

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF THE SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTED IN G.C.E. (O/L) CLASSES



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An Investigation into the Nature of the School- Based Assessment
Programme Implemented In G.C.E. (O/L) Classes -2015

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Table of content

Exacative Summary	I
Introduction	1
Evolution of the School-Based Assessment	2
Rationale for the Research	5
Literature review	6
Methodology	10
Objectives	10
Research Method	10
Population	10
Sample	10
Data collecting instruments	11
Data analysis	11
Limitations and delimitations	11
Findings and Suggestions	12
Teacher’s Responses	12
Implementation of SBA programme in schools	12
Problems emerging when implementing SBA	13
Teacher – related problems	13
Student – related problems	14
Problems related to the method of assessment	14
Problems related to time	14
Suggestions	14
Students’ Responses	15
Information provided by the curriculum developers	16
Problems related to SBA	17
Suggestions for the improvement of SBA	17
Overall suggestion	18
References	20

Executive Summary

The aim of this research was to study the state of the art of the School- Based Assessment Programme (SBA) in implementation in the school system of Sri Lanka. The study was conducted along three specific objectives, i.e. to identify the present operative situation of the school – based assessment programme that is being implemented in the school system, to inquire into the teachers’ perceptions about its operational situation and, to investigate the problems emerging during the implementation of the school-based assessment programme at the school level. Survey, research method was used as the research methodology to fulfil the above objectives.

A sample of 180 teachers and 180 students were selected. From four provinces (Western, Central, Sabaragamuwa and Eastern), representing 36 schools,(1AB – 3, 1C- 4, T2 – 2) following the method of stratified random sampling technique. In addition, data were collected from four curriculum designers involve in Mathematics, Science, History and Sinhala. Data were collected using a questionnaire, FGD, interviews were the main data gathering techniques. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to analyze data. Quantitative data were analyzed through percentages and descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed by grounded theory method. Tables and graphs were used to present data.

Its was revealed that, every teachers (n- 180) are aware of the school – based assessment programme. Group activities, short written tests, assignments and open book examinations were the popular assessment methods used by the teachers. All these are writing – inclined evaluation techniques. More than 50% of the teachers have resorted to quizzes, creative activities, listening tests, speech and wall papers. As per the teacher responses, discussion panels, projects, explorations, exhibitions, debates, concepts maps, seminars, double entry journals and surveys which inspire students’ creativity have been rarely used. In the classrooms, evaluation has been mostly implemented monthly and at the end of a unit. Most of the SBA evaluations were carried out in relation to the subjects’ mathematics (82%), science (87%) and history (82%). Least number of evaluations has been reported in case of Tamil language (13%). The results of evaluations have been mostly (76.7%) communicated to the students but they have been least to the parents (31.7%). In contrast to Tamil Language, English Language was supervised satisfactorily.

Most of the teachers held negative attitudes towards SBA. Impeding the teaching process due to extra documentary work (68.9%), low acceptance of community (68.9%), difficulty in implementation due to overcrowding of classrooms (61.1%) and hiccups in enacting as priority is given for the coverage of syllabi (54.5%) were the reasons given for it.

Problems had cropped up in classrooms when implementing the SBA in schools, the difficulty of implementing at the classroom level owing to the unwieldy number of students, difficulty in bringing the backward students to the required level of proficiency, not implementing according to a common standard, declassing teachers to the level of clerks, negative attitudes of teachers, inability to cover the lengthy syllabi and subjectivity of the marks awarded. Problems relating to the method of evaluation, the student and time too have emerged for the teacher. Reorganization of the assessment method, total removal of the assessment method, reduction of the documentary work load of the teacher and holding monthly tests instead of the SBA have been proposed.

With regard to the students' responses, it was revealed that most of the students are happy for the addition of a mark to the marks of the G.C.E. (O.L) examination. Curriculum developers perceive that the objectives of this programme which targeted the development of the quality of the classroom learning teaching process have not been achieved as yet. Because of the prevailing problems in the evaluation process, the expected subject objectives too have not been realized. They opine that this evaluation method has been undervalued because of several reasons. The teachers do not implement this correctly considering it as an extra burden. Preparation of students only for the national level examinations, examination – cantered teaching continued at the school level and focusing of examination results by divisional, zonal, provincial as well as the nation level are the other reasons.

