TRANSFORM project

English language assessment in Sri Lanka

OUTPUT 2: Research paper on

Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka

and

Comparison with the larger region

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1 Introduction

This research paper constitutes Output 2 of a research project on English language assessment in Sri Lanka, funded by the *TRANSFORM* programme of the British Council and Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka. With this paper, we aim to provide insights into the **current status of English language assessment at the national level in Sri Lanka**. The main focus is on the secondary school level in General Education. Therefore, we conducted a review of existing documentation relevant to English language assessment in General Education in Sri Lanka, as well as of other countries in the region. In addition, we carried out an empirical study in which we interviewed a range of key stakeholders in Sri Lanka.

We begin this paper with the findings of our document analysis on the current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka (Section 2). To gain a clear view on the position of English language assessment (2.1), we first provide an overview of the Sri Lanka education system in which we describe the educational levels, administrative structure, curriculum, assessment, and structural challenges in General Education in Sri Lanka (2.1.1). Furthermore, we describe the role of English in General Education (2.1.2). Next, we focus on the English language curriculum and on the English textbooks used in General Education in Sri Lanka (2.2), and then we zoom in on the national English language examinations at GCE O-Level and A-Level (2.3).

In Section 3, we report on our empirical study on English language assessment in Sri Lanka, for which we interviewed people whose professional role bears relevance to language assessment. We describe how we conducted this study (3.1), provide a profile of our participants (3.2), and report their views on the current English language curriculum and assessment, and on language assessment literacy in Sri Lanka (3.3).

In Section 4, we take a look at the wider South Asian region, and consider how our findings on English language assessment in Sri Lanka compare to other countries in the area. We end our paper with a set of recommendations for English language assessment in Sri Lanka, based on our document review and empirical findings (Section 5).

2 Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka: Document analysis

We start by summarising key information gained from our review of existing documentation and publications, in order to contextualise the current national provision of English language assessment in Sri Lanka.

2.1 Position of English language assessment within the Sri Lankan education system

2.1.1 Overview of the Sri Lankan education system

Educational levels

Schooling in Sri Lanka is compulsory from the age of 5 until the age of 16, with a number of general and tertiary education options also available beyond this age. The General Education system comprises different levels of education. Namely, *elementary education* ranges from Grades 1 to 5, and entrance is largely based on children's place of residence. Schooling at this level follows the national curriculum which covers six subject areas: first national language, second national language, English, mathematics, religion, and environment (social/biological/physical sciences). At the end of primary education, there is an optional scholarship examination to compete for entry into a prestigious national secondary school.

Next, children move on to *junior secondary* school, which spans Grades 6 to 9. At this level, students take subjects in first national language, second national language, English, mathematics, religion, history, science and technology, health and physical education, practical and technical skills, social studies, life competencies, and aesthetic studies. Entry into a particular school is typically based on place of residence, apart from those who have been awarded scholarships or who opt for private schools. Progression to the next Grade is determined by performance on subject assessments.

Junior secondary school is then followed by Grades 10 and 11, which are part of *senior secondary* school. At this level, students have to take six so-called core subjects - first language, second language, math, science, history, and religion – and select 3-4 optional ones from subjects such as art, entrepreneurship, agriculture, etc. Entry into particular senior secondary schools is more competitive. Grade 11 is rounded off by the **General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level (GCE O-Level)**, which is awarded on the basis of performance in the national GCE O-Level exams. Students who achieve a higher level in five subjects (including first national language and mathematics) can proceed to the final stage of senior secondary school, named the **General Certificate of Education, Advanced level (GCE A-Level)**. According to a 2013 report by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, approximately half-a-million students take the GCE O-level exams, and of these, approximately 60% qualify for GCE A-level entry based on their O-Level results (Ministry of Education, 2013: 26). Those who do not, enter vocational education after GCE O-Level, or leave education, usually with the intention of entering the labour market.

The GCE A-level, which is sometimes also referred to as *college-level* (Liyanage, 2014; D'Souza & Moore, 2017), consists of Grades 12 and 13. Successful completion of this level is a requirement for tertiary education. The GCE A-Level examination, which marks the end of Grade 13, comprises exam papers in on subjects from the streams students opted to study at this level (science, commerce, arts, or technology) as well as a paper in English language ('General English').

Due to the high-stakes nature of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) exams, senior secondary school-level has been characterised as exam-oriented, with many students paying for private tuition outside of the school system, to help them prepare for the exams. Based on the 2013 Ministry report (p.26), and also reported on by Linayage (2014), only 15% of students are eventually offered a university place, despite the fact that 60% of students (out of approximately 200,000) successfully complete the GCE A-Level. Those who do not secure a university place are eligible for other tertiary-level educational programmes (e.g., business studies, teaching, nursing, etc.). At the same time, the low university acceptance numbers carry a high risk of a large outflow of academically capable young people from the educational system who are at the same time not sufficiently skilled or attractive enough to secure jobs/positions in the labour market.

A visual summary of the key stages of the Sri Lankan educational system is provided in Figure 1. As commented by D'Souza and Moore (2017), overall, the General Education system and its "school examinations and curricular content remain modelled on the British examinations".

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Note: Not all awards or study patterns are included

Source: NOOSR

wenr.wes.org
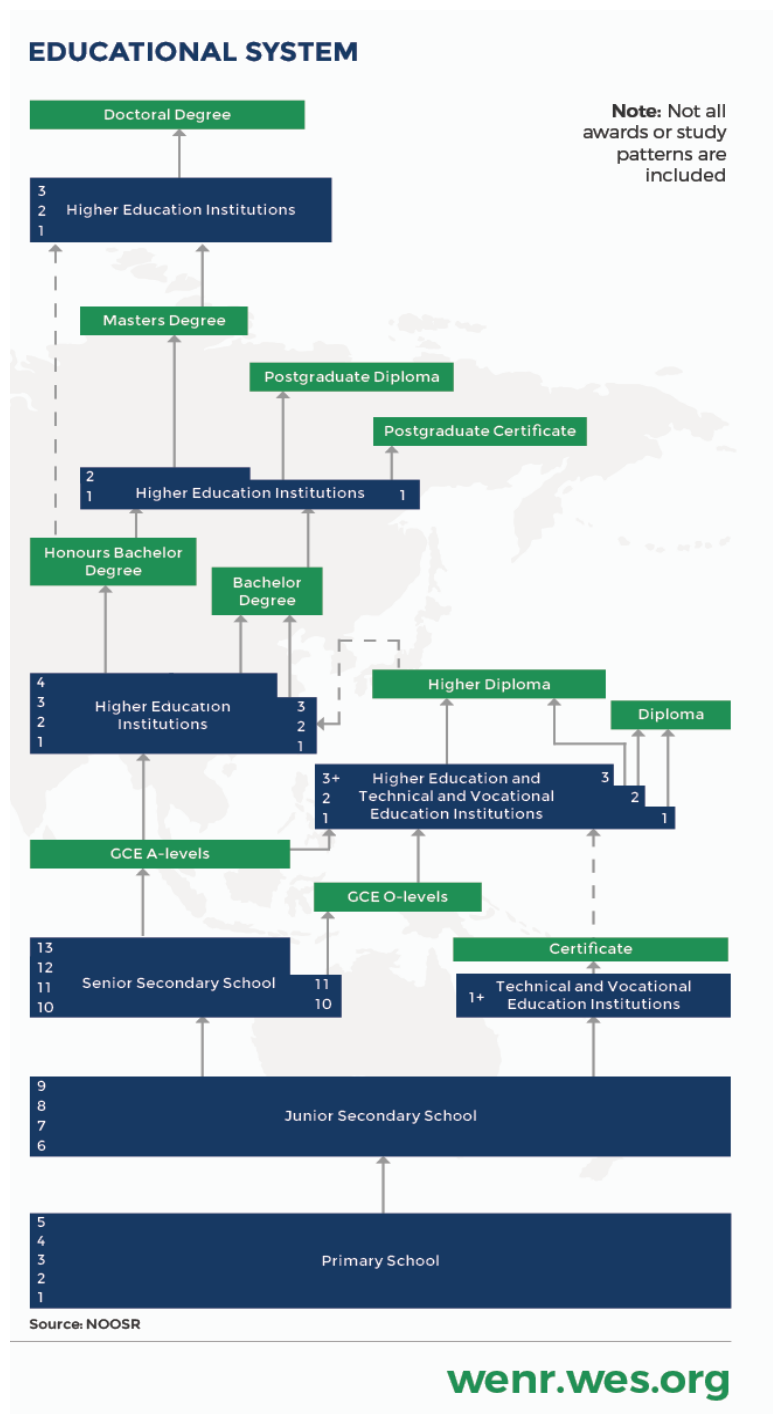
Education administrative structure

As reported in the Ministry of Education's 2017 School Census report, there are just over 10,000 schools in Sri Lanka which offer General Education (Ministry of Education, 2018). As further explained in a 2016 National Education Commission publication, approximately 90% of these are government schools; the remainder are private, international or pirivena schools (Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena & Chandratilleke, 2016). The government schools, together with the pirivena schools, all follow the national curriculum and the national examinations cycle. The schools are free of charge, and students are provided with textbooks up to GCE O-Level (at GCE A-Level

textbooks are not provided, but teachers are provided with Manuals and guidelines). The textbooks are produced by the Government.

The government schools fall under the **national administrative and management structure for education in Sri Lanka**, which comprises **various layers of responsibility at divisional, zonal, provincial and national level**, with ultimate accountability to the Ministry of Education and HE the president of Sri Lanka. A distinct feature at national level is that the **responsibilities with respect to the curriculum, assessment, and textbooks are spread out across three different bodies**. Namely, the National Institute of Education (NIE) is responsible for matters related to the curriculum (including curriculum development), the Department of Examinations (DoE) for matters related to the public examinations (Grade 5 scholarship, GCE O- and A-Level), and the Educational Publications Department (EDP) for the writing, publication and distribution of textbooks (Ministry of Education, 2013).

At the provincial level, the ministries and departments of education focus on "policy formulation, planning of programmes, provision of resources, staffing and monitoring and evaluation" for the relevant province (National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009: 28). At the local level, schools are bundled into groups of 100-150 per educational zone, and within this there are groups of 30-40 schools per division. The National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education (2009) commented, however, that a lack of specification of duties at the zonal and division levels has in practice resulted in overlap between levels. Finally, at ground level, each school has its own organisational structure.

A visual summary of the administrative and management structure for education is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Administrative and management structure of education in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Education, 2013: 44)
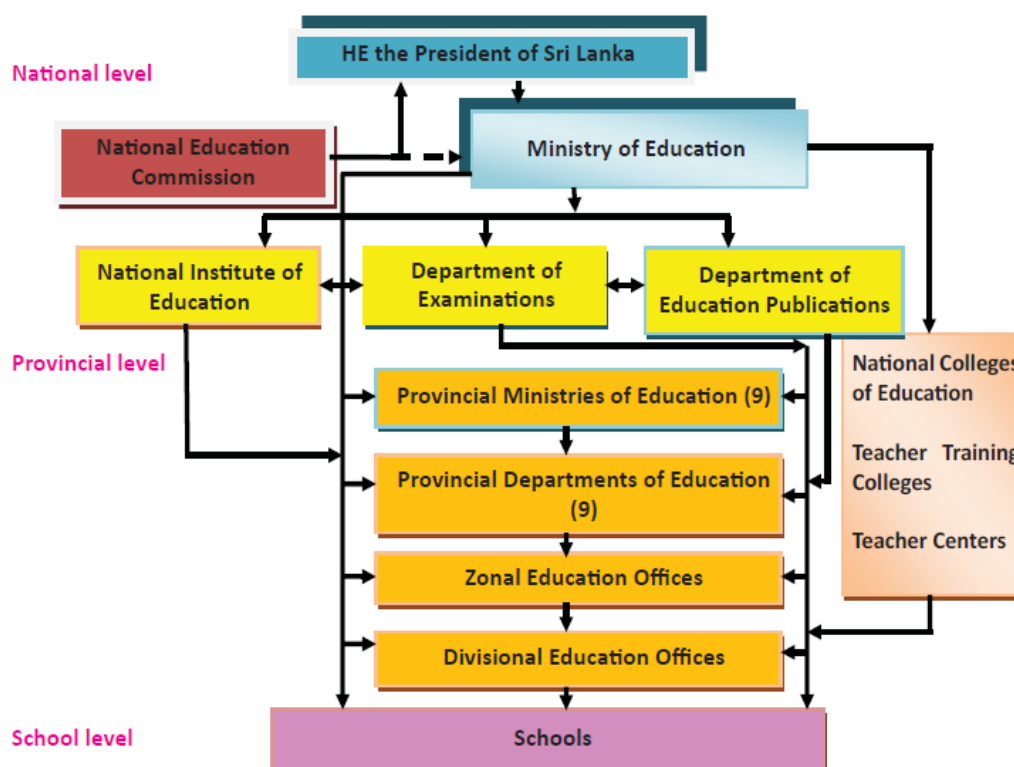
Curriculum

Over the past few decades, General Education in Sri Lanka has undergone a number of reforms. A particularly far-reaching **education reform** was the one in 1997, which saw the development of a set of national goals and competencies needed to reach those goals, and thus a shift to more **competency-based curricula**. This was followed by a further reform in 2003 which constituted only limited adaptations of the 1997 one. Examples of General Educational competencies that seem particularly relevant to English language learning include: competencies in communication, competencies relating to personality development, competencies relating to preparation for world of work, and competencies relating to 'learning to learn' (Ministry of Education, 2013; Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena & Chandratilleke, 2016).

