Survey of Academic Resources in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities

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Abstract

The university system of Sri Lanka in general and the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in particular have been subjected to intense criticism in respect of academic quality of the programmes and the quality of the output of the graduates in recent decades. This article presents the findings of a survey which looked at: the quality of the staff in terms of educational qualifications, the availability of staff resources in relation to the academic work load, the constraints that impinge on the professional development and career mobility of academic staff, and the output of postgraduates to expand the pool of professionals in diverse fields of university teaching and research. The study indicated inadequate attention being paid to the improvement of staff qualifications and engagement in research which is to a certain extent linked to an over-emphasis on teaching large student numbers and an insufficient number of postgraduate programmes and students.

1. Introduction

In recent past, the entire university system of Sri Lanka in general and the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in particular have been subjected to intense criticism in respect of academic quality of the programmes and the quality of the output of the graduates. An increasing number of unemployed graduates, estimated at 25,515 in 2001 and 40014 in 2004 (UGC, 2002, 2004), is perceived as an indicator of the low quality of university education in the country. It is also noted that the majority of the unemployed graduates have followed courses in the above disciplines and conclusions regarding the quality of education in these Faculties are drawn even if the relationship can be purely sporadic (Wijemanne and Bastianpillai, 1983; Gunawardena et al, 1991).

The National Education Commission (1992) commented on the following factors as affecting the quality of university education.

Overcrowding and consequent failure of infrastructure to meet the needs of the university community,

> Breakdown of the internal communication processes,
> Isolation from the larger society, and
> Widespread apathy among a majority of both staff and students.

The Higher Education Sector Survey (1995) pointed out the 'deterioration of academic, professional, moral and social standards, partly as a result of overcrowding of students in universities' as a one of four problem areas in university education. They specifically mentioned the fact that the large majority of university teachers have not followed a course in teaching methodology, which would have enhanced their professional competence to function as effective mediators in learning. "Lectures often degenerate into dictation". The Asian Development Bank (2000) observed that "university programmes are adversely affected by the shortage of fully qualified staff, many of whom have no postgraduate training or programmed staff upgrading. Faculty promotion and tenure are granted without reference to classroom performance, teaching techniques or research outputs".

In the context of such vehement criticism, a survey of academic resources available in the above faculties seemed relevant and worthwhile. This article presents the findings of the survey which looked at:

(i)   The quality of the staff in terms of educational qualifications and grade,
(ii)   The availability of staff resources in terms of the academic work load (teaching, research guidance, evaluation, development of programmes and courses and student numbers) and how constraints, if any, impinge on the professional development and career mobility of academic staff; and
(iii)   Output of postgraduates to expand the pool of professionals in diverse fields of university teaching and research.

2. Review of Pertinent Literature

Concern about quality and standards in education though not new, has intensified, particularly in higher education, in the 1990s (Frackman, 1992; Kalkiyk and Vroejenstijln, 1992). The causes for this concern voiced across societies stem from the rapid expansion of student numbers against a backdrop of reduced public expenditure, increasing competition within the educational 'market' for resources and students and the tension between efficiency and quality.

Morey (1998) makes a sweeping adulation when he refers to faculty as "the holders and producers of the world's knowledge". He highlights how expectations from faculty, were shaped by dedication to the discovery of new knowledge leading to an articulation of the concepts of freedom to learn and freedom to teach, the recognition they received from disciplinary peers and loyalty to discipline over institutions and use of specialized expertise in the service of the larger public.

An important issue in Quality Assurance revolves around the question of Performance Indicators used in the measurement of quality. Linke Report (1984) in Australia suggested that indicators for evaluation may be classified into three broad categories: Indicators of institutional context (e.g. staff and student background, resource inputs and expenditure), Indicators of institutional performance (e.g. outcomes of teaching and learning, staff achievement and professional service) and Indicators of participation and social equity (e.g. representation of disadvantaged groups and range of courses provided).

Jarret Report (1985) in UK provides a useful categorization of Performance Indicators for Universities: Internal performance indicators, External performance indicators and Operating performance indicators. These three types of indicators are broken down as follows:

Internal performance indicators

- Market share of undergraduate applications by subject
- Graduation rates and classes of degrees
- Attraction of masters and doctoral students
- Success rates of higher degrees (and time taken)
- Attraction of research funds
- Teaching quality

External performance indicators

- Acceptability of graduates (postgraduates) in employment
- First destination of graduates postgraduates)
- Reputation judged by external reviews
- Publications by staff and citations
- Patents, inventions consultancies
- Memberships, prizes, medals of learned societies
- Papers at conferences

Operating performance indicators.

