

# THE WORLD BANK CREDIT FACILITIES INFLUENCE IN FRAMING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY IN SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY OF COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT FACULTY, UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA

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## ABSTRACT

*Higher education sector plays a significant role in producing intellectual and human capital for countries' economic and social development. In Sri Lanka, graduates un-employability and limited access opportunities to higher education are critical issues of the sector in uplifting the Sri Lankan economy from lower middle income status to upper middle income status country. The policy makers have invited the World Bank to review the higher education sector during 1990s for suggesting improvements. The outcome of the study highlights the necessity of improving the quality and relevance of the higher education provided by the national universities in Sri Lanka to enable producing globally employable graduates. Between the period of 2003- 2020, the World Bank has funded through three projects, named IRQUE, HETC and AHEAD for the sector improvements. This study reviewed documentary sources to understand how these projects conceptualize 'quality' and impact on Sri Lankan higher education sector. As a case study, the Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies of the University of Kelaniya, was selected to reveal how their fund winning study programs have been affected by the quality perceptions of the World Bank and to understand the means through which those quality constructs were operationalized by the academic departments offering the degree programs. This study contributes as the first impact study examining implementation proposals of all three World Bank projects. Findings reveal the World Bank's influence in framing the conception of 'quality' as producing graduates fit-for purpose; - purpose being the career ready graduates. In line with this, the study programs have aligned curriculum for the job-market requirements, embedded skillset demanded by the employers into formative assessment and evaluation and made changes to teaching and learning modes and methods to adopt proposed changes.*

**Keywords:** *Quality, higher education, quality constructs*

In the year 1990, Sri Lankan government initiated reforming higher education policies grounded on a comprehensive study conducted by the International Development Association of the World Bank. Amongst several drawbacks identified in the higher education sector, unemployment of graduates produced by the national universities was a dominant issue emphasized for policy makers' attention (Little & Hettige, 2013). According to the World Bank [WB], (2012) on average 2% of students who meet the performance standards at the General Certificate Education Advanced Level are enrolled to 15 national universities in the country. This is well below the average student intake to national universities when compared with South Asian, East Asian and Pacific countries. Despite low access opportunities to higher education also matters the wealth of the human capital of the country, the government has prioritized to improve the quality of the higher education offered by the national universities enabling produce of employable graduates. A series of loan facilities have been arranged between the government of Sri Lanka and the WB to successfully implement the reformed policies in the sector.

This paper focuses on the WB funding projects granted to undergraduate study programs of national universities. By the year 2020, the WB has funded three such projects. The first project, "Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education (IRQUE)" granted through Quality Enhancement Fund was a five-year project granted first in 2003. The second project, "Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century" (HETC) funded through

Quality and Innovative Grant – (QIG) was a three-year project first granted in 2011. The latest project that is being funded from the year 2019 is a three-year development project named 'Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development' (AHEAD) project.

As the literature reveals, in the context of higher education, stakeholders play a critical role in defining 'quality' and its constructs and influenced by the contextual factors (Alzafari & Ursin, 2019; Pitman, 2014). However, it is not known how stakeholders influence higher education quality in Sri Lanka, in particular the funders as key stakeholders. The WB involves through funding the higher education sector development in Sri Lanka. In this context, this study is motivated to explore the role of the WB in defining the higher education quality in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, main research question of the study is formulated as; how does the WB, as a key funding sponsor influence quality in higher education? The study aims to examine how 'quality' is conceptualized, interpreted and framed through project guidelines by the funding organization- the WB and the ways in which the fund winning national universities have operationalized those 'quality' conceptions in their study programs in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the researcher attempts to answer the following sub research questions.(1). *What are the key aims and objectives of each funding project?*(2). *What dimensions have been conceptualized and framed into project guidelines to enable the said aims and objectives?* (3). *How do the WB project fund winning academic departments conducting undergraduate study programs*

*of the national universities have operationalized those requirements?* Thereby, this study aims to fill the gap in the higher education literature showing funders influence in defining the higher education quality in the context of Sri Lanka.