The national curriculum policy specifies a pattern of an eight-year cycle, with the possibility of making amendments at the end of each cycle (Ministry of Education, 2013). As stipulated above, the **NIE is the unit responsible for developing, revising and implementing the curriculum**, including the dissemination of amendments to teachers.

For most subjects, a curriculum grid has been designed which defines the competency targets across grades. Implementation of the curriculum is supported by the provision of Teacher Instructional Manuals which specify the target competencies, levels, and learning outcomes. Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena and Chandratilleke (2016: 9) state that all subjects are modelled on a pattern of "Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration and Evaluation". Additionally, textbooks developed by the EDP (up to Grade 11) are intended to enable the implementation of the curriculum.

A 2010 study by the Sri Lanka Institute for the Advancement of Education on the effectiveness of the secondary school curriculum (Grade 6-11), however, concluded that many subjects' curricula did not accurately reflect the national goals and competencies and thus did not enhance the achievement of these. In addition, the study found that **teachers did not have a good understanding of the concept of the competence-based approach**, and struggled with the lengthy Teacher Instructional Manuals. Furthermore, the study highlighted **discrepancies between the curriculum** and the Teacher Instructional Manuals on the one hand – which are produced by the NIE – **and the textbooks** on the other hand – which are produced by the EDP. On the positive side, it was found that both the syllabi and textbooks were age- and grade-appropriate, including those for English (Sri Lanka Institute for the Advancement of Education, 2010).

Similar observations were made in curriculum development studies by the NIE (National Education Commission, 2008/09). In addition, these studies also concluded that **formative assessment had not yet been implemented everywhere**, and that **curriculum developers' expectations did not align with the public examinations**.

The General Education curriculum has also been problematized in a broader sense, in particular as being **disconnected from the world of work**. Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena and Chandratilleke (2016: 12), for example, report that industry leaders are concerned about the extent to which the education system equips them with the "hard and soft skills" needed to enter employment. Even the introduction of technical- and business-oriented course options in the curriculum, does not seem to have much uptake as evidenced by low student enrolment on these, unfortunately. Similarly, Linayage (2014) reports that the National Human Resource

Development Project has labelled the curriculum as 'too academic', and Tharmaseelan (2007) discussed this as directing graduates more narrowly to public sector service jobs, rather than the wide spectrum of jobs in business and industry.

Assessment

As mentioned earlier, assessment in General Education is characterised by three high-stakes **public examinations**: an optional exam at the end of primary level, and the GCE Ordinary Level (O-Level) and GCE Advanced Level (A-Level) exams in senior secondary school. These exams are the responsibility of the **Department of Examinations** (DoE) of the Ministry of Education, which ensures the development, organization, and administration of the public examinations, and issue certificates. The DoE is headed by the Commissioner General of Examinations. The provincial education authorities are responsible for conducting exams as a local level.

In addition to the public examinations, the concept of **school-based assessment** (SBA) was trialled on a small-scale in 1994 at lower-secondary school, and subsequently rolled out nationally as part of the assessment policy in Grades 6-9 in 1999 and in Grades 10-13 in 2002 (National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009). SBA aims to bring assessment to the heart of the teaching and learning process, by giving the teacher full responsibility over assessments and involving more regular, formative evaluations to inform learners' progress as well as teaching directions.

However, several studies published in the last decade (e.g., Linayage, 2014; National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009; Sedere, Karunaratne, Karunanithy, Jayasinghe-Mudalige, 2016) have all raised similar issues concerning assessment in General Education in Sri Lanka. The first of these is the **exam-dominated** nature of educational practice, with excessive time being spent on exam preparation and teaching to the test. As formulated by the National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education (2009: 88): "Our schools today have become large-scale factories that encourage children to consider the examination as an end in itself". A second issue raised is the **narrow construct** being tested in the public examinations, which has been described as *knowledge-based* and therefore leading to *predictable exams* which stimulate memorisation, reproduction, and cramming-oriented teaching and learning, as well as "a generation that is deficient in thinking skills, social skills and personal skills" (National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009: 74). Similarly, in a report by the Northern Province Ministry of Education (2014), the nature of the GCE O-Level and A-Level examinations was described as promoting the development of memorisation and recall strategies, but not skills that are vital for professional and academic purposes, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. This presents a lack of connection with the competence-based curriculum aims which intend to encourage more higher-order skills development, and therefore more authentic and criterion-referenced testing. Thirdly, while **school-based assessment** has great potential for widening the construct and the DoE drew up a set of 23 modalities for SBA, it has **remained a policy rather than a (successful) assessment practice** in many cases (see e.g., Karunaratne, 2012). Bandary (2014), for example, found in an empirical study on classroom assessment in Sri Lanka that the majority of formats used were traditional pen-and-paper, knowledge-oriented tests. Reasons mentioned for the lack of implementation of SBA include: teachers' limited understanding of SBA, "increase in the work load of teachers and students, limited use of assessment tools and methods, unwieldy number of traits to be assessed, lack of confidence

and negligence of some of the students" (National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009: 94), as well as limited assessment literacy of teachers (Sedere, Karunaratne, Karunanithy, Jayasinghe-Mudalige, 2016). Finally, and as a consequence of the issues mentioned above, the **educational potential of assessment is vastly underused**. Too little of the assessment carried out is positively exploited for providing regular feedback, feeding forward, and designing remedial interventions. Assessment is not well-integrated in the learning-teaching process, but seen as an isolated event.

Structural challenges

While on the one hand Sri Lanka has a high level of literacy (i.e., 98.86% of youth between 15-24 years' old in 2017; see https://data.worldbank.org/), a number of structural issues have been raised with respect to the education system.

For example, an education system review published in 2014 by the Sri Lankan Northern Province Ministry of Education found that there is a **disjoint in timelines between the teaching and examination calendars** at crucial transition points in learners' education. More precisely, due to lack of alignment in calendars, young people spend several months waiting after receiving their GCE O- or A-level results to enter the next level of education. Similar timeline issues for resits in the case of fail grades mean that an important proportion of youngster opt out of the educational route and enter the employment market as unskilled labourers. Therefore, both **valuable potential professional and educational development opportunities are missed due to a systemic factor**.

Although the 2014 review focused on the education system as a whole, this also comprises the subject of English. Therefore, the systemic factors pointed out above equally hold true for the teaching, learning, and assessment of English language, i.e. missed English language and skills development opportunities for professional and educational purposes due to a disconnect in timelines between teaching and examinations within and across education levels.

An additional systemic factor described in the 2014 report concerns the **'Tutories' system**, which is effectively an exam preparation business that consists in parallel with the school system. In practice, as pointed out by Linayage (2014) these fee-paying tuition centres have in many places overtaken regular schooling, since school teachers teach at them and learners attend the private classes instead of their regular school. As a number of sources have argued (e.g., National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009; Sedere, Karunaratne, Karunanithy, Jayasinghe-Mudalige, 2016), this practice is encouraged by the heavily exam-oriented education system, as well as by the predictability of exam content.

The tutories system also exists for English, and, as evidenced in the British Council's English Impact study, is a wide-scale arrangement. Namely, in a robustly-sampled survey of 1,437 Grade 11 learners in Sri Lanka, 75% reported to also study English outside of school. 78% of these learners reported to take private English classes, go to an English language school, or have one-on-one tuition (Shepherd & Ainsworth, 2018). They reported spending an average of 2-4 hours per week on English language learning outside of the regular school system.

2.1.2 The role of English in General Education in Sri Lanka

The 2017 School Census report indicates that, at the majority of schools, the **medium of instruction** is one of the two **national languages**, i.e. Sinhala (62%) or Tamil (30%) (Ministry of Education, 2018).

However, following an amendment made in 1987 to the country's 1978 constitution, **English** has been recognised in Sri Lanka as a '**link language**' (Walisundara & Hettiarachchi, 2016). English is therefore also used as the medium of instruction in some schools, in combination with one or both national languages. These figures are also reflected in the proportions of students being taught through a particular medium, i.e. 73.2% of learners have Sinhala as their medium of study, 25% Tamil, and 1.8% English. Of those who are taught through the medium of English, many are based in the Western province (30%), the Central province (15%), and the North Western province (14%) (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Regardless of the medium of instruction, English is introduced from the start of children's schooling in Grade 1, where it is used as a **means of communication** through so-called Activity Based Oral English teaching. This concerns the use of English as a way to communicate during guided play activity as part of the subject 'Environmental Related Activity' (Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena & Chandratilleke, 2016). While a study by Fernando and Mallawa (n.d.) on the implementation of Activity Based Oral English showed that the majority of principals, teachers and parents held positive views on this approach, the study also found that it was not implemented successfully in most cases, that many principals and teachers felt ill-informed, under-resourced and not well-trained to put it into practice, and that many parents in rural areas were unable to support their children's oral English learning.

English is more formally introduced as a **subject** from Key Stage 2 (Grades 3 & 4). In junior secondary school (Grades 6-9), English is one of twelve subjects which make up the common curriculum at that level of education. Based on a 2008 circular from the Ministry of Education, English can also be used from this level onwards as a medium of instruction in a specified set of subjects, encouraging bilingual education if school resources allow (Widanapathirana, Mampitiya, Jayawardena & Chandratilleke, 2016). At senior secondary school level (Grades 10 & 11), English language becomes a **core subject**, among a set of six core subjects and three optional subjects. At GCE A-level (Grades 12 & 13), General English is **mandatory**, and a pass is needed to be eligible for university admission.

In terms of educational administration and management, English language teaching, learning and assessment in General Education is ultimately the responsibility of the *English and Foreign Languages Branch* of the Ministry of Education. As its core goal, the Branch states that it aims to assist "all students in government schools to develop literacy and competencies in relation to English & Foreign Languages to be fully equipped to perform productivity both locally and globally as a fully fledged citizen" (http://www.moe.gov.lk/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=777:english-and-foreign-languages-branch&catid=347&Itemid=800). It does this through, for example, taking policy decisions about language teaching, monitoring language programmes across different administrative and management levels, supporting Regional English Support Centres, and offering capacity building programmes for languages.

In the literature, a number of particular **challenges for English language teaching** in General Education in Sri Lanka have been identified. These include, for example, *heterogeneous classes* with students exhibiting a wide range of English language abilities (Perera, 2010), and a *lack of qualified teachers* to teach English (National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education, 2009). In addition, Linayage (2014) reported *large differences between different parts of*

the country (e.g., urban vs. rural, between provinces, between districts) in terms of available resources, population characteristics, and teacher qualifications for the teaching of English. Similarly, on the basis of an empirical study in a rural, post-conflict district, Seefa (2017) concluded that the development of learners' English proficiency was challenging due to: lack of exposure and opportunity to practice English outside school, lack of facilities for teaching English in school, lack of qualified teachers, problematic teaching methodology and materials, generally poor economic conditions of the region, as well as students' reported anxiety and negative attitudes to learning English.

Furthermore, **data on the English language proficiency of learners** reported in a number of studies **raise questions about the effectiveness of English language teaching, learning, and assessment in Sri Lanka**. For example, relying on a 2005 World Bank report, Linayage (2014: 128) stated that only 10% of students reach 'mastery' level in English, and only 1% does so in English writing – with the proportions being higher for students in urban areas, but lower for those in rural regions. In a more recent study conducted by the British Council (*English Impact*; Shepherd & Ainsworth, 2018), 1,437 Grade-11 students from 148 schools in Sri Lanka took the *Aptis for Teens* English language test, which reports performances in terms of Common European Framework of Reference levels (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). It was found that more than half of the students (58%) achieved the A1 level in terms of their overall English proficiency, and another 30% were at the A2 level. Only 9% of the students had reached a level beyond the so-called Basic User level. This is despite 49% of the participants reporting that they had started learning English from pre-school or Grade 1, and 51% stating that they dedicate at least three hours every week to studying English. Considerable differences in proficiency were also found between the four language skills. 44.2% of the 11th graders in the study had at least an Independent User profile for English listening comprehension (i.e., CEFR B1 or above), and another 47.7% were at the A2 level for listening. In terms of English reading comprehension, the majority of learners operated at a Basic User level; based on their *Aptis for Teens* test results, 56.1% was at the A2 level and 25.8% at the A1 level for reading in English. In addition, most students' productive language ability was very low, with half of them still being at the A0 level (sometimes also referred to as 'pre-A1') for writing in English, and more than two-thirds (68.9%) performing at this pre-Basic User level for speaking in English. Less than 8% of the learners had an Independent User profile in writing or speaking (B1 or B2). In addition, the English Impact study showed that there were significant differences in English language proficiency achievements between: 1) learners from urban vs rural schools – with students in urban schools having higher levels of proficiency in all skills apart from speaking, and 2) between provinces – with learners in the Western and Southern provinces having higher English proficiency levels on average and those in the Northern province having the lowest level on average.

The National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education (2009: 91) argued in their report that: "With the expansion of the market economy and the private sector, it is recognized that those who do better in English have an edge over the majority of students who cannot effectively communicate in English with the inevitable result that the latter is debarred from social mobility, again leading to social polarization." If we follow this line of reasoning, then both the **average level of English language proficiency** of Sri Lankan secondary school students after many years of English classes at school, as well as **differences in proficiency levels according to a number of demographic variables**, are a **cause for concern** – at the personal, social, educational and economic level.