- Unit costs
- Staff/student ratios
- Class sizes
- Course options available
- Staff workloads

- Library stock availability
- Computing availability

Jayasuriya (1997) mentions the issues that have been considered in Quality and Efficiency Audits I several Australian Reviews of Disciplines and Departments:

- Aims and objectives of institutions (e.g. departments/disciplines, and/or programmes)
- Nature and quality of courses offered
- Standards of teaching and research
- Relevance to employment and/or the community
- Effective use of resources
- Current deficiencies in resources
- Adequacy of places and selection procedures
- Level of service provided by academic staff to government, the profession and community

In Sri Lanka, writers have pointed out that the system of universities in the country has developed without any systematic, regular and built-in mechanism for on-going evaluation of their activities (Lakshman, 1997). Lakshman goes on to explain: "Systematic performance of any system of university education would involve, on the one hand, evaluation of at least the following; quality of performance of teachers and other staff, courses offered and their changes, systems and methods of teaching, facilities available in the university for the staff and students, the quantity and quality of research conducted and published or otherwise used, quality of support services and the caliber of graduates produced".

Boyer (1990) in his seminal work proposed the abandoning the old paradigm of research versus teaching for a new paradigm: faculty should be engaged in the scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching. The scholarship of discovery "contributes not only to the stock of human knowledge but also to the intellectual climate of a college or university". The scholarship of integration involves conducting research on the boundaries of various converging fields, placing research (your own or others') into "the larger intellectual patterns. The scholarship of application, which is closely related to what we call service, must be closely related to one's own field of expertise and relates acquired knowledge to the larger community. Scholarly teaching says Boyer, "both educates and entices future scholars". Boyer asserts that "teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well". He claim that these four categories of scholarship are inseparable and rest upon the "recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, synthesis, practice and teaching". He concludes "We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students".

Austin (1998) discusses the four dominant cultures that affect faculty members: the cultures of the disciplines; of the employing university or college; of the national system and of the scholarly profession.

The present survey was not equipped to examine the various aspects that has surfaced in the above discussion but is a preliminary attempt to gauge the quality of academic resources in the disciplines of arts, humanities and social sciences in our University system.

3. The Survey

Two short questionnaires were designed to obtain information relevant for the study.

Form A – to be filled by the Heads of Departments
Form B – to be filled by each individual staff member

Form A requested for basic information on academic staff – by designation and by qualifications. In order to examine the extent of staff development, information was sought in respect (a) at the time of the survey, i.e. November 2001 and (b) five years earlier. As the main responsibility of a University is towards teaching, information on academic programmes conducted by the Departments was also requested. It was envisaged to get an understanding of the total work-load (undergraduate and postgraduate) and information related to the number of subjects offered, the weightage between compulsory and optional subjects, number of students enrolled in these subjects was asked for. As the Universities attempt to cater to the needs of a changing society, and are expected to review and revise programmes periodically, the extent to which revisions have taken place during the previous two years under the survey was also requested for.

The mail survey was initiated in November 2001 and followed up until May, 2002.

Altogether 69 Departments with 502 academics from nine universities had responded to the questionnaire. The Eastern University and the University of Ruhuna and the Faculty of Law of the University of Colombo had not responded at all. It was noted that in some of the departments either less than half the total number of academics or mostly the junior staff members in some departments had responded. As inclusion of such Departments would tend to distort the real situation in the Faculties, it was decided to leave out such Departments from the analysis.

Table 1 gives the breakdown of the number of Departments and academics responding from each University.

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Table 1
Universities and Departments Who Responded to the Survey

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University	No. of Departments	No. of Academics
Colombo	15	68
Sabaragamuwa	2	21
South-Eastern	2	26
Peradeniya	9	67
Sri Jayawardenapura	8	75
Kelaniya	14	76
Jaffna	11	80
Open University	6	73
Rajarata	2	16
Total	69	502

4. Distribution of Academic Staff by Grade

It is not possible to precisely specify the ideal distribution of staff of an academic department, but a need to ensure an equitable distribution of very senior, senior and junior staff to assure continuity is seen. Professors and Associate professors presumably have longer experience, higher academic credentials and research prowess to guide and mould junior staff as mentors and role models. The academic staff on the rungs below them should be systematically and gradually developed to step up without creating a vacuum when the senior academics leave the service.

