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Passing the Crossroad: An Overview on Issues and Challenges of the University Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract- In spite of recent developments in the higher education in Sri Lanka, it has undergone a tremendous transition that somehow resulted in a crisis. The review of this issue through a critical narrative analysis shows that some of the issues hidden behind more conspicuous ones like increasing gender-based violence and ragging are more detrimental. The hardening challenge is that many students in public-funded universities have lost enthusiasm to learn, as there is no conducive environment, and further this is crystallized due to lack of quality in pedagogy, narrow and shortsighted perspectives of the contribution of universities to the contemporary world. These issues would challenge the existing higher education process in Sri Lanka, which in turn signals the policymakers including academics to work fast with care and to search for innovative strategies to tackle with them while minimizing the severe impact of existing issues on higher education.

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Abstract- In spite of recent developments in the higher education in Sri Lanka, it has undergone a tremendous transition that somehow resulted in a crisis. The review of this issue through a critical narrative analysis shows that some of the issues hidden behind more conspicuous ones like increasing gender-based violence and ragging are more detrimental. The hardening challenge is that many students in public-funded universities have lost enthusiasm to learn, as there is no conducive environment, and further this is crystallized due to lack of quality in pedagogy, narrow and shortsighted perspectives of the contribution of universities to the contemporary world. These issues would challenge the existing higher education process in Sri Lanka, which in turn signals the policymakers including academics to work fast with care and to search for innovative strategies to tackle with them while minimizing the severe impact of existing issues on higher education.

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I. Introduction

Higher education is one of the pillars in sustainable development, the ultimate goal of modern nation states. It creates new knowledge, challenges existing but non-suitable paradigms, teaches specific skills and promotes core values such as freedom, tolerance, and dignity, which are essential ingredients of a successful and complete life (liep, 2017). Enabling graduates to be competent in regional and global social, economic, research and development has been the expectation of higher education for many decades, though that aim has been challenged recently. The higher education is diverse that of other sectors of the education continuum (Astin, 1999; Sagy, Kali, Tsaushu, & Tal, 2018). In addition to wide-ranging traditional degree and advanced degree programmes, there are some other programmes, which are recently introduced focusing on career, vocational or technical needs. In fact, university education has been challenged because the current needs and societal requirements more often focus on higher education catering for vocational purposes (Hippach-Schneider, Schneider, Ménard, & Tritscher-Archan, 2017).

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Furthermore, as the globalization prevails many dimensions of higher education can change that will result in several challenges (Giddens, 2003). Economic globalization solely can affect higher education, though cultural globalization too affects higher education, particularly in the south Asian region, as we adopt many policies relevant to higher education from developed or western countries.

Globalization has resulted in an increased demand for the internationalization of education (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). In the higher education system, this will encourage internationally recognized universities to establish regional campuses all over the world, though it challenges government funded local universities severely. Moreover, internationalization of higher education affects both structural and process dimension of higher education1, which sometimes may result in unexpected challenges especially in developing countries like Sri Lanka (Seckinger, 1982). On the other hand, developing countries strive to attract international universities to implement regional campuses in their countries. Furthermore, international research collaborations between institutions and scholars, developing curriculum and establishing a memorandum of understanding with universities for different purposes have become top priorities of recent universities, and without having a greater conscious on international collaborations, it has bespoken a stagnant progress of the higher education (Boekholt, Edler, Cunningham, & Flanagan, 2009).

Globalization has brought about a tremendous change in the function of higher education, as universities have asked to equip their graduates not just with subject skills and knowledge, but also with capabilities to function effectively in the modern world facing constant chaos. Therefore, university teachers must prepare for the challenges emanating from changes in the education that will influence the students. To become competitive in this new global context, students are required to graduate with a global mindset that would probably be a result of university education supported by good-quality university teachers (Masser & Moffat, 2006; Veniger, 2016). Furthermore, graduates are expected to work in and communicate across different cultures without constricting to so-called their own culture, and with an all-important plethora of twenty-

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first-century skills (Myles & Cheng, 2003). Universities should readjust their structural and process dimensions in line with ever-changing social needs, and universities are expected to take part as key-institutions in the process toward societal progress as they would contribute more effectively and appropriately, but this is more challenging since existential structure might hinder the novel readjustments within universities. This paper, therefore, strives to delineate as to how appropriately a university teacher/academic can prepare to face the recent challenges of higher education that would benefit themselves and the students.

