

University Collages Sri Lanka: Are We in the Right Direction?

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Abstract: The National Vocational Qualification Framework of Sri Lanka (NVQSL) makes it easier for people to pursue higher education, including degrees, based on their vocational credentials. In order to boost the country's supply of midlevel labor as well as increase access to qualification upgrading for NVQ holders, six University colleges (UCs) were founded. UCs offer diploma credentials and welcome students who hold both National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) holders and General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L.) students. These two disparate groups are taking the same class at the same time to learn. To lessen gaps in entry-level competencies, foundation programs were established. Rates of the programs run by UCs have reportedly been quite low. As a result, this study was carried out to determine how the administrative team perceived the resources' accessibility and the goals of UC students. More than 95% of students who enroll in UCs with G.C.E. A/L. do so with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree from a university of vocational technology. After receiving their diploma, they do not want to take on middle-level jobs in the sector. Additionally, just 5% of people have followed the process for upgrading their NVQ qualifications. This is counter to the reasons why UCs were founded. The majority of students enroll in UCs following GCE A/ to earn a degree, which requires them to spend roughly 3 years at the UCs and another two to three years at UoVT. As a result, the strategy has gone wrong. Students feel demotivated when they realize their goal is too far away, which can result in indiscipline and subpar academic performance. In order to get the most out of UCs, this issue needs to be studied in greater detail.

Key Words: University Collages, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, National Vocational Qualification

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

For a country's socioeconomic growth, the contribution of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector is critical. [1] TVET in many nations is inadequately designed and managed. A prevalent criticism is that TVET does not produce the human resources needed by the country and industry in particular. However, TVET could be the solution to reduce educated unemployment by providing employable ready skills to the school leavers.[2] National Vocational Qualifications Framework of Sri Lanka (NVQFSL) was formally established by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) in the year 2004 with the aim reforming the TVET sector and to improve the quality and relevance. [3] NVQFSL has been hierarchically structured into seven levels. Qualifications offered at NVQ

Levels 1 to 4 are certificate level qualifications. NVQ Levels 5 and 6 are diplomas and higher diplomas while NVQ Level 7 is the degree. The levels of the NVQFSL have been formulated using the criteria of learning demand, complexity of the processes involved and the responsibility attached to the competencies that are included in a qualification. [4]

As illustrated in Figure 1, NVQFSL provides avenues for upward mobility from craft to technician and from the technician to higher education levels. Entry to NVQ Levels 1 to 4 are open. Those who want to go to NVQ level 5 have to have NVQ Level 3 or 4 qualifications. In addition to that they have to face an entrance test. NVQ Level 5 is the prerequisite to enter NVQ level 6. Those who are having NVQ Level 5 qualifications can either continue to level 6 or have the option of sitting the entrance test and continue to study at NVQ Level 7. Non NVQ diploma holders also can join the NVQ Level 7 study programmes through a selection test. But to be eligible to sit the selection test they have to provide the proof of equivalence of the qualification with the relevant NVQFSL levels. University collages were established under the provisions of University of Vocational Technology Act, with the aim of offering NVQ level 5 and 6 diploma programmes. [5]

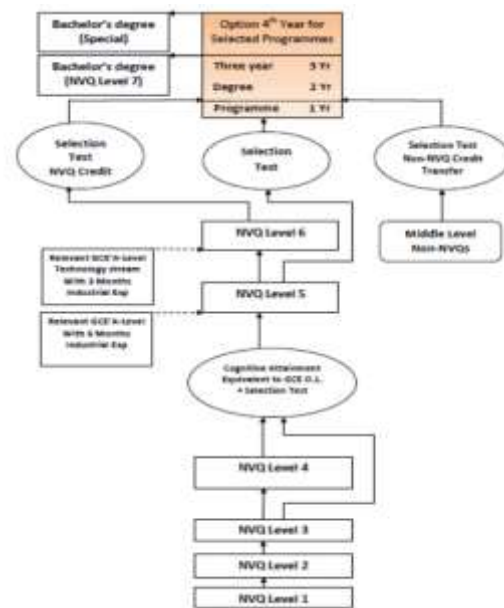


Figure 1 Qualification linkages and pathways for higher education in NVQSL

Source: https://nvq.gov.lk/TVET_GUIDE/pdf/Western_Province.pdf

As number of applicants to NVQ 5/6 programmes with NVQ three and four qualifications became inadequate for these institutions, Ministry in charge of TVET at that time allowed agencies to admit students with GCE (A/L) qualifications. Priority was given to newly introduces Technology stream students. However, institutions were instructed to offer suitable gap filling and bridging programmes to these candidates. However, implementation of these programmes as intended at the university colleges is questionable as they do not have physical and human resources. [5]

