Higher Education: Criteria for Selection and the Competition for Places in the University in Sri Lanka

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Due to the limited number of places in the University in Sri Lanka, the standard of entry has to be raised appreciably. As a result, a very large proportion of candidates has been rejected, many of whom may have been successful at the degree had they been admitted to the Universities.

The most suitable candidates for admission would perhaps be those who have the highest probability of obtaining a good degree. Thus, any Entrance Test must have the potential for predicting future degree performance. The test must have a high predictive validity. In Sri Lanka, the A-level aggregate is used as the criterion for selection to the Universities. An important question that arises is to what extent the A-level can be considered a valid educational signal for predicting future Degree performance.

Extensive studies of the correlation's between A-level grades and the degree performance, across subject groups and across Universities, have been carried out in the U.K. All correlation's have been found to be statistically significant, though weak. Such detailed correlation studies have yet to be made in Sri Lanka.

Assuming a hypotecnical form of correlation between A-level performance and degree results, the paper will discuss briefly the effect of raising the standard of entry on (a) the proportion of degree successes among those admitted, and (b) the percentage of candidates rejected who may have been successful had they been admitted. The present selection criteria, governed by the limited places in the Universities, Deny admission to a significant proportion of candidates with a potential for doing well at the degree. There is therefore a strong argument for providing alternative avenues of tertiary education, with a re-structuring of the education system.