II. Objective and Methods

The university education in Sri Lanka undergoes a perilous crisis hardening the advancement of higher education in the country, which in turn affect the quality of graduates who completed their degrees, particularly in public-funded universities. Furthermore, the globalization tremendously impacts on every aspect of Sri Lankan society, so that the higher education too began to restructure, this would perhaps result in unexpected catastrophes within higher education. The catastrophic situation of Sri Lankan higher education has undergonea keen investigation by the government and some other responsible authorities, but the strategies they make are unclear and fragile. Moreover, that emanating crisis has many dimensions, and most of them have been identified and understood, though it seems that the comprehension of that crisis by many stakeholders is not clear and precise. This paper, therefore, will strive to outline the nature of the crisis regarding the apparent crisis in the higher education in Sri Lanka. Moreover, different perspectives of this crisis will also be described in detail. Lastly, some of the possible strategies proposed by highly experienced university professors and pedagogists, to deal with the erupted crisis in the higher education will be presented.
The main intention of the article is, therefore, to investigate the prevailing issues conducive to a perilous crisis in the higher education in contemporary Sri Lanka. For that purpose, selected studies are compared and summarized on the basis of author's reflections as a university academic, existing theories and models. The information, thus critically analyzed and reflections were taken to a keen consideration.

III. Analysis

a) Paradigm shift in higher education

The higher education is substantially different from secondary or primary education, though all of them contribute in diverse ways throughout the lifelong learning process (UIL, 2016). Unlike school education or other formal or informal education systems, higher education is systematized and provides considerable value to individuals, the economies where educated individuals work and live, and society in general (Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005). The higher education is now identified as a way toward economic gains, though at early ages the philosophy behind higher education was dissimilar to modern thoughts (White, 1997). Some viewed "Emancipation" as the expected outcome of higher education (Barnett, 1988), that would liberate the individual from narrow intellectual perspectives about the world they suppose to live, and further their ability to think critically. Individuals' emancipation was perceived as a result of proper knowledge gaining, and hence the main focus of higher education was on knowledge, on the other hand, society did not expect universities to produce job experts as needs of society were quite different that of the modern society. Early universities, therefore, focused more on knowledge transfer, so that students can learn and liberate themselves from narrow views of the world, this, in turn, has resulted in knowledge-based stratification in societies, however (Noltemeyer, Mujic, & Mcloughlin, 2012). Through 'emancipation', Barnett (1988) believed that the individual would adapt to the society accordingly, so that the person is not required to have a specific set of skills to go along with contemporary needs of a society, since the person has emancipated, in the sense the individual gained a self-understanding.

Once the neo-liberal policies were adopted and prevailed over many countries including some developing countries (Harvey, 2007), the expectations and the objectives of higher education have changed, as universities then viewed as places where employees produce. Then, the globalization affected many aspects of society including the higher education, which is particularly prominent in developing countries since they adopted the policies made in developed countries in the process of their higher education. Some of the subjects perceived as having more economic value were introduced to university systems and researches have extensively been taken place (Olssen & Peters, 2005), this was mainly supported even by industries, as they need researches to further their industrial capacities. This was where humanities and social sciences left their dominance and prominence in the higher education. Today the market focus that creates students as consumers and employees/potential employers, and specifically faculty as service providers have become a global practice (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

Although the old paradigm on expected qualities of a graduate remains, the market focus on higher education is given prominence since emancipation in no longer valid if it has no ties with the market economy. The industrialized countries have already prepared necessary policies for producing graduates who are capable enough to perform in that market economy, but surprisingly on toward this goal, the older vision on 'emancipation' has not

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compromised, though the case is different in the developing world, particularly in South Asia.

The higher education in South Asia is at a crossroad where the crisis is apparent. This is because of the mismatch between education policies and economic policies of many countries in South Asia (Tilak, 2015). The economic capacity or the gross domestic production of many countries in South Asia cannot allocate sufficient amount of budget for public-funded universities. Moreover, the internal resistance erupt within universities due to multifaceted causes toward innovative rearrangements in the higher education harm the advancement of higher education, which ultimately affect the graduates who complete their degrees in universities with poor academic reputation and qualities (Tilak, 2015). In comparison with other high ranking universities in South Asia, much of the public funded universities in Sri Lanka could preserve their academic qualities, even though some certain calamities are apparent. Since Sri Lanka, a developing nation in South Asia has no choice except adhering to the global economic governance; it strives to go along with international guidance to readjust the university education for coming years of the twentieth century. It, however, faces several different challenges due to changes that take place in the modern day.

