

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents the finding of a study that investigated the relationship between the contribution of alumni of schools towards the revival and promotion of English language teaching and the learning process in Sri Lankan schools. The main objective of this endeavour is to find out the impact of policies in obtaining the contributions of the past pupils. A non-experimental cross-sectional research design was used in gathering data. Primary and secondary data, focus group discussions and interviews were used to gather information from past pupils in three provinces in Sri Lanka i.e. Western, Uva and Central provinces. The instrument was tested with sixty –two past pupils of ten schools of 1AB and 1C status. The sample includes Government Schools, Semi-Government schools and Government approved Private schools. According to the focus group discussions that were carried out, the voluntary services of the past pupils is turned down or discouraged by certain administrators of schools citing clauses in circulars issued by the educational authorities. Hence this study on Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution is aimed in addressing the related concerns and suggesting practical guidelines to mitigate the issue. Obtaining the voluntary services of the past pupils professionally and amicably; revising the circulars to obtain a better service from the past pupils, and encouraging the past pupils' Associations to function independently while building up a better rapport with the administration of the school in addition to providing the School Principals with the necessary training to work with the past pupils are suggested as a part of recommendations in this paper. This paper serves a part of the initial purpose of the main research of which the Researcher is a team member.

**KEYWORDS:** contributions, English, Policies, relationship, stakeholders, training

### INTRODUCTION

The Colebrook Commissions' realization of the importance of imparting education with English, forty years after Sri Lanka became a colony of the British has continued to the present with the trends of globalization. The importance of continuation of the same is felt more than ever presently due to certain relaxations executed after the independence to gain political mileage of the majority by enabling children to have their education in their mother tongue. However, there is a drastic difference in the quality of the professionals who were directly affected by the above change and their predecessors. Thus, English Language skills is a well-sought requirement for higher education and employment, not only in Sri Lanka but all over the world today.

G.C.E.(A/L) and the G.C.E.(O/L) qualified students and over 18,000 Graduates have become unsuccessful in being selected to employment positions in Sri Lanka due to their lack of English language competency. This hinders the Socio-Economic development and Social Mobility at large in Sri Lanka. (Annual Report 2019, Unemployment rates).

The G.C.E. (O/L) English language results from 2008-2015 depict that the English Language is the least passed subject among all other core subjects, and the situation remains unchanged even in 2019. Even though certain schools claim of having 100% results at the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) English language, it does not indicate the competency level of the Speaking and Listening skill of the student. This brings the competency vs. performance to a questionable position as it is evident that fluency, appropriateness, accuracy in the use of the language are not effective.

Gunawardene and Karunaratne (2017) point out that although several implementations were made in recent years to remedy the issues pertaining to English language teaching and learning, achieving the expected objectives was a failure. Teachers of English being the most important stakeholders in English language teaching, their contribution to these failures are significant.

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Out of several reasons it is apparent that teachers' skills, professional knowledge, perceptions and pedagogic practice all contribute to the failure in ELT.

A two year research on the title Improving English in Schools as a Strategic Measure of Importance for Socio-Economic Development in Sri Lanka in fulfilment of a project under the Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) of the Ministry of Education funded by the World Bank is being conducted with a view of recommending practical solutions to this vital issue by a team of professionals including the researcher who are in the field of education and English Language teaching. The researchers postulate that the participation of all stakeholders i.e. state, students, teachers, parents, past pupils and well wishes are important in the exercise of enhancing the standard of English language in Sri Lankan schools.

This paper strives to comprehend the impact of Educational Policies concerning the voluntary contributions of past pupils.

The formation of the School Development Societies (SDS) in 1982 under circular No 1981/2, School Development Board Act no 8 of 1993 and School Improvement Programme in 2013 are a clear indication of the Government's intention to seek support from the parents and the past pupils. Circular No 27 of 1964 by the Department of Education invites all Principals to set up Past Pupils' Association to support the academic and non-academic and infrastructure development.

Although conditions are stipulated in Act 5 of 1960, Act 8 of 1961 and amended Act no 65 of 1981 for all schools to get equal facilities and support from the Government, a remarkable disparity in the providence of funds to the National schools and Provincial schools is perceptible. In addition much has been discussed and read on the demands of the Federation of University Teachers' Association (FUTA) of 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for education for the last ten years

During the focus group discussions, the researcher learnt that the aforementioned two policies i.e. circular No 27 of 1964 and Circular No: 26/2018 have directly discouraged and distanced the past pupils who are important stakeholders in the Sri Lankan education system.

In 2019, responding to a Writ application by the Past Pupils' Association of vested schools, the appeal court of Sri Lanka has given a verdict against Circular No: 26/2018 of the Ministry of Education recommending to maximize the number of SDS Executive members who are parents educated in the same school.

### BACKGROUND

In 1833, the Colebrooke Commission observed that the English education was in a low ebb and with state patronage established the Colombo Academy to impart Education in English, and the revival of many schools in 1867 following the recommendations of the Morgan Committee was a turning point in the system of education in Sri Lanka.

However, presently there are 10,194 schools out of which 50% is with less than 200 students functioning in Sri Lanka. This includes 2750 schools taken over by the Government in 1961 under Act no 5 of 1960 assuring a more systematic education with national standards.

An in-depth study into the present status of these 2750 schools is required; the performance at the public examinations reveals that the standard of the English language of the majority of these institutions has reached a low ebb despite steps taken to improve the standards.

At present, competency in the English Language is an imperative requirement to face challenges of the present world, particularly when seeking employment positions and entering higher education.

