

PERCEPTION OF THE PAST ADVANCED LEVEL BIOLOGY STUDENTS TOWARDS THE BIOLOGY CURRICULUM

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The first detailed exposure in Biology for Sri Lankan students is through the Biology subject in General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) studies. However, A/L biology education is complicated as limited number of successful students is selected to government universities through highly competitive A/L examination. Students are working hard to excel in the examination and that would lead to enormous stress on students. There is an argument that the stresses and problems are due to the complexity of A/L biology curriculum and content must be simplified. However, society has different feelings about simplifying the A/L biology curriculum as some believe simplification would alleviate the burden and stress on students and others think simplification would not allow students to develop necessary competence in biology and making them under prepared for higher education and jobs and unable to understand contemporary biological issues and biological problems in daily life. The diverse social concern on the current debate on simplification of A/L biology curriculum has not been studied adequately. Therefore, present study was conducted to assess the attitudes of precedent A/L biology students towards the complexity of A/L biology curriculum. A survey was conducted by using a questionnaire guided interview with 180 past A/L biology students currently engaged in different career levels: current university students in biology related fields, professionals with degrees and professionals without degrees.

The subject depth was considered adequate by majority of the respondents (80% or more) in three categories. The extent of topics covered was also considered adequate by 75% of current university students, 63% of professionals with a degree and 67% of professionals without a degree. Around 70% of respondents in all three categories believed the complexity was at optimum level. Thus the general opinion of respondents was they like the existing nature of A/L biology curriculum. More than 60% of the respondents in the opinion that students face financial difficulties in A/L studies. Among the respondents 92% of current university students felt stressed during A/L studies and only 47% of professionals with a degree and 55% of professionals without a degree felt stressed. More than 50% in each category enjoyed A/L biology studies and around 40% had mixed feelings. When considering respondents in all three categories 90% of them believed that A/L Biology is helpful in their present careers

and in daily life. Sixty percent of the respondents believe there are job opportunities for people who have done A/L biology. Ninety seven percent of professionals with a degree and all current university students were in the opinion that A/L biology is very important in university studies. Almost 99% of the past students attended private tuition classes for A/L biology studies and believed extra support is essential to complete the syllabus and detailed learning. They were skeptical about the role of government schools and teachers and suggested to improve the current system of education.

Majority of the respondents believe that A/L biology curriculum must not be changed for its depth, extent and current level of complexity. However, more applied aspects of biology and practical sessions must be included. The government education system must be improved to lessen the dependence on tuition classes.