b) Higher education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan university education is at a point in time where a perilous crisis has developed during the past few decades. It is more apparent that the higher education in the country has encountered multifaceted crises that hindered its advancement, taken into keen consideration particularly due to tremendous attention toward knowledge economy that can be integrated with the nations' current development agenda. Moreover, challenges emanating from changes of the higher education influenced by globalization is more common, though the impact on developing countries is perilous that of developed countries. The real challenge, however, lies beneath the most apparent problems such as rising of students violence, decreasing quality of curricular and university academics, and the kind. The crisis that the society is more conscious on relies on mostly apparent challenges such as increasing student violence and decreeing quality of education, as that is more visible to the society even though some of the severe crises are not apparent to the society. This paper hence would delineate some severe issues and challenges, which are unknown to the public, but Sri Lankan universities frequently encounter, which influence the quality of graduates expected to produce.

Though the higher education in Sri Lanka has a long history, which is perhaps believed to be started as early as Anuradhapura period[1] (De Silva, 1981), the modern higher education system was introduced by the British administrators (they were pressured to do so by local intellectuals though), and OXBRIDGE[2] model was used as the blueprint for establishing the University of Ceylon, the first government-funded and full-fledged university in Sri Lanka. However, some British-government driven university colleges were there even before 1942 at which the University of Ceylon established. Consequently, the higher education system in Sri Lanka has been developed in accordance with the British Higher Education model, though it has changed later. The 'OXBRIDGE' model had several positive aspects such as ensuring the autonomy of university education, minimum political intervention; however, this has changed since education-policies revised after the monumental constitutional change in 1972.

The University of Ceylon was considered a high ranked university, as the quality of graduates were ensured which supported by the structural arrangements of the university and proper academic functioning, and especially the students who were selected demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm toward learning which brought up worldly renowned academics. Sri Lankan government, later on, understood the high demand for higher education and established some other universities, but the quality of the graduates expected to produce has declined to a certain extent unexpectedly, due to different reasons of which youth uprising ranked the first. Low level of economic development and unemployment of the country did not absorb newly emerged graduates from rural areas and poor or middle-class families that in turn, resulted in youth uprising. At the inception of higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, there was a foreseen philosophy, but the initial error of that was the unconsciousness about the non-parallel position of prevailing higher education and the economic development.

A letter from Prof. Marrs, Head of the University College received by Sir James Peiris, one of the outstanding pioneers of the university project in colonial Sri Lanka, demonstrates the initial enthusiasm to establish a university in Sri Lanka, and it specifies the intention behind founding a university in the country.

"He was far from advocating a University as a political weapon. He knew his Cambridge, and the paradox of the inadvertence of its national importance, too well for that. He desired a University for its intellectual and moral fruits, for the development, of all the latent talent in his people, knowing that the rest of his ambition would follow as an inevitable consequence of their proved capacity" (Cooray, 1990).

As Sir James Peiris wished, the purpose of university education is to provide necessary opportunities to the people so that they can inculcate qualities of a universal person having intellectual ability together with morality, for the purpose of individual and social development, to their fullest potential. The expectation, however, was difficult in the sense giving an

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opportunity to be intellectuals was a success, on the contrary the utilization of knowledge and skills acquired in the real world, at least for economic gains were difficult to be achieved as the country's economic growth fallen behind the gradual development of the higher education system. This imbalance, in turn, fired the young generation as the expectation of them could not be achieved. The Ceylon insurrection of 1971 has supported by the JVP (a leftist party in Sri Lanka: Peoples Liberation Front), severely damaged the higher education system in Sri Lanka, as they got the students of universities involved in the revolt (Kearney & Jiggins, 1975). In April 1971 the insurrection erupted producing a convulsion of political violence on a wide scale previously never encountered by the people. As Jiggins et al. (1975) clearly understood, one of the distinctive features of the revolt was that almost exclusive engagement of young intellectuals of the universities. This has largely changed the landscape of the Sri Lankan higher education system. In addition, the 1989 insurrection further damaged the higher education, not particularly the structure but the philosophy of the higher education too (Venugopal, 2011). Many notable academics flee from the country with fear, as many who reluctant to accept the ideology of that Peoples' Liberation Front were murdered brutally (Kearney & Jiggins, 1975). As a result, universities of the country closed down or they did not function for about a decade. The remnants of the severe consequences of those insurrections still have an impact on the higher education; for example, the prevalence of ragging and student unions that control students and sometimes badly harden the university administration.