As the global economy is booming, individuals strive to have vibrant lives, yet encounter challenges resulting from changes in their work environment. Government officials emphasize on international relations and import and export; businessmen either use IT or are required to travel abroad to extend their business territory and opportunities, and educators are demanded on possessing expertise knowledge and skills to meet their learners' diverse needs.

Many promising scholars of Government schools have become drop-outs and many a man has become unemployed due to the less proficiency of the English language skills in Sri Lanka.

The G.C.E. Advanced Level and Ordinary Level qualified students and a significant number of graduates have become unsuccessful in being selected for employment positions due to their lack of English language competency. This directly interferes with the socio-economic development in Sri Lanka and hinders social mobility at large. This is the subject of the main research under the topic Developing English in Schools as a Strategic Measure of Importance for Socio-Economic Development in Sri Lanka of the team where the researcher functions as the Director.

After the independence, although the role of education was to facilitate the students with relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and mindset to play a role in the socio-economic development of the country. In reality, the country has to face youth unrest in 1971, 1983, 1988/89 and a three-decade-old civil war sacrificing many young lives whilst bringing down the Socio-

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economic status of the country down. According to the latest statistics, the unemployment rate of youth in Sri Lanka is increasing rapidly. The present Government is able to allocate only 2% of GDP for education despite the prolonged demands for 6% by teachers, educators and undergraduates. The Present Minister of Education calls upon better-performing schools to support rural schools.

### LITERATURE SURVEY

The principal focus of this literature review is to explore the possible contributions of alumni in enhancing the quality of education including English language.

Saravanathan (2012) revealed that according to HIES 2009/10, only 14.7% of the population passed the GCE O/L Examination and another 11.2% has passed the GCE A/L Examination or beyond, out of which little over 1% have an undergraduate degree or above. Hence, in total only 26% of the population had passed the GCE or beyond in the country. He further mentioned that the FUTA and IUSF may content that the foregoing pathetic results of our free education system are due to underfunding.

Although through the school take over under Act 5 of 1960 and Act 8 of 1961 all schools are liable to get equal facilities and support from the Government, the disparity in the providence of funds among the National schools and Provincial schools continues. According to the Central Bank report, from 1973 to 2015 the Government expenditure on education had been fluctuating between GDP 2.2% and 3.3%, and even though there is an increase in Government expenditure on Education from 2015 to 2016, there is a decline from 2016-2018 by 3.2%.

The formation of the School Development Societies in 1982 and the School Development Committee in 2013 are a clear indication of an attempt to seek direct support from the parents and the past pupils towards education in Sri Lanka.

This paper resents an analysis of the policies involving the past pupils who are potential stakeholders who would contribute voluntarily due to their regard and loyalty towards their Alma mater in all aspects including the uplifting the standard of English.

(Dolbert, 2002): Summarises 5 Is to achieve alumni engagement in a productive manner: Identity, Inform, Interest, Involve, and Invest for continual alumni engagement.

Saroj TIAG 2017 concludes that the reputation of an educational institution lies on its students Past and present. She shows that the Former students or alumni of an institution can play an immensely positive role in higher education transformation and it is vital for the institutions to have established open and direct communication channels with alumni and ensure that alumni representatives provide a strong support to the managing body of the institution. In addition to alumni donations, it can serve many other purposes such as – being or building institution's ambassadors, recruiting prospective students and mentoring current ones, providing assistance to students in career advancement; helping alumni to stay connected with each other and providing valuable feedback to the institution. She adds that the Alumni are truly a strong support to the institution. An active Alumni Association can contribute in academic matters, student support as well as mobilization of resources – both financial and non-financial. But to achieve this, firstly education in India must be detached from political influences and politicians.

Until 1956, the medium of education in mainstream schools in Sri Lanka was English and this was demoted from its status and given a subordinate position in the hierarchy of languages in Sri Lanka. The language policy in 1956 and the school take over by the state in 1961 have brought positive as well as negative changes in Sri Lankan Education System. Prof.G.T.Francis de Silva, 2010 mentions that three revisions that appear to have adverse effects, especially on education, employment opportunity and health care lowering the level of Education, Curtailing Missionary activities and take-over of schools to the Government control.

The school takeover has been discussed for the last 70 years. Former member of the Parliament Albert F.Peiris 1960 has stated during Parliament debate on the 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1960 that buildings could be taken over, but the life in the institutions cannot be taken over...actually there is life in these institutions but not in the institutions administered by the state. There is protest by parents"

Former Prime Minister and Minister of Education W.Dahanayake voiced his displeasure of the school take over making the longest speech (8 hours) in the Sri Lankan Parliament in 1960. After 35 years of the school take over, in 1995 he (92 year old) added the following in the book published by St Aloysius' College, Galle " I learnt at St Aloysius' College, on the whole, devotion in my work and the pursuit of right, because right is right and it is wisdom to follow right ". Answering a question by an old boy he mentions "When the debate for the takeover of schools was held in Parliament, I was against a full takeover. I wanted those schools that were badly managed to be taken over, but I wanted the good schools to remain under the management of that time and so on, Indeed, St Aloysius College was not taken over" (SAC Hundred Years of Love and Service,1995, pp.101-102). St Aloysius College, Galle was one of the 50 schools that opted to remain private in 1960.

The Past pupils in Sri Lanka have contributed towards their Alma mater maintaining higher standards. Their involvement and commitment were mainly due to their loyalty and affection.

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The Old Thomians' Centenary publication by Gunaratne, (1985) gives a clear indication of the bond between the Past pupils and the College in the lines "In the history which has endured, the scope of the OBA is amply manifested. It is not a frail thread on which Old Boys annually resting their friendship. It is not for nothing that Warden Stone in his farewell to the OBA (1926) said characteristically in a brief speech: "Live for St.Thomas', do anything for her whenever you are asked to do it, if necessary die for her" it is a third of a century since those words were spoken, and the OBA has been one equal temper of heroic hearts.