Table 2 shows the classifications of academic staff in the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in the universities covered in the survey by grade in 1996.

In general, the above table reveals that the ratio among the top, middle and junior academic levels in the university system is 18:47:34. It appears to be a rational and a desirable ratio, but also a reflection of the fact that many senior academics stagnate in the senior lecturer cadre probably due to the requirement of research output for progression to higher grades. When individual faculties are considered the percentage in professorial grades is lower in the University of Jaffna, newer universities of Sabaragamuwa , South-Eastern, Rajarata and Open University and in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the University of Kelaniya. At the other extreme, the Faculties of the University of Colombo and the University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Arts in the Sri Jayawardenapura, Faculty of Humanities in the University of Kelaniya, appear to have higher percentages than the above Faculties/Universities in the junior grades.

Table 2
Classification of Academic Staff:
By University, Faculty, Department and Grade – 1996

Colombo	Arts (N)	4	3	10	6	1	13	37
	%	10.8	8.1	27.0	16.2	2.7	35.2	100.0
	Education (N)	4	3	9	3	4	1	24
	%	16.6	12.5	37.5	12.5	16.6	4.3	100.0
Kelaniya	Humanities (N)		8	10	12	5	8	47
	%	8.6	17.0	21.2	25.6	10.6	17.0	100.0
	Social Sciences (N)	7	2	21	14	5	14	63
	%	11.1	3.7	33.3	22.2	7.8	22.2	100.0
Sri Jayawardenapura	Arts (N)	5	12	16	21	3	15	72
	%	6.9	16.6	2.2	29.2	4.2	20.8	100
Peradeniya	Arts (N)	5	6	13	11	4	19	58
	%	8.6	10.3	2.4	18.8	7.4	32.7	100
Sabaragamuwa	Social Science & Language (N)	2	0	0	4	0	10	16
	%	12.5	0	0	25.0	0	62.5	100.0
South-Eastern	Arts & Culture (N)	0	0	1	0	0	4	5
	%	0	0	20	0	0	80	100.0
Jaffna	Arts (N)	6	5	13	17	5	16	62
	%	9.7	8.0	21.0	27.4	8.6	25.8	100.0
Rajarata	Social Sciences (N)	1	0	0		5	0	7
	%	14.3	0	0	14.3	71.4	0	100.0
Open University	Humanities & Social Sciences (N)	2	0	9	18	9	11	49
	%	4.1	--	18.4	36.7	18.4	22.4	100.0
All Universities *(N)	Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	40	39	102	107	41	111	440
	%	9.1	8.9	23.2	24.3	9.3	25.2	100.0

*Excluding Eastern and Ruhuna Universities

The survey also sought the same information for the year 2001 to find out whether any progress had taken place five years later (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that in the space of five years the balance has slightly tipped negatively to an increase of middle academic grades (senior lecturers) at the expense of professorial grades from 47 to 50. In respect of different Faculties we see a lowering of the percentages of professors in Sabaragamuwa from 12.5 to 7.4, in Jaffna from 17.7 to 13.4, Social Science in Kelaniya from 14.8 to 12.3, Rajarata from 14.3 to 5.3 and Open University from 4.0 to 3.6. This clearly indicates that the balance among different academic grades may have changed mainly as a result of the change in the newer Faculties.

5. Academic Staff by Qualifications

Qualifications of academic staff of a Department/Faculty are normally considered as a proxy indicator of the quality of education offered. Even though staff possessing only Bachelors degrees are assigned teaching responsibilities in undergraduate courses, it is deemed essential for those teaching in these courses also to have at least a Masters degrees. Especially in view of the growing trend towards more interactive teaching-learning, where two-way communication operates and students as independent learners are expected to question and critically examine what is taught to them, a certain degree of specialization in the subject is useful.

The qualifications of staff are examined at from two angles:

1.   Does a department have the staff with requisite qualifications to conduct the programmes/courses that are being conducted, especially, for example, postgraduate programmes?
2.   To what extent have the entry qualifications been improved upon by the staff during their period of service?