It is suggested to formalize the SBA and ensuring its objectivity. The evaluation method should change backward child engage in learning teaching process through interesting learning experiences. Child should also be provided feed back to more forward without examination centeredness. Systematic method of receiving the assistance of ISAs to minimize teacher's documentation work is also suggested. SBA should not be restricted to written works only; it should also include other assessments method. It is also suggested to award a document indicating the students' progress on

SBA activities along with the school leaving certificate, finally, an advisory committee of scholars is appointed to explore the plight of this evaluation process in depth and decide its future which will involve its reorganization, replacement or removal.

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Introduction

The present system of examinations operating in Sri Lanka to evaluate students in the secondary level had been a subject of severe criticism over the years. A successful system of evaluation should be able to assess students in relation to the learning outcomes they have achieved in connection with the aims set out under all the three domains, cognitive, affective and psychomotor-which all the educationists unanimously agree as the essentials required for a balanced development of an individual. In spite of that true spirit of education encompasses all these three domains bringing about the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills, many institutions as well as academics and scholars have been critical over the present evaluation system which overlooks the assessment of attitudes and skills. The reason for this, as was pointed out by them, is the high academic orientation of the present curriculum and its examination-centred nature. Moreover, this monolithy is enshrined by the community that reposes a strong credibility in centralized and national level examinations rather than in a system of testing and evaluation developed at the school level.

The situation had not been overlooked continuously and commendable efforts have been taken or proposed from time to time to remedy it. The rural education modality popularly known as the Handessa scheme was one of them. This was followed by Kannangara reforms in 1945. Under the 1972 reforms, pre vocational subject were introduced to accentuate the need of the psychomotor domain. Requirement of realizing the common national goals and producing students with essential competencies and generic skills was pronounced by the National Education Commission (1992). Reforms in 1997 have emphasized the need of changing the prevailing examination system. They pointed out the inadequacy of the summative method as a mode of assessment and prescribed its coupling with formative evaluation. The committee appointed to formulate a new act for basic education too has stated that the traditional summative method of evaluation is not a satisfactory method to evaluate higher abilities (2009).

As a remedy to these problems School Based Assessment (SBA) was introduced in 1998. It was stated that the propose of SBA was to 'bring prevailing public examination results to a better status' (Circular No. 1998/04). It was not just a paper-pencil test conducted at the end of a school term. Its main purpose was to adopt it as a compulsory component of the students' learning-teaching process and a process that helps identify strengths and weaknesses of students and bring them to the expected level of proficiency (Circular No. 2001/23, MOE)

The SBA also envisages decreasing dropouts and making the school an institution providing joyful learning experiences. It prescribes the use of different types of evaluation materials. It aims to create a total constructive change in the classroom. It is also considered an extension of the attempts made by the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education over a long period of time to orient the classroom learning teaching process towards a student centred learning teaching process towards a student-centred learning environment. Since about 10 years have elapsed after the introduction of SBA, it is a timely need to find whether it is being implemented in a way its aims are realized.

Evolution of the School-Based Assessment

By the 20th Century, Sri Lanka was under the colonial rule of the British. The privileged class enjoyed the better part of the dualistic education. Yet even under such an atmosphere, some progressive steps towards the democratization of education could have been taken under Kannangara reforms, Handessa rural education program, an initiative of Kannangara was a move to uplift rural agriculture preventing the school leavers becoming unemployed. Later the Special Committee on education emphasized character development and education for citizenship. Under that, subjects such as dance, music, needlework and gardening were introduced to Central Schools in rural areas.

In 1965, a practical orientation was given to 'bookish' education in schools with the weeding campaign entitled 'Wedahuruwa' which later snowballed as an introduction of technical subjects. This movement was supposed to inculcate a sense of 'dignity' of labour.

A deliberate move to incorporate the psychomotor domain in general education was brought about with the introduction of 'pre vocational subject' into the curriculum. It helped develop a culture of labour in the school and give students an understanding and practice related to materials and tools need in a particular vocation in the world of work.