That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine till this momentous period of our country's history. "

In 1886 the St.Thomas' College magazine has carried another testimony to show the sentimental thoughts of a past pupil who has enclosed the following lines in his letter to the editor "I am not ashamed to tell you that it was with a suppressed tear I left St.Thomas 'College on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of last July. J.G.C.Mendis.

In a letter to the researcher who has been the OBA secretary of St Xavier's College, Nuwara Eliya, A past pupil, Alegius G.Pillai from Canada (2010) ends his letter with the following lines "Some of us may not learnt much at school, and some may have fallen by the wayside, but of this I am sure that each one of us, who had the privilege of passing through the portals of St Xavier's College, is proud to be an Old Xaverian. I owe my life to my dear parents and second only to them, I owe a debt of gratitude to my beloved Alma Mater for what I am today"

S.S.Peshawur on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 1886 mentioned " that the objects of the Society be to increase the sense of fellowship in Old Boys with one another and with the College, to promote good works among them ,and to afford guidance and encouragement to the younger generation"

Answering to the question on Thomian apropos the Thomian spirit ,the Warden Stone has stated " I never despair about a Thomian even if he has gone wrong a year or two, Some of them have gone wrong, but I believe there is something in the College called the Thomian Spirit that can never die"

The financial contributions made by Past pupils is remarkable in Sri Lanka. Gunaratne N.H. 1985 states "Many schools in Ceylon have had to depend for their existence on money brought from abroad. St Thomas College has had very little foreign aid. The generosity shown by Old Boys to St Thomas dates from very early times long before the formation of the OBA.

Loyalty pledge of Royal College Colombo inspires past pupils to be connected with their alma mater in the following way: "I pledge with all my heart that, wherever I may be, I shall always remember with love and loyalty my alma mater, Royal College that taught, guided and moulded me to be what I am. I also pledge that now and in the future, both in word and deed, I shall keep her fame inviolate and strive to repay the immeasurable debt I owe to the school that nurtured me to man's estate"

This relationship and bond between the Past Pupils and their institutions in other countries may differ as the requirements and sentiments are different, but in Sri Lanka until their death past pupils live with their Alma mater.

"Wrap me up in my Trinity blazer

With Red, gold and blue in my view

And six stalwart fellows shall carry me

With steps at a-mournful and slow" is a popular song at Trinity College, Kandy that well depicts the affection and loyalty of past pupils towards their alma mater.

Following lines condensed from the constitution (1947) of the OBA of St Xavier's College that indicates the purpose and goals of the Association.

Article ii - Purpose & Goals

To uplift the standard of the College and maintain the traditions of St. Xavier's College Nuwara Eliya. (Hereinafter referred to as The College).

To promote and advance the economical general welfare of past pupils of the College.

To work for the integral development of the Association.

To foster comradeship and welfare among the past pupils of the College.

To keep the past pupils of St. Xavier's College in a purposeful relationship with their Alma Mater and thereby maintain within them and among them a spirit of loyalty to their Alma Mater.

To obtain the advice, support and cooperation of past students in all matters affecting the College.

To promote the advancement, progress and welfare of the College.

To promote advancing educational, cultural, recreational, social and economic welfare of the students of the College.

To enable those senior students of the College to acquaint themselves with members of the Association to engage in a spirit of friendship, which would help those younger members.

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It is an indisputable fact to mention that no school has come down because of the Past Pupils. Even in occasions where the Heads of the schools were transferred and terminated their services, the Past Pupils' Associations found alternatives to safeguard their Alma mater.

These Past Pupils Associations have been doing great service to their Alma Mater. Providing infrastructure facilities, setting up science laboratories, language labs, sports activities, Cricket and Rugby, providing scholarships and financial assistance to deserving students to enter National and International level in sports, teacher training, extra educational workshops, promoting music, drama and even the film industry are to name a few projects launched by the past pupils. One can argue that Hon.D.S.Senanayake wouldn't have become the first Prime Minister if not for the Past Pupils' Association of his Alma mater. Dudley Senanayake, and S.W.R.D.Bandaranayake, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and third Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka who were also active members of the same Association and have received the perseverance from the Past Pupils' association to enter public service.

Hundred years after the institution of the Past Pupils Association /Old Boys' Association in Sri Lanka by the Past Pupils themselves, the Government has rung a wakeup call in 1964 through a circular inviting all Principals to set up Past Pupils' Association to obtain the support of the past pupils for the functioning of schools. At present only a handful of Principals are able to set up Past Pupils Association indicating that the wake-up call is not listened to.

The old boys who voluntarily joined the focus group discussions from the provinces of Western, Central and Uva pointed out that the Heads of the schools should be trained to build up a better rapport with Past Pupils rather than creating distance between the past pupils and their school. The presence of mind of the Head of the school is vital in making decisions.

Setting up of Learning Management System (LMS) in a school in Colombo by the Past Pupils in 2018 is taken up as a positive move by teachers, parents and students as the system has served the purpose during the sudden Lockdown due to the Covid -19 in 2020. Answering to a question the former secretary of the OBA stated that at the inception the teachers took it as an extra burden, but when the schools were closed down, all the teachers were eager to learn and some teachers even have become successful in online teaching and at present, there are 3575 classes conducted through the LMS and classes are on from 8.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.

During the focus group discussions, one of the former Secretaries of an OBA stated that the Principal of the school has taken the OBA as a threat to his administration and OBA is not allowed within the school.