In spite of the vice chancellor's authority on the university administration, mislead political leaders got the students involved in the insurrection, this in turn, severely damaged the autonomy of Sri Lankan universities. Ceylon University Ordinance (1942) granted the autonomy to every university specifying that the responsibility of a university is to ensure universal free higher education for all without any discrimination (Ceylon University Ordinance, 1942). This has redefined in 1971, which abolished the autonomy of universities by asserting the government's authority on higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. Consequently, political influence and intervention came into higher education system too. Moreover, due to youth insurrections and political interventions, the autonomy of Sri Lankan universities had gradually decreased; on the contrary, political authorities gained the control over universities as well as students' university life, which largely affected the expected outcomes of higher education and the process within universities, Sri Lanka. For several decades, the higher education system in the country has functioned facing different crises, but most of them were academic related issues. Once two insurrections erupted, the ideology and the perception regarding the university education have completely changed, for the worst, as the changed ideology by no mean supported its advancement. As many argue, academic freedom alongside university autonomy is seen as an essential value in higher education and has become a focus of attention in the twenty-first-century education (Estermann, Nokkala, & Steinel, 2011; Ren & Li, 2013). Students who pursue degrees in universities must have the freedom to learn without fear, as freedom drives them toward appropriate learning. However, the individuals' freedom and university autonomy were seriously damaged and taken control over by completely politicized student unions, that was not taking control over only on university administration, but that by and large hinders those students' right to education by different interventions such as ragging, collecting money unnecessarily, limiting class participation and the kind. Consequently, the public funded universities in Sri Lanka positioned at a place in time where some certain events can be called crises are taking place. Moreover, the after-effects of severe challenges have emerged after two insurrections in Sri Lanka still reverberate, and hence, the outcomes of them are larger than the effects that could have emerged some several decades back.

Even though it is difficult to point at one person, group or an organization in regard to the issues erupted in the modern day higher education, despite being identified those issues which contribute to a crisis in the higher education, the case still thrives uninterrupted. So that victims would be the so-called cream of the cream or highly intellectual students in Sri Lanka, particularly those who come from middle or poor classes, or remote areas of the country that of (urban) high-class students[3]. This is a more perilous issue, as again the students from poor or middle-class families would be troubled in the market economy since there will not be a sufficient number of employment opportunities, in spite of having a degree level qualification (Aggestam & Hallberg, 2004; Singam, 2017).

Furthermore, there are some other multifaceted issues, such as lax recruitment and promotional criterion of academic staff and their lack of commitment to improving quality of university education to meet the demands of the expanding economy (Mendis, 2012). Moreover, orienting university courses to meet the contemporary demands of employers, assessing quality of human resources, focusing on English language and IT competence, changing the philosophy of university education, losing the enthusiasm by students toward education, emerging private education competing with public funded universities are some of the challenges among myriad of other issues which bring about a crisis at state universities in Sri Lanka (Amarasooriya, 2015; Weerasooriya, 2013). However, the real-challenge is hidden, but that severely causes the quality of graduates who complete their degree

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programmes later on. It always seems that issues and emanating challenges of contemporary higher education directed at the structural dimension of education, which particularly focuses on the out layer of the higher education process. This does not guarantee a good-quality higher education nor go along with the recently introduced sustainable development agenda (UN, 2015; UNESCO, 2015).

c) Challenges of the higher education: The hidden side

On the one hand, unlike in developed countries, local realities of the higher education in Sri Lanka like developing countries are shaped by integrated world economy, new information and communication technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of English language, and some of the other forces beyond the control of local academic institutions. On the other hand, some inappropriate practices at the local level too affected the higher education severely. The real-challenge, therefore, does not solely lie on structural issues. The foremost crisis in the university education is that, except for a few cases, many students have lost their enthusiasm and hope for learning. This is particularly seen in the students of social science faculties, in the sense owing to structural and process related issues, the students just strive to graduate but not to acquire an essential set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that devastates the expected quality of graduates. Since there is no or less enthusiasm, a driving force of education, the students will try to graduate somehow, this may even include completing degrees with minimum requirements, but without having important abilities related to emotional intelligence or even without the knowledge on essentials of the subjects they learn. This has been a consequence of hidden problems regarding structural issues such as lack of infrastructural facilities or human resources, and furthermore, the students even do not have any conscious on 'hope for education' so that public-funded universities in Sri Lanka perhaps would undergo an instability in the years to come. This will again hinder the development of the lower layers of the social hierarchy, as people at the top would find alternatives that of public-funded higher education institutions that they are likely to provide low-quality education in the perception of the general-public (this perception may be varied from one discipline to another, however).