The continuous assessment introduced with the educational reforms in 1981 marks the next milestone in this regard. It widely expended the scope of traditional written examinations and brought new dimensions such as verbal examinations and practical examinations into its purview. It provided feedback both to the teacher as well as the student about the achievement which facilitated the teacher to adjust his/her teaching methodology fitting the student. It was expected to include the grades scored by the students in continuous assessment and an evaluation in co-curricular activities in addition to the marks scored by the student in the final term test. Selection for tertiary education was thought to be based on the performance shown at the G.C.E. (O/L) examination as well as the skills essential for the tertiary education courses. The final evaluation was thought to be held at three levels, national, district and cluster. However, the excessive paper work placed on the part of the teacher, inadequacy of resources and strong opposition imposed by the students' unions in universities and some sectors of community debarred its implementation.

The need to educate all and the requirement of a minimum learning package by all world citizens were highlighted at the Jomtien Conference held in 1990. Having understood that this requirement was not met by the learning teaching process practical at the time. School Based Assessment (SBA) was introduced into the school system in 1998. The initiative aimed at bringing about a development in the quality of the learning teaching process and was based on the principle that evaluation has to be carried out parallel to learning and teaching.

It helps monitor the progress of the learning teaching process and plan feedback and feed forward accordingly. It was stated that 26 strategies could be used in this regard.

The first circular issued in January 1998 with regard to SBA states that the initiative aims to bring the then existing public examination results to a more satisfactory level, lower the number of repeaters and dropouts and make the school an institute that provides joyful learning experiences. The innovation implemented for grade 6 on a pilot basis in 1998 was extended to higher grades under the directions of the second circular (1998/42) and made provisions to issue a certificate of proficiency at the end of grade 9 and establish organizations for planning, organizing, implementing, supervising and monitoring the SBA.

The next three circulars issued in this regard concern the establishment of monitoring boards and elaborate the requirements for the certificate of proficiency expected to be issued at the end of grade 9. The sixth circular mainly deals with the implementation of SBA for grade 10 and underscores the need of entering SBA marks in the G.C.E.(O/L) certificate.

Subsequent to these several circulars have been issued which are concerned with specimen assessment instruments and issuance of a provincial level certificate (2001/23), inclusion of practical and technical skills in SBA and related activities (2001/32), need for the inclusion of SBA and related activities (2001/32), need for the inclusion of SBA grades in the G.C.E.(O/L) certificate and possibility of covering a credit pass requirements from SBA grades (2002/14), how the certificate issued at the end of grade 9 is completed (2002/23) and the number of times a student has to be assessed and need to organize a systematic procedure at the school level for SBA and raise teachers' awareness about it.

Within the period of 17 years from 1998 to 2015, 12 circulars have been issued regarding the SBA. Since 1931, five major reforms were brought into effect in the field of education with a view to developing its quality. Of them, the reform that spans across the longest period of time is the SBA. Even with stumbling blocks on its way, it has spearheaded change that widens the boundaries of assessment transcending traditional limits.

Rationale for the Research

The undue emphasis laid on the examinations for a long time distanced the school education from the expected aims of education. SBA can be counted as one attempt made to rectify this situation. To make this a reality, the processes and methodologies followed in the school plant has to be continuously updated and geared to synchronise with the innovative practices conceived to promote the quality of education. SBA is one such practice. In order to give guidance for it and make it contextually applicable, there is a need to receive feedback not only through continuous supervision and monitoring but also through research.

Seventeen years have passed since putting the SBA into practice at the school level and little research studies have been undertaken in this area. In the meantime, many changes are being implemented and mooted in the sector of secondary education in the country and hence it is timely that the concept and its practice in the system is investigated from a research perspective.

Literature review

In global context, SBA is being used in various countries as a means of making informed decisions about students. As different sources reveal it is characterised by several features.

- It helps oversee the students' performance over a longer period
- It given an opportunity for the teacher to adjust and modify teaching methods to suit the students
- It can be implemented in the normal classroom atmosphere
- Very often it is carried out by the class teacher
- As it incorporates self, individual and peer assessment, students participate actively
- It enables teacher to give constructive feedback promptly
- It paves way for continuous assessment
- It invites and supports other methods of evaluations such as external examinations

SBA is widely used in countries like Australia, Canada, UK and Finland to provide information on students' achievement. The Government of Hong Kong had used this strategy as a part of their public examinations as far back as in 1978 and currently it has been extended to Diploma Courses. The Government of Malaysia defines SBA as a part of evaluation used by teachers to rank students. They use SBA as performance tests along with the well planned standardized traditional examinations. The national computer-based school in New Zealand is reported to adopt from 2000 an evaluation system based on eight principles namely curriculum alignment, calibration, innovation communication, choice, low consequences, local control, incremental design and development of computer technology.