Findings of the study that involved several Past Pupils' Associations in the Western, Uva and Central Province reveal that the interference of the Heads of schools has caused a negative impact on the aspirations of the good work that includes enhancing the standard of the English language carried out by the past pupils.

If the schools can get the support of the Past Pupils, better exposure and opportunities could be created within the school with the experience of past pupils who would have even had their education in the English medium. The interview with the former Secretary of an OBA in Nuwara Eliya who has been educated in the English medium stated that his OBA is the only OBA that has been functioning in English for the last 75 years in the entire District, and the OBA is taboo within the school. The Heads consider the OBA as a threat.

The Peradeniya OBA secretary states that the teachers are prejudiced against them as the parents of the students are from humble backgrounds and all walks of life and the teachers do not wish to obtain the services of the Past Pupils. Another Secretary of a leading OBA in Kandy revealed that his OBA functions independently after a verdict given by the Magistrate court in Kandy in favour of the old boys.

E. H.Alwis, Director of Education stipulates the following objectives in circular No 27 issued on the 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 1964: "The Department of Education is well aware of the fact that the Past Pupils Associations have done immense service to their schools. Hereby an invitation is extended to establish Past Pupils Association in all schools to strengthen the relationship of the past pupils, and to function under the following constitution". The objectives have been cited in the constitution - To obtain the support of the past pupils in common activities of the school. To obtain the services to extend the premises of the school and to obtain instruments and equipment. To obtain the services to bring difference into the curriculum and to provide career guidance. To provide lunch successfully. If possible to provide something extra in addition to the lunch. To provide health facilities. To obtain assistance for religious and national events organized in the schools. To obtain the services to organize and support sports, athletics, sports meets, scouting etc. To obtain the services in organizing concerts, variety entertainments, folk singing, dancing events. To obtain the services concerning the school and society.

According to the focus group discussions that were conducted with Secretaries of three OBA's in the Central Province, the voluntary services of the past pupils is turned down by certain administrators of schools citing the circular issued in 1964.

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Table No 1

| Unemployment Rate (a) (b)   |      |      |      |      |      |        |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| 2019 ( C )                  |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| Category                    | 2018 |      |      |      |      |        |
|                             |      | Q1   | Q2   | Q3   | Q4   | Annual |
| All                         | 4.4  | 4.7  | 4.9  | 5.1  | 4.5  | 4.8    |
| <b>By Gender</b>            |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| Male                        | 3.0  | 3.4  | 3.4  | 3.3  | 3.2  | 3.3    |
| Female                      | 7.1  | 6.9  | 7.5  | 8.5  | 6.9  | 7.4    |
| <b>By Education Level</b>   |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| Grade 5 and below           | ..   | ..   | ..   | ..   | ..   | ..     |
| Grade 6-10                  | 2.9  | 2.9  | 3.0  | 3.4  | 3.4  | 3.3    |
| GCE (O/L)                   | 5.2  | 6.0  | 6.5  | 7.7  | 5.6  | 6.5    |
| GCE(A/L) and above          | 9.1  | 7.9  | 9.5  | 8.7  | 7.7  | 8.5    |
| <b>By age Group (Years)</b> |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| 15-19                       | 26.5 | 23.3 | 27.8 | 24.3 | 29.1 | 26.0   |
| 20-24                       | 20.1 | 21.0 | 17.8 | 23.1 | 19.2 | 20.3   |
| 25-29                       | 10.4 | 9.0  | 12.6 | 11.8 | 10.4 | 11.0   |
| 30-39                       | 3.0  | 3.0  | 3.3  | 3.2  | 2.9  | 3.1    |
| 40 and above                | 0.7  | 1.2  | 1.1  | 1.2  | 1.1  | 1.2    |

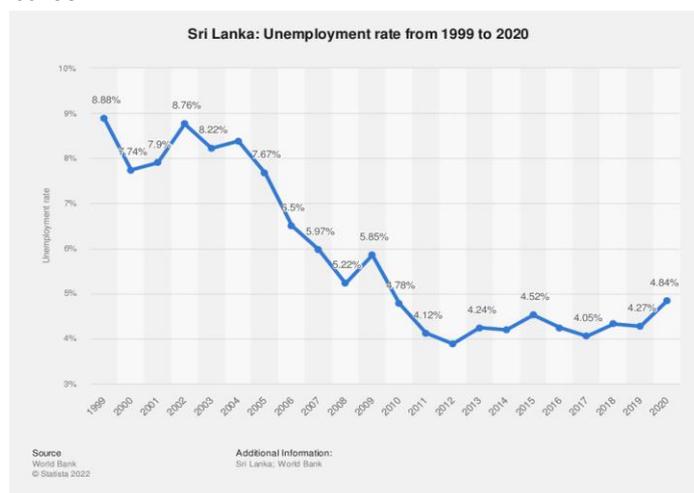
( a ) Household population aged 15 years and above

( b ) In July 2016, the Department of Census and Statistics published a re-weighted and revised labour force data series for 2011 onwards.