2.2 The English language curriculum

As mentioned in section 2.1.1, the curricula for General Education in Sri Lanka are developed by the National Institute of Education (NIE). The curriculum for English falls under responsibility of the NIE's Faculty of Languages, Humanities & Social Sciences, and more specifically, their Department of English. The main duties of this Department are to: develop English syllabi, prepare audio materials, train English teachers and In-Service Advisors (ISAs), manage the country's Regional English Support Centres (including staff development), and offer a Diploma in TESOL (http://nie.lk/facdep24).

English language curriculum in secondary education

In line with the educational curriculum as a whole, the English language curriculum aims to promote a **competence-based approach** to language learning and teaching. For **Grades 6 to 11**, working towards the GCE O-Level exam, the following **overall subject objectives** are listed for English (National Institute of Education, 2014a: xii, 2014b: v, 2016a: v, 2017a: v, 2018: v):

- "Creating the need to learn English as a Second Language in a multilingual society
- Creating opportunities for the Sri Lankan child to achieve the competencies in a link language
- Creating facilities to learn a language which can be used to build ethnic harmony
- Enabling the students to learn an International Language which could be made use of in their later life for employment purposes
- Empowering the learner to communicate confidently, fluently and effectively in the English Language."

At these grades, the English Language curriculum (also referred to as the 'syllabus') is built around **eight key competencies** which were first introduced in 2007:

Competency 1: Identifies the sounds of English Language
Competency 2: Uses mechanics of writing with understanding
Competency 3: Engages in active listening and responds appropriately
Competency 4: Building up vocabulary using words appropriately and accurately to convey precise meaning
Competency 5: Extracts necessary information from various types of texts
Competency 6: Uses English grammar for the purpose of accurate and effective communication
Competency 7: Uses English creatively and innovatively in written communication
Competency 8: Communicates clearly, fluently and concisely

A curriculum grid then further defines the development targets for each key competence across grades by means of so-called **competency levels**:

- Grade 6: 47 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2014a)
- Grade 7: 54 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2016b)
- Grade 8: 36 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2017a)
- Grade 9: 45 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2018)
- Grade 10: 49 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2014b)
- Grade 11: 72 specific competency levels (see National Institute of Education, 2016a)

For each competency level, a more detailed **content** description is provided, **learning outcomes** are listed, and a recommendation is made on the number of **classroom periods** to spend on each competency level descriptor. An example from Grade 9 is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Example English competence description, Grade 9 (National Institute of Education, 2018: viii)

Competency	Competency level	Content	Learning outcomes	No. of periods
3. Engages in active listening and responds appropriately	3.3 Listens to a simple text for specific information	• Provide opportunities for students to listen to various types of texts and extract specific information. **E.g.** names of people, places, animals, dates and days, months, years etc. **Text types** - dialogues; descriptions of people, places and things, lectures, narratives, debates, news reading, announcements, speeches, songs, advertisements, etc. **Activities** - matching, labeling, multiple choices, filling blanks, etc. (Options should be given to select the correct answer.)	Students will be able to listen to various types of texts and find specific information.	3

The curriculum for General English, which is a mandatory component of GCE A-Level (**Grades 12 & 13**) is organized according to sets of **performance standards for each of the four language skills**. For *listening*, students need to achieve 11 different performance standards, e.g. 'Student distinguishes between a question and a statement in a day-to-day conversation'. For *reading*, there are also 11 performance standards. An example is: 'Finds the general idea in comparatively complex and cognitively more demanding literary and non-literary texts'. *Writing* is associated with 10 performance standards, e.g. 'Student writes for official purposes and responds to written official communication maintaining appropriate register, style and age-appropriate vocabulary'. Finally, for *speaking* teachers are referred to the Can-Do Statements of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL; https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements). For a complete list of the Grade 12 & 13 General English performance standards, see National Institute of Education (2017b).

The above overview confirms that the secondary school curriculum for English Language in General Education in Sri Lanka is competency-oriented, and aims to develop both learners' lower-order and higher-order skills in all four language skills in English.

Implementation of the English language curriculum

The implementation of the curriculum is supported by the provision of **Teacher Instructional Manuals** (up to GCE A-Level), developed by the NIE. The **Grade 6-11** teacher guides contain an overview of the general National Goals and Basic Competencies (see section 2.1.1), the English subject objectives, and the competencies and accompanying descriptions as explained above (see National Institute of Education, 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017a, 2018). In addition, for each competency as set of 'Instructions for lesson planning' is provided, as well as 'Tips for teachers', **'Instructions for assessment and evaluation'**, and 'Suggestions for further reading'. An example instruction for assessment and evaluation for Grade 9, Competency 3 is:

Instructions for assessment and evaluation:

It is advisable to include a listening test at the term end examination, so that it becomes a part of the school evaluation culture.

Further, it is highly recommended that listening should be assessed as a part of School Based Assessment system.

(National Institute of Education, 2018: 10)

As can be seen from the above instructions extract, the guidance on assessment and evaluation in the teacher guides is very broad and general. For the assessment of speaking, two **holistic rating scales** are also provided (see Figure 4). The brevity of these scales may make them very practical (e.g., little time needed for rating) and also flexible enough to use for a wide range of speaking tasks. At the same time, however, the vagueness of the descriptors is likely to lead to vastly different interpretations between teachers. As a consequence, the reliability of ratings (between teachers, and also by the same teacher for different learners) is likely to be weak.

Figure 4: Grade 6-11 Assessment scales for speaking (National Institute of Education, 2018: 45-46)

General assessment scale

Band	
9	Expert user. Communicates with authority, accuracy, and style. Completely at home in idiomatic and specialist English
8	Very good user. Presentation of subject clear and logical with fair style and appreciation of attitudinal markers.Often approaching bilingual competence.
7	Good user. Would cope in most situations in English
6	Competent user. Although coping well with most situations he is likely to meet, is somewhat deficient in fluency and accuracy and will have occasional misunderstandings or significant errors.
5	Modest user. Although he manages in general to communicate, often uses inaccurate or inappropriate language.
4	Marginal user. Lacking in style, fluency and accuracy, is not easy to communicate with, accent and usage cause misunderstandings. Generally can get by without serious breakdowns.
3	Extremely limited user. Does not have a working knowledge of the language for day to day purposes, but better than an absolute beginner. Neither productive nor receptive skills allow continuous communication.
2	Intermittent user. Performance will be below the level of a working day to day knowledge of the language. Communication occurs only sporadically.
1/0	Non – user.May not even recognize with certainty which language is being used.

Interview assessment scale

Band	
9	Expert speaker. Speaks with authority on a variety of topics. Can initiate, expand and develop- a theme.
8	Very good non-native speaker. Maintains effectively his own part of a discussion. Initiates, maintains and elaborates as necessary. Reveals humour where needed and respond to attitudinal tones.
7	Good speaker. Presents case clearly and logically and can develop the dialogue coherently and constructively. Rather less flexible and fluent than Band 8 performer but can respond to main changes of tone or topic. Some hesitation and repetition due to a measure of language restriction but interacts effectively.
6	Competent speaker. Is able to maintain theme of dialogue, to follow topic switchers and to use and appreciate main attitude markers. Stumbles and hesitates at times but is reasonably fluent otherwise. Some errors and inappropriate language, but these will not impede exchange of views. Shows some independence with ability to initiate.
5	Modest speaker. Although gist of dialogue is relevant and can be basically understood, there are noticeable deficiencies in mastery of language patterns and style. Needs to ask for repetition or clarification and similarly to be asked for them.Lacks flexibility and initiative. The interviewer often has to speak rather deliberately. Copes but not with great style or interest.
4	Marginal speaker. Can maintain dialogue, but in a rather passive manner, rarely taking initiative or guiding the discussion. Has difficulty in following English at normal speed; lacks fluency and probably accuracy in speaking. The dialogue is therefore neither easy nor flowing. Nevertheless, gives the impression that he is in touch with the gist of the dialogue even if not wholly master of it. Marked L1 accent.
3	Extremely limited speaker. Dialogue is a drawn- out affair punctuated with hesitations and misunderstandings. Only catchers part of normal speech and unable to produce continuous and accurate discourse. Basic merit is just hanging on to discussion gist, without making major contribution to it.
2	Intermittent speaker. No working facility; occasional, sporadic communication.
1/0	Non – speaker. Not able to understand and/ or speak.

The **Grade 12 & 13** teacher guide (National Institute of Education, 2017b) is organized according to the four language skills, and includes a statement on why each skill is of importance to GCE A-Level students. Apart from presenting and elaborating on the performance standards, the guide also contains a section on the teaching of each skill, in which emphasis is put on developing learners' language strategies (e.g. predicting listening text content, inferring vocabulary from written texts) as well on authentic language use. In addition, suggestions are made for the **assessment and evaluation** of each skill. For example, for the testing of reading, ideas are provided on types of test tasks that could be used. For writing and speaking, suggestions are made on what aspects of students' writing or speaking could be evaluated (e.g. fluency, content, syntax) as well as for rating criteria. For speaking, the scale provided in Figure 4 is also suggested at this level of study, as well as one for interpersonal communication.

Overall, however, the advice provided with reference to **language assessment** in the teacher guides across all secondary school grades, can be characterised as follows (see also Green, 2018):

- Broad and vague advice
- Lacking concrete practical examples or advice on how to assess
- Drawing on outdated sources
- Not operationalising the intended construct
- Representing inauthentic language use

Apart from the teacher guides, the implementation of the curriculum is also supported by the provision of English language **textbooks** up to Grade 11 (GCE O-Level). These are provided for free by the Government, and are developed, published and distributed under the auspices of the Educational Publications Department and downloadable from the Department's website (http://www.edupub.gov.lk/BooksDownload.php). Based on the contributor acknowledgements in the textbooks, they are written by teams consisting mainly of teachers, teacher trainers and In-Service Advisors, with editorial roles for staff from the Educational Publications Department, National Colleges of Education, universities, and National Institute of Education.

The textbooks are structured according to a number of Units, each of which consists of a variety of activities. In the early sections of the textbooks, Unit activities are plotted against specific competency levels from the relevant Grade's curriculum. This aims to provide transparency on the curriculum-textbook link, which is something that was heavily criticized as lacking in past versions of English Language textbooks (see e.g., Perera, 2010). The textbooks' organization and types of tasks included are kept fairly consistent across Grade levels, but the tasks are adjusted for complexity of the targeted language knowledge and (sub)skills. The textbooks look appealing with many colourful drawings, to support tasks in all four language skills. Activities alternate between targeted knowledge and skills (vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, speaking, writing). Nevertheless, our review of the digital copies of the textbooks on the EPD website, as well as Green's (2018) analysis of the Grade 11 textbook, indicate that there is room for improvement in the textbooks. In particular the following weaknesses need to be addressed:

- The use of inauthentic and unnatural language
- The use of inauthentic tasks and activities
- The promotion of discrete-point language knowledge
- The limited range of constructs being taught and practised
- The lack of clarity on the construct being taught in some activities/tasks

The above suggests a mismatch between what the curriculum is aiming to promote in terms of 'real world' English language skills (including for employment and further education) and what is actually being practised by means of the language, tasks and activities existing in the current textbooks.

The **dissemination** of the curriculum is designed to happen through In-Service Advisors for English (Ministry of Education, 2013). However, Wijeskera (2011/12: 19) has argued that, in practice, the "top-down/bottom-up communication system" in Sri Lanka lacks efficiency and "messages of changes are not correctly received by [English] teachers". Wijeskera (2011/12: 18) also argued that the curriculum needs to be localized and sufficiently detailed to avoid placing an "extra burden" on teachers to interpret the curriculum for local use within a centralized system.

2.3 Nature of the national English language assessment: GCE O-Level and GCE A-Level

As described in section 2.1.2, English is a core subject in Grades 10 and 11, which lead up to the GCE O-Level public examinations. In Grades 12 and 13, English is equally core, with General English being a mandatory exam paper in the GCE A-Level examination. A pass mark in the GCE A-Level paper is a prerequisite for university entry. The construction, distribution and evaluation of these national, public English examinations are the responsibility of the Department of Examinations.

To gain more precise insights into the current approach to English language testing, we conducted a **content review of the English Language exam papers** from the 2016 and 2017 English Language GCE O-Level and the 2017 GCE A-Level. This showed that the public examinations target the **assessment of language knowledge (grammar and vocabulary), reading comprehension, and writing**. This is done through a range of tasks, sometimes switching back-and-forth between skills and also between question types. Students' language ability is furthermore tested by means of a limited number of selected-response task types and several short-constructed-response types, and by long-constructed-response types for the testing of writing. The exam papers do not contain sections on listening or speaking. Immediately, this implies that a number of Competencies described in the secondary school curriculum are by definition excluded from evaluation through the public examinations – for example, Competency 3 of Grades 6-11, 'Engages in active listening and responds appropriately'. Other Competencies have to be operationalized more narrowly in the public examinations'. Namely, while, in principle, Competency 6 'Uses English grammar for the purpose of accurate and effective communication' could refer to both written and spoken communication, the lack of a speaking component in the GCE O-Level exam means that use of grammar can only be evaluated with respect to written communication in the present exam format. Similarly, Competency 5 'Extracts necessary information from various types of texts' could in principle concern comprehension of both written texts (reading) and oral texts (listening). However, the lack of a listening component in the GCE O-Level exam means that this Competency can only be evaluated with reference to reading in the present exam format.