SBA was introduced to the Sri Lankan education system in 1998. It was conceptualised as a means of taking students to the expected level of proficiency through frequent investigation into the abilities and weaknesses of students by the teacher by moving with them while they are engaged in learning (National Institute of

Education, 1997). The ultimate aim was to produce a fully-fledged person with a balanced personality. The initiative envisaged a shift from a culture of evaluation where the student is judged by a summative test to a culture of assessment where the student's overall development is monitored based on criteria and relative to his/her previous position rather than comparing the student with others. For this, the progress of the student had to be measured continuously by the teacher while he/she is involved in the learning teaching process. The methodologies and instruments for this had to be developed by the teacher and guidance for them was given by the National Institute of Education. These overstepped the traditional and hackneyed evaluation methods and some modalities introduced were as follows.

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Assignments | 14. Open book tests |
| 2. Surveys | 15. Listening tests |
| 3. Observations | 16. Speeches |
| 4. Field trips | 17. Group activities |
| 5. Structured essays | 18. Double entry journal |
| 6. Creative work | 19. Wall papers |
| 7. Practical work | 20. Quizzes |
| 8. Compendium of creations | 21. Question and answer books |
| 9. Concept maps | 22. Debates |
| 10. Projects | 23. Discussion for a |
| 11. Explorations | 24. Seminars |
| 12. Exhibitions/Presentations | 25. Prompt speeches |
| 13. Short written tests | 26. Role plays |

SBA is an integral part of the learning continuum which embodies learning, teaching and evaluation. It upholds enjoyment through education. It can be used at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the learning teaching process and can be exploited by teachers to give both feedback and feed forward to their children.

The National Education Commission identifies SBA as a process that assists students individually to promote and provides feedback to students, teachers and parents.

The dearth of research in this area in Sri Lanka is noticeable. However a study undertaken in Hong Kong in relation to the SBA used for practical work in Biology reveals inadequate orientation of teachers for the innovation. Studies of Dixon and Helan (1999) of New Zealand point out that problem have cropped up when teachers work collaboratively in connection with SBA in schools. The teachers seemed to have reposed their credibility more in summative evaluation in comparison to the formative methods.

A study conducted by the National Institute of Education Research and Evaluation Centre (Year not stated) of Sri Lanka with the major aim of evaluating the degree of effectiveness of the SBA programme in Grade 6-9 classes and identifying means for ensuring effectiveness using a sample of 576 schools covering 8 provinces indicate that a higher proportion of assessment used by the teachers were of the written type and the full range of assessment types were not used. There seemed to be an overwhelming agreement about the credibility of the marks awarded. However the teachers and principals lament that heavy extra work load imposed by the method on the part of teachers had undermined the real object of OBA.

Majority of the teachers agreed that, as regards the students' active participation the SBA has caused an improvement in the teaching learning process. However, challenging this view the researchers through their observations reveal that incidence of active learning was seen only in 29% of the classes. However prevailed in 90% of the classes and the students have preferred the new system to the traditional summative type evaluation. A similar paradoxical situation is seen with regard to the motivation of students. Though about two third the sample of teachers perceived an improvement in meaningful learning, it was at the low ebb in more than 50% of the classes.

A positive trend has been observed in learning through observation and discovery, use of a variety of assessment methods especially in the subjects of Environmental Studies, Science and Technology and social Studies. A large majority of teachers maintained reports and records systematically. An improvement had also been noticed in the form and frequency of providing feedback to parents.

A satisfactory support was given by higher officers with regard to monitoring and supervision and Monitoring Committees had been established in nearly two thirds the schools surveyed.

Inadequacy of training received by teachers, extra workload and time constraints, difficulty in handling large classes and continuous absenteeism of students have been identified as the problems confronted in implementing SBA.

Methodology

Objectives

The main objective of the research study was to investigate into the working condition of the SBA implemented in the school system in Sri Lanka. Its specific objectives were to:

- identify the state of the art of the SBA in the school system;
- inquire into the perceptions of teachers about the current state of SBA; and
- Investigate into the problems that emerge during the implementation of SBA at the school level.

