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STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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1.0 Introduction

The history of education in Sri Lanka extends over two thousand years but the modern system of education was developed under the British colonial administration. This system however provided opportunity and mobility for only the urban elite while it shut its doors to the majority of the population in the rural areas.

Educational reforms introduced after 1940 - the opening up of central schools in rural localities, the introduction of a scheme of free education in 1945, the switch over to the native languages as the medium of education improved access and equity.[1] Educational reforms together with the rapid growth of population increased enrolment in schools and higher education institutions.

This expansion in enrolment undoubtedly created problems as it was a linear or quantitative expansion and the output was more and more of the same product. The majority of the students were those who had followed an arts based course as access at the secondary level was greater in that area. Even though science based courses enjoyed much prestige they were limited to a few because of less access and the dearth of physical facilities. There was a demand, however, for science education in order to enter the medical, science and engineering faculties.

It is pertinent to point out at this stage that curricular diversification at both the secondary and tertiary levels was attempted without success at different times. Curricular diversification with a vocational bias was proposed by the Special Committee on Education 1943, the White Paper of 1951, the National Education Commission 1962, the White Paper of 1966, the Educational Reforms of 1972 and the White Paper of 1981. The thrust towards vocational or job oriented courses did not succeed as the demand was for the more prestigious professions and for white collar jobs.

Most of the reforms that were introduced never took into consideration the aspirations or needs of the clientele. Eminent educationists who obtained the views of the public and officials put forward proposals without actually ascertaining the needs of the students. This study is an attempt to explore the needs and aspirations of students studying in the secondary schools of Sri Lanka and to ascertain their perception of educational needs. The study was conducted with the assistance of UNICEF in order to place the views of students before a Task Force Meeting which prepared the Sri Lankan Country Report for the World Conference on 'Education for All'.

2.0 Review of earlier studies

Several studies were undertaken over the last few decades to investigate the vocational aspirations of students.

Green (1952) collected data from a sample of 1365 students in Senior School Certificate classes in selected schools in all nine provinces in 1950, in order to investigate their vocational choices. He noted that Government employment was the most sought after mainly because of security. In the Northern Province 99.9% of the boys and 81.2% of the girls sought Government employment compared to 75.3% and 61.5% in the Western Province. The vocational preferences of girls and boys in his study are presented in Table 1 in rank order of preference.

Table 1 : Vocational Preferences (1950)

Rank	Boys	Girls	North Boys	West Boys	North Girls	West Girls
1	Doctor	Doctor	Doctor	Doctor	Doctor	Doctor
2	Engineer	Teacher	Engineer	Engineer	Teacher	Teacher
3	Teacher	Engineer	Pilot	Teacher	Engineer	Engineer
4	Farmer	Farmer	Teacher	Pilot	Pilot	Pilot
5	Pilot	Advocate	Farmer	Farmer	Politician	Nurse
6	Police Inspector	Pilot	Soldier	Police Inspector	Advocate	Farmer
7	Soldier	Police Inspector	Politician	Planter	Electrician	Police Inspector

Doctor, Teacher and Engineer occupied the first three places. The author concludes: "The overwhelming demand for Government employment, though to some extent unavoidable in a society where the Government is the chief employer, is also evidence of the search for security and of unwillingness to depart from tradition or accept risks - conditions essential in private enterprise. Vocational ratings also emphasise the value set on prestige, the strong effect of caste and the low value given to manual work - and strength and wide extent of these determinants is shown in the remarkable degree of similarity of ratings by boys and girls of a list of occupations which are predominantly of male interest."

In another study Green and Wickramasuriya (1953) investigated the vocational aspirations of 48 men graduates attending the course for the Diploma in Education in the University of Ceylon (1951 - 1952). Even though this study has no direct relationship with the present study, it serves as a pointer to the vocational aspirations of educated Sri Lankans. When asked to rank given occupations the graduates

selected the following occupations in descending order : Doctor, Lawyer, Accountant, Engine-driver, Construction foreman, Clerk and Farmer.