The UGC guidelines for recruitment and promotion of academic staff are almost directly tied to qualifications and research output. Thus, for example, a lecturer (probationary) needs to obtain further qualifications within 5-8 years after recruitment or he/she would face discontinuation. The scheme of marking awards points for postgraduate qualifications for promotions. Table 4 gives the qualifications of academic staff by Faculty and University. Here the qualifications were categorized under five categories – Ph.D., M.Phil (research degrees), Masters degrees (M.A., M.Ed., M.Sc.), Postgraduate Diploma and Bachelors degrees.

Table 4 indicates that in the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in the entire university system, about 40 per cent of the academic staff appear to possess research degrees – Ph.D. or M.Phil. with 26 per cent having Ph.D. degrees. The percentage of Ph.D.s ranges from 36.5 in the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo to 12.5 in Rajarata and 3.8 in South-Eastern University.

Table 3
Classification of Academic Staff: By University, Faculty, Department and Grade – 2001

University	Faculty	Ph.D.	M.Phil.	M.A./M. Ed.M.sc.	PG Diploma	B.A./ B.Sc./ B.Ed	Total
Colombo	Arts (N)	19	4	16	5	8	52
	%	36.5	7.7	30.8	9.6	15.4	100
	Education (N)	3	8	3	1	1	16
	%	18.8	50.0	18.8	6.25	6.25	100
	Total (N)	22	12	19	6	9	58
	%	37.9	20.7	32.8	10.3	15.5	100
Sabaragamuwa	Social Sc. & Language (N)	3	1	9	0	8	21
	%	14.3	4.7	42.9	–	38.1	100
South-Eastern	Arts & Culture (N)	1	1	2	1	21	26
	%	3.8	3.8	7.6	3.8	81.0	100
Peradeniya	Arts (N)	22	15	22	0	8	67
	%	32.8	22.4	32.8	–	11.9	100
Sri Jayawardenapura	Arts (N)	24	3	33	0	15	75
	%	32.0	4.0	44.0	–	20.0	100
Kelaniya	Humanities (N)	20	5	15	4	13	57
	%	35.1	8.8	26.3	7.0	22.8	100
	Social Sciences (N)	20	3	42	3	12	80
	%	25.0	3.8	52.5	3.8	15.0	100
	Total (N)	40	8	57	7	25	137
	%	29.2	5.8	41.6	5.1	18.2	100
Jaffna	Arts (N)	16	19	16	9	20	80
	%	20.0	23.8	20	11.3	25	100
Open University	Humanities & Soc. Sciences (N)	15	13	20	4	15	67
	%	22.4	19.4	29.8	5.9	22.4	100
Rajarata	Soc. Sciences & Humanities (N)	2	0	9	0	5	16
	%	12.5	–	56.3	–	33.3	100
All Universities	Arts, Humanities & Soc. Sciences (N)	145	72	177	27	126	547
	%	26.5	13.2	32.3	4.9	23.0	100

*Excluding Eastern and Ruhuna Universities

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Table 4
Classification of Academic Staff:
By University, Faculty, Department and Educational Qualifications – 2001

University	Faculty	Ph.D.	M.Phil.	M.A./M. Ed.M.sc.	PG Diploma	B.A./ B.Sc./ B.Ed	Total
Colombo	Arts (N)	19	4	16	5	8	52
	%	36.5	7.7	30.8	9.6	15.4	100
	Education (N)	3	8	3	1	1	16
	%	18.8	50.0	18.8	6.25	6.25	100
	Total (N)	22	12	19	6	9	58
	%	37.9	20.7	32.8	10.3	15.5	100
Sabaragamu wa	Social Sc. & Language (N)	3	1	9	0	8	21
	%	14.3	4.7	42.9	--	38.1	100
South-Eastern	Arts & Culture (N)	1	1	2	1	21	26
	%	3.8	3.8	7.6	3.8	81.0	100
Peradeniya	Arts (N)	22	15	22	0	8	67
	%	32.8	22.4	32.8	--	11.9	100
Sri Jayawardena pura	Arts (N)	24	3	33	0	15	75
	%	32.0	4.0	44.0	--	20.0	100
Kelaniya	Humanities (N)	20	5	15	4	13	57
	%	35.1	8.8	26.3	7.0	22.8	100
	Social Sciences (N)	20	3	42	3	12	80
	%	25.0	3.8	52.5	3.8	15.0	100
	Total (N)	40	8	57	7	25	137
	%	29.2	5.8	41.6	5.1	18.2	100
Jaffna	Arts (N)	16	19	16	9	20	80
	%	20.0	23.8	20	11.3	25	100
Open University	Humanities & Soc. Sciences (N)	15	13	20	4	15	67
	%	22.4	19.4	29.8	5.9	22.4	100
Rajarata	Soc. Sciences & Humanities (N)	2	0	9	0	5	16
	%	12.5	--	56.3	--	33.3	100
All Universities	Arts, Humanities & Soc. Sciences (N)	145	72	177	27	126	547
	%	26.5	13.2	32.3	4.9	23.0	100