The landscape of the higher education has been changing due to mushrooming private educational institutes including branches of foreign universities, one that highly in demand owing to the increasing demand for higher education, especially oriented towards market-oriented subjects that can be marketed in the globalized market economy. On the contrary, this makes a challenge for public-funded universities as they could not orient their education process and structure according to the global needs, quickly due to internal pressure from deep-rooted cultural barriers that include resistance from student unions and even university academics. Privatization or integrating private universities with the public universities has been one of the top priories of recent policymakers, though several times it failed as politicized civil organizations protested against it.

One of the other telling issues is that collapsed interrelationship between the society and the university system. The society more often looks for a contribution by universities, but it seems that the society has lost its hope, as universities in the country are likely to have deviated from the outside society. University academics also stick to teaching and research but the possible contribution to the society is minimal to a greater extent.

d) Emanating challenges of the higher education

Recently a sentiment prevails regarding the university education that it is in a state of constant crisis due to different reasons. Many explanations presented in support of this sentiment, in that, graduates particularly in public universities, are considered unemployable (this is more relevant to humanities and social sciences faculties) and of low quality; universities as center-places for student violence and conflicting political ideologies. Furthermore, there is a strong criticism about the pedagogy as the quality of teaching is deplorable with outdated curricular compared to global trends and private sector innovations within the higher education sector. Even quality of researches and academic innovations, public contribution by universities in the country too have been disparaged, this in turn, resulted in deterioration of academic freedom, university autonomy and especially politicization of university administration.

Challenges emanate from changes in the higher education is multidimensional and wide variant, so that tackling those issues would not be an easy task. The different challenges pertinent to higher education sector can be classified into four categories. All those challenges somehow hinder the proper functioning of the university education in Sri Lanka.

1. Maintaining and improving education quality, even in the face of severing financial constraints. Public funded universities are more often depended upon public funds, though they try to find funds from different sources, and hence this leads to constant political interventions. Increasing and better utilizing the financial resources available to higher education would be another challenge. Globally many developing countries allocate a substantial portion of the Gross Domestic Production to the higher education, as they are in a capable state, though this is quite difficult in developing countries so that available financial resources must be managed with conscious comprehension.

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2. Improving the relevance of curricula and instructions at a time of rapid change in the labor market need can be identified as the main challenge associated with higher education. The need for higher education has been redefined alongside changing contemporary social needs. Although university education is for preparing scholars that they can adjust themselves to the dynamism of society, recently higher education has been expected to contribute tremendously to the market needs, in the sense universities are expected to provide employees, but not just scholars. This ideological change challenges the existing norms of higher education. For profit-oriented higher education institutions, including regional campuses implemented in the peripheral countries by universities in developed countries constantly seek profit increasing, so that traditional ideologies regarding higher education has been neglected. Private institutions offer courses valued at the market and graduates of those universities are more employable than graduates from public universities. On the other hand, quality of pedagogy including teaching and learning are believed to be higher in private universities except for a few cases, so that academics and students of public universities are in a state of crisis, since the transformed ideology of the whole society demean the value of the contribution of public universities despite their contribution might be essential.
3. Changes in pedagogy have engendered some challenges. The ideological transformation of society that evolves constantly adopting new values and norms always affect the higher education system of a country. As global values prevail, innovative and more effective pedagogies are introduced, and universities are asked to adopt them in their teaching and learning environments. In spite of the positive outcomes of pedagogical changes, this is more challenging to implement particularly in developing countries like Sri Lanka, as the existing structure quite often does not support it. The reluctant mindset to change would be another cause which hinders adopting and implementing effective pedagogies, and this would sometimes be intensified due to incompetence communication and collusion among management personnel, academic staff,and students. Both students and academic staff members shall be ready to go along with contemporary pedagogies (this might include new teaching and learning methods, use of IT, new examinations methods and the kind).However, this would be quite challenging as the nature of different disciplines contrasts each other. For example, institutions (or faculties) teaching and researching science-related areas perhaps more forward welcoming novel pedagogies, while institutes who teaches humanities and social sciences or arts-related subjects are less likely to go along with transformed and changed pedagogies due to the specificity of their disciplines. While the traditional face to face mode of delivery and exam based assessments were still dominant, there is now an increasing trend toward distance-learning, and blended programmes can be assessed using innovative methods, though it again a challenge to integrate into the existing system. In addition to those challenges, poor motivation concerning academic curiosity and scholarly achievement can be identified as another perilous challenge academics would encounter.
4. Even though this can be considered under the second category above, reinterpreting the relationship between university teachers and students in market terms would be a hidden but more influential problem that challenges the existing role of both students and university teachers. There are situations where university academics have no control so that they are abided by imposed rules and regulations, and hence interventions in addressing challenges would be quite complicated. Recently several issues regarding students' mindset and learning have been bespoken, though academic staff's intervention to them was not sufficient. Gender-related issues, psychological turbulences due to many different causes must be addressed within the university system since students are residentially engaged in academic activities, and lecturers are expected to attend to those matters, but the challenge is the extent to which those academic staff members shall intervene is not clear and might reinterpret more subjectively. In spite of having a code of conduct, there seemed to have some inappropriate cases between and among students and lectures in regard to balancing their both private and professional life. If this is not taken into keen consideration, the expected outcome of the higher education will be seriously affected. Challenges regarding the subjective life of both academic staff members and students, therefore, shall be scrutinized in the achievement of a better outcome of the university life.