Jayasuriya (1961) carried out a survey of Vocational ambitions of a sample of 316 boys in the G.C.E. Preparatory class in different types of schools - Assisted and Government, Urban and Rural remote, English and Swabasha, Central and College in different regions of Sri Lanka. He examined the relationship between intelligence and vocational ambitions by ascertaining the vocational ambitions of the most intelligent pupils (IQ over 125) and the least intelligent pupils (IQ below 75). (Table 2)

Table 2 - Intelligence and Vocational Ambitions (1961)

Most Intelligent Pupils		Least Intelligent Pupils	
Engineer	17	Engineer	4
Doctor	13	Trade	4
Teacher	6	Doctor	3
Army	2	Teacher	3
Civil Service	2	Clerk	3
Architect	1	Technician	2
Proctor	1	Engine Driver	1
Govt. Officer	1	S.I. Police	1

Talented pupils in science classes were seen to have a clear occupational focus - engineering, medicine and teaching.

The ILO survey (1971) 'Matching Employment Opportunities and Expectations' ascertained the perceptions of the job market of 336 undergraduates. In this study 87 per cent of the sample preferred the Public Sector as against 10 per cent who preferred the Private Sector. Only 3 per cent were in favour of self employment. The choice of the Public Sector was due to security, pension and other facilities such as holidays and travelling that were provided. It is also worth noting that some wished to serve the country, specifically because they had received a free education. Asked how they would like to be engaged during the waiting period for permanent employment, the activities envisaged were study, vocational training, private teaching, work on family farm, work in household, self employment and work in the private sector.

Muthulingam (1973) in a study titled 'Factors Associated with Vocational Choice of Adolescents' investigated the influence of certain environmental and psychological factors on the vocational choices of 1030 pupils aged 15 - 17 in G.C.E. classes of 18 secondary schools. This sample included boys and girls from both urban and rural areas, following science and arts courses.

The occupations were classified under four groups: professional, semi professional, skilled and unskilled and the choices given by the pupils in the sample for the four groups were 26.3%, 41.3%, 16.9% and 15.5% respectively.

Out of fifty selected occupations the following occupations occupied the first 10 places according to the ranks given by the pupils

Table 3 - Rank order of occupations (1973)

1. Doctor	6. Graduate Teacher
2. Judge	7. Trained Teacher
3. Professor	8. Police Inspector
4. Engineer	9. Pilot
5. Scientist	10. Soldier

It was observed that occupations with high pay and those requiring higher educational standards occupied top positions in the list while those with low economic gains and manual work occupied bottom positions. Caste seems to have been a major factor in determining the prestige of occupations.

The researcher concluded that parental influence on choice of scientific occupations especially in homes of higher socio-economic levels, probably reflected the impact of science on a developing society. The educational level of the family had a highly significant relationship with the choice of scientific vocations.

Jayaweera (1976) ascertained the vocational preferences of a sample of girls in G.C.E.(O.L) classes in 1973 and a sample of girls in NCGE classes in 1976.

The 1973 sample consisted of 1000 girls from five Districts - Colombo, Kandy, Jaffna, Matara and Polonnaruwa. In 1976, 1000 girls from 10 urban and 16 rural schools were drawn into the sample. The same schools were used in both years and the same questionnaire was administered.

One of the aspects investigated in this study was the level of education at which the respondents wished to enter employment. In 1973, 36.7% wished to seek employment after G.C.E. (O.L) but by 1976 this group had declined to 13.6%. In 1973 33.7% sought to join employment after tertiary education and in 1976 their percentage increased to 58.5. Two reasons were adduced for this, the rise in the level of educational expectations and the replacement of G.C.E.(O.L) with NCGE examination after 9 years of education as compared to the previous span of 10 years.

83.2% of the 1973 group and 81.7% of the 1976 group opted for employment in the State Sector, but there were urban, rural, linguistic and social class differences. A higher proportion of rural, Sinhala medium and less affluent students preferred

government jobs. On the other hand a large percentage of English medium urban and middle class students who have the right connections preferred the non state sectors.

The most popular vocational choices were the same in both years.