( c ) Provincial

Source: Department of Census and Statistics

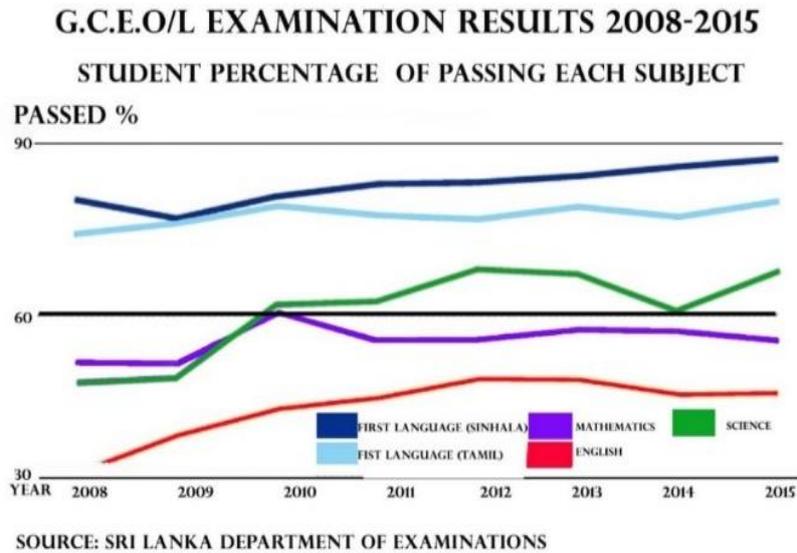
The statistics obtained from the Department of Census and Statistics show that the highest unemployed group belongs to the A/L qualified youth who are around 15-19 years old in Sri Lanka. The unemployment rate was 9.1 and 8.5 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The root cause of the issue of unemployment is the incompetency level of the English Language among the youth who have spent thirteen years in school.



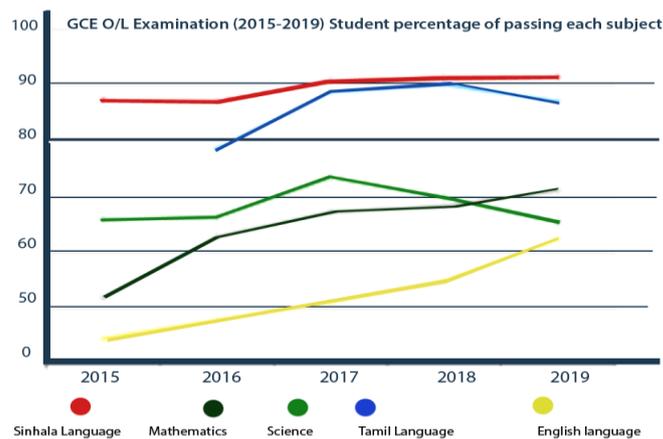
Graph No 1

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution

The above depicts the unemployment rate in Sri Lanka. From 1999 to 2008 the unemployment rate comes down and since 2012 the rate increases according to the additional information of the World Bank.

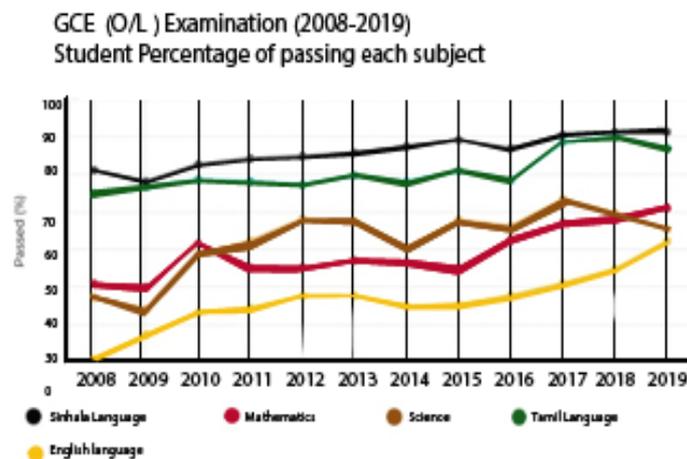


Graph No 2



Graph No 3

The G.C.E.O/L English language results from 2008-2019 depict that English language is the least passed subject among all other subjects.



Graph No 4

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution

G.C.E. O/L Examination (2015 – 2019)

Student percentage of passing each subject

Table No 2

| Subject                  | 2015 (%) | 2016 (%) | 2017 (%) | 2018 (%) | 2019 (%) |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| First Language (Sinhala) | 87.28    | 87.03    | 90.63    | 91.30    | 91.40    |
| Mathematics              | 51.93    | 62.81    | 67.24    | 68.30    | 71.08    |
| Science                  | 65.88    | 66.33    | 73.46    | 69.83    | 65.45    |
| First Language (Tamil)   |          | 78.60    | 88.72    | 90.08    | 87.05    |
| English Language         | 44.57    | 47.90    | 51.12    | 54.90    | 62.36    |

Source: Depart of Examinations, Sri Lanka

The above table of the O/L Results from 2015-2019 indicates that English has been the least passed subject with 44, 57%, 47.90,51,12, 54.90 and 62, 36%.

Table No 3

G.C.E.(O.L) Examination - 2019

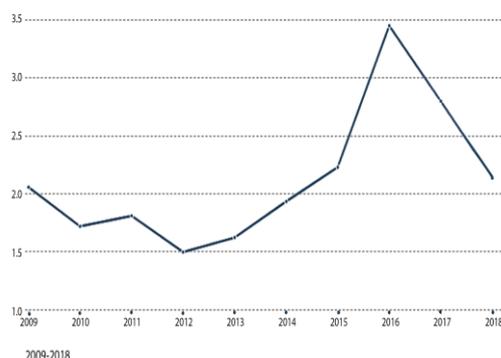
School Candidates (1<sup>st</sup> Attempt) - Results by Grades in each Subject