Research Method

Survey method was used for the study,

Population

The student in the Sri Lankan schools in which SBA is implemented was the total population. The target population was the grade 10 and 11 students in 1AB, 1C and type 2 schools in five districts (Colombo, Kandy, NuwaraEliya, Kegalle and Ampara) belonging to four provinces (Western, Central, Eastern and Sabaragamuwa).

The accessible population selected for the study was the grade 10 and 11 students in eight zones in the above five districts.

Sample

Using school as the sampling unit, a sample of 36 schools was selected from eight educational zones in the above four districts using the stratified random sampling method. The sample comprised 12, 1AB schools, 16, 1C schools and 8 type 2 schools.

The core subjects Mathematics, Science, Sinhala/Tamil, History and English were selected for the study. Five teachers teaching these subjects in G.C.E. (O/L)

classes and five students from each school were selected for the sample. So, the sample altogether comprised 180 teachers and 180 students.

In addition, six curriculum designers representing Mathematics, Science, Sinhala, English, Tamil and History were also drawn into the sample.

Data collecting instruments

Three instruments were developed and used to collect data.

- A questionnaire for teachers
- An interview schedule for students
- An interview schedule for curriculum designers

Data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse data. Quantitative data were analysed using percentages (SPSS version 13).

When analysing qualitative data, the data were first coded and in case where they were quantifiable percentages were calculated.

Table and graphs were used to present the analysed data.

Limitations and delimitations

Taking affordable time, financial and human resources, the study was limited to a sample of 36 schools in eight zones representing four districts and five core subjects. The teacher sample was limited to only 180 with five teachers from each school. The student sample comprised only grade 10 and grade 11 students amounting to a total of 180 representing the 36 schools. As one of the curriculum developers of the NIE was not available at the time of data collection her ideas concerned not be incorporated into the corpus.

Findings and Suggestions

The findings of the study are presented below in relation to the responses of the three categories of respondent, the teachers, students and curriculum developers.

Teacher's Responses

The sample of teachers selected for the study comprised 180 teachers of whom 50.0% are graduates or graduates with higher professional qualifications while nearly 47.0% are either trained teachers or NCOE diploma holders. 86.0% of them have teaching experience of 5 years or more and nearly 67.0% are with an experience of above 10 years. They are all teaching the core subjects' mother tongue, English, mathematics, science and history in the school.

About 88.0% of the teachers had participated in training programs conducted on SBA. Only about 4.0% have not had an exposure for any kind of training. The reasons given by them for not having an exposure were not calling for the programs and being new recruits for teaching.

Asked about how the teachers became knowledgeable about the SBA programme, the response of the majority (73.9%) was by in-service training programs. The other methods stated were through the in-service adviser (66.1%), by the teacher colleagues (47.8%), by officers of the zone or province and by teacher training courses (24.4%). Asked whether the knowledge they gained is adequate to implement the SBA program in schools, all the teachers has responded affirmatively.

Implementation of SBA programme in schools

Through the questionnaire and by way of interviews, how the SBA programme is implemented at the school level was investigated. In this regard the strategies used by teachers for SBA, how often they are used in the classroom, recording of assessment results, communication of information gathered and the supervision of assessment process were examined. Several strategies adoptable for SBA have already been introduced by the MoE, NIE and DOE.

Of them the most popular and frequently used strategies were found to be group activities, short written tests, assignments, open book examinations and quizzes. Creative works, question – answer books, presentations, impromptu speeches, role play, field trips and observations seem to be used moderately.

The least frequently used are discussion panels, projects, explorations, exhibitions, debates, concept maps, seminars, double entry journals and surveys. Hence it is seen that the teachers are having a greater inclination for written modes of evaluation even during SBA. This is not surprising because in the context of an examination – centred education, teachers tend to prepare their students to get better results at the national level examinations.

As regards the occasion of carrying out SBA, most of the teachers (77.8%) had conducted the assessments monthly. The second highest frequency was noted for at the end of a unit (60.0%) and this was followed almost equally by at the end of the lesson (38.9%) and during the lesson (38.3%) A few (8.3%) had held assessment before starting the lesson. When the number of instances of SBA held by subject is considered almost a similar frequency has been found in case of science, maths, English and history whereas as a relatively low incidence was reported for Sinhala. In the case of Tamil it was very low.