Furthermore, combining the above analysis with that conducted by Green (2018), it can be concluded that the public examinations for English Language at both levels suffer from the following **weaknesses**:

- A lack of standardisation within and across exam papers
- Test tasks that do not reflect guidelines of good language test task design as described in language testing handbooks, research, and guidelines for practice by international language testing organizations (e.g., ILTA, EALTA, ALTE)
- Inauthentic task input materials and test items
- A lack of transparency on and rationale for the targeted construct
- An unbalanced and narrow testing of a limited construct
- Mismatches between the intended construct and construct tested due to task design issues, which also lead to issues with scoring validity and reliability

Each of these pose great threats to the validity of the examinations. More specifically, there is **construct underrepresentation**, i.e. the exam does not include the assessment of important aspects of English language ability, and there is a **high risk of construct-irrelevant variance**, i.e. the exam

assesses things that are not relevant to English language ability. As a consequence, the **inferences about learners' English language ability**, drawn on the basis of their test scores, **may be incorrect or 'contaminated'**. In addition, the lack of standardisation means that there are differences in what is being tested between different versions of the examination (which are developed, for example, for multiple administrations during one school year or administrations across school years), and also that there are differences in the level of difficulty of the exam papers. This is likely to result in **unequal opportunities for learners** within exam sittings and across years of administration.

Similar observations regarding the narrowness of the construct being tested in the English O-Level exam were made by Walisundara and Hettiarachchi (2016). In addition, Walisundara and Hettiarachchi (2016) raised concerns over the very low pass marks achieved by learners on the **English Language GCE O-Level** examination. This observation is also backed up by data from the Department of Examinations. Namely, while a Powerpoint presentation by the Department's Research & Development Branch (2017) shows that there has been an increase in the proportion of learners passing the English Language exam in the period 2008-2016, this increase was situated in the first four years of the reported period. Since 2012, however, the **pass rates have levelled**, and, more importantly, the pass rate percentages have **never reached a figure which constitutes more than half the test-taking population**. This means that a very large number of secondary school students do not achieve the GCE O-Level targets for English Language in their O-Level examination. This figure (less than 50% of the test-takers) is also considerably lower than the proportion of students who are reported to qualify for GCE A-level based on their GCE O-Level results *as a whole*, which is approximately 60% of students (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The item difficulty statistics for the 2016 GCE O-Level English Language examination, reported in the same 2017 Powerpoint presentation (Department of Examinations, 2017), similarly indicate that the **test was difficult for the population**. Several items fell below the recommended statistical cut-offs for item facility values, and, overall, the majority of items was more difficult for the population than would be expected in achievement-type tests. While there may be many different reasons for these results, they indicate **issues with the link between what is being taught, learned, and tested**.

With respect to the **GCE A-Level** for English, data from the Department of Examination's Research & Development Branch's (2017) indicate that, from 2011 onwards, **approximately two-thirds of candidates passed** this exam. Nevertheless, these **pass rates are comparatively much lower than in other subject areas** such as history, geography, IT, etc.

Given the omission of listening and speaking in the public examinations, and the exams' difficulty level for the population, Gamage and Chappell's (2013) call for research on the impact of the current assessments on the Ministry of Education's ability to promote communicative competence in English classrooms seems critical. This conclusion is supported by earlier research which indicated a lack of synergy between textbooks and the curriculum (Karunaratne, 2003), or between the learning activities and exam tasks (Canagarajah, 1993), and which resulted in a lack of engagement and interest to communicate in English in Sri Lankan classrooms at the time. It also drove students to extra-curricular tuition with a so-called traditional grammar approach.

3 Current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka: Interviews with stakeholders

Apart from a review of existing documentation and publications relevant to current national English language assessment in Sri Lanka, we also investigated the perceptions of a range of key assessment stakeholders through a series of interviews (and an alternative questionnaire format). Below, we describe how we gained information on stakeholder's views on the current national English language assessment approach and practices in Sri Lanka (section 3.1) and we provide a background profile description of the stakeholders who took part in the study (section 3.2). In section 3.3, we report the findings of the interviews (and alternative questionnaires).

3.1 Methodology

Information on experiences with and views on Sri Lanka's current national English language assessment policy and practices was gained from 32 stakeholders (see section 3.2 for a description of the participants' profile). With 27 of these, semi-structured interviews were conducted by a member of the Lancaster University research team. Due to availability restrictions, five others completed an online questionnaire via the software Qualtrics. The questionnaire was devised as an alternative to the interview format, but contained a similar set of questions as the interviews.

Ethical approval for the study was gained from Lancaster University's *FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee*. Stakeholders were provided with a written information sheet containing further details on the project, the nature of their participation, withdrawal procedures, and data handling procedures (see Appendix 7.1). Consent was sought from participating stakeholders prior to the start of the interview/questionnaire (see Appendix 7.2). The stakeholders also filled out a personal background questionnaire (see Appendix 7.3).

The interviews (and online questionnaires) were thematically divided into two parts. One part, which focussed on 'Curriculum and assessment', was structured according to a set of questions on the strengths and weaknesses of: a) the current English language curriculum, and b) current English language assessment in Sri Lanka. In this part of the interview, the stakeholders were also asked about key aspects of the curriculum and assessment policy and practices that were in need of change/improvement. They were furthermore given the opportunity to share any additional information or thoughts on the English language curriculum and assessment that had not already been covered in their interview/questionnaire responses.

The other part of the interviews (and online questionnaires) focused on 'Language assessment knowledge and skills.' Language assessment literacy in the present study is understood in accordance with Fulcher's (2012) highly influential definition:

> "The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice."
> and
> "The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order to understand why

practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals." (Fulcher, 2012, p. 125)

The interviews aimed at gathering insights into the language assessment literacy of people in Sri Lanka in professional roles relevant to an aspect of English language education and assessment (see section 3.2).

In this part of the interviews (and questionnaires), the stakeholders were asked to share their views and insights into the language assessment competence and knowledge of people in their profession. This was done by means of an adaptation of Kremmel and Harding's (forthcoming) *Language Assessment Literacy Survey*. More specifically, the stakeholders were presented with 30 questions for which they were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale how competent/ knowledgeable they feel people in their profession a) need to be, and b) are. The questions represented the following factors (as identified by Kremmel & Harding, forthcoming) of language assessment literacy:

- Competence in developing and administering language assessments
- Competence in scoring and rating
- Competence in statistical/research methods
- Competence in assessment principles and interpretation
- Competence in assessment in language pedagogy
- Competence in language assessment policy and local practices
- Knowledge about language structure, use and development
- Knowledge about washback
- Knowledge about personal beliefs and attitudes related to assessment

A copy of the questions, including how they map onto the Kremmel & Harding's (forthcoming) Language Assessment Literacy Survey, can be found in Appendix 7.4.[1]

Following this, the interviewees (questionnaire respondents) were asked to name up to three top priorities for language assessment literacy development in their profession in Sri Lanka (see question 9 in Appendix 7.3 for the identification of participants' profession). Finally, they were also given the opportunity to share any further thoughts or information related to language assessment in Sri Lanka, which had not already been covered in other parts of the interview/questionnaire.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were audio-recorded and the interviewer-researcher also noted down salient points from the stakeholders' answers during the interview. The findings from the interviews were then combined with the responses from the five stakeholders who had completed the online questionnaire. This dataset then formed the basis of the analysis, which aimed to identify the main views expressed by the stakeholders on aspects of the

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[1] Note that due to limited time availability of the stakeholders, as well as for reasons of context-relevance and –appropriacy, only a selection of questions from the Kremmel & Harding (forthcoming) Survey was included in the present study. Furthermore, the wording was changed from a statement-format to a question-format and in some cases adapted to make them less technical and more context-relevant for our study's participants. In addition, one new question was added which we felt particularly relevant to our research-context, and two others were somewhat more remotely based on statements from the Survey. Finally, to enable combining the questions about needs versus present competence/knowledge, a different Likert-scale was adopted from that of the Survey. Namely, in the present study, the answer options ranged from 1 – 'Not at all' to 5 – 'Fully'.

current curriculum and assessment, and on the language assessment knowledge and expertise of those professionally involved in an aspect of English language education in Sri Lanka.

3.2 Participants

Thirty-one percent of the participating stakeholders were male, and 69% were female. Their age ranged between 32 and 61 years' old (M=50.38, SD=7.43). 81% were Sri Lankan nationals, 16% were British nationals, and one held another European nationality. They were based in six of the nine Sri Lankan provinces, with most of them living in the Central (38%) and Western (38%) provinces. 66% of the participants lived in an urban area and 34% in a rural area.

All participants held higher education degrees (all postgraduate degrees, except for one), with 38% having studied TESOL/TESL, 34% Education, 16% Linguistics, 13% English, 6% Sinhalese and 3% Teacher Education. The majority of participants had professional expertise as English language teachers (78%) and teacher trainers (75%). Other key areas of professional expertise were: item writers (38%), test designers (34%), researchers (34%), curriculum developers (32%), textbook writers (25%), policy makers (25%), and exam rater/interlocutors (19%).

The participants represented the following stakeholder groups:

- Ministry of Education (MoE) (31%):
    - MoE general division (6%),
    - Department of Examinations (19%)
    - English Publications Department (6%)
- National Colleges of Education (NCE) (31%)
- iTESL/TEE trainers (16%)
- National Institute of Education (NIE) (13%)
- Secondary school English teachers (6%)
- Regional English Support Centre (3%)

These included staff in the following types of posts:

- Director/President/Commissioner General (19%)
- Dean/Deputy/Assistant/Vice-President (34%)
- Lecturer/teacher/teacher trainer/consultant (47%)

3.3 Findings

3.3.1 English language curriculum in Sri Lanka

It is vital in educational systems that assessments operationalise what is intended to be learned – which is normally laid out in the curriculum – in order to evaluate to what extent learners have progressed and/or achieved the curricular goals at a particular point in their schooling (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1996; Green, 2014). Therefore, to gain additional insights into the **curriculum**, we first asked the stakeholders for their experiences with, and views on the current English language curriculum in Sri Lanka. Below, we describe the main findings along three foci: what the stakeholders perceived to be key merits of the present curriculum (*Strengths*), what they perceived to be

important weaknesses (*Challenges*), and curriculum-related issues that need urgent addressing (*Priorities for change*).

Strengths

A number of common themes emerged in stakeholders' considerations regarding the current English language curriculum in Sri Lanka. The key strength identified by the interviewees was the recent shift to a **competency-based** English language curriculum. The interviewees felt that this move meant that the curriculum was much more connected with the 'real' world, would equip learners with **real-world knowledge and skills**, embrace variety, and promote a focus on developing 'day-to-day' language use.

A number of interviewees argued that such a shift would initiate changes to the language learning and teaching methodologies currently adopted in many English classrooms in Sri Lanka. For example, the new curriculum encourages the use of more **authentic** tasks and input materials in the English language classroom and a shift from language in isolation to **contextualised** language.

Several stakeholders also emphasized that a further great strength of the new curriculum lies in its incorporation of all four language skills. More specifically, a couple of interviewees thought that the curriculum puts more emphasis on the skills of **reading and writing**, and lays out clear definitions and expectations for these two language skills. Several interviewees also praised the inclusion of listening and speaking skills development in the new curricular goals, and thought that this was particularly well done for the lower grades (6-8). Two interviewees also felt that the curriculum worked especially fine at primary-school level. At the same time, many interviewees pointed out that the four-skills approach is currently more of a **theoretical reality** of the curriculum documents rather than an actual feature occurring in most English language learning and teaching classrooms in Sri Lanka.

Delving further into the details of the curriculum documents themselves, two stakeholders discussed how the new curriculum **describes standards of performance and target competency-levels**, which was not the case in the past. Two interviewees also thought the documents were clear enough for teachers and one thought that they were also accessible enough for parents to understand.

Overall, as discussed more explicitly by two stakeholders, the curriculum was felt to fit in well with **global trends** in English language learning and teaching, and at the same time left enough room for the **local Sri Lankan context**. For example, one stakeholder talked about how the curriculum encouraged or allowed for the use of culturally and locally appropriate language learning materials, including 'localised' texts.

Challenges

The interview data suggest that the current English language curriculum has three large weaknesses. First, many stakeholders talked about an **insufficient (or lack of) focus on listening and speaking** skills. They pointed out that, as a consequence, vital skills for further study or employment are not (sufficiently) focused on by the curriculum, e.g. presentation skills, general oral communication skills, and language competencies as related to social skills. The curriculum therefore offers rather limited opportunities to encourage the use of English. One stakeholder thought that the curriculum still placed too much emphasis on accuracy ('correctness'), and three others similarly felt that the curriculum still puts too much emphasis on theory and too little on practice.

