme are inbuilt into the teaching-learning process a deviation from the present day receptive and rote learning procedures and going towards meaningful and discovery learning procedures can be expected. Teachers are expected to deviate from the old fashioned lecture method and work with a humanitarian point of view, considering that all children are educable. The classroom is expected to be a place where enjoyable learning events take place, allowing the students to learn efficiently and effectively through experiences.

The system of Assessment Boards that are to be initiated at School Levels, Zonal Levels, Provincial Levels and National Level will make way for smooth and efficient implementation of the SBA Programme and improve quality and quantify of teaching,

learning and assessment. The objective of achieving education for all goals will become a reality within the next few years to come.

### Summary

Achieving Education for All Goals is a felt need. SBA Programme piloted and introduced in Sri Lankan schools is a such programme that facilitates the objectives of providing compulsory, general education on a free and equity basis. By its nature this programme will lead to better learning-teaching and assessment procedures within the whole school system. In time to come a paradigm shift towards an assessment culture and a deviation from the centrally controlled traditional examination pattern can be expected. ■

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