Problems emerging when implementing SBA

As per the responses of the teachers, the problems confronted when implementing SBA can be categorized under the following sub headings.

Teacher – related problems

The most frequent (20.0%) response of teachers was the difficulty in implementation due to the overcrowded classrooms. This was followed by the difficulty of bringing the backward students to the required level because there is an aptitude range in classrooms with gifted students at one end and the backwards at the other end. Lack of a common standard, lowering teacher to the level of a clerk, teachers’ negative attitudes, lengthy syllabi, lack of credibility of marks due to subjectivity and evaluating without proper awareness have also been announced by a few.

Student – related problems

Absenteeism of students on the relevant data was the issue faced by a majority of teachers (20.5%) students not participating actively for the assessments was also a problem for a substantial number (12.8%). Excessive pressure imposed on students when assessments are done for all subjects, negative attitudes of students about assessments, not completing the assessments within the stipulated period of time were the setbacks noted by 5 – 6% of the respondents. Causing a disadvantage for brighter students when awarding marks again for weaker students, not attending to the assigned assessments and evading assessments by cutting classes were the concerns of very few teachers.

Problems related to the method of assessment

The more prominent drawbacks related to the method of assessment were inability to assess on time (16.1%) and inadequacy of time for teaching because of the assessments (13.9%). 6.1% have stated that much time has to be spent for documentary work. Lack of opportunities for students to become active, difficulty of awarding the due mark for a student because a minimum mark has already been decided, difficulty of giving marks for five criteria, problems related to the time factor in preparing mark sheets and insufficiency of time to write assessment plans are the other concerns presented.

Problems related to time

Difficulty in completing the entire syllabus due to lengthy syllabi and wastage of students' learning time are the problems surfaced with regard to time.

In addition to the above, failure of the authorities to make teachers aware and not making students aware of SBA, interception of assessments by co curricular activities, lack of adequate resources and willingness of parents to see their children involved only in bookish work have been instanced as impediments for SBA.

Suggestions

5.5% of the teacher respondents wanted complete removal of SBA. Others have not turned it down completely but have proposed amendments to the process.

The suggestions made in relation to the assessment process are as follows.

- Changing the assessment process constructively
- Provision of materials essential for the assessment process
- Planning common assessments
- Decreasing the number of assessments
- Reducing the load of documentation work of teachers
- Replacement of SBA by monthly tests
- Removal of written tests
- Inclusion of SBA marks to the G.C.E. (O.L) examination results sheet
- Not including SBA marks to public examination certificates because they are subjective and teacher – dependent.

Raising the awareness of students, teachers and relevant authorities on SBA have been seen by a few teachers as a requirement to make it more effective.

Decreasing the number of students in a class according to a standard and decreasing the number of units in the syllabus were also suggested.

Students' Responses

Asked about the awareness about the SBA programme, 97.8% of the grade 11 students in the sample responded positively indicating that the programme is being implemented in schools and students participate in it. By percentage 94.4% of the students stated that they have participated in SBA in grades below 11. There was no significant difference in percentage by province and by school type.

Regarding the current implementation of the SBA programme in schools, 93.3% responded affirmatively. Almost the same result was seen when district – wise breakdown was taken into consideration. The foregoing figures reveal that SBA has been accepted by the education system as a policy and is being implemented by a majority of schools whatever is its status.

When the students were asked when the SBA is done, majority had stated 'during the lesson' followed by 'at the end of the lesson'. These two altogether constitute 70.0% of the respondents showing that SBA is carried out during classroom teaching 6.7% had said that it is carried out during school hours. Asked whether the teacher discusses the marks scored by the students in SBA, a high percentage (88.3%) answered positively.

Irrespective of the school type a very high proportion of the students (93.3%) had expressed their willingness to have SBA.

93.9% think that SBA is supportive for the progress of the student. Relatively a low percentage (77.8%) had responded affirmatively as regards the awareness raising of parents about the SBA.

Only 28.3% of the students had responded to the question on the inclusion of SBA marks in the G.C.E. (O.L) examination certificate. The reason given by a majority of the respondents (17.8%) to this question was that it helps raise the level of O.L. results. This was followed by the statement good and fair (5.6%) and an encouragement for the students (2.2%). Reducing examinational stress, ability to identify the talents of student's shown in the classroom and increasing the credibility of results are the other reasons giving in favour of this measure. Only a single student had stated the disapproval.

