

# Changing Academic Profession: Perceptions of a Sample of Sri Lankan University Academics

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The environment in which higher education operates is experiencing rapid change. The emergence of a knowledge-economy, skills demand, market forces, globalization, and technology are potent forces leading to change. The contribution that universities can make for socio-economic development of a country is therefore immense. The study investigated perceptions of a sample of Sri Lankan academics on their own career roles, governance and management of the institutions in which they work and the infrastructure support for their academic work. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Academics from eight state universities responded to the survey.

The majority of respondents were lecturers and probationary lecturers. Their highest degrees were from nine broad academic disciplines with the majority being from Humanities, Arts, Education and Law. The percentage of females with doctoral degrees was smaller.

The highest percentage of academics expressed a leaning towards research with an interest in both teaching and research. Around 30 % had responded as satisfied regarding library, classroom, and computer facilities and office space. A high majority responded that they consider their affiliation to academic discipline and the Department as important but to the institution as lower. Negative statements regarding their university career were totally rejected by the academics.

Research collaboration of academics with local and international colleagues was low. The contribution for scholarly books, research reports/monographs was extremely low. Academics felt that in key areas of selecting key administrators, making faculty promotions, determining budget priorities, and establishing international linkages, institutional managers played the primary role. Individual faculty was important in evaluating teaching and setting internal research priorities. Students were not considered as important in any of the above areas. The study indicates the low contribution of university academics to activities other than teaching. Inadequacy of facilities such as laboratories, research equipment, library facilities, telecommunications (Internet, networks, and telephones), teaching and research support staff and research funding existed in all universities. The study indicated the importance of developing a sense of belongingness to the institution in all staff and students. It is imperative for university academics to contribute to the activities on which universities are ranked (Citation, Industry income, Innovation and International outlook) if their institutions are to become world class universities to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.

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