Table 4 - Vocational Choices of Girls 1973, 1976

1973		1976	
Teacher	37.1%	Doctor	29.4%
Doctor	17.8%	Teacher	25.3%
Nurse	10.0%	Nurse	6.2%
Clerk	6.4%	Air Hostess	4.9%
Stenographer	4.6%	Engineer	4.7%
Accountant	3.1%	Clerk	3.7%
Lawyer	2.5%	Police	2.5%
Engineer	2.0%	Accountant	2.4%
Air Hostess	2.0%	Lawyer	1.8%
Police	1.8%	Stenographer	1.7%

The researcher attributed the increase in the percentage seeking to be doctors to the curriculum changes since 1972 which made science education available for all students completing NCGE. In 1973 only science students could aspire to be doctors and engineers. With the removal of the curriculum differentiation medicine and engineering became 'attainable' goals for all aspirants.

3.0 The present study

The study examined

(i) The career aspirations of secondary school students and whether their aspirations differed according to ethnic group, gender and type of school.

(ii) The sector in which they would prefer to be employed and whether ethnic factors, gender and type of school influenced the choice of sector.

(iii) Factors that hindered their aspirations while in school.

(iv) The influence exerted by the school in adjusting to family and community life.

(v) Whether all secondary school students aspired to proceed for higher education.

(vi) The degree of importance attached by students to examinations.

The sample consisted of students from two levels of education G.C.E. (A. Level) and G.C.E.(O.L) corresponding to the 13th and 11th year in school. A detailed breakdown of the sample according to stratifications is given in Table 5 and 6.

The first step in the stratification was to identify the different zones which depict different levels of socio-economic development. The classification used by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka for the socio-economic survey of 1978-1979 was adopted and from each of the five socio-economic zones one district was selected as follows:

Zone 1	Galle District
Zone 2	Anuradhapura District
Zone 3	Jaffna District
Zone 4	Kandy District
Zone 5	City of Colombo
Private schools	City of Colombo

The second stage in the stratification was to identify 1A or B and IC schools from each district corresponding to the provision of G.C.E.(A.L) science stream and arts or commerce streams respectively.1A or B schools which offered the science stream were schools located mainly in the urban sector whereas the 1C schools which offered arts or commerce were selected from the rural sector. A diagrammatic presentation of the stratification is given below:

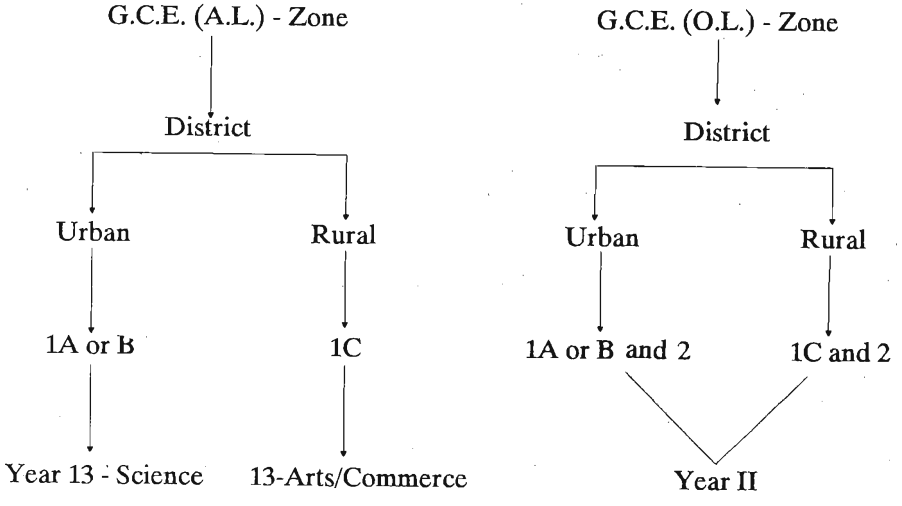

Table 5 : Sample of G.C.E. Advanced Level Students

Socio-economic Zone	1		2		3		4		5		5		
District	Galle		Anuradhapura		Jaffna		Kandy		Colombo City		Colombo City		Total
Type of School	1A	1C	1A	1C	1A	1C	1A	1C	1A	1C	Private		
Urban-Rural	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	Urban		Urban		
Stream	Sc	A/C	Sc	A/C	Sc	A/C	Sc	A/C	Sc	A/C	Sc	A/C	
Male Sinhala	10	10	10	10	-	-	10	-	15	15	10	10	100
Female Sinhala	10	10	10	10	-	-	10	-	15	15	10	10	100
Male Tamil	-	-	-	-	10	10	10	-	05	05	05	05	50
Female Tamil	-	-	-	-	10	10	10	-	05	05	05	05	50
Male Muslim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	10	-	-	20
Female Muslim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	10	-	-	20
Total	40		40		40		40		120		60		340