Information provided by the curriculum developers

Four curriculum developers were interviewed especially with a view to collecting information regarding the planning, awareness building, feedback and achievement of aims of SBA. The subjects they were engaged in were Sinhala, Mathematics, Science and History.

The aims of SBA with regard to each subject were stated as follows.

Sinhala – Evaluating the language ability of students especially by assessing their listening and speaking abilities which cannot be measured by written examinations

Science – Improving subject knowledge and practical skills in science

History – Measuring skills which cannot be measured by written tests

Mathematics - Improvement of the learning teaching process by quality and quantity

Hence the major aim of SBA seems to be the improvement of the learning teaching process especially through the measurement of skills which cannot be evaluated by written tests.

Excepting the traditional paper and pencil tests, special assessment methods have been introduced for SBA in some subjects. Creative activities, concept maps, double entry journal, projects and discussion panels have been introduced for mathematics whereas in the case of science, projects and practical activities have been highlighted. Exhibitions, field trips and creative activities had been recommended for

history. However, in the case of Sinhala Language and Literature, no such special methods seemed to have been introduced.

A formal follow-up of SBA is not in place. However, with regard to some subjects information seems to be collected through the ISAs. Informal inquiries are also made when visiting schools for other activities such as collecting data for research and during workshops conducted for the ISAs. Thus the follow up process is neither regular nor consistent.

The curriculum designers hold the opinion that the aims regarding the respective subjects are not realized by the SBA. The major reason for this situation as they perceive is that the school system has not understood the concept of SBA. Their central aim is to award marks by written tests and prepare students for the G.C.E. (O.L) examination.

No new materials have been prepared to give guidance and instructions to implement SBA at the school level. The only material presently in use for most of the subjects is the manual of assessment instrument issued in 2007 for the grade 6 – 9.

Problems related to SBA

The main problem connected with SBA stems from the highly examination – centred education fostered and perpetuated by the school system. As there is no organic linkage between the SBA and the national level exams, the stakeholders at the school level are bent to overlook the significance of SBA and prepare students for the public examinations.

Inattention paid at the zonal and provincial levels for SBA, lack of awareness among the teachers, insufficiency of the method to measure students' abilities are the other drawbacks cited by the respondents.

Suggestions for the improvement of SBA

The following suggestions have been made to prop up the implementation of SBA with its true spirit.

- Conducting a follow up about the working status of the SBA in schools
- Formalising the SBA and ensuring its objectivity
- Reorganising the evaluation process so that the students and teachers are motivated and reinforcing them

- Raising the awareness of the entire system
- Implementing teacher training programmes highlighting the significance of SBA and its implementation
- Establishing an internal monitoring board in the school to monitor the SBA activities and assigning the responsibility of instructing that board to the zonal education office
- Freeing the SBA as much as possible from written tests
- Identifying the subject areas which should be based for SBA and giving a training to teachers about the preparation of instruments that promotes creativity of students
- Designing a method to conduct SBA without causing difficulties to both teachers and students
- Devising a method to incorporate SBA marks to the marks scored at the G.C.E. (O/L) examination and adding at least 5% to it from SBA
- Creating an independent boards for evaluation
- Establishing a method to ensure that the work for awarding marks belongs to the student

Overall suggestion

It is proposed that the SBA be continued at the school level further subject to the following amendments.

- The evaluation methodology should change in such a way that the SBA inclines the backward child successfully to the learning stream through interesting learning experiences while providing feedback to the gifted child to move forward divorcing itself from being examination - centred.
- A systematic modus operandi should be put in place to receive the assistance of ISAs to facilitate the teachers' role minimizing their documentation work.
- The marks awarded by the SBA need to be further continued as a means of qualifying students seeking the admission to G.C.E. (A/L) classes after sitting the G.C.E.(O/L) examination.

- The NIE should summon teachers at regular intervals for the teacher training programmes organised in SBA.
- A suitable programme should be organized to raise the awareness of students and parents about SBA.
- At the point of leaving the school, a document indicating the students' progress on SBA activities should be awarded to him/her along with the school leaving certificate.
- The SBA should be expended to include other assessment methods as well without being restricted to written tests.

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