| Subject   | Number Sat | A      |       | B      |        | C      |       | S      |       | Passed (A+B+C+S) |        | W      |       |
|---|------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------------|--------|--------|-------|
|   |            | Number | %     | Number | %      | Number | %     | Number | %     | Number           | %      | Number | %     |
| 11. Buddhism  | 219808     | 76417  | 34.77 | 37901  | 17.24  | 49644  | 22.59 | 32369  | 14.73 | 196331           | 89.32  | 23477  | 10.68 |
| 12. Saivneri  | 34377      | 8637   | 25.12 | 5313   | 15.46  | 8499   | 24.72 | 6941   | 20.19 | 29390            | 85.49  | 4987   | 14.51 |
| 14. Catholicism   | 19549      | 8676   | 44.38 | 3233   | 16.54  | 3817   | 19.53 | 2379   | 12.17 | 18105            | 92.61  | 1444   | 7.39  |
| 15. Christianity  | 3186       | 496    | 15.57 | 574    | 18.02  | 912    | 28.63 | 767    | 24.07 | 2749             | 86.28  | 437    | 13.72 |
| 16. Islam   | 28598      | 6553   | 22.91 | 4459   | 15.59  | 6736   | 23.55 | 5884   | 20.57 | 23632            | 82.64  | 4966   | 17.36 |
| 21. Sinhala Language & Literature                       | 238474     | 47964  | 20.11 | 48786  | 20.46  | 76034  | 31.88 | 45177  | 18.94 | 217961           | 91.40  | 20513  | 8.60  |
| 22. Tamil Language & Literature                         | 66983      | 6228   | 9.30  | 10899  | 16.27  | 23528  | 35.13 | 17653  | 26.35 | 58308            | 87.05  | 8675   | 12.95 |
| 31. English Language                                    | 305162     | 32293  | 10.58 | 25873  | 8.48   | 55116  | 18.06 | 77029  | 25.24 | 190311           | 62.36  | 114851 | 37.64 |
| 32. Mathematics   | 304894     | 58858  | 19.30 | 32685  | 10.72  | 69839  | 22.91 | 55329  | 18.15 | 216711           | 71.08  | 88183  | 28.92 |
| 33. History   | 305371     | 56970  | 18.66 | 38363  | 12.56  | 86326  | 28.27 | 73353  | 24.02 | 255012           | 83.51  | 50359  | 16.49 |
| 34. Science   | 304987     | 25238  | 8.28  | 22507  | 7.38   | 62912  | 20.63 | 88963  | 29.17 | 199620           | 65.45  | 105367 | 34.55 |
| 40. Music (Oriental)                                    | 41828      | 9967   | 23.83 | 7031   | 16.81  | 11998  | 28.68 | 9372   | 22.41 | 38368            | 91.73  | 3460   | 8.27  |
| 41. Music (Western)                                     | 2371       | 1315   | 55.46 | 461    | 19.44  | 412    | 17.38 | 130    | 5.48  | 2318             | 97.76  | 53     | 2.24  |
| 42. Music (Carnatic)                                    | 8505       | 1552   | 18.25 | 1742   | 20.48  | 2945   | 34.63 | 1875   | 22.05 | 8114             | 95.40  | 391    | 4.60  |
| 43. Art   | 88372      | 4973   | 5.63  | 8427   | 9.54   | 30011  | 33.96 | 34082  | 38.57 | 77493            | 87.69  | 10879  | 12.31 |
| 44. Dancing (Oriental)                                  | 55179      | 7041   | 12.76 | 9307   | 16.87  | 17553  | 31.81 | 14951  | 27.10 | 48852            | 88.53  | 6327   | 11.47 |
| 45. Dancing (Bharatha)                                  | 2885       | 618    | 21.42 | 620    | 21.49  | 948    | 32.86 | 575    | 19.93 | 2761             | 95.70  | 124    | 4.30  |
| 46. Appreciation of English Literary Texts              | 8791       | 2666   | 30.33 | 2046   | 23.27  | 2406   | 27.37 | 1192   | 13.56 | 8310             | 94.53  | 481    | 5.47  |
| 47. Appreciation of Sinhala Literary Texts              | 24258      | 9876   | 40.71 | 6038   | 24.89  | 4816   | 19.85 | 2146   | 8.85  | 22876            | 94.30  | 1382   | 5.70  |
| 48. Appreciation of Tamil Literary Texts                | 26894      | 6760   | 25.14 | 4990   | 18.55  | 6629   | 24.65 | 4845   | 18.02 | 23224            | 86.35  | 3670   | 13.65 |
| 49. Appreciation of Arabic Literary Texts               | 2228       | 1147   | 51.48 | 304    | 13.64  | 269    | 12.07 | 241    | 10.82 | 1961             | 88.02  | 267    | 11.98 |
| 50. Drama & Theatre (Sinhala)                           | 32555      | 3988   | 12.25 | 7340   | 22.55  | 13424  | 41.23 | 6619   | 20.33 | 31371            | 96.36  | 1184   | 3.64  |
| 51. Drama & Theatre (Tamil)                             | 7470       | 1042   | 13.95 | 2138   | 28.62  | 2896   | 38.77 | 1206   | 16.14 | 7282             | 97.48  | 188    | 2.52  |
| 52. Drama & Theatre (English)                           | 13         | 2      | 15.38 | 3      | 23.08  | 6      | 46.15 | 2      | 15.38 | 13               | 100.00 | 0      | 0.00  |
| 60. Business and Accounting Studies                     | 88365      | 25132  | 28.44 | 18621  | 21.07  | 22560  | 25.53 | 14989  | 16.96 | 81302            | 92.01  | 7063   | 7.99  |
