

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF GCE O/L AND A/L EDUCATION ON SELECTED LEARNING SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA

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This study investigates the impact of GCE Ordinary Level and GCE Advanced Level education on specific learning skills, as perceived by university students in Sri Lanka. The learning skills under examination include critical thinking, reflective judgment, higher-order thinking, and self-directed learning. The research aims to understand how Sri Lankan university students reflect on their experiences at the GCE Ordinary Level and GCE Advanced Level and how these formative educational stages shape the learning skills required for success in higher education at the university. A sample of twenty-eight final-year university students was selected. Data were gathered through structured interviews conducted in both English and Sinhalese and were recorded for accuracy. Subsequently, the recorded interviews were translated, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the constant comparative method to draw meaningful insights. The literature review traced the historical development of Sri Lanka's education system, highlighting the influences of Buddhism and Christianity. It examined the initial challenges faced by higher education in Sri Lanka and the ongoing discourse among educators regarding the necessity for systemic reform. The review underscored the need for an educational approach that fosters essential learning skills and competencies. Additionally, it was noted that international educators also emphasize the importance of these skills for effective learning. The study's findings reveal that university students often struggle to distinguish between learning activities and skills. A noticeable gap exists between students' theoretical understanding of learning and their practical experiences. Furthermore, differences were observed in how learning skills are perceived by students from government versus private institutions. Another key finding was the disparity between the language of instruction at the GCE Advanced Level, Sinhala, and the use of English in Sri Lankan universities. As stated in this paper's literature review, the reforms educators proposed over the years to enhance students' learning skills appear to have had limited success. The study concludes with a call for further research to address factors hindering the implementation of educational reforms, to explore the relationship between the education system and national development, to assess the impact of religion and culture on education, and to investigate the pedagogical curricula needed to support a developing nation.

Keywords: Critical thinking, reflective judgment, higher-order thinking, self-directed learning