

**FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF
GCE ADVANCED LEVEL SCIENCE SUBJECTS:
A CASE STUDY OF SINHALA MEDIUM STUDENTS IN
NUWARA-ELIYA EDUCATION ZONE**

P. E. Illukkumbura

Postgraduate Institute of Science, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

The current Sri Lankan education system forces students to choose a subject stream for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A/L), which in many ways dictates their future opportunities. However, there is little research done exploring on factors which influence students' decision of choosing a subject stream. The purpose of this research was to study such factors affecting students in the Nuwara-Eliya educational zone. Here, the influence of explicit factors such as the perceptions of students as well as implicit factors such as gender and socio-economic factors were studied. A mixed method was utilized, using both a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews for the collection of data. The sample consisted of 185 (grade 12) students from seven schools in the Nuwara-Eliya district. In this sample 115 students were from the A/L arts or commerce subject streams and 70 from A/L science or mathematics streams. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire were provided to 55 teachers. Basic statistical procedures and qualitative techniques were used in data analysis. Results indicate that a large majority (80%) of students choose their study stream according to their own preference. A very minor portion of students identify that their parent's (4%), or their friends (2%) as the major influence in choosing a subject stream. Responses in semi-structured interviews indicate that in some cases students avoid the science stream due to misguidance a perceived lack of future opportunities, both in higher studies and employment. Further research needs to be conducted to probe the unperceived social influences which affect students in their dislikeness in science subject. Quantitative data showed that there is a correlation between the monthly domestic income and the likelihood of a student choosing science; students were more likely to choose science when their family's income was relatively high. Furthermore, in the sampled student population, female students were more inclined to choose science or arts streams, while the male students were more inclined to choose commerce or technology streams. To increase the number of productive citizens trained in science and technology, it is essential to increase the number of students entering into higher studies in science. As a first step the root causes dissuading students should be found, especially in educational regions which have historically shown poor academic performance of students.

Key Words: Competitive examinations, Secondary science education, Socio-economic basis, Student perceptions, Student-teacher relationship