Secondly, several interviewees talked about **alignment issues between the curriculum and other core dimensions of English language learning and teaching**. More specifically, two stakeholders raised the issue of mismatches between the curriculum and the *textbooks* being used in classrooms. They pointed out that there is a clash between the competency-based approach of the curriculum versus the theme-based approach of the textbooks. Two stakeholders regarded mismatches between the curriculum and the *national exams* as problematic, and one stakeholder talked about a mismatch between the curriculum and what was being done in *teacher training*. Furthermore, one stakeholder felt that there was a mismatch between the curriculum (and textbooks) and what is appropriate / of interest to / and suitable for *children*.

Thirdly, several stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the **operationalization and implementation of the curriculum**. A range of challenges was raised in this regard. A key obstacle, as perceived by several stakeholders, is the *lack of detail or clear guidance* ('proper guidance') in the curriculum documents. Although a couple of stakeholders thought the competency descriptions were clear, more stakeholders felt that these were too vague for materials writers, item writers or teachers to be able to use them. Several stakeholders argued that not only is most present teacher training insufficient and not fully relevant to enable teachers to deliver the curriculum, it is also effectively difficult to train teachers on how to use and implement the curriculum on the basis of the current documentation. Therefore, stakeholders urged for further development of the curriculum. An example given was that the curriculum provides only guidelines on topics to focus on, but not on how to do that or what to focus on in terms of language knowledge and skills. Another important obstacle for curriculum implementation seems to be the nature of the *textbooks* used, which are developed in-country and provided to most schools by the Government. More specifically, stakeholders described the textbooks as: lacking in practice tasks; lacking workable activities for large groups; overemphasizing the skill of reading; containing errors; including unmotivating input materials with unsuitable or insufficient tasks; lacking sufficient practical guidance for teachers; and being too complex and lengthy for some learners. An additional curriculum implementation challenge mentioned by three stakeholders is *insufficient contact time* with learners to cover the entire curriculum. Finally, one stakeholder commented that the challenges to implement the curriculum were particularly steep for teachers and schools in *rural areas* of the country due to more *limited resources*.

One stakeholder characterised the curriculum-design cycle in Sri Lanka as an 8-year cycle of updates without 'real changes' and more a system of 'changing things around'.

Priorities for change

In line with the curriculum weaknesses and challenges identified above, the stakeholders argued that the following were priorities for change. First, the majority of stakeholders pleaded for an **increased focus on the skills of listening and speaking**, and three stakeholders also felt that an **integrated-skills** element should be added to the curriculum whereby different language skills are combined (e.g. reading-to-write, listening-to-speak). This – as a couple of stakeholders expressed it – would help conceptualise 'English as a life skill' in the curriculum, would make the curriculum more relevant and practical for students, and would 'give them a voice' as language learners. In addition, three stakeholders strongly argued that the English language curriculum should **align better with language as used in the world of employment**. To prepare learners better for the job market, some competences in the curriculum would need to be 'tweaked'. Another stakeholder thought the

curriculum should align with the CEFR 'because it realistically captures language', and a further stakeholder thought the curriculum could be revised to better reflect current approaches to English language learning and teaching.

Secondly, four stakeholders urged for an **improvement in the links between the curriculum and textbooks and teaching materials**. More specifically, the interviewees emphasized the need for classroom materials that operationalize a competency-based, four-skills approach to English language learning and teaching, and that would enable and support teachers to implement the curricular goals.

Thirdly, the stakeholders made a number of recommendations on how to ensure an effective implementation of the English language curriculum in Sri Lankan classrooms. A key suggestion was to **make the curriculum clearer for teachers**, for example by providing explicit guidance on how to teach according to the curriculum, clearer descriptions of the target competencies and the envisaged progression journey for learners, and more supplementary teaching materials. Available resources should also be better advertised as teachers are not always aware of the teacher guides (or that they are freely available online). Several stakeholders felt that a **simplification** of the curriculum might be needed as there is currently 'too much to get through'. They saw scope for removing some competencies, dropping less essential elements of the curriculum, and one stakeholder also suggested reducing literary aspects in favour of language competence goals. The stakeholders furthermore emphasized that this should be done in parallel with an **increase in teacher training** to support them in operationalizing the curriculum and a competence-based, four-skills approach. Teachers should also be trained so that they effectively use English as the medium of instruction in their English lessons. Finally, one stakeholder emphasized that a strategy needed to be developed to ensure that children in rural areas would be able to develop their English proficiency and achieve the curricular goals without structural disadvantages as compared to other areas of the country.

3.3.2 English language assessment in Sri Lanka

Next, we report the stakeholders' insights and views on the current approach to and practices in English language **assessment** along the same three foci: what the stakeholders perceived to be key qualities of the present assessment system (*Strengths*), what they perceived to be significant shortcomings (*Challenges*), and what assessment-related issues they feel require urgent addressing (*Priorities for change*).

Strengths

With respect to the current approach to English language assessment in Sri Lanka, several stakeholders indicated their appreciation of the **school-based, continuous assessment**. They felt that the advantages of this approach, in principle, allowed for *formative* assessment, the use of a wide *range of assessment types* (e.g., presentations, multimedia, etc.), and the assessment of the *four skills*. One stakeholder discussed that teachers in this way gain a *better understanding* of their students' English language ability and as a result can *remedy* issues where needed.

At the same time, a number of stakeholders expressed their appreciation of the inclusion of **standardized exams** as part of the system as well. As some stakeholders stated, this helps ensure a

valid, reliable, and fair approach to English language assessment, which puts all learners across the country on the same foot. One stakeholder added that this better reflected international exams.

During the interviews, a couple of stakeholders also argued that it is reassuring for learners to know what they have to be able to do in the exam, and that it leads to a *national certificate* and thus large-scale recognition of their English language ability. In addition, one of the stakeholders argued that the standardized exam also gives *better insights* into where the students are, and might give the learners increased *confidence* in their language knowledge and motivation to learn English.

Three stakeholders particularly thought that reading and writing skills were evaluated in a satisfactory manner in the present approach to English language assessment in Sri Lanka, reflecting learners' ability in these skills well.

Two stakeholders, however, held more negative views on the current approach to English language assessment in Sri Lanka and stated that they were not able to name any particular strengths.

Challenges

Despite seeing some value in the current approach to English language assessment, the majority of stakeholders raised the **lack of testing of listening and speaking skills** as a major weakness of the present assessment system. In their experience, assessments still overly emphasize linguistic accuracy, language in isolation, and memorisation. As a consequence, testing practices are characterised by a *lack of meaningful contexts and communicative focus*.

A couple of stakeholders also felt that exams are too **often still seen as a means to fail students** and therefore end up discouraging further language learning. In addition, teachers often do **not recognise the potential of assessments as diagnostic instruments** and tools for remedial purposes, but treat assessments as instances of record keeping. Similarly, the range of assessment formats and types that could be used, and how this could enable assessment of curricular goals, is unknown to many teachers.

At the same time, the interviewees acknowledged the **lack of** teachers' and other stakeholders' **knowledge and training in the area of language assessment**, as well as the **limitations in resources**. These factors are seen as issues that contribute to the lack of testing listening and speaking, as well as being related to the low **quality of teacher-designed assessments** and scoring procedures.

Finally, two stakeholders also stated that assessments often repeat the textbook, and, given the disjoint between the curriculum and textbooks, this results in a very narrow type of testing and a **discrepancy between the curriculum and assessments**. An underlying problem is thought to be the **lack of dialogue between key language education stakeholders** (e.g. curriculum designers, textbook writers, teacher trainers, teachers).

Priorities for change

The fundamental change needed, as expressed by one stakeholder, is the **linking-up of teaching, learning and assessment.** In particular a couple of interviewees explicitly urged for **better coordination and communication between relevant stakeholders**. This would at the same time help address another priority identified by a couple of stakeholders, namely a full reflection of the **competence-based approach in the English language assessment** in Sri Lanka. As such, this would

also enable a **match between language use as tested and language use for real-world demands**.

As discussed by the majority of interviewees, a further key change needed therefore is the introduction of or increase in the **testing of listening and speaking**, and their inclusion in the standardised national exams. This would ensure a four-skills approach, and – as the interviewees hoped - make a more task-based and functional language-oriented approach possible. In turn, they thought this could lead to better construct representation and higher authenticity. At the same time, it would be important that these skills are tested in a **valid and reliable** manner, which must include rater and examiner monitoring systems. Several stakeholders, however, emphasized that the introduction or increase in the testing of listening and speaking should go hand-in-hand with **improvements in classroom resources and guidance** on the testing of these skills, which would be particularly vital for more rural areas.

To stand a chance of accomplishing these changes, many of the interviewees brought up the need to **develop stakeholders' language assessment literacy**, including that of item writers, test developers, teacher trainers, and teachers. Such training should not be narrowly defined, but cover technical and practical aspects of language assessment, as well as broader pedagogical and ethical dimensions. As argued by a few stakeholders, this is necessary so that teachers are both more aware and also better equipped to develop good-quality assessments, to be able to use assessment results 'in a more positive way' such as to inform teaching and for remedial purposes, to take more responsibility in school-based assessment, and more generally, to address the poor level of attention currently given to assessment in many instances.

Finally, a couple of stakeholders also made a number of recommendations with regards to **communication**. For example, one interviewee emphasised the importance of making the relationship between teaching and testing clearer while another stressed the necessity of transparency in testing itself through for example, making exam-related information more publicly available.

3.3.3 Language assessment literacy: priorities for development

Finally, we report the findings on our exploration of the (perceived) language assessment literacy of people employed in relevant roles in Sri Lanka. Since many of the interviewees had expertise in a variety of roles (English teacher + teacher trainer, or English teacher + policy maker), they were asked to choose a particular one of these, and respond to the questions with respect to that profession. Fifteen participants opted to focus on the role of English language teacher trainer, seven on English language teacher, four on language test designer, three on policy maker, two on textbook writer and one on curriculum developer. Below, we report the findings for all participants together. Although we conducted a sub-analysis per professional role, findings for the two largest groups – teachers and teacher trainers – were very similar to the overall findings and to each other. In addition, since the other professional roles were associated with only a (very) low number of participants, these categories risk being idiosyncratic and lacking representativeness. For this reason, the sub-analyses are not reported here.

Table 1 and Table 2 show that the stakeholders feel that a **high level of language assessment competence and knowledge is needed** by people in English language assessment-related jobs in Sri Lanka (English language teachers, teacher trainers, test designers, policy makers, textbook writers and curriculum developers). This is evidenced by the fact that the medians and

means on all questions are close to 5 ('Fully competent/knowledgeable') on the 'need to be' sub-questions. At the same time, the participants in the present study judged the actual language assessment competence and knowledge of professionals to be around 2-3 on the five-point Likert scale (see the mean and median results on the 'are' sub-questions). This suggests that they believed that **professionals hold some level of competence/knowledge in language assessment, but not a (very) high level**. Although there was some variation between stakeholders' responses (see the minimum and maximum figures), as indicated by the standard deviations (SD), this was not overly large.

Table 1: Perceptions on language assessment competence in Sri Lanka (by question)

Competence of people in your profession in…		Median	Mean	SD	Min	Max
1. Developing overall plans (specifications) for language tests?	Need to be	5.00	4.53	.761	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.69	.998	1	5
2. Writing good-quality questions (items/tasks) for language tests?	Need to be	5.00	4.34	1.004	1	5
	Are	3.00	2.84	.954	1	5
3. Training others to write good-quality questions?	Need to be	5.00	4.44	1.105	1	5
	Are	2.00	2.38	1.008	1	5
4. Trying out (piloting) language tests before their official administration?	Need to be	5.00	4.16	1.194	1	5
	Are	2.00	2.16	1.019	1	4
5. Designing scoring keys and rating scales (rubrics) to use in marking language tests?	Need to be	5.00	4.34	1.125	1	5
	Are	2.00	2.59	1.214	1	5
6. Scoring short-answer questions?	Need to be	5.00	4.41	1.073	1	5
	Are	3.50	3.44	1.216	1	5
7. Using rating scales to score writing or speaking performances?	Need to be	5.00	4.59	.756	2	5
	Are	3.00	2.81	1.030	1	4
8. Training others to use rating scales appropriately?	Need to be	5.00	4.38	.942	1	5
	Are	2.00	2.28	1.143	1	5
9. Determining pass-fail marks (or cut scores)?	Need to be	5.00	4.45	1.028	1	5
	Are	3.00	3.16	1.186	1	5
10. Using statistics to analyse students' scores?	Need to be	5.00	4.63	.609	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.81	1.091	1	5
11. Using statistics to analyse the quality of individual questions (items/tasks)?	Need to be	5.00	4.56	.759	3	5
	Are	2.50	2.56	1.268	1	5
12. Using techniques other than statistics (questionnaires, interviews, analysis of language,…) to get information about the quality of a language assessment?	Need to be	5.00	4.50	.916	1	5
	Are	2.50	2.34	.902	1	4
13. Understanding the concept of validity (how well an assessment measures what it claims to measure)?	Need to be	5.00	4.59	.665	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.72	1.114	1	5