Table 6 : Sample of G.C.E. Ordinary Level Students

District	Galle		Anuradhapura		Jaffna		Kandy		Colombo City	Colombo City	Total
Urban / Rural	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	Urban	Urban	
M Sinhala	10	10	10	10	-	-	10	20	30	20	120
F	10	10	10	10	-	-	10	20	30	20	120
M Tamil	-	-	-	-	10	10	-	10	10	10	50
F	-	-	-	-	10	10	-	10	10	10	50
M Muslim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	-	30
F	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	-	25
Total	40		40		40		80		135	60	395

Ethnic Group	AL	OL	Total	%
Sinhala	200	240	440	60
Tamil	100	100	200	27
Muslim	40	55	95	13
Total	340	395	735	100

The stratification in the year 11 or G.C.E. (O.L.) sample was slightly different from the AL sample as there was an additional category of schools : Type 2 and the absence of subject streams.

The third stage in the stratification was to identify schools where different ethnic groups Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students were represented. The fourth and final step of the process of stratification was the identification of schools which would represent male and female students and both single-sex schools and co-educational schools. Private schools were considered as an exclusive category and were confined to the City of Colombo. The total number of students in the sample was 735 - 340 G.C.E. (A.L) students and 395 G.C.E. (O.L.) students. Ethnicwise there were 440 Sinhala, 200 Tamil and 95 Muslim students. Genderwise the numbers were almost equal.

There were 80 students each from Galle, Anuradhapura and Jaffna and 120 from Kandy. Colombo municipality had the largest representation with 255 students from state schools and 120 students from private schools.

The collection of data was carried out by qualified and experienced teams of personnel who visited the schools and interviewed the students. In order to maintain uniformity an interview schedule was used. The field interviews were carried out between January 8th and 25th 1990 simultaneously in the different regions.

Table 7 gives the career aspirtations of the G.C.E. (O/L) students.

Three professions, Teacher, Doctor and Engineer were preferred by O.L. students, followed by Accountant, Clerk and Nurse. Nurse occupies number three position among girls and Tamil students have given first place to Doctor. Muslim students have a different pattern of preferences. It should be noted that none of the Tamil students wanted to join the army or police. In the whole group among those who wanted to be a Doctor 57.5%, Clerk 58.6%, Teacher 62.0% and Lawyer 73.0% were girls. Between 9 to 12 per cent in all groups were ready to accept any job.

A breakdown of the same data for Sinhala students according to type of school gives the following pattern (Table 8).

A large percentage of students in Urban Deprived schools and Private Schools would accept any job offered to them. In the rural sector the thrust is towards Teaching (35.5%) and Nursing (11.1%) and a fair number want to join the Army and the Police. On the other hand the job aspirations of students in 'Popular Schools' are towards traditional and prestigious professions such as Doctor, Engineer, Teacher and Lawyer (Adding up to 78%). In the Private Schools Accountant

Table 7 : Career aspirations of G.C.E.(O.L) students by Sex & Ethnic Group (Percentages)

Number	(395)		(195)		(240)		(100)		(55)	
Rank	Total Sample		Females		Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim	
1.	Teacher	21.3	Teacher	26.7	Teacher	23.0	Doctor	28.0	Clerical	18.1
2.	Doctor	16.7	Doctor	19.5	Doctor	14.0	Teacher	21.0	Teacher	14.5
3.	Engineer	10.3	Nurse	9.8	Engineer	11.0	Engineer	12.0	Doctor	9.0
4.	Accountant	8.1	Clerical	8.7	Accountant	8.0	Accountant	9.0	Business	7.2
5.	Clerk	7.3	Accountant	8.2	Clerical	6.0	Clerical	5.0	Technical	7.2
6.	Nurse	4.8	Lawyer	5.6	Nurse	6.0	Lawyer	4.0	Bank	7.2
7.	Army	4.0	Engineer	4.6	Army	5.0	Technical	4.0	Engineer	5.4
8.	Lawyer	3.8	Air Hostess	1.5	Lawyer	4.0	Business	3.0	Accountant	5.4
9.	Technician	3.0	Police	1.5	Police	3.0	Nurse	3.0	Army	5.4
10.	Business	3.0	Army	1.5	-		-		-	
11.	Any job	10.6	Any job	8.7	Any job	12.0	Any job	9.0	Any job	9.0