Academics of universities, therefore, meet those challenges, though the preventative mechanisms that they would carry out might be obscure to a greater extent. Moreover, both identification of those challenges and preventative mechanisms have been identified as ideologically neutral options for a long time, though on close examination, it is clearer that the identification of those challenges and how academics would prepare to encounter them emerges from a specific view of society and of education. Overall, the challenges emanating from recent changes in the higher education are often related to the expectation of university education and

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strategies and approaches to dynamics of university education.

e) Approaches and Strategies to face the challenge

A university teacher's role does not constrict into to teaching, but alongside it involves generating knowledge, identifying possibilities of society toward opulence, innovations, and hence it comprises multiple roles; society too expects university teachers to be more dynamic in the sense they are expected to contribute to the greater success of a society. As Sampson (2007) clearly understood "universities are anchor institutions for innovation, economic competitiveness and property of a region". In spite of having emanating challenges every time, even in different faces, universities must be continued to function since the sustainability of society substantially depended upon them as the readiness and the agility of a society make a reality by competent people having an adequate and relevant knowledge and a skill set, probably that has been given by universities. University teachers, therefore, must prepare adequately to face the challenges of changes in the contemporary higher education locally and globally.

The changing educational landscape in the global and local contexts have placed unprecedented attention on teachers' preparedness to education for Twenty-first century global needs. As described earlier, producing a competent and a holistic graduate who can confront global problems in the 21st century has even been widely prospected by higher education institutions, though this would be more challenging, and university teachers are considered to be responsible more on this matter. University teachers' world vision or how they comprehend their disposition in relation to other stakeholders within the higher education process, therefore, shall be changed accordingly. Mindset must be rearranged in line with changing global norms, though it might require a considerable phase of time. The challenges emanating from both structural and process dimensions of higher education can best be confronted if university teachers are ready to comprehend their exact disposition at the academia.

Students are graduating today into a world that is interconnected as never before, and all the global level challenges that somehow impact on local levels, whether in health, environment, poverty, or peace and security require cooperation across different cultures and regions. University teachers are, therefore, required tremendously attend to those needs, this, in turn, might look for competent and timely adjusted mindset of university teachers, and hence they must learn to respect the holistic nature of the world in the sense respect for fellow humans, regardless of different stratification factors like caste, race, gender, religion or even political ideologies. University teachers should be responsible for solving pressing global challenges in whichever they can, as they are believed to be more competent in understanding the dynamics of the modern world that of other professionals. As global forces always influence local realities, academics should conscious of about challenges might cause and shall show the correct path that the society would go on.

Though there are several counter-arguments, globally accepted norms concerning higher education are considered universal, so that those global paradigms might realize in local levels in the achievement of local expectations that might ultimately contribute to the realization of global expectations. Since this is a task that requires a systematic and more conscious intervention, university teachers must take the lead as they have a necessary and relevant knowledge. This makes it clearer that an approach to teaching and learning that provides students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to understand how the world around them works and prepares them to participate in an interconnected society is highly important. Therefore, university teachers may work first on developing and improving their competence concordance with the global expectations. Some of the endeavors toward that end might include,

1. Understanding the direction and where the world drives, and the place of our country in relation to it.
2. Learning about other regions, cultures that can have tremendous impacts on local level initiatives.
3. Reflect own disposition within the wide terrain of global education.
4. Applying learned theories to achieve sustainable development.