14. Understanding the concept of reliability (how accurate or consistent an assessment is)?	Need to be	5.00	4.66	.602	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.84	1.081	1	5
15. Interpreting what a test score says about a student's language ability?	Need to be	5.00	4.72	.581	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.97	1.062	1	5
16. Knowing how to use tests to motivate student learning?	Need to be	5.00	4.69	.592	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.72	1.143	1	5
17. Knowing how to use tests to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses?	Need to be	5.00	4.66	.545	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.97	1.257	1	5
18. Knowing how to use tests to guide teaching?	Need to be	5.00	4.69	.644	2	5
	Are	3.00	2.84	1.139	1	5
19. Knowing how to give useful feedback on the basis of a test?	Need to be	5.00	4.63	.751	2	5
	Are	3.00	2.75	1.218	1	5
20. Determining if a language test aligns with the local curriculum or syllabus?	Need to be	5.00	4.69	.535	3	5
	Are	3.00	3.13	1.040	1	5
21. Determining if the results from a language test are relevant to the local context?	Need to be	5.00	4.53	.671	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.88	1.129	1	5

Table 2: Perceptions on language assessment knowledge in Sri Lanka (by question)

Knowledge of people in your profession about…		Median	Mean	SD	Min	Max
22. How English is used in the real world?	Need to be	5.00	4.72	.523	3	5
	Are	4.00	3.66	.827	2	5
23. How English language skills develop (reading, listening, writing, speaking)?	Need to be	5.00	4.81	.397	4	5
	Are	3.00	3.47	1.016	1	5
24. How English is learned as a second/foreign language?	Need to be	5.00	4.81	.397	4	5
	Are	3.50	3.34	1.004	1	5
25. How tests can influence teaching and learning in the classroom?	Need to be	5.00	4.84	.369	4	5
	Are	3.00	3.30	.952	1	5
26. How tests can influence teaching and learning materials?	Need to be	5.00	4.72	.457	4	5
	Are	3.00	3.22	1.099	1	5
27. How tests can influence the design of a language course or curriculum?	Need to be	5.00	4.65	.486	4	5
	Are	3.00	3.00	1.107	1	5
28. How tests can influence further educational and employment opportunities?	Need to be	5.00	4.69	.644	3	5
	Are	4.00	3.66	.971	2	5
29. How their own beliefs might influence their test practices?	Need to be	5.00	4.66	.545	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.56	1.045	1	4

30. How their own knowledge of language testing might be further developed?	Need to be	5.00	4.56	.564	3	5
	Are	3.00	2.94	.914	1	5

To explore whether these differences between perceptions of *desired* and *actual* language assessment competence and knowledge of professionals in Sri Lanka are statistically significant, we first grouped the questions according to components of language assessment literacy (see Appendix 7.4) and then ran paired-samples t-tests between the perceived needs and actual literacy. The results in Table 3 show that there is a **statistically significant difference in perceptions of** what the **desired and actual competence and knowledge** are for all components, with a large effect size. This suggests that **training is recommended in a vast range of skills and knowledge relevant to language assessment**.

Table 3: Comparison of desired versus actual language assessment competence and knowledge (by component)

Language assessment literacy		Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.	η^2
Competence in developing and administering language assessments	Need to be	17.47	3.483	11.049	31	.000	.797
	Are	10.06	3.407				
Competence in scoring and rating	Need to be	22.10	4.549	9.511	30	.000	.751
	Are	14.10	4.497				
Competence in statistical/research methods	Need to be	13.69	1.839	10.365	31	.000	.776
	Are	7.72	2.691				
Competence in assessment principles and interpretation	Need to be	13.97	1.694	9.130	31	.000	.729
	Are	8.53	3.048				
Competence in assessment in language pedagogy	Need to be	18.66	2.179	8.911	31	.000	.719
	Are	11.28	4.350				
Competence in language assessment policy and local practices	Need to be	9.22	1.099	8.647	31	.000	.707
	Are	6.00	2.048				
Knowledge about language structure, use and development	Need to be	14.34	1.153	9.010	31	.000	.724
	Are	10.47	2.475				
Knowledge about washback	Need to be	18.90	1.718	8.061	28	.000	.699
	Are	13.34	3.628				
Knowledge about personal beliefs and attitudes related to assessment	Need to be	9.22	.906	8.307	31	.000	.690
	Are	7.50	1.078				

The participants were also asked more directly what they felt were the key priorities for language assessment training of stakeholders in Sri Lanka. A wide range of suggestions was made, which reflect the components above. In fact, five stakeholders stated that simply a solid overall and comprehensive training was needed in language testing and assessment. Those who identified more specific priorities urged for **training on**:

- **Linking the curriculum/syllabi – teaching – testing**: How to translate the curriculum into tests; How to go from what is being taught to testing; But also how to develop a 'realistic' curriculum that can be implemented in teaching, learning and testing;
- **Making use of test results**: How to translate test results into strategies for teaching, remediating, diagnosing; How to use test results to inform language education policy
- **Practical competence in developing, administering tests**: How to develop test specifications; How to develop a (good) test; How to write items; How to select item types; How to do 'proper' test administration; How to build item banks; How to use technology for language testing; How to develop and use classroom-based/continuous/formative/peer assessment;
- **Broadening the construct**: How to assess all four skills; How to develop 'interesting tests in the four skills'; How to specifically assess listening and speaking skills;
- **Understanding the construct**: The nature of the language being tested; How English is used in 'the real world'; What can/should be assessed; How to develop learners' language skills (rather than rote learning);
- **Scoring and rating:** How to develop rating scales for speaking and writing; How to develop standardised assessment criteria; How to rate and grade performances; How to rate reliably;
- **Evaluating test quality**: How to validate tests; How to analyse test results; How to interpret test results; How to use statistics for validation; How to conduct statistical analyses;
- **Knowledge & awareness**: Of key principles and theory in language testing and assessment; Of the role of test specifications for valid testing; Of the importance of standardisation; Of the range of assessment types that are available for use and what they are useful for; Of the key potential of assessments as tools for testing language communication instead of pass/fail decision tools;
- **Understanding impact potential**: Why assessment is important; What role testing plays; How assessment can have washback on the curriculum/materials/classroom teaching; How assessment can impact on or be utilized for language learning motivation; How to create and use assessments in a fair manner; How to train others in language assessment;

4 Comparison with the larger region

This section aims to put the English language assessment situation in Sri Lanka into a wider perspective by comparing it with other countries in South Asia. Therefore, first, we provide some key statistics regarding education in South Asia (section 4.1), and information on the status and general English proficiency in countries in South Asia (section 4.2). South Asia is hereby understood as covering: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In section 4.3, we then draw some comparisons related to English language assessment in General Education between a selection of South Asian countries and Sri Lanka.

4.1 Education in South Asia

Data reported by the World Bank (https://data.worldbank.org) show that Sri Lanka has **one of the highest youth literacy rates in the region** (% of 15-24 year olds). Namely, for the year 2016, the youth literacy proportion of Sri Lanka was 98.69%, whereas for the South Asian region as a whole it was 88.25% (with Afghanistan having the lowest and the Maldives the highest youth literacy in the region). Also, Sri Lanka outperforms many other middle income countries, with the 2016 youth literacy rate of this group of countries reported to be 92.76%, and that of lower middle income countries together to be 89.14%. In addition, Sri Lanka's **education achievements** have been classified as '**high human development**' in a recent report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018: 55), with the Maldives being the only other South Asian country in this category, and the majority of South Asian countries classified as 'medium human development' (and Afghanistan as 'low human development').

Whereas **governmental educational spending** in Sri Lanka was low in the past (e.g., UNDP, 2016: 1.6% of GDP during the period 2010-2014), the country **is starting to increase** its expenditure on education, as evidenced in the 3.5% of GDP figure reported in the 2018 UNDP report (covering the period 2012-2017). This is only slightly below the figure for South Asia as a whole – 3.6% of GDP expenditure for education, but well below the 7.4% of GDP spent on education in Bhutan (the highest in the South Asian region) and somewhat above the 2.5% of GDP spent in Bangladesh (the lowest in the South Asian region) (UNDP, 2018: 54-57).

A research report by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2013) looked into skills development in the South Asian region, which was defined in the study as comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The study pointed out that the **participation rates in General Education have improved** across this region in the last decades. Within this group of countries, Sri Lanka was singled out as achieving "relatively high levels of education by South Asian standards" (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013: 21). Also, 2010 data on the educational attainment of the labour force in South Asia indicated that the Sri Lankan workforce is proportionally higher qualified educationally than the workforces in other countries in the region. For example, at the time of the study, more than 70% of the labour force in Sri Lanka had completed secondary education versus less than half in the other countries, and just over 20% in Sri Lanka held a tertiary degree versus less than 10% in the other countries (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013: 13). The next step named in the report is to gain better insights into **skill gaps** and "developing skills systems geared to address these" in South Asia (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013: 2). A challenge in these countries (including in Sri Lanka), however, as identified in the report, is the spread of relevant responsibilities

across several different government instances within each country, both horizontally and vertically, resulting in "dispersed" objectives. As a positive development, however, the report commended the setting up of coordinating National Skills Development Councils in Bangladesh and India. Importantly, The Economist Intelligence Unit (2013: 3) specifically emphasized the need for the South Asian region in particular to better develop "'soft skills' such as English language and communications" through the education system to gain a more competitive labour market position. In fact, a Euromonitor International report (Pinon & Haydon, 2010) demonstrated the strong relationship between the **economy and English** for the South Asian countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, and, for example, also found that there were salary gaps of up to 15% depending on professionals' English language skills in Bangladesh and Pakistan. At the same time, the study found that these two countries performed less well in terms of their **education system and English** language skills.

4.2 English in South Asia

The English language is widely used across South Asia, often fulfilling the role of lingua franca. Its **status differs between countries**, for example, being an official language in Pakistan, a 'linking/working language' in Sri Lanka, a 'subsidiary/associate official language' in India, or simply being used as a second or foreign language in parts of society. Its usage tends to be reported as higher in urban areas across South Asia and associated with business, as well as with government and educational institutions (e.g., in Pakistan and Bangladesh; Pinon & Haydon, 2010).

From a World Englishes perspective, English as spoken in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is considered to belong to Kachru's (1985) so-called "Outer Circle". English is considered an important language for communication within these countries, and its widespread usage and status is largely a result of these countries' former colonial status in the British Empire. In these countries, "different varieties of English are developing in a multilingual setting" (Mathew, 2013). In Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal, on the other hand, English is considered a foreign language or international lingua franca, since these countries don't have the same historical connection with the UK and are therefore described as part of the "Expanding Circle" (Kachru, 1985). [The "Inner Circle" being defined as the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and English-speaking parts of Canada.] More recently, Kachru (2011) has introduced the term "South Asianness" to describe South Asian Englishes in relation to their linguistic features, usages, policies and practices in a wide range of personal, cultural and public spheres.

In terms of people's **English language proficiency** in South Asia, the *English Proficiency Index* by Education First (2018) describes the proficiency to range between 'Very low' (Afghanistan) to 'Moderate' (India), with most South Asia countries categorised as having 'Low' English proficiency (i.e., Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh). According to Education First, the levels of 'Moderate', and 'Low' correspond with the **CEFR B1 level**, while 'Very low' corresponds with the **CEFR A2 level**. The Index is determined on the basis of performances on an online, adaptive test of reading and listening in English, and thus 'proficiency' should be understood as proficiency in the receptive skills. Also, it should be noted that the test is typically taken by a population that is biased towards interest in English language learning (Education First, 2018: 44). Compared to Education First data from the previous year, the English proficiency of people in South Asian countries is described as 'Trending

up', with the exception of Bangladesh for which a considerably lower Index score was noted in 2018 as opposed to 2017 (Education First, 2018: 29).

4.3 English language teaching and assessment in South Asia

In almost all South Asian countries, the majority of subjects in state-governed schools are taught through an official (regional) language from the country. The exception to this is Bhutan, where English is used as the medium of instruction. Mathew (2013: 1660) explains the latter as: "no other language [in Bhutan] is sufficiently developed to meet the demands of teaching/learning".

In all South Asian countries, however, English is taught as a **subject** from the early Grades of (pre-)primary school onwards. Within countries, however, the actual implementation of the educational policies regarding the teaching of English often differs between states/regions/schools. For example, Meganathan (2011) describes how, in principle, English should be introduced as a subject in Grades 1 and 2 in the majority of States in India and in Grades 3-5 in other States, but in practice children are not actually learning English at school due to a **lack of facilities** and **teachers' low English proficiency**. Similar observations have been made with reference to Pakistan, where a lack of resources have been reported to hinder the actual implementation of educational policies on the teaching and learning of English, called 'English for All' (Shahim, 2011). Nepal has also been named as a country struggling with low resources and underqualified teachers, as well as lacking a clear policy on English language education (Mathew, 2013). The **history of English language education in Sri Lanka**, however, is often coined as **somewhat different** from other countries in the region. Due to conflicts around national identities in the post-colonial period, and the linking of the languages of Sinhala and Tamil to these, as well as due to social and economic inequalities, a range of language policies have alternated with each other. These have also specifically affected policies, practices, and emotions around the role of English in education in Sri Lanka (Mathew, 2013).

In terms of **English language assessment** in General Education in South Asia, a similar system is used across the region as far as public examinations are concerned (Mathew, 2013). Namely, **national exams for English language** are administered at the end of the first cycle of secondary school and at the end of the second, 'higher secondary school' cycle. This corresponds with Grades 10 and 12, respectively, in all countries, apart from in Sri Lanka which has one more year of General Education and where these thus correspond with Grades 11 and 13. The examinations are the responsibility of Government-associated examination boards in each country (often structured under the Ministry of Education), which are in charge of the development, administration and certification of the exams. The exams themselves are considered high-stakes in nature, since they act as key transition points in the educational system and determine the route of progress for each individual learner (as also described with reference to Sri Lanka in section 2).

In sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.4, we take a closer look at the English language assessments in four South Asian countries. These were selected to represent a range of similarities/differences with the Sri Lankan context (as well as the availability of published research on English language assessment for each country).

4.3.1 Bangladesh

Similar to Sri Lanka, English language education in General Education in Bangladesh has seen considerable policy and curriculum changes in the last two decades, aiming to promote more communicative approaches to English language teaching and to equip learners with the language skills for a globalised world (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012: 24). Sultana (2018) argues that role of English in the current General Education curriculum does not just concern English as a subject, but that the language is also seen as a vehicle for national development in science, technology, education, business and industry.

A large-scale study (English in Action) focussing on English in primary and lower secondary schools in Bangladesh in 2008, however, identified several challenges to the implementation of a four-skills English language curriculum at that time (see English in Action, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d). These include:

1) Low English language proficiency of most teachers (11% at CEFR A0, 50% Basic Users, 39% Independent Users) and teacher trainers
2) Low English language proficiency of most learners (53% at CEFR A0, 44% Basic Users, 5% Independent Users), including Grade 10 learners (approx. 25% at CEFR A0, 65% Basic Users, 12% Independent Users)
3) Extremely basic and limited classroom facilities and teaching resources
4) Prevalence of a traditional lecturing and textbook-oriented approach, with hardly any student interaction
5) Primary use of Bangla as the medium in English classes
6) Poor-quality textbooks

Following the introduction of the 2010 National Education Policy in Bangladesh (Ministry of Education, 2010), which stipulates English as compulsory subject from the start of primary school, a series of new baseline studies was conducted in 2015 (Power et al., 2016) and 2016 (Brunfaut & Green, 2017; NILE, 2017). This time, the focus was on: a) English language assessment, and b) listening and speaking skills. With respect to secondary school (the main focus of the present paper), the studies revealed a number of positive developments at lower secondary level (Grades 6-10), but a status-quo at higher secondary school (Grades 11 & 12). Focusing on Grades 6-10, working towards the so-called Secondary Examination, Power et al. (2016) found that a wide range of stakeholders held positive views on a shift towards a communicative approach, including developing learners' English listening and speaking skills. They also observed a shift to use of English as the medium during English lessons and some, but limited introduction of interactive activities in classrooms. At the same time, they found a discrepancy between the curriculum's learning objectives and pedagogic approaches and resources used in classrooms, as well as a lack of focus on listening and speaking in actual English language learning and teaching. Teachers were undertrained and underresourced in this regard, had low levels of proficiency themselves, and, in addition, the Secondary Examination did not include the testing of English listening and speaking skills.

With regard to this Secondary School Certificate examination, taken at the end of Grade 10, Sultana (2018) claims that the English exam is viewed to be most important and most difficult among the set of subjects. The exam is written by experienced English teachers from around the country, under the auspices of Bangladesh's National Curriculum and Textbook Board. Sultana's review of the English exam, however, revealed that: there was no clear description of the exam's purpose; the

exam is restricted to the testing of reading, grammar and writing only; some items rely on memorisation rather than anything else; the exam sometimes duplicates textbook tasks; the marking practices are questionable in terms of reliability; tasks and input are weak in authenticity; and the leaking of question papers is an increasing problem. Sultana (2018: 6) concludes that: "The way the examination is set, it is only helpful in getting the [sic] high score but ineffective in measuring the communicative purpose of the English language teaching or students' English proficiency in general".

In addition, on the basis of a small-scale interview study with English secondary school teachers, Sultana (2019) concluded that teachers had not been trained in language assessment or how to use assessment in teaching practice, had a limited understanding of the purpose of assessments, saw assessments as connected with grading and test preparation. The negative washback of teaching-to-the-test meant that the curriculum was not implemented. Another interview study by Al Amin and Greenwood (2018), indicated that teachers were in fact aware of the negative consequences of their exam-oriented teaching practices.

With respect to Grades 11 and 12, working towards the Higher Secondary Examination, Brunfaut and Green (2017) found that both teachers' and students' English language proficiency at this level was low, that hardly any English was spoking during English lessons (Bangla served as the medium), that the emphasis in the lessons as well as the textbooks was on reading and grammar, and that schools were heavily underresourced. In addition, very large class sizes were identified as a challenge for the teaching and assessment of speaking skills. The limited weighting of listening and speaking, and restricted test formats and assessment criteria of the English Higher Secondary examination were also raised as a cause for concern. Furthermore, teachers felt underprepared for both the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills. A further fundamental issue was that not all stakeholders appeared to be aware of the inclusion of listening and speaking in the curriculum targets, and also that the curriculum learning outcomes themselves lacked specificity and preciseness and were therefore challenging in terms of being operationalized and implemented in both teaching and assessment.

Both Power et al. (2016) and Brunfaut and Green (2017) therefore concluded that a wide range of significant improvements and resources were needed to enable the Bangladeshi Ministry of Education to effectively include a system of classroom-based, continuous assessment of listening and speaking skills in secondary school English language teaching. In addition, the quality of the existing national (higher) secondary school examinations for English was questioned, with improvements required in terms of what is being tested and how, as well as validation research being necessary.

The situation described for Bangladesh shows several similarities to our Sri Lankan findings reported in sections 2 and 3 above. This is, for example, the case for learners' low English language proficiency despite many years of English classroom learning (see 2.1.2), and the disconnections between the curriculum-textbooks-assessments (see 2.2 and 2.3). Overall, however, although there is need for improvement to facilities, teaching resources and textbooks in Sri Lanka, the situation and quality of materials seem comparatively less poor in Sri Lanka than observed in Bangladesh. In both countries, however, language assessment literacy development of stakeholders is highly necessary to ensure fair and valid English language testing in public examinations and school-based assessments.

4.3.2 Bhutan

As mentioned earlier, Bhutan differs importantly from Sri Lanka in a number of respects. First, education in Bhutan receives a considerably higher proportion of financial support from the Government, despite being classified as a Least Developed Country by the United Nations. Second, English is the medium of instruction in all subjects (except for the teaching of the national language). This is despite the fact that English is strictly speaking a foreign language in Bhutan (versus a second language in Sri Lanka as the result of the colonial history).

With regard to English language assessment in secondary education (our focus of interest in this study), the national exams at the end of Grades 8, 10 and 12 are the responsibility of the Bhutan Board of Examination. This exam board was also one among a range of partners involved in the development of a new curriculum for English, introduced in 2006, which aimed to move away from a memory-skills and literature focussed curriculum. The two most vital changes of this curriculum were: 1) its focus on all four language skills, and 2) the introduction of continuous assessment. On the basis of the details of the new assessment system by Bhutan's Department of Curriculum Research and Development (see Kirkpatrick & Gyem, 2012), it can be inferred that the aim was to broaden the existing summative, achievement testing practices with: a) assessment for progress, diagnostic and remedial purposes, b) the use of so-called alternative assessments (e.g., portfolios, group assessment, peer assessment, teacher observations, etc.), and c) assessment of all four language skills.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the new English language curriculum and assessment approaches, Kirkpatrick and Gyem (2012) conducted a questionnaire study with secondary school teachers representing different parts of the country and levels of secondary school, as well as a group of recently graduated students. Kirkpatrick and Gyem identified several positive influences. For example, teachers and students felt that assessment was now part-and-parcel of the teaching and learning process; learners no longer only received grades, but also qualitative feedback on their work; teachers adopted a wider range of assessment types; students said that they were more motivated and could study more effectively. The teachers thought the new teacher guides that accompanied the new curriculum were helpful in that they contained rating scales, criteria and checklist samples which teachers could use in practice. Nevertheless, a number of challenges were also identified. These included, for example: a lack of sufficient teaching materials for the new curriculum, large class sizes, heavy workload for teachers, and teachers' lack of assessment literacy (making them feel insecure or not knowing how to assess). In addition, the teachers and students admitted that they were also still focussed on preparing for the final national examination.

The research summarised above suggests that Bhutan's move to a combined system of public examinations and continuous assessment of the four language skills constituted a positive development in terms of assessment practices as well as washback on teaching and learning. This might suggest a somewhat more successful introduction of a new curriculum and assessment than in Sri Lanka. However, a number of issues were also raised in the Bhutan context, which also constitute challenges in the present Sri Lankan context, including resource-issues and insufficient levels of language assessment literacy.

4.3.3 India

The practices adopted around English language assessment at the secondary school level in India are very diverse, due to the size of the country and its division into 7 Union territories and 29 States. As a consequence, English language education and assessment policies are often determined at State-level, with different Boards holding responsibility over curricula and testing systems. In an overview of current practices in assessing English at school-level in India, Mathew (2013: 4) states that the majority of English exams can still be coined as "traditional" and testing only reading, writing, and grammar. She also points out that, unfortunately, even in the testing of these skills there is a large construct-irrelevant factor. Namely, since the tasks are often based on the textbooks used in the classroom, memory may be tested as much as language proficiency. Mathew reports, however, that some national secondary education boards, in particular in regions where English is used as the medium of instruction, have adopted different testing approaches. As an example, the Central Board for Secondary Education shifted to 'unseen' reading comprehension tests, although the grammar and literature part remained closely linked to the textbooks. With respect to writing, students are given the choice of being tested through the Board's writing section or a school-based exam. However, Mathew's (2013) analysis of a sample writing task from the Board reveals several issues with the quality of the writing prompt, as well as with aspects of the rating.

A larger move towards communicative language testing was observed in the approach taken by the Nagaland Board of School Education. This Board also tests reading, writing, and grammar on the basis of 'unseen' materials, but Mathews (2013) reports that, in addition, listening and speaking are tested. The latter is done in individual as well as group tasks, with an emphasis on conversational skills, and counts for a proportion of the final mark. The overall objectives against which students are evaluated for listening and speaking are, as for example stated in the 2017 Grade 9 syllabus (Nagaland Board of School Education, 2017: 6):

- "to communicate effectively and appropriately in real–life situations,
- to understand English effectively for study purpose across the curriculum,
- to develop and integrate the use of the four language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing,
- to speak and express idea [sic] in clear and grammatically correct English (Tenses) using appropriate punctuation and cohesion devices,"

In line with recommendations of good practice in language testing and assessment, Mathew (2013) reports that the Board also provides assessment guidelines and rating criteria.

In sum, while assessment in Sri Lanka is centralized at the country-level, in India it appears to be mostly at the State-level. English language assessment practices in India generally seem to suffer from construct-underrepresentation and construct-irrelevant factors. However, in areas where English is the medium of instruction, practices seem to have shifted away from these flaws, even though leaving room for further improvements.

4.3.4 Pakistan

Pinon and Haydon (2010) describe the co-existence of four different educational systems in Pakistan: 1) Urdu-medium, 2) English-medium, typically private schools, 3) religious education, and 4) British O- and A-Levels. They also state that to acquire entry to state universities, applicants need to

successfully complete an in-house English language test. In Urdu-medium schools, English language is taught as a subject from the start of primary school.

With regard to English language assessment, Fernandez and Siddiqui (2017) explain that the responsibilities for conducting the secondary school exams lay with regional exam boards. In the Punjab province, for example, there are nine different Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. Each of these operate independently, but they are at the same time "closely connected at the provincial level" (Fernandez & Siddiqui, 2017: 3). In terms of the nature of the exams, the conclusions from previous research on the Secondary School Certificate in Pakistan resonate with many of the weaknesses found present in exams in other South Asian countries, as described above. For example, citing a Master's dissertation by Mumtaz (2010), Mathew (2013) described the English exam as being flawed, to rely on students' memory skills, and to promote test preparation courses rather than actual language skill development courses. Furthermore, due to their limited awareness of the range of possible language teaching and assessment approaches, students and teachers even thought that the courses would meet their future needs in terms of English language (Shahim, 2011).

With respect to the Higher Secondary School Certificate in the Punjab province, Fernandez and Siddiqui (2017) conducted a study looking into the rating of students' writing performances. The motivation for their focus was that essay writing is typically a core feature of high-stakes tests in Pakistan, but that explicit scoring criteria are usually missing. They state that the English paper is a compulsory part of the Higher Secondary School Certificate investigated in their study, that it counts for 18% of the Certificate's scores, and that it typically contains several essay-style tasks. Fernandez and Siddiqui's empirical study, which involved the scoring of a set of scripts by 15 raters, showed that there was a high amount of variability in: the scores the raters allocated to the same scripts, the rating criteria they used for this, and the importance they attached to particular criteria. They furthermore discussed the common practice in Pakistan of memorizing entire essays or literary quotes, in order to reproduce these in writing tests. This of course raises questions over the validity of the exam. Of equal concern is that the raters in the study seemed to consider students' use of such memorized chunks as beneficial to the quality of the essays, as it could strengthen the students' argumentation line. This suggests that the raters were thus not aware of the negative impact this factor has on the test's validity. Fernandez and Siddiqui therefore urged for rater reliability training, and language assessment literacy development more generally.