| 61. Geography   | 78888      | 14856  | 18.83 | 15289  | 19.38  | 23781  | 30.15 | 16699  | 21.17 | 70625            | 89.53  | 8263   | 10.47 |
| 62. Citizenship Education & Governance/ Civic Education | 104528     | 11352  | 10.86 | 14614  | 13.98  | 30274  | 28.96 | 27272  | 26.09 | 83512            | 79.89  | 21016  | 20.11 |
| 63. Entrepreneurship Education                          | 6855       | 948    | 13.83 | 1113   | 16.24  | 1957   | 28.55 | 1746   | 25.47 | 5764             | 84.08  | 1091   | 15.92 |
| 64. Second Language (Sinhala)                           | 11382      | 4518   | 39.69 | 2970   | 26.09  | 2253   | 19.79 | 1252   | 11.00 | 10993            | 96.58  | 389    | 3.42  |
| 65. Second Language (Tamil)                             | 12701      | 6056   | 47.68 | 3257   | 25.64  | 2459   | 19.36 | 828    | 6.52  | 12600            | 99.20  | 101    | 0.80  |
| 66. Pali  | 23         | 4      | 17.39 | 1      | 4.35   | 7      | 30.43 | 8      | 34.78 | 20               | 86.96  | 3      | 13.04 |
| 67. Sanskrit  | 6          | 0      | 0.00  | 0      | 0.00   | 1      | 16.67 | 1      | 16.67 | 2                | 33.33  | 4      | 66.67 |
| 68. French  | 360        | 41     | 11.39 | 42     | 11.67  | 82     | 22.78 | 86     | 23.89 | 251              | 69.72  | 109    | 30.28 |
| 69. German  | 206        | 59     | 28.64 | 37     | 17.96  | 51     | 24.76 | 34     | 16.50 | 181              | 87.86  | 25     | 12.14 |
| 70. Hindi   | 112        | 25     | 22.32 | 18     | 16.07  | 24     | 21.43 | 27     | 24.11 | 94               | 83.93  | 18     | 16.07 |
| 71. Japanese  | 719        | 398    | 55.35 | 76     | 10.57  | 88     | 12.24 | 68     | 9.46  | 630              | 87.62  | 89     | 12.38 |
| 72. Arabic  | 609        | 370    | 60.76 | 61     | 10.02  | 77     | 12.64 | 70     | 11.49 | 578              | 94.91  | 31     | 5.09  |
| 73. Korean  | 222        | 17     | 7.66  | 20     | 9.01   | 38     | 17.12 | 64     | 28.83 | 139              | 62.61  | 83     | 37.39 |
| 74. Chinese   | 55         | 6      | 10.91 | 11     | 20.00  | 13     | 23.64 | 13     | 23.64 | 43               | 78.18  | 12     | 21.82 |
| 75. Russian   | 5          | 1      | 20.00 | 1      | 20.00  | 3      | 60.00 | 0      | 0.00  | 5                | 100.00 | 0      | 0.00  |
| 80. Information & Communication Technology              | 60176      | 24961  | 41.48 | 11926  | 19.82  | 13471  | 22.39 | 7287   | 12.11 | 57645            | 95.79  | 2531   | 4.21  |
| 81. Agriculture & Food Technology                       | 50741      | 6163   | 12.15 | 6627   | 13.06  | 13258  | 26.13 | 15724  | 30.99 | 41772            | 82.32  | 8969   | 17.68 |
| 82. Aquatic Bio. Technology                             | 671        | 49     | 7.30  | 110    | 16.39  | 233    | 34.72 | 194    | 28.91 | 586              | 87.33  | 85     | 12.67 |
| 84. Arts & Crafts                                       | 3053       | 840    | 27.51 | 716    | 23.45  | 879    | 28.79 | 427    | 13.99 | 2862             | 93.74  | 191    | 6.26  |
| 85. Home Economics                                      | 34262      | 1378   | 4.02  | 3616   | 10.55  | 13682  | 39.93 | 9647   | 28.16 | 28323            | 82.67  | 5939   | 17.33 |
| 86. Health & Physical Education                         | 141833     | 47989  | 33.83 | 29871  | 21.06  | 34658  | 24.44 | 19204  | 13.54 | 131722           | 92.87  | 10111  | 7.13  |
| 87. Communication & Media Studies                       | 6115       | 572    | 9.35  | 957    | 15.65  | 1878   | 30.71 | 1701   | 27.82 | 5108             | 83.53  | 1007   | 16.47 |
| 88. Design & Con. Technology                            | 3874       | 183    | 4.72  | 427    | 11.02  | 1687   | 43.55 | 1159   | 29.92 | 3456             | 89.21  | 418    | 10.79 |
| 89. Design & Mec. Technology                            | 3374       | 439    | 13.01 | 547    | 16.21  | 1180   | 34.97 | 792    | 23.47 | 2958             | 87.67  | 416    | 12.33 |
| 90. Design & Elec. & Elec. Technology                   | 1230       | 86     | 6.99  | 73     | 5.93   | 284    | 23.09 | 428    | 34.80 | 871              | 70.81  | 359    | 29.19 |
| 92. Electronic Writing & Shorthand (Sinhala)            | 13         | 0      | 0.00  | 2      | 15.38  | 3      | 23.08 | 7      | 53.85 | 12               | 92.31  | 1      | 7.69  |
| 93. Electronic Writing & Shorthand (Tamil)              | 2          | 0      | 0.00  | 2      | 100.00 | 0      | 0.00  | 0      | 0.00  | 2                | 100.00 | 0      | 0.00  |
| 94. Electronic Writing & Shorthand (English)            |            |        |       |        |        |        |       |        |       |                  |        |        |       |

