Is Training Students In Vocational Certification By National Schools A Solution To The Lack Of Sufficient Higher Educational Opportunities?



In the last 50 years Sri Lanka has made huge strides in primary and secondary education. My estimate is that at least 90 percent or more of children of school going age are attending schools. However everything changes once the students sit for Advance Level Examinations. For over 300,000 who sit for the Advanced Level only 25,000 or so get admitted to the Universities.

Considering the better organised nature of the school system they could do more on

the issues such as youth unemployment and lack of technically qualified personnel in the country. One way forward would be to in concurrence with the National Universities, Technical colleges (such as NIBM, Nursing Schools and German Tech), the Ministry of Education through the National Schools, to introduce one and two year certificate level courses in a few areas. These would be areas that mostly require class room training such as Accounting and Finance, Marketing, Management, Human Resources Management, Sales Management, Supply and Logistics Management, Banking, Insurance, Leasing, Laboratory Technology and Basic levels of IT such as Graphic Design. Also areas that require limited practical training such as Motor Mechanism, use of heavy machinery, Agriculture and Food Processing and Performing Arts. This would enable the students after their A-Levels to continue in vocational training in the school system and obtain a certificate level qualification.

Apart from the obvious benefits of this system this will also provide a guided entrance to vocational training. This will do so much good for the students whose parents are unable to guide the students to courses such as AAT, German Tech, CIMA and SLIM, either due to lack of finances or due to a lack of knowledge. The Ministry of Education (and the schools system) is currently training students to handle University education such as Medicine, Engineering, Bio-science or Physical-science. As only eight percent of the students get admission to Universities, the other 92 percent seeks employment without the knowledge to obtain such employment. Hence one could argue that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to equip the balance 92 percent of its student population in subject areas they would end up being employed in, rather than only concentrating on training 100 percent of the students in subjects only eight percent would pursue.

After normal school hours, the National schools could use their facilities to conduct certificate level training courses leading up to a qualification that will be awarded by a recognised higher educational institution. The technical and personnel support of Accounting and Management faculties of National Universities would develop the teachers who are required to conduct Certificate Courses in these areas. After a lapse of few years, the National Schools will have fully fledged faculties to conduct the lectures on their own. The National Universities and Technical Colleges should however continue to assist the Ministry of Education in continuously updating the curricular, continuous training of the faculty, conducting examinations and awarding

the certifications.

As these certificate courses are conducted under the guidance of the National Universities and Technical Training Colleges, the students who complete the courses and maintain satisfactory scores in examinations could be awarded the certifications from the relevant National University or the Technical College. The training obtained will assist in the students obtaining employment without following ad hoc courses conducted by the informal parties or attempting to enter the work force with the subject specific knowledge they had received at the GCE Advanced Level. The Private and government sector employers would prefer to employ a person who is trained in say a certificate course in banking in a National School to a bank rather than employing a student trained in Zoology to a bank.

The availability of certificate courses could also be extended to the higher technical areas such as para-medical, nursing, automobile engineering, software engineering and IT. As there could be a high technical and practical training component in such courses, the Ministry of Education could obtain the participation of Institutes such as German Tech, Nursing Schools, and NIBM to take the leadership in conducting such courses in the National Schools. They could assist the National Schools to develop the basic level infrastructure whilst providing the higher level of practical training in their own institutes.

Once the National Schools are ‘equipped’ to provide certificate level training the Ministry of Education has to allocate, the students to the relevant courses based on the performance in the advanced level examination. This will be similar to the allocation of schools to the best performers in the Grade five scholarship examinations. An additional section in the Ministry of Education could perform a function similar to that of the University Grants Commission. A National School will have to be allocated with several non-national schools in the area training students up to A-Level. After A-Levels by way of an entrance examination and an interview students could be selected to pursue the certificate courses and allocated to National Schools. Further savings could be made if an examination similar to Advanced Subsidiary Level (a.k.a AS Level, an examination held after first year of studies in an A-Level stream in the British education system) and the students who are in the lower 50 percent are directed to vocational certifications. This may be controversial but considering only eight out of the balance 50 students could get in

to the University system it would be a most practical method.

Whilst the admission from the school system to the Universities is seamless, the selection and admission to vocational training institutes such as German Tech, NIBM, and Nursing Colleges happen independently. This deprives the opportunity to the children of lower segments who are not familiar with the other higher education options to pursue them. The proposed certificate level courses by the Ministry of Education (through National Schools) will make the vocational training seamless while directing much larger number of students to their technical segments. Institutes such as German Tech and Nursing Schools, also benefit by the above as they could scrap their first year training and take in a larger number of trainees from the students who perform well in the Certification courses conducted by the Ministry of Education.

Higher Education Building The Infrastructure To Accommodate The Same Number Of Students If They Are To Be Provided With Two Year Vocational Certification Under Them.

The biggest advantage in this system would however be the continuous guidance the students of less affluent families receive all the way up to technical education compared to the current system of abandoning them after sitting for GCE Advanced Level. Shifting of the overdependence of expatriates who go for low skilled jobs such as housemaids to that of technician level jobs and larger number of self employment seekers will also have many advantages to the economy and to the society. In the cost side there will only be a marginal increase in the expenditure for the ministry of education to keep the students for additional two years compared to Ministry of Higher Education building the infrastructure to accommodate the same number of students if they are to be provided with two year vocational certifications under them.

Although it may sound impractical in Sri Lanka, I would not be surprised if in the future the Ministries of Education of some countries link with industries and the providers of jobs and also aggressively market their produce (technically qualified people) in the country and overseas. A government agency of the repute of the Ministry of Education would have much higher level of recognition as a supplier of manpower than private agents. This will enable Ministry of Education to train an

individual from the kindergarten to the technical education and arrange for their employment.

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