4.3.5 Challenges for English language assessment in South Asia

The above review of the literature on English language education in South Asia makes clear that Sri Lanka does not stand on its own in terms of practices and challenges concerning English language assessment in General Education. Common themes that emerged were:

- The **low levels of English language proficiency**, despite learning English language at school from the early years of primary education.
- The **narrowness and irrelevance of the construct being tested** due to textbook- and memory-based test content, and a primary focus on achieving 'the right scores' rather than a high level of actual English proficiency.
- The **omission of vital steps in the test cycle** to ensure valid and reliable testing and good-quality tests, e.g. the lack of a piloting phase, a test evaluation phase, or validation research.
- The **low levels of language assessment literacy** of stakeholders at all levels (policy makers, test developers, teachers, students).

5 Recommendations

Many of our empirical findings resonate with the issues and policy recommendations that were formulated by the National Education Commission (NEC) in their 2016 proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka (National Education Commission, 2016). For example, the NEC problematized:

- the quality of the national examination papers
- the overemphasis on memory-based knowledge and lower-order skills in the exams
- the heavy examination orientation of educational practice
- the underuse of the diagnostic potential of assessment results (formative and summative) to inform language learning, teaching, and remediation
- the underuse of assessment results for educational policy-making
- the 'misuse' of assessment results for classroom stratification
- the lack of assessment skills in teachers
- the lack of communication with stakeholders such as parents and potential employers, resulting in misinformation as well as underuse of feedback channels to improve the educational system

Our findings indicate that these issues and needs remain current, and that they also specifically apply to the teaching, learning and assessment of *English* in Sri Lankan General Education. Therefore, on the basis of our literature review and interview study, we formulate the following recommendations for national English language assessment in Sri Lanka.

1. **Establishing a 'full circle' in English language education (teaching-learning-assessment)**: An explicit and comprehensive connection between the English language curriculum and assessments at the relevant level. This requires a systematic mapping of exam content on the curriculum, as well as clear communication to stakeholders on the mapping. Similarly, the textbooks and teacher guides need to be comprehensive reflections of the curriculum for actual classroom practice.

2. **Close collaboration between Departments**: To ensure such a 'full circle', it is vital that the institutions responsible for the curriculum (NIE), the textbooks (EPD), the exams (DoE) and teacher training (NCE) work together closely as well as communicate to other stakeholders in a coherent manner. This will ensure that the curriculum is interpreted and operationalized in the intended manner in terms of the teaching materials, examinations, school-based assessments and classroom practice. At the same time, textbook writers, teachers and examiners can inform and help shape or adapt the curriculum in terms of what is operationalizable.

3. **Enhancing the development of learners' English listening and speaking skills**: Through equipping teachers with the pedagogic skills and proficiency to teach these language skills, providing hands-on resources to teach these language skills (which can also be effectively employed in rural and low-resource areas), and testing these skills in the public examinations. Our comparative regional analysis indicates that there may be room for larger investment of the Sri Lankan Government in Education.

4. **Improving the quality of English language assessment**: Implementing the recommended steps for a full test cycle (see e.g., Green, 2014), including the development of test specifications and improvements in test, task and item design, to ensure compliance of the public examinations with international standards for ethical behaviour in language testing (see e.g. the International

Language Testing Association's Code of Ethics, which has recently been translated into Sinhala - https://www.iltaonline.com/page/CodeofEthics, or the European Association for Language Testing and Assessments' Guidelines for Good Practice - http://www.ealta.eu.org/guidelines.htm). In addition, aiming to improve the quality of exams also requires **research** on the assessments, especially the high-stakes GCE O- and A-Level English exams, in order to **validate** them as well as continue to work on them.

This will help ensure good construct representation in the examinations, reduce the predictability of the exam, and therefore hopefully result in positive exam washback (and eliminate or reduce the reliance on a 'tutories' system).

5. **Developing stakeholders' language assessment literacy**: Language assessment training of stakeholders at all levels of the English language education system in Sri Lanka. While our empirical study indicates that a solid and multi-component basis in language assessment is needed in all stakeholders, in line with Pill and Harding's (2013) language assessment literacy continuum, higher levels of language assessment literacy are particularly desirable for those in key positions such as at the Department of Examinations or in teacher training.

   Increased language assessment literacy will benefit the quality of the public English examinations and school-based assessments. It will also help ensure that assessment results are used more effectively as tools that can inform language pedagogy (e.g. to diagnose or remedy second language learning problems), and not simply to award a score or make a pass/fail decision. As put forward by the National Education Commission (2016: 68): "Assessment information enables the teacher to continuously improve his/her interpretation and to provide a rich learning environment to students."

6. **Addressing systemic factors**: Optimize connections between the teaching and examinations calendars (including publication of results) to avoid losing precious time for educational development. This will require communication and collaboration between Departments responsible for examinations, secondary schools, and universities.

The above suggestions are made with two main aims in mind: a) a 'rounder' development of learners' English language skills and the achievement of higher levels of proficiency through General Education, and b) a better preparation of learners, in terms of English language skills, for communication in the 'real world' of employment and/or further study.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Participant information sheet: Stakeholder interviews

Project: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT in SRI LANKA
Participant information sheet for stakeholder interviews

We are researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, assisted by a local Sri Lankan interpreter, and we would like to invite you to take part in a research study about English language assessment in Sri Lanka. Our research is funded by the TRANSFORM programme of the British Council and Sri Lankan Ministry of Education.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?
This study aims to gain insights into English language assessment in the Sri Lankan education system.

Why have I been invited?
We have approached you because you work in an area related to English language learning and/or assessment in Sri Lanka. Your knowledge and experiences will help us gain insights in the current policy and practices in English language assessment in Sri Lanka, and also to help us develop a training programme on English language assessment. We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?
If you decided to take part, you will be interviewed by a Lancaster researcher (who might be assisted by a Sri Lankan interpreter) who will ask you questions on English language assessment in Sri Lanka. The interview will be conducted face-to-face, and will be audio recorded. It will last approximately one hour.
We will also ask you to complete a short questionnaire about yourself. This will ask questions such as how old you are, your job title and professional experience in English language education and policy.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?
Taking part in this study will allow you to share your knowledge on and experiences with English language assessment in the Sri Lankan education system.

Do I have to take part?
No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your job.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. We will then remove your information and responses from our dataset. Please contact the lead researcher, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, in that case (see the contact details below).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 1 hour for an interview.

Will my data be identifiable?
After the interview, only we will have access to the data you share with us. We will keep all personal information about you (for example, your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is we will not share it with others. We will anonymise any audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that we remove any personal information.

How will my data be stored?
Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than the researchers will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. We will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in our office.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?
We will use the data you have shared with us for academic purposes only. This will include a research report and potentially academic and professional journal or book publications. We may also present the results of our study at academic and professional conferences.
When writing up the findings from this study, we will mainly report the results at the general level, for all participants together. We might also like to add illustrations by reproducing some of the views and ideas you shared with us. When doing so, we will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although we will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications. For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection.

Who has reviewed the project?
This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?
If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact the lead researcher, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, [e-mail], [telephone number], Lancaster University, Department of Linguistics and English Language, County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YL, United Kingdom.

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact our Head of Department, Professor Uta Papen, [e-mail], [telephone number], Lancaster University, Department of Linguistics and English Language, County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YL, United Kingdom.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project!
Dr Tineke Brunfaut, Dr Rita Green, Dr Luke Harding, Dr Bimali Indrarathne

7.2 Consent form: Stakeholder interviews

CONSENT FORM for stakeholder interviews

Project Title: English language assessment in Sri Lanka

Name of Researchers: Dr Tineke Brunfaut, Dr Rita Green, Dr Luke Harding and Dr Bimali
Indrarathne
[Email]

Please tick each box

Please tick (✓) each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand the information on withdrawing as described in the information sheet.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic/professional articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.	☐
4. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
5. I understand that data will be kept according to Lancaster University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
6. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____   Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

7.3 Personal background questionnaire: Stakeholder interviews

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English language assessment in Sri Lanka
Stakeholder background questionnaire

Dear participant,

Thank you very much for taking part in our research! We would be grateful if you could tell us a bit more about yourself. We will not use your name in any publications.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tineke Brunfaut, Dr Rita Green, Dr Luke Harding and Dr Bimali Indrarathne

1. First name:_____ Last name:_____

2. Age: _____ years' old

3. Gender: ☐ male   ☐ female

4. Nationality: ☐ Sri Lankan   ☐ other: _____

5. Language(s) you speak at home:_____

6. Which province do you live in?

☐ Central   ☐ Eastern   ☐ Northern   ☐ North Central

☐ North Western   ☐ Sabaragamuwa   ☐ Southern   ☐ Western   ☐ Uva

7. What kind of area do you live in?

☐ urban   ☐ rural

8. What is the highest level of education you passed?

☐ Grade 5

☐ G.C.E. (O/L)

☐ G.C.E. (A/L)

☐ higher education: a. ☐ undergraduate   ☐ postgraduate

b. Subject field of your degree(s): _____

☐ other:_____

9. What is your professional expertise? Tick all that apply:

☐ Curriculum developer

☐ English language teacher

☐ Item writer

☐ Policy maker

☐ Exam rater or interlocutor

☐ Researcher

☐ Teacher trainer

☐ Test designer

☐ Textbook writer

☐ other (please specify):_____

10. Your current job title:_____

11. Company/institution/organisation you work at:_____

12. Do you speak English?

☐ no   ☐ a little bit   ☐ well   ☐ very well

13. Do you understand English?

☐ no   ☐ a little bit   ☐ well   ☐ very well

14. Did you ever study English?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

        a. For _____ years
        b. In: *(Tick all that apply)*

            ☐ Grade 1-5

            ☐ Grade 6-11 (G.C.E. O/L)

            ☐ Grade 12-13 (G.C.E. A/L)

            ☐ higher education

            ☐ other:_____

15. Did you ever live in an English-speaking country?

☐ No   ☐ Yes

        a. In which country/ies? _____
        b. For how long? _____ years

7.4 Language assessment competence/knowledge questions

[NOTE that the info in the first two columns of the tables below was not presented to participants, but is included here to describe the present's study's LAL construct as operationalised by the set of questions and record its relationship with the Language Assessment Literacy Survey on which it was based.]

For each of the questions in the table below, please consider:

A. How **competent** do people in your profession **need to be** in …

B. How **competent** are people in your profession in …

Circle your answer on the scale, ranging from 1='not competent at all' to 5='fully competent'.

Please carefully distinguish between how competent people need to be in your profession and how competent they are on average in your experience.

Kremmel & Harding (forthcoming) - factors	Kremmel & Harding (forthcoming) – question numbers	This study		**Not at all**				**Fully**
Developing and administering language assessments	58	7. Developing overall plans (specifications) for language tests?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	63	8. Writing good-quality questions (items/tasks) for language tests?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	62	9. Training others to write good-quality questions?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	70	10. Trying out (piloting) language tests before their official administration?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
Developing & administering language assessments (Scoring & rating here)	68	11. Designing scoring keys and rating scales (rubrics) to use in marking language tests?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5

				1	2	3	4	5
Scoring and rating		56	12. Scoring short-answer questions?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		53	13. Using rating scales to score writing or speaking performances?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
Developing & administering language assessments	(Scoring & rating here)	61	14. Training others to use rating scales appropriately?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		65	15. Determining pass-fail marks (or cut scores)?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
Statistical/research methods		50	16. Using statistics to analyse students' scores?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		51	17. Using statistics to analyse the quality of individual questions (items/tasks)?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		52	18. Using techniques other than statistics (questionnaires, interviews, analysis of language,…) to get information about the quality of a language assessment?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
Assessment principles and interpretation		32	19. Understanding the concept of validity (how well an assessment measures what it claims to measure)?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		31	20. Understanding the concept of reliability (how accurate or consistent an assessment is)?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5
		10	21. Interpreting what a test score says about a student's language ability?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
				Are	1	2	3	4	5

				1	2	3	4	5
Assessment in language pedagogy	6	22. Knowing how to use tests to motivate student learning?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	5	23. Knowing how to use tests to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	1	24. Knowing how to use tests to guide teaching?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	21	25. Knowing how to give useful feedback on the basis of a test?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
Assessment policy and local practices	+/- 12	26. Determining if a language test aligns with the local curriculum or syllabus?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	14	27. Determining if the results from a language test are relevant to the local context?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5

Now, we are going to change the questions slightly, and ask about people's <u>knowledge</u>. For each of the questions in the table below, please consider:

C. How **knowledgeable** do people in your profession **<u>need to be</u>** about …
D. How **knowledgeable <u>are</u>** people in your profession about …

Circle your answer on the scale, ranging from 1='not knowledgeable at all' to 5='fully knowledgeable'.

Please carefully distinguish between <u>how knowledgeable people need to be</u> in your profession and <u>how knowledgeable they are</u> on average in your experience.

Kremmel & Harding (forthcoming) – factors	Kremmel & Harding (forthcoming) – question numbers	This study		**Not at all**				**Fully**
Language structure, use and development	+/-28	28. How English is used in the real world?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	26	29. How English language skills develop (reading, listening, writing, speaking)?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	27	30. How English is learned as a second/foreign language?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
Washback	25	31. How tests can influence teaching and learning in the classroom?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	24	32. How tests can influence teaching and learning materials?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	23	33. How tests can influence the design of a language course or curriculum?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	/	34. How tests can influence further educational and employment opportunities?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5

Personal beliefs and attitudes	46	35. How their own beliefs might influence their test practices?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5
	48	36. How their own knowledge of language testing might be further developed?	Need to be	1	2	3	4	5
			Are	1	2	3	4	5