

An analysis of problems relating to leadership skills and positive attitudes among undergraduates in Sri Lanka: security concerns

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Abstract— *The large majority of students who enter the university system are equipped only with theoretical knowledge of the subjects they intend to pursue further. Their lack of leadership qualities and positive attitudes has often been reflected in their attitudes displayed through their activities on various occasions. These lapses in students create a favourable environment for the growth of extremist political fractions rooted within the university system for many decades, and allows for misuse for narrow political gains, and to create instability and chaos in the university system and the country at large.*

The Higher Education Ministry has launched a leadership programme for the potential university students prior to their entry in to the universities. The objective of the programme is to equip university students with leadership, skills and positive attitudes necessary to be good and productive citizens of Sri Lanka. The selection of the Armed Forces to conduct this programme was for the reason that the Sri Lankan Armed Forces had proved to be the most disciplined and result-oriented organization in Sri Lanka with vast experience in leadership and maintenance of discipline in all forms of its activities.

In this backdrop, students engaged in students' protests and unrests in the university system. This has serious security concerns within the university system as well as society at large. It is observed that a small element within the university system create such situations and majority succumb to pressure from this small element. Frequent interruption of university system has a security dimension where group mobilization could be possible. This could be detrimental to the national security of the country. This paper attempts to analyse the security concerns by analyzing the problems relating to leadership skills and positive attitudes among undergraduates in Sri Lanka.

Keywords— Attitudes, Leadership, National security, Unrests, Protests, Mobilization

I. INTRODUCTION

Present education system in Sri Lanka has evolved from the British system. However, we have a written history of 2500 years where our education system was centred in monasteries and temples.

We had a few major reforms in our system of education during pre and post independent periods. First it was the reforms introduced by Dr CWW Kannangara, who is fondly remembered as the father of free education in Sri Lanka, in the early 1940s to 1950. One of the main concepts in Kannangara reforms was the provision of free education from kindergarten to university level. His reforms were also based on the concept of head, heart and hands; head implies academic excellence, heart the emotions and feelings, and hands the vocational aspect of education. Kannangara reforms also incorporates the concepts of vernacular schools and central colleges to reduce the disparity in education that prevailed, where the affluent, urbanized and anglicized few could get an exposure to high quality education that ensured them white collar jobs whereas the large masses were deprived of any opportunity for a worthwhile education.

Second major reforms came in the first half of the 1970s during Dr Badudeen Mahamud's period as the Minister of Education. He introduced district quota system for university entrants and the standardization of GCE A/L marks was introduced with the aim of minimizing disparities for the underprivileged. Since then Sri Lankan education system does not undergo any major reforms except for a few procedural changes.

A. Main hurdles in the Sri Lankan education system

A child who receives education in the Sri Lankan educational set up undergoes three main hurdles, i.e. Grade five scholarship examination, General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level examination and the GCE advanced level examination. Grade five scholarship examination though competitive is not very significant as a hurdle because even the children who fail in this examination can still continue to pursue education. GCE ordinary level examination is competitive and has a significant effect as large numbers of students get dropped out from education as a result of failing this examination. (See Table 2) The last hurdle GCE advance level examination happens to be extremely competitive and significant because of the limitations of the university set up in the country in terms of the numbers that they can accommodate for tertiary education.

Year	Percentage of students scoring over 70%
2007	58.83
2008	39.45
2009	57.63
2010	56.19
2011	64.90

Table 1. Performance of Students at the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination (Source: Department of Examinations)

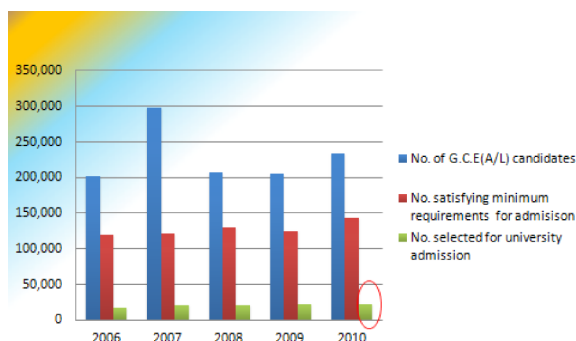


Fig 1. Comparison of A/L Performance and University Admission

Year	Number of Students	Percentage
2006	144,862	48.72
2007	153,460	49.14
2008	159,860	56.81
2009	150,608	48.51
2010	182,653	58.79

Table 2. The percentage G.C.E. O/L candidates qualified to proceed for G.C.E A/L examination

Above charts indicate the amount of competition in the present day education system. This extreme competition for academic excellence has made the majority of students to forgo vital component of extra-curricular activities, and this has adversely affected their self-confidence, personal abilities and leadership skills during their formative years. It has been observed that many such students who had excelled in their studies and got responsible positions in the public and private sector cannot cope with the challenges that demand leadership and positive attitudes. This in turn has affected the productivity of the organizations concerned and of the country at large.