*Excluding Eastern and Ruhuna Universities

Postgraduate qualifications of staff have a direct impact on the quality of postgraduate research in a department/faculty, especially in a university system such as Sri Lanka's where some departments do not make it mandatory for research students to follow (a) course/s in research methodology. Table 5 presents data on the number of research students enrolled in different Departments and against this data the number of staff with research degrees.to ensure the relevance of educational programmes.

programmes is indicative, to some extent, of quality. At the same time, too large a number of students can diminish the quality of a programme if sufficient human, physical resources are not available to support students.

In this survey, an attempt was made to find out the workload of a Department in terms of student numbers and the number of programmes/courses conducted and the number of students conducting research (projects and minor dissertations) at undergraduate level and postgraduate levels. Secondly, it was envisaged to calculate the staff-student ratios to ascertain whether the workload of Departments are realistic from the perspective of their missions as institutions committed not only to teaching but also to research, dissemination of knowledge and community/national development. Thirdly, it is imperative that updating/revision of programmes are undertaken at regular intervals to ensure the relevance of educational programmes.

The above statistics indicate that some of the Departments (for example, Education in Peradeniya, Geography, Library Science and Information Science, Sociology and Economics in the University of Kelaniya) are not having sufficient staff with research expertise to guide students enrolled in their postgraduate studies.

6. Programmes, Courses and Students

The quality of education offered by a University Department is also adjudged by the quality of the programmes provided and the demand for these programmes is indicative, to some extent, of quality. At the same time, too large a number of students can diminish the quality of a programme if sufficient human, physical resources are not available to support students.

In this survey, an attempt was made to find out the workload of a Department in terms of student numbers and the number of programmes/courses conducted and the number of students conducting research (projects and minor dissertations) at undergraduate level and postgraduate levels. Secondly, it was envisaged to calculate the staff-student ratios to ascertain whether the workload of Departments are realistic from the perspective of their missions as institutions committed not only to teaching but also to research, dissemination of knowledge and community/national development. Thirdly, it is imperative that updating/revision of programmes are undertaken at regular intervals to ensure the relevance of educational programmes.

Table 5
Research Students and Staff with Research Degrees

University	Department	No. of Research Students(1)	No. of Staff with Research Degrees
Colombo	Demography	5	3
	Education (Faculty)	112	11
	History & International Relations	71	8
	Sociology	32	7
Peradeniya	Pali & Buddhist Studies	27	7
	Education	118	3
	Tamil	25	5
Sri Jayawardenapura	Geography	5	7
	Sociology & Anthropology	36	5
	History & Archaelogy	60	6
	Pali & Buddhist Studies	6	6
	Language & Culture	8	0
Kelaniya	Sinhala	51	13
	History	8	5
	Geography	23	2
	Mass Communication	6	4
	Philosophy	37	5
	Library & Information Science	8	0
	Western Classical Culture	16	3
	Sanskrit	9	0
	Hindi Studies	1	0
	Sociology	169	1
	Economics	113	2
Jaffna	Education	55	4
	Hindu Civilization	5	2
	Linguistics & English	12	3
	Political Science & Sociology	7	4
	Tamil	41	6
	Sanskrit	3	1
Open University	Education	60	14

(1) Includes Postgraduate Diploma students in some Departments

In our questionnaire we requested the Heads of the Departments to indicate the total number of subjects offered by their departments for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The number of subjects so indicated were classified under five categories – 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40 and more than 40.