Source: Depart of Examinations, Sri Lanka

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution

The above Table depicts the grades obtained in 2019 for English Language A: 10.58% B: 8.48%, C: 18.06%, S: 25.24% W: 37.6% comparing to other core subjects English Language in a low ebb.



**Graph No 5**

Sri Lankan Government Expenditure on Education total (% of GDP)

Expenditure by the GVT 2008-2018 on Education

World Development Indicator

( [uis.unesco.org](http://uis.unesco.org) ) Data as of September 2021

**Table No 4**

| Series Name  | Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) |
|--------------|---|
| Country Name | Sri Lanka   |
| Country Code | LKA   |
| 2011         | 1.80860996246338                                      |
| 2012         | 1.49617004394531                                      |
| 2013         | 1.62107002735138                                      |
| 2014         | 1.93288004398346                                      |
| 2015         | 2.22874999046326                                      |
| 2016         | 3.44919991493225                                      |
| 2017         | 2.79924988746643                                      |
| 2018         | 2.12420988082886                                      |

**Source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics (<http://uis.unesco.org/>). Data as of September 2020

*Data from database: World Development Indicators Last Updated: 10/15/2020*

General Government expenditure on education (current, capital, and transfers) is expressed as a percentage of GDP. It includes expenditure funded by transfers from international sources to government. General Government usually refers to local, regional, and central Governments. Since 2016 the expenditure on education is on a decline. Average 2.79 per year which is far below the FUTA's demand for 6%.

The percentage of Government expenditure on education to GDP is useful to compare education expenditure between countries and/or overtime concerning the size of their economy; a high percentage to GDP suggests a high priority for education and a capacity of raising revenues for public spending. Note that government expenditure appears lower in some countries where the private sector and/or households have a large share in total funding for education.

### METHODOLOGY

The Past pupils come under stakeholders who belong to the independent variables of the Conceptual Framework of the main research.

In order to ascertain the views of past pupils focus group discussions were conducted without any prompting.

The main study of this research was conducted based on a mixed method using primary data from questionnaires, observations, interviews, and focus group discussions and secondary data from published sources such as Central Bank Reports, and Ministry of Education, Department of Census and Statistics and relevant publications.

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution

Past Pupils, Past and present officials of Past Pupils Association of three types of schools 1 AB, 1C and Type 2 from the same Education Zone of three different provinces based on the demand and the popularity of the school and the socio-economic status of the stake-holders were selected to ascertain the views and opinions of the past pupils on their contribution towards enhancing the English language standards of their schools.

### DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table No 5

| Province | Number of participants | Gender    |
|----------|------------------------|-----------|
| Western  | RC 10, LAM 4,          | Male 14   |
|          | 10, Mc BB 02           | Female 12 |
| Central  | TC 10, NE 10, PERA 04  | Male 24   |
|          | Female 12              | Female 12 |
| Uva      | 10                     | Male 04   |
|          |                        | Female 06 |
|          |                        | 72        |

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Many participants of Past Pupils Associations/Old Boys' Associations of schools in Peradeniya, Nuwara Eliya, Colombo, Badulla, Bandarawela and Kandy were not in favour of the circular dated 1964 which calls the Principals to lead the Past Pupils' Associations, and the participants posed the following questions

1. If the circular is so valid, then why the majority of schools have failed in setting up Past Pupils' Associations?
2. What action the Authorities have taken against the Principals who were unable to set up Past Pupils' Associations in their schools?
3. In this sense can the Educational authorities force the Past Pupils to elect the Principals as their Presidents?
4. Can Principals who are failures in their performance handle the affairs of the past pupils?
5. Are qualified and dedicated past pupils a threat to the Principals?
6. Can the Principals have the same degree of loyalty towards their workplace which is called the Alma Mater by the past pupils?
7. Are Principals trained to obtain the services of the past pupils who are honestly loyal and true spirited towards the welfare of their Alma mater?

The sincere interest of a group of Sri Lankan past pupils had prompted them to seek legal direction to join the executive committee of their schools where they have become parents of their children attending the same school.

Responding to a Writ application by the Past Pupils' Association of vested schools, the appeal court has given a verdict against Circular No: 26/2018 of the Ministry of Education recommending to maximize the number of Executive members who come under the parent category educated in the same school.

In the court of Appeal of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka: Petitioners: Asanga Peiris and Seven others. C.A (Writ) Application No: 21/2019 Respondents: Hon.Akila Viraj Kariyawasam, Minister of Education, Ministry of Education, Isurupaya, Battaramulle.

The Secretary, Ministry of Education 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2019 declares the following in his response to the petition: 22-“Answering the Petitioners Petition as a whole, I state that steps have been taken to delete the impugned clause in 4.2.1 (iii) of the Circular No 26/2018, to give effect to the grievance of the Petitioners. Accordingly the amended circular No: 19/2019 has been issued with effect from 9.4.2019, by the Ministry of Education.”

This amendment of the circular based on the petition of a group of past pupils of different schools in Sri Lanka is an indication of the views of the authorities against the volunteer services of the Past Pupils who strive to assist their schools for their development.

The Magistrate Court of Kandy has given a verdict in favour of the OBA to function with a past pupil holding the position of President of the OBA.

The Principal of a school in Nuwara Eliya who uses to circular no 27 of 1964 complaints of the functioning of the OBA goes to the extent of writing to another Principal of a neighbouring school to annul a sports event, but becomes a failure as his credentials do not support his cause, but discourages the Past Pupils of the continuity of their service to the school. The letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 2011 of the OBA of St Xavier's College to the Governor of the Central province is evidence to prove this fact.

## Improving English Language Teaching in Sri Lankan Schools: Past Pupils' Contribution

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the focus group discussions that were carried out, the voluntary services of the past pupils is turned down or discouraged by certain administrators of schools citing the circular issued in 1964.

The following is recommended to mitigate the issue;

To Obtain the services of the past pupils in a professional and amicable way, revise the circular permitting the Old Boys' Association to function independently while building up a better rapport with the administration of the school and to train the Principals and teachers to work with the past pupils.

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