

The Prolonged Duration of Education and Youth Dependency in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan education system, while providing high literacy rates and free access to state-funded learning, faces significant challenges regarding the efficiency of its timeline. Unlike many global systems where students enter the workforce by age 21 or 22, Sri Lankan students often find themselves within the academic cycle well into their late twenties.

Structural Barriers and Exam-Centric Culture

The education journey in Sri Lanka is defined by high-stakes competitive examinations.

- **The “Repeat Attempt” Culture:** Due to the limited intake of state universities, thousands of students sit for the G.C.E. Advanced Level(A/L) exam two or three times. This process alone can keep a student in secondary education until the age of 21 or 22.
- **Academic Pressure:** From the Grade 5 Scholarship onwards, the focus is on rote learning for exams rather than skill acquisition.

Administrative Inefficiencies and Systemic Delays

A primary driver for the late graduation age is the “waiting period” inherent in the state system.

- **Result Deadlines:** There is often a significant gap between the conclusion of national exams and the release of results.
- **Internal Disruptions:** Administrative delays, strikes and infrastructure issues within state universities often extend a standard 3-year or 4-year degree into a 5-year or 6-year period.

The Impact on Career Entry (Age 28-30)

As a cumulative result of the factors, the age at which a Sri Lankan graduate becomes financially stable is significantly higher than the global average. By the time a student completes their degree, often followed by a mandatory internship or postgraduate qualification to remain competitive, they are typically 28 to 30 years old.

Socio-Cultural Factors and Parental Dependency

Sri Lanka has a unique culture of prolonged parental dependency which differs sharply from the western model of independence at age 18.

- **Lack of part-Time Infrastructure:** The Sri Lankan economy does not have a robust student-job culture. Flexible shifts in retail or service sectors are rare and often carry a social stigma.

- Cultural Expectations: Sri Lankan parents generally view it as a moral obligation to support their children until they are settled in a career or married.