As recent researches pointed out, a globally competent teacher should have the following characteristics. Knowledge of the interdependency of world events and issues is one of the major competencies that a university teacher should possess, as several telling issues of the country are someway related to global events, and more often the global forces might reshape the face of local events thereby it would reconfigure the existing expectations of the country. The modern higher education is, moreover, expected to prepare proper and more-timely learning experiences for students that clearly distinguished from the traditional student-centered learning, and this requires competent teachers who would be able to understand the existing situation of the country in relation to what the world is thinking on today. Secondly, in order to transfer the knowledge university teachers are required to have necessary pedagogical skills, this would further help students to analyze their true place in the society and comprehend their contribution to the society. Though different governmental regulations can be implemented, the university teachers in the twenty-first century are believed to be a person having a high morality in the academic field, in the sense they must

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adhere to the good practices in the academia, that would soften the learning and teaching endeavor in higher education institutions. The commitment to assist students would be a result of it.

One of the main problems in the modern higher education process is to prepare students who are more qualified in the job market. Earlier, the philosophy behind the university education was to transfer content knowledge to students, and to debate existing knowledge, in the sense they dealt with epistemology, but did not focus on preparing students to work with the market-oriented society, sometimes it was because of the earlier societal expectations were not oriented toward a capitalist market economy. Quite contrarily, the modern society is directed at a capitalist market economy and that is believed to be a place where people can enjoy their lives ultimately stepping on self-actualization. The higher education has also been gradually changing its structure and process adapting into the modern society, though some certain different arguments too prevailed. However, the modern society expects higher education institutions to contribute to the advancement of society so that university teachers must take the responsibility. This is particularly a challenging task in faculties like humanities and social sciences because there is a vast mystic that the subjects taught are not suitable or relevant to the capitalist economy. On the other hand, though university teachers those who teach in those faculties are conscious of this matter largely, the actions taken have not been quite effective. Therefore, making learning experiences for students, which can be utilized in their upcoming life events, is a greater responsibility of those academic members, and they should strive to find out how to link students with the job world. For example, ethics and philosophy, a core philosophic humanity can best be taught to students, if the principles and learned experiences of that course can link with analyzing the contemporary social situations.

An impressive and most relevant strategy in order to prepare for the global and local level challenges would be identifying different aspects of knowledge and acquiring it. As pedagogic experts suggest, there are five domains of knowledge one must acquire (Goodwin, 2010).

1. Personal knowledge
2. Contextual knowledge
3. Pedagogical knowledge
4. Sociological knowledge
5. Social knowledge

This is an important capture since it shed light on different dimensions of knowledge, and which signifies to lecturers that sole acquisition of content knowledge does not suffice unless other domains of knowledge are integrated into.

The personal knowledge is the knowledge of the teacher him/herself, which is related to the philosophy of teaching, the way in which conceptualize teacher's active engagement in the learning process. The university teacher should have a well planned and proper provident philosophy, is the one that guides the person to what direction s/he must go on, otherwise, s/he cannot face the emanating challenges in higher education institutions as there is no proper vision and proper path. The contextual knowledge is, on the contrary, explains the ability to understand the place or the context where teaching and learning take place. Understanding different types of learners is one of the main features here. The pedagogical knowledge includes content knowledge, methods of teaching, which is by no means can be compromised. The sociological knowledge is the other domain that is also essential as it includes knowledge of living cultures, how learners and other stakeholders work in a society and the kind. This is more important, as without having a proper understanding of the society, university academics cannot make effective decisions and proper learning experiences for students. The last, social knowledge implies the emotional intelligence that an academic must acquire, which is inviolable as that is a governing aspect of learning and teaching process within higher education institutions. The public-funded higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, most of the time fail due to lack of human resources with emotional intelligence that is the one, which facilitates every aspect of knowledge to fit better in the society with many different people.

Go along with recent trends while preserving effective local realities has been one of the challenges academics face, this signals that effective measures are indeed required. The world runs very fast with the contribution of modern science, and even social scientists too contributed it tremendously (Cernea, 1994). The world, therefore, multidisciplinary nature has been always appreciated, as the expected results would be more sustainable. Trends in the higher education are multidimensional, in the sense, there are areas where university lecturers can intervene, while some of them cannot be addressed as they are out of their gaze. Students are, now more likely to shift for job oriented subjects, if they have the choice to do so, while some of the students were forced to do non-job oriented subjects, is one of the trends. Therefore, some of the trivial problems have been emerged due to mal-adjustment of the structure in higher education, particularly in developing countries. University lecturers, therefore, should prepare themselves more to deal with the agile nature of this society, and this could be furthered if their researches are more focused on the society they work. Especially, they should more aware of the local realities like how students behave within

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universities and adopt globally developed strategies to deal with students at the local level very carefully.