Year of A/L Exam	Academic Year	No. sat the G.C.E (A/L) Exam (1)	No. satisfying minimum requirements for Admission (2)	No. Selected	No. Selected As % of (1)	No. Selected As % of (2)
1993	1994/95	144,573	59,292	9,460	6.5	16.0
1994	1995/96	148,883	56,740	9,787	6.6	17.2
1995	1996/97	136,728	70,379	11,200	8.2	15.9
1996	1997/98	141,161	71,846	11,658	8.3	16.2
1997	1998/99	142,336	73,570	11,901	8.4	16.2
1998	1999/2000	147,853	73,422	11,821	8.0	16.1
1999	2000/2001	169,679	73,561	12,040	7.1	16.4
2000	20001/2002	214,189	91,676	12,132	5.7	13.2
2001	2002/2003	218,441	98,432	12,654	5.8	12.9
2002	2002/2003 (A)	210,141	92,252	13,036	6.2	14.1
2003	2003/2004	247,755	93,353	14,260	5.8	15.3
2004	2004/2005	199,937	108,357	14,850	7.4	13.7
2005	2005/2006	204,030	118,770	17,287	8.5	14.6
2006	2006/2007	201,686	119,955	17,248	8.6	14.4
2007	2007/2008	198,183	121,421	20,069	10.1	16.5
2008	2008/2009	207,436	130,236	20,270	9.8	15.6
2009	2009/2010	205,249	125,284	21,547	10.5	17.2
2010	2010/2011	233,609	142,516	22,016	9.4	15.4

Table 3. Students entry to universities against the number who sat the G.C.E. (A/L) examination since 1993

Source: Department of Examinations

B. Development of Leadership and Positive Attitudes

1) *Analysis of the First Leadership Course 2011: A feed back* obtained from 10000 students who followed the leadership and positive attitudes development course conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2011 reveals that they were heavily benefited by this course and the rating given are shown in the following chart.

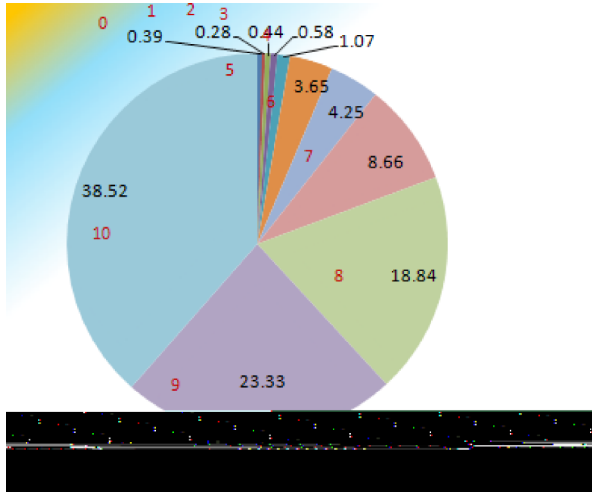


Fig 2. Development of leadership and positive attitudes: analysis of course

C. Group Dynamics & Mobilization

This whole process of group dynamics indicated in Figure 2 above has a significant effect on the total mobilization process among university students. Initially, when students enter the university they interact with one another where this group dynamic plays a major role. In this population of 2.7 represent negative segment of the student population would dominate the entire population where they could work towards group mobilization to disturb the existing systems in higher education institutions. These negative elements, though small in numbers will formulate group norms and ensure that those norms are adhered to without allowing positive thinking majority to alter these norms. They will have their own leaders and motivate the balance population to carry out negative and disruptive deeds. This group dynamic has serious impacts on the security of the institutions.

D. Security Concerns

The above group dynamics in the higher education institutions in the country tends to generate issues which have direct links with the security concerns of the country. The main cause of this situation is the absence of opportunities for students to develop their leadership and positive attitudes within the system. The total process of the formation of student movements unfolds in the following manner.

- a. The majority of students become vulnerable to radical groups with certain political agendas

- b. The creation of unrest and destabilization in the university system
- c. Engagement in activities of sabotage leading to constant closures and interruptions in the university systems
- d. Group mobilizations in a larger scale that lead to subversion and revolutionary activities
- e. Insurgencies against the democratic process of the country.

II RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings this research proposes several recommendations that would help to ameliorate the conditions in the higher educational institutions and in the country at large.

- a. Evolving a system to develop leadership skills and positive attitudes through primary, secondary and tertiary education
 - i. Models to be considered
 - ii. Singaporean Model
 - Sports and Games
 - Uniformed Groups
 - Performing Arts Groups
 - Clubs and Societies
 - iii. UK , US and Japanese Models
- b. Identification of radical elements at the early stages and engaging them in leadership and counseling programmes
- c. Continuation and expansion of the Leadership Programme organized by the Education Ministry
- d. Conducting routine leadership programmes during university education
- e. Conducting awareness programmes for parents of undergraduates by Academic Staff of universities
- f. Informing the parents of the progress of their children in the initial years of their university education
- g. Educating and raising awareness among the academics by experts on security concerns

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