Table 8: Career Aspirations of G.C.E. (O.L) students by Type of School (Sinhala Students) - Percentages

Number Rank	(240) Total Sample (Sinhala)		(60) Urban Deprived (Type 2)		(90) Rural (Type IC)		(50) Urban Popular (Type 1AB)		(40) Private	
1.	Teacher	23.0	Teacher	18.3	Teacher	35.5	Doctor	26.0	Accountant	20.0
2.	Doctor	14.0	Doctor	13.3	Nurse	11.1	Engineer	22.0	Clerk	12.5
3.	Engineer	11.0	Engineer	10.0	Doctor	10.0	Teacher	22.0	Engineer	10.0
4.	Accountant	8.0	Clerk	10.0	Accountant	7.7	Lawyer	8.0	Doctor	7.5
5.	Clerk	6.0	Nurse	6.6	Army	7.7	Accountant	4.0	Lawyer	5.0
6.	Nurse	6.0	Accountant	5.0	Engineer	5.5	Nurse	2.0	Business	5.0
7.	Army	5.0	Army	5.0	Police.	4.4	Army	2.0	Army	5.0
8.	Lawyer	4.0	Lawyer	1.6	Clerical	3.3	Business	2.0	-	
9.	Any job	12.0	Any job	26.6	Any job	3.3	-		Any job	27.5

Table 9 : Career Aspirations of G.C.E. (A.L.) students by Sex and Ethnic Group

Number Rank	Total Sample		Female		Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim	
1	Doctor	22.6	Teacher	24.4	Doctor	24.0	Doctor	25.0	Teacher	26.6
2	Teacher	15.2	Doctor	20.0	Teacher	15.1	Engin eer	16.0	Engineer	13.3
3	Accountant	13.1	Bank Clerk	14.4	Acountant	12.2	Accountant	16.0	Accountant	10.0
4	Engineer	9.3	Accountant	13.2	Bank Clerk	8.8	Teacher	12.0	Lawyer	10.0
5	Bank Clerk	9.3	Lawyer	8.8	Lawyer	6.3	Bank Clerk	11.0	Computer Tech.	10.0
6	Lawyer	6.8	Engineer	6.6	Engoneer	5.4	Lawyer	7.0	Doctor	6.6
7	Business	3.8	Journalist	6.3	Business	4.4	Lecturer	5.0	Bank Clerk	6.6
8	Computer Tech.	2.7	Computer Tech.	2.2	Army	3.4	Pharmacist	3.0	Business	6.6
9	Army	2.0	Research Officer	2.2	Computer Tech.	2.4	Busioness	2.0	-	
10	Lecturer	1.8	-		Architect	2.4	Computer Tech.	1.0	-	
11	Any job	8.4	Any job	13.2	Any job	12. 2	-		Any job	10.0

(20.0%), Clerical (12.5%) and Engineer (10.0%) occupy the first three places. A clear inclination towards the private sector is witnessed in Private Schools.

As in the case of O.L. students, the A.L. students also aspired to established professional careers such as Doctor, Teacher, Accountant and Engineer. But an important development is the relatively high position occupied by the Bank service. However, there are differences when we examine the responses of different ethnic groups. Tamil students have conformed to the traditional pattern - Doctor, Engineer, Accountant and Teacher. More Muslims aspire to become teachers. As usual a large number of females have given priority to teaching, but no one has opted for nursing.

In comparing Science (IAB Schools) with Arts/Commerce (IC Schools) it is seen that among Science students the most popular occupations were Doctor(41%), Engineer (17%), Teacher (8%) and Clerical and Computer Technician (3% each) where as in the case of Arts/Commerce students the ranking was Accountant (24%), Teacher (27%), Clerical(13%). Business (6%) and Lawyer (11%). The stream of study at 'A' Level obviously does influence future career aspirations.

In Table 10 OL ranks are juxtaposed with AL ranks for purposes of comparison.