The biggest challenge in the past recent decades of university education in Sri Lanka that universities were taken as hosts for political endeavors. Students though engaged in student-politics, ultimately they are related to party politics, which is most of the time hardening the internal learning and teaching process, as student-community organizing do not quite supportive for formal education system, and might collide with the administration, so that ultimately the education of the majority of students will be disturbed, for the sake of tiny but severe issues that they make. Student counselors, which is a major role of every academic member, therefore, sometimes might face difficult problems in dealing with students. Dealing with students in the modern day must be more humane and strategic.

Issues regarding the relationship between students and lecturers must be carefully attended, in front of the face of globalization (Altbach, 2011). Students are no longer considered to be listeners or passive learners but are considered more active and having different capabilities, so that university teachers should first understand different abilities of them and should prepare lecture series and other pedagogies which are more suitable to those students, that then everyone can go on with their own phase toward their expected goals (Felder & Brent, 2005).

IV. Notes Referred in the Text

1. The era from 377 BC to 1017 AD of Sri Lanka is known as Anuradhapura period, as the capital of the country located in Anuradhapura. Several Buddhist monasteries administered higher education institutions, and they conducted internationally accepted curricular to those who registered in their institutions (De Silva, 1981). Historical evidence proves that some international scholars too came here to master several subject areas as many subjects expire were there at that time. “Mahavihara”, “Abhayagiriya”, “Jethwanaya” were three main higher education institutions, were more famous internationally for comparative Buddhist studies and Theravada Buddhist studies.
2. OXBRIDGE Model: This is a way of constructing universities, which comprises methods Oxford and Cambridge universities used (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2002). Policies, regulations, management regarding university system in Ceylon were based on the procedures similar to Oxford and Cambridge. This particularly because of, pioneers including Sir Ivor Jennings were remarkably influenced by the British higher education, and they were strived to adopt those models to establish a university in Sri Lanka.

Higher education and class status are closely related in Sri Lanka, as many students got a secondary level education through government-funded schools, they would largely be able to get the entrants to universities. On the other hand, due to the quota system, that restricts the university entrants by the dedicated number of students per district will encourage more students from rural areas to get the placement in a particular university. There is a limited number of seats in the government-funded universities in the country so that those who ranked at the top would secure the placement. This further classified by the district levels. Consequently, many students from rural areas would enter universities.

V. Conclusion

Higher education is one of the essential ways toward sustainable development, as it makes the knowledge economy a reality. However, recently there seems to have emerged several issues within the higher education sector in terms of process dimension and structural dimension, both of them hinder the advancement of the higher education. Particularly, Sri Lanka like developing countries face severe problems regarding the development of higher education, or to be more precise, to go along with contemporary world needs would be more challenging. The paper has discussed some of the issues prevailed in the higher education sector while giving some of the possible strategies to deal with them. University academic members as the driving force of higher education in the country should prepare to face those challenges ahead.

The higher education in Sri Lanka has undergone a considerable transition during the past few decades, particularly in its philosophy in which ways and expected results were included. The higher education, hence no longer considered to be a process of liberating people which ensures that the people are set aside from narrow views of the world, though the quality of expected graduates in the modern day is still depended upon the ‘emancipation perspective’ to a greater extent. However, a graduate with qualities useful in the market economy is more appreciated, today. With this transition, as the traditional view of universities changes, some unexpected challenges might emerge, and the existing crises are likely to increase in the years to come.

Some of the structural and process-related issues in the higher education in Sri Lanka have been critically reviewed, in that decreasing students’ enthusiasm to learn would be a serious issue that gives rise to several other challenges. In addition, increasing harmful student politics, ragging, and gender-based violence, decreasing the quality of education are some certain issues that conducive to a fragile environment within public-funded higher education institutions in Sri

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Lanka. Moreover, a telling challenge of contemporary higher education is to strengthen the relationship between universities and the public, private and civil sectors of the society. Though it was identified as a potential toward a better higher education, searching for appropriate strategies is challenging, as many times universities of the country are reluctant to or have no conscious on strengthening the bond among themselves and with the society. All those problems would challenge the existing higher education process in Sri Lanka that in turn, signals the policymakers including academics to work more quickly and to search for innovative strategies to tackle with while minimizing the severe impact of the existing issues on higher education. The ripple effects of that impact would otherwise remain for several years to come.

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