Candidates selected for entry to a NVQ level 5 programme may possess different skill and knowledge backgrounds. Even those coming through the NVQ system itself will have qualifications from different occupations. In order to ensure that all those selected to undergo a level 5 programme have the minimum skills and knowledge needed at entry, they will initially go through a Bridging program. This is carried out for the selected candidates after a selection test and an academic counselling session. The bridging program provides the necessary knowledge and competence to the students selected to Level 5. If there is a skill gap in a particular student that will be identified at the academic counselling session and the student is directed for necessary “Gap-Filling” programs. The “Foundation Studies” program is intended to provide the necessary mathematics, science and English knowledge and computer literacy needed to embark on a level 5 programme.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Demand for NVQ 5/6 qualifications gradually increased as these diploma qualifications facilitated entry to University of Vocational Technology, which was established to offer NVQ level 7 degrees. This was further increased, when government incorporated NVQ 5/6 as the base qualification in the schemes of recruitment applicable to recruitment into middle level technical positions in government and semi-government institutions. Initially NVQ 5/6 were established in more engineering technology related areas and expanded to other sectors and subject areas subsequently. Altogether 65 NVQ Level 5/6 programmes had already been introduced as per the TVEC. [5]

At the inception of introduction of NVQ 5/6 programmes, at UCs heavy investments were made through donor funding to equip the training centers with required physical and human resources and courses were introduced with a systematic planning process. University Collages offered programmes on fee levying basis at the beginning, but the with the Government policy on free TVET, NVQ 5 & 6 programmes are now offered free of charge. This has resulted increased dropout rates. Although, larger number of students were enrolled to the courses conducted by university colleges, completion rates are very low and dropout rate has gone to 51% which is more than the dropout rate other TVET providers [6]. This is a waste of resources, so this need to be investigated to find out the reasons behind and to take

remedial actions to reap maximum benefits of the investments made on UCs.

Therefore, it is necessary to look into whether the resources that have been deployed are adequate or not or are being used effectively and whether students' perceptions of university colleges are in line with the government's intentions, which are to foster NVQ holders' upward mobility while producing middle-level workers needed for the nation's economic development. [7]

1.3 Objectives

1. To determine the perception of the college Director /CEO on availability of human and physical resources
2. To determine the aspirations of students enrolled to diploma programmes

II. METHODOLOGY

Study was carried out as an analytically focused descriptive survey. To gather secondary data for research, UoVT and TVEC documents and reports were consulted. Information gathered on the availability of sources from all six college directors and CEOs using a google form. More than 2000 students, who were all enrolled in 23 Diploma programs at six UCs, made up the population. The required sample size, according to Krejcie & Morgan's formula, was 326.[8] Due to the pandemic condition that existed in the nation, a google form questionnaire was distributed to all students online through their CEOs and course coordinators, indicating that participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Therefore, the study used a voluntary sampling technique. No personal information was gathered in order to protect the respondents' privacy and the confidentiality of the data. 368 students replied collectively. Simple descriptive statistics were used to examine the given data.

III. FINDINGS

3.1 Resource availability at UCs

Director/CEOs perception of the resources availability of UCs are illustrated in the Table 1

Table 1 Physical and Human Resources available at UCs

Item	Mean Response	Interpretation
The college have well equipped library	4.4	Strongly agree
The college have well equipped laboratories for all programmes	4.2	Agree
The college have well equipped workshop for relevant programmes	3.4	Neutral
The number of available classrooms is adequate	2.4	Disagree
Sizes of available classrooms adequate to accommodate students	3.6	Agree
Adequate of physical resources available for extracurricular activities like sports etc.	3.0	Neutral
Adequate number of Lecturers are available for all programmes	3.2	Neutral

Adequate number of non-academic support staff available	2.8	Neutral
Difficult to find visiting resource persons for some programmes.	2.2	Disagree

Key for interpretation: 1 -1.80= Strongly Disagree ,1 .81-2.60 = Disagree 2.61- 3.40 = Neutral, 3.41-4.20, Agree, and 4.21 -5 = Strongly Agree .

Table 1 shows that colleges have well-equipped libraries and laboratories that have received significant funding. However, they make it quite evident how inadequate the classrooms are and how tough it is to get visiting lecturers. On the other items they are neutral. All are neutral on “Adequate of physical resources available for extracurricular activities like sports etc.”. They might have conveyed it positively if it had been positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that colleges lack such a facility. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the suitability of workshops and the availability of Lecturers for all diploma programs. Overall, it's clear that the CEOs /Directors are satisfied with the institutions' physical facilities for awarding diplomas. programmes

3.2 Student Enrolment percentages

Table 2 2.1 Student Enrolment percentages

Stream	2018	2019
NVQ	4.6%	3.5%
A/L	95.4%	96.5%

Source: Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission.