Table 10 : A Juxtaposition of OL and AL Ranks

Occupation	Whole Sample		Female		Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim	
	OL	AL	OL	AL	OL	AL	OL	AL	OL	AL
Doctor	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	6
Engineer	3	4	7	6	3	6	3	2	6	2
Teacher	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	4	2	1
Accountant	4	3	5	4	4	3	4	3	7	3
Bank Clerk	5	5	4	3	5	4	5	5	1	7
Business	19	7	-	-	-	7	8	8	4	8
Computer Technician	9	8	-	8	-	9	7	9	5	5
Nurse	6	-	3	-	6	-	9	-	-	-
Lawyer	8	6	6	5	8	5	6	6	9	4
Army	7	9	9	-	7	8	-	-	8	-

In the whole group Teaching occupies the first place (1.7) followed by Doctor (2.1), Accountant (4.0) and Engineer (4.2). Nursing appears to be very popular among OL female students. Law as a profession has declined in status. New fields

like Bank service and Computer Technician seem to be emerging in the contemporary job market. The armed services have been very attractive to sections of the population specially rural and urban deprived students.

Employment Sector

Table 11 : Sector of Employment by Ethnic Group, Gender and Type of School for O.L. Students (Percentages)

		Ethnic Group			Gender	Type of School			
Sector	Total Sample	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Female	UD	UP	R	P
State	64.0	64.0	69.0	60.0	63.6	50.0	78.0	83.3	2.5
Self	12.2	12.0	14.0	7.2	9.2	13.3	8.0	8.8	22.5
Private	17.5	16.0	12.0	29.2	19.0	8.3	14.0	7.7	55.0
Any	6.3	8.0	5.0	3.6	8.2	28.4	-	0.9	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	395	240	100	55	195	60	50	90	40

In the G.C.E. O.L. Sample 64 per cent would prefer to work in the state sector. Ethnicwise a large percentage of Muslim students preferred the private sector. Again a large percentage of students from Urban Deprived Schools did not mind working in any sector. In the rural schools the main demand was for the state sector - 83.3%. In the private schools the majority preferred the private sector. In urban popular schools too the preference was more for the State Sector.

Table 12 : Sector of Employment by Gender & Ethnic Group for G.C.E. A.L. Students (Percentages)

Sector	Total Sample	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Female	Science
State	65.0	64.5	63.0	66.6	75.0	65.0
Private	17.6	17.0	21.0	10.0	13.0	18.0
Self	17.4	18.5	16.0	13.4	12.0	17.0
Number	335	205	100	30	160	-

Among the G.C.E. (AL) students too the majority (65%) preferred to work in the State Sector while the rest were equally divided between the other two sectors Private and Self Employment. The differences among the ethnic groups are not

salient. Nevertheless the percentage of female students opting for the State Sector was very high.

Among the reasons for selecting the state sector have been security, pension and service to the poor.

Table 13 : Reasons for Selecting the State Sector (Percentages)

	Total Sample		Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim	
Reason	OL	AL	OL	AL	OL	AL	OL	AL
Security	33.0	45.3	25.0	43.4	54.0	51.0	27.2	40.0
Pension	26.5	35.5	16.0	32.2	51.0	46.0	27.2	23.3
Serve Govt/Poor	40.8	46.5	44.0	50.2	40.0	38.0	25.4	50.0

Tamil students in both O.L. and A.L.classes preferred state jobs because of security and pension. During field interviews it was stated by the Tamil and Sinhalese students that they would prefer the state sector in order to serve the poor in return for the free education they have received from the state.

Factors hindering aspirations while in school

The major factors that had a negatibve effect on the fulfilmentof aspirations are listed below:

G.C.E. (O.L.) Sample		G.C.E. (A.L.) Sample	
Shortage of Teachers	24.0%	Poor Teaching	29.0%
Poor teaching standards	22.5%	Too many holidays	18.8%
Schools being closed over a long period	20.0%	Teacher transfer and shortage	15.5%
Too many holidays	17.7%	Weakness in English	12.8%
Weakness in English	17.0%	Public & School functions	10.7%
Indiscipline	11.4%	Indiscipline	4.7%

In the urban deprived schools G.C.E.(O.L) the relative percentages for some of the above variables are shortage of teachers 61.6%, poor teaching 33.3% and weakness in English 45.0%. For students in rural schools (G.C.E. O.L) the comparable figures are : shortage of teachers 27.7% and weakness in English 22.2%.