Of the 69 departments, six were offering more than 40 subjects/courses in different programmes (Geography and Sociology in the University of Colombo, Geography in the University of Kelaniya and Pali and Buddhist Studies and Economics in University of Peradeniya and Education in the Open University); Four others offered between 31-40 subjects (Philosophy in the University of Kelaniya, History and Archaelogy in the University of Sri Jayawardenapura and Management Studies and Languages in Open University). In these 10 departments, the demands made on the time of the staff for teaching is undoubtedly greater than in the case of the other departments.

To maintain relevance, the scope and content of the curriculum need to be revised in accordance with the changing societal trends and expectations while rapid advances in knowledge and technology demand that curriculum revision be carried out at least once in five years. The Heads of Departments were asked to state how many courses/ subjects were revised during the two years prior to the time of the survey in order to gauge the extent to which the University departments recognize relevance to be an important consideration.

A total of 36 Departments stated that they had undertaken revision of a certain proportion of the subjects offered by them. Eight Departments stated that all their courses/ subjects had been revised during the five years under survey. Six of them were offering more than 10 courses each. Eight others stated that they had revised half or more of the courses offered by them. On the whole, these figures indicate that attention paid to the updating of courses needs to be improved.

An examination of the total number of students served by a department in proportion to the number of academic staff who engage in teaching and evaluation is pertinent in a survey of departmental resources. A large student intake, especially if unsupported by technology, makes a heavy demand on a Department which may necessitate the organization of parallel lectures for teaching. In the context of the introduction of the course unit system and continuous assessment, the university teachers are required to evaluate students' assignments at least three times before the final examination. Especially in a context where diverse evaluation techniques such as multiple choice test, short answer types or computer-assisted marking are not used much, evaluation entails a large percentage of teacher time, at times a monotonous activity, which eat into the time he/she has for academic renewal to improve and update his own store of knowledge.

The data related to the student numbers in respective departments were collected staff-student ratios for undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses were calculated. In calculating the staff-student ratios for undergraduate courses, the total number of students was divided by the total academic number of academic staff members. In calculating the postgraduate staff-student ratio, the total number of postgraduate students was divided by the total number of senior staff (Senior lecturers and above) even though in some Departments Senior lecturers Grade II may not be assigned postgraduate teaching.

Of the 52 Departments for which data was available, 26 have undergraduate staff-student ratios which are above the norm of 1:18 recommended by the University Grants Commission. These Departments are given in Table 5.

Table 6
Staff- Student Ratios (Undergraduate)

University	Department	Staff-Student Ratio
Colombo	Geography	1:19
	History & International Relations	1:185
	Sociology	1:38
Peradeniya	Political Science	1:51
	Pali & Budd. Studies	1:31
	Economics	1:35
Kelaniya	Sinhala	1:74
	Geography	1:20
	Mass Communication	1:615
	Language	1:22
	Sociology	1:123
	Economics	1:36
Sri Jayawardenapura	History & Archaelogy	1:33
	Pali & Budd. Studies	1:51
	Social Statistics	1:48
	Economics	1:66
	Archaelogy	1:47
South-Eastern	Social Sciences	1:34
Jaffna	Tamil	1:59
	Sanskrit	1:75
	Philosophy	1:29
	Linguistics and English	1:25
	Music	1:71
	Political Sc. & Sociology	1:40
Open University	Law	1:662
	Management Studies	1:172

It is particularly important to note that (a) the Departments of Sinhala, Mass Communication, Sociology, in the University of Kelaniya, (b) Political Science Department in the University of Peradeniya, (c) History and International Relations, in the University of Colombo, (d) in the University of Jaffna, the Departments of Tamil, Sanskrit, and Music, and (e) the Department of Economics, in the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, the staff-student ratio exceeds 1:50. In six Departments the staff-student ratio exceeds 1:100 ranging from 1:662 in Law (Open University), 1:615 in Mass Communication in University of Colombo, 1:185 in History & International Relations (University of Colombo), and 1:172 in Management Studies (Open University), 1:123 in Sociology (University of Colombo).

At postgraduate level, the staff-student ratio is heavy in the Departments of Sinhala (1:38) (University of Kelaniya), Educational Psychology (1:33), Science and Technical Education (1:30), and Humanities Education (1:193) in the University of Colombo, and Education (1:122) in the University of Peradeniya and in the Open University (1:91). It is probable that these departments depend to a great extent on the visiting lecturers for teaching and evaluation, yet the staff too would be expending much time on these activities thus making inroads into their time allocation for research.