3.3 Aspirations of Students

According to table 2 it can be seen that the large majority of students are enrolled with GCE A/L qualifications.

Students were requested to respond to 10 likert type questions with responses; 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 - Agree, 3= Neutral, 2 = Disagree & 1 = Strongly Disagree. They were clearly informed that the participation for the data collection as voluntary activities. Altogether 348 students responded. Responses received are given in table 3.

Table 3 student Aspirations

#	Item	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1	I prefer to obtain a degree before going out to work as can get more knowledge from university.	4.37	Strongly Agree
2	At the very beginning, I wished to study a degree but after enrolling to diploma I decided to complete diploma and go work	3.06	Neutral
3	Qualifications are vital, so I prefer to study for some more years to get a degree and then start to work	3.94	Agree
4	I have no specific dream; My parents prefer me to become a graduate. They advised me to select UC as path is there to get a degree after diplomas	2.95	Neutral
	I know I don't have much chance of further studies at university because I am not very good at studying so I will start working after diploma	2.24	Disagree

6	I think it is important to get an exposure to the workplace though and build up my communication skills, so I will try and get a job after diploma	3.29	Neutral
7	My first choice after the diploma would be to study because in our society, if you do not have a degree, you are less recognized.	3.72	Agree
8	Although starting work earlier can give me a range of experiences, those experiences may not be that highly valued in this society. So, I will continue to study for a degree after diploma. If you can live to 60, and you spend your first 25 years studying, you still have another 35 years when you have to work. So, it is better to study first.	3.91	Agree
9	I want to work rather than continue studying. I feel my time will be wasted if I continue to study after diploma for a degree at a stretch .	2.55	Disagree
10	I think it is good for me to “earn and study” at the same time as I can learn some skills and gain some working experience.	3.93	Agree

Key for interpretation: 1.00 -1.80= Strongly Disagree ,1 .81-2.60 = Disagree 2.61- 3.40 = Neutral, 3.41-4.20, Agree, and, 4.21 -5.00 = Strongly Agree

It is evident from an analysis of the data in Table 3 that students' primary aspirations. At contrast to finding gainful employment, this is to become a graduate by continuing education after receiving diploma by enrolling in UoVT.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Discussions on Findings

According to the perceptions of director/CEOs, UCs are under-resourced in terms of space, particularly classrooms. It also revealed a human resource shortage, both in terms of academic and non-academic personnel. It was also discovered that getting visiting lectures is tough. This obstructs the most efficient use of physical resources as well as effective course delivery. More than 95% of students join UCs after completion of G.C.E. A/L. Their intentions to become graduates. After receiving their diploma, pupils have been informed that they have a path to obtaining a degree from UoVT. The majority of students do not intend to enter the workforce after receiving their diplomas at middle-level roles. But expanding middle level TVET, preparing the human resources the nation needs, and giving them a path for upgrading their qualifications was the fundamental reason why UCs were established. The vast majority of students appear to prefer upgrading their qualifications to finding middle-level employment. These students become discouraged when they learn that it will take them around three years to earn a diploma and another three years at UoVT to earn a degree. As a result of their frustration, people perform poorly and may even exhibit descriptive behaviors. Additionally, it appears that the TVET system, which is meant to generate the trained labor needed by the industry, has strayed from its intended course and is heading in a new path.

The nation's need for midlevel workers could become vacant as a result.

4.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

In order to enhance middle-level TVET offerings and address the demands of the nation for middle-level labor, university colleges were founded. Such individuals now have a way to grow in their jobs by obtaining higher academic degrees through UoVT thanks to the NVQFSL.

In contrast to enrolling in these programs with the objective of earning a diploma and entering the workforce, it is now clear that students did so with the goal of earning a degree. As a result, the goals of students enrolling in university colleges do not coincide with those of the government, which is to create the middle-class workforce necessary for the nation's economic prosperity.

The majority of students enroll in UCs with the idea of graduating from UoVT, which requires a minimum of 05 years to complete a three-year degree, therefore it appears that this plan has gone wrong. Students become demotivated when they see that their objective is too far away, which can result in indiscipline and subpar academic performance, wasting their precious young lives and the resources of the nation. This topic needs to be researched more thoroughly in order to make the most of UCs.

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