Students in the sample, in both O.L. and A.L. classes, have stated that poverty and disturbances in the community are two other factors affecting their career aspirations. For instance 22.0% of the A.L. students 21.3% of the O.L. students,

21.0% of the O.L. students in Urban Deprived Schools and 32.2% of the O.L. students in Rural Schools have stated that poverty affects their career aspirations.

The impact of the school on family and community life

Among the O.L. students 88.4% have indicated that the school had a positive effect on family life, with the highest percentage being Sinhala (94%) and lowest being Tamil (77%). In the A.L. sample 94.6% have maintained that the effect of schooling on family life was positive. Regarding the effect of schooling on community life, 87.6% have stated that it was positive. But here too the percentage for Tamil students is low (79%). The corresponding percentage for AL students is 93.4%.

Aspirations for higher education

A very high percentage of students both at OL and AL aspire to proceed to higher education. In the OL sample 86 percent want to go on to higher studies and half of this number are females. Only 14 percent were hoping to obtain employment, the main reason being to support the family. (9.8 percent). Even in the urban deprived sector and the rural sector 86.6% and 77.7% wished to pursue higher studies.

Regarding the stream of study at A.L. preferred by students, 41.8% of O.L. students indicated that they preferred the Science Stream. The figures for Arts and Commerce were 20.2% and 25.6% respectively. In the case of students from urban popular schools, 72.0% wanted to enter the Science stream, a high figure when compared to the urban deprived (35%) and rural students (27.7%). Of the total number of students who desired to enter the Science stream 46% were women whereas in the case of the arts stream the percentage of women was much higher (64%).

Among the A.L. students, 87.4 percent expressed their desire to pursue higher studies and the institutions they preferred were University (50.4%) and Medical College (22.6%). The figures for several other institutions were :Law College (42%), Computer Institute (7.5%), Business Institute (5.0%), Agriculture(1.5%) and Training College (1.5%).

In the O.L sample 16.7% wished to enter Medical College whereas 34.4% expressed their desire to gain admission to a University.

Importance attached to examinations

98.2% in the O.L. group and 93.7% in the G.C.E.A.L. group responded that examinations are very important. Difference among ethnic groups and types of schools do not vary widely.

Both O.L. and A.L. students have hinted at the inadequacy of the education received in school, stressing the necessity to obtain private tuition. Some of the salient factors for their dissatisfaction are:

G.C.E. (O.L.) Students		**G.C.E. (A.L.) Students**	
Necessity for tuition	64.3%	Necessity for tuition	78.5%
Inadequecy of extra curricular activities	26.5%	Syllabuses too wide	13.1%
Lack of practical skills	21.7%	Only examination knowledge	7.5%
Lack of play ground	13.4%	OL - AL gap	5.3%
Lack of free time for other activities	9.1%		

Conclusions and Implications

In the whole sample at both levels (O.L and A.L) the first five positions have been occupied by Teacher, Doctor, Engineer, Accountant and Clerk, even though the specific ranks of some of these occupations change for the two levels: O.L. to A.L. These findings are consistent with most of the studies reviewed earlier. a comparison of the findings of the present study with five previous studies is given overleaf.

Table 14 : Rank for popular occupational choices : 1952 - 1990

Sample	Green 1952		Jayasuriya 1961 Intelligent Pupils	Muthulingam 1973 Age 15 - 17	Jayaweera 1973	1976	Wanasinghe 1982 Science		Rupasinghe 1990 OL		AL	
	M	F			F	F	M	F	T	F	T	F
Occupation												
Teacher	3	2	3	6	1	2	6	2	1	1	2	1
Doctor	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	2
Engineer	2	3	1	4	8	5	1	5	3	7	3	6
Accountant	-	-	-	-	6	8	-	-	4	5	3	4
Clerk	-	-	-	-	4	6	4	3	5	4	5	3

(M- Male, F - Female, T - Total Sample)

From the above data it is evident that the vocational preferences of Sri Lankan youth have remained unchanged during the last five decades. Comparing the 12 samples it is seen that Doctor (1.5), Teacher (2.5), Engineer 4.0), Accountant (5.0) and Clerical jobs including Bank Clerk (4.22) are the more popular jobs. All these occupations belong to the White Collar and professional category. An emerging trend during the last decade has been the increasing importance attached to clerical jobs specially in the Banking sector. A further examination of data reveals differences in female aspirations.