The data revealed that fourteen of the Departments in the survey that conduct undergraduate programmes did not have a research component in their undergraduate degrees. Sixteen other departments had less than 25 students enrolled in undergraduate degrees with a research component while four departments had more than 100 students doing research in such programmes (Social Science in South-Eastern and Sabaragamuwa Universities, and Law and Management Studies in the Open University). Undoubtedly guidance for undergraduate students to carry out their projects and their evaluation would be a substantial addition to the workload of these departments.

The literature identifies disciplinary culture as a major component of 'faculty culture' an important element to be considered in an analysis of work, careers and lives of faculty (Austin, 1998; Gunawardena, 2001). The strength of the disciplinary culture is rooted in the socialization that occurs through the graduate school experience. The graduate students who enhance the pool of researchers supporting the university system learn the language, traditions, symbols and professional activities in their own fields through the disciplinary culture.

Within each discipline in some universities, the number of academics is so small that a conducive environment for academic interactions may not be available. It is in such contexts, that postgraduate students offer possibilities for greater interaction. The survey looked at the output of postgraduate students from different Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The data furnished appeared to be incomplete in the case of some Departments/Faculties. Perusal of data showed that out of the Departments responding to the questionnaire, 18 were not conducting any postgraduate programmes which included a research component and that five were offering postgraduate programmes which included both course work and research.

7. Conclusion

The study showed that in the space of five years an increase of middle academic grades (senior lecturers) at the expense of professorial grades from 47 to 50 had occurred. The lowering of the percentages of professors is seen mainly in the newer and less-resourced Faculties. This finding has to be considered in conjunction with the fact that in the departments surveyed, only about 40 per cent of the academic staff appear to possess research degrees – Ph.D. or M.Phil. and of them, 26 per cent having Ph.D. degrees. The percentage of Ph.D.s ranges from 36.5 in the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo to 12.5 in Rajarata and 3.8 in South-Eastern University. On the whole the position in the newer, smaller Universities appears to be grave. These figures also indicate that some of the departments would not have sufficient staff with research expertise to guide students enrolled in their postgraduate studies.

Ten of the departments, were offering more than 30 subjects/courses. Undoubtedly, in these departments, the demands made on the time of the staff for teaching is greater than in the case of the other departments. It is noteworthy that only eight of these Departments had stated that all their courses/subjects had been revised during the five years under survey. Eight others stated that they had revised half or more of the courses offered by them. On the whole these figures indicate that attention paid to the updating of courses and thereby to ensure relevance, may need to be improved.

Twenty-eight Departments studied, have staff-student ratios which is above the norm of 1:18 recommended by the University Grants Commission. Twelve Departments had a ratio of more than 1:50. When the Open University departments using the distance mode are left out, in six other Departments the staff-student ratio was seen to exceed 1:100 ranging from 1;615 in Mass Communication in University of Colombo, 1:185 in History & International Relations (University of Colombo), and, 1:123 in Sociology (University of Colombo). The notion that undergraduate education in Humanities and Social Sciences needs only classrooms, furniture and teachers may perhaps have given rise to this situation which obviously needs to be challenged if quality education is the objective.

At postgraduate level, the staff-student ratio is inordinately heavy in the Departments of Sinhala (1:38) (University of Kelaniya), Education (1:193 in University of Colombo) and (1:122 in the University of Peradeniya). Even if these departments depend to a great extent on the visiting lecturers for teaching and evaluation, whether the staff can devote sufficient time for research in such a context is doubtful.

The dearth of academics in certain disciplines obstructs the creation of a conducive environment to optimize learning. It is in such contexts, that postgraduate students extend the possibilities for greater participation. The fact that the number of postgraduate programmes with a research component is small deprives the departments of utilizing such an avenue for much needed academic debate and discussion.

On the whole, the survey indicated inadequate attention being paid to improvement of qualifications and engagement in research (as evident from the academic profiles in different departments), which is to some extent linked to an over-emphasis on teaching, large enrolments, and an insufficient number of postgraduate programmes and students. It is possible that some of these issues may be addressed by the recent initiative on Quality Assurance by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors yet internal examination of the issues and identification of ways and means of addressing them would be more effective than externally imposed procedures.

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