Table 15 : Ranks for Popular Occupational Choices - Females

Sample	Green	Jayaweera		Wanasinghe (Science)	Rupasinghe		$\bar{X}$
	1952	1973	1976	1982	1990		Rank
					OL	AL	
Occupation							
Teacher	2	1	2	2	1	1	1.5
Doctor	1	2	1	1	2	2	1.5
Nurse	-	3	3	-	3	-	3.0
Engineer	3	8	5	4	7	6	5.5
Clerk	-	4	6	3	4	3	4.0

Among the females Teacher and Doctor occupies equal status but according to percentages a greater weightage could be assigned to the former. Another conspicuous feature is the importance attached to nursing and clerical jobs by the female population.

A glance at the overall position reveals that traditional white collar professions still occupy pride of place even though there are minor variations according to gender and ethnic groups. Science students have a bias towards traditional jobs connected with that sector. Occupations such as Banking, Armed services and Computer Science have been emerging as important jobs among sub groups, specially during the last few decades, perhaps due to changes taking place in the traditional economy and the prevailing political situation in the country.

The majority of the students (64% O.L and 65% A.L) prefer the state sector with variations among sub groups, the highest being rural students (83.3% and lowest being urban deprived 50%). Three previous studies Green (74%), ILO (87%) and Jayaweera (83.2% in 1973 and 81.7% in 1976) have recorded higher percentages. The saturation of employment in the state sector and the expansion

of the private sector in recent years could be factors that account for the decline in the popularity of state sector in 1990. The reasons adduced for selecting the state sector have been security, pension and service to the government and poor people in return for free education provided by the state. These findings conform to most of the reasons cited in earlier studies.

It was also revealed by the students that several factors in school such as poor teaching, shortage of teachers, holidays and low proficiency in English inhibit their progress through school. On the other hand they have claimed that the impact of school on their family and community life has been positive.

The student's aspiration to pursue higher studies was also high with 86% in the O.L. and 87.4% in the A.L sample responding positively. Wanasinghe's study revealed that 81% expressed their willingness to study further. A greater percentage preferred to enter the Science stream. It was further seen that the majority desired to enter the University.

Finally the emphasis placed upon examinations both at O.L and A.L. has been tremendous. The percentages were 98.2% for O.L students and 93.7% for A.L students respectively. Meanwhile students have pointed to the inadequacy of education imparted in school both curricular and co-curricular and as a result stressed that they had to seek private tuition in order to achieve in academic subjects.

The implications of this study are quite far reaching and could be made use of by policy makers and planners both at national and grassroots levels.

The greater percentage of students are still aspiring to higher education in order to secure professional jobs, and in fact there had been no significant change in the career aspirations of Sri Lankan students during the past fifty years. Today we are faced with a crisis in University education and the crisis revolves around several key factors such as the number to be admitted; the nature of the curriculum, the structure of institutions and degrees or diplomas such institutions are going to offer. It is essential that the views and aspirations of students be taken into consideration in formulating policies for higher education. The thirst for higher education in Sri Lankan students should not be quelled using disguised strategies or policies.

Educational reforms at secondary level could also take into consideration the views expressed by the students. The rural and urban deprived schools in slum and shanty areas need improvement in physical facilities, resources for learning and cocurricular activities. The secondary school curriculum itself requires revision with a shift towards practical skills thereby bringing about the much desired balance between the academic component and the vocational or practical component.

Over reliance on examinations which use summative evaluation as the main device has resulted in an unhealthy competition at all levels of education. The result is that the majority of the students feel that education as it is imparted in school is inadequate, thus compelling them to go for private tuition. Steps should be taken to arrest this trend by making the teaching-learning situation in school more organised and effective. A completely relaxed learning situation is desirable and schools need better equipped teachers and alternative ways of assessment.

Finally, whether it is for security or pension, the wish of a large majority of students to serve in the state sector should be viewed seriously. A large number of students who wanted to become doctors, teachers, nurses, have expressed that they wish to serve the poor and in order to accomplish that task would like to serve in the state sector. On the other hand during the last few years we have been witnessing a shift towards private enterprise.

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