The remaining sections of the paper are organized as follows. Sec.2 reviews prior literature on higher education quality and then Sec. 3 explains the methodology. Data analysis and discussion is presented in the Sec. 4 and the Sec. 5 concludes the paper.

## **2. Quality in Higher Education**

With the global concerns for equal education opportunities for all, higher education opportunities enjoyed by an elite group of people in the societies are gradually opened up for the mass (Faure et al., 1972; Burrage, 2010) and across the globe. Social and economic development of a country and its prosperity depends on the availability of skilled human capital. Thus, quality of education, particularly higher education matters in achieving economic prosperity through research and creating new knowledge (Larsen et al., (2016). With this global trend, 'quality' has become a popular discourse in the higher education sector. Thus, policy makers of developed nations pay continuous attention on quality aspects of higher education. A challenging view is that increasing access to higher education may negatively impact higher education quality (Whiteford et al., 2013). However, as Odhiambo, (2011) shows in the context of developing countries, higher education opportunities are relatively limited and the quality is affected negatively due to insufficient budgetary allocations to

education, political influences, brain drain and globalization impact. Realizing the growth potential of the economy through improving the quality of higher education, these countries are taking measures to improve quality and implement quality assurance systems. Quality assurance mechanism aims to implement systems and procedures to monitor and evaluate the higher education quality.

This study uses 'quality' as the main concept of the study. As the extant literature reveals, Quality can be defined in terms of resources or performance of the higher education institutions. Resource based definition considers stakeholder perceptions about internal resources which is considered a traditional view to that of performance view, which considers outputs and outcome of the higher education institutions such as resource usage efficiency, producing employable graduates. This complements valued added approach in determining the higher education quality (Astin, 1991; Bennett, 2001). This study adopts both resource and performance based quality perspectives to examine how quality is defined and constructed by the WB through its funding. Accordingly, in this study, what 'quality' means to the WB may constitute aspects of internal resources and/or the performance of the higher education institution. This section reviews how quality term has emerged and embraced into the context of the higher education.

The term 'Quality' was a concept that emerged in the Manufacturing sector (Hides et al., 2004) and meant for 'fitness for purpose'. However, in the context of

higher education, the term lacks a uniform definition as 'Quality' is perceived differently by stakeholders. As Harvey and Green (1993) highlights:

Quality is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is involved. It means different things to different people, indeed the same person may adopt different conceptualizations at different moments. This raises the issue of whose quality? (p. 10).

What does quality mean? Quality is perceived as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money and as transformative. (Harvey, 1995; Harvey et al., 1992; Pitman, 2014). Students, academics, university administrators, parents, employers and the government as well as funding bodies, accreditors, auditors and professional bodies are considered the stakeholder categories of higher education. Promoting the collaboration between the universities and the industry has found a key direction for improvement of the sector (Larsen et al., 2016).

Apart from differences of quality expectations amongst stakeholders, the methods adopted to measure the quality differs depending on the points considered for defining the quality of higher education (Udam & Heidmets, 2013). For instance, within the higher education system either input, process or output activities have been chosen as quality measurement points using variables such as student intake, number of graduates produced and skilled workers (Tam, 2001). Models suggested to measure the higher education quality includes namely, 'production model' which is similar to measuring manufacturing quality concerning

the relation between inputs and outputs, 'value-added approach', which counts on the value addition during the completion of the degree and another approach counts on the total learning experience as 'total quality experience approach' (Tam, 2001, p.51-53).

Differences in quality perceptions, measurement points and modes have led in use of multiple quality dimensions to measure the quality (Teichler, 2011; Blanco-Ramírez and Berger, 2014) and pose further challenges to understand what higher education quality means (Udam & Heidmets, 2013). Quality dimensions include competencies of graduates, employers' satisfaction, students experience in the higher education system (Tam, 2001), student progression indicators, completions rates, student satisfaction and continuity of education after graduation (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 80), student learning, engagement, service quality and satisfaction, total quality management, quality assurance, bench marking and accountability (Prakash, 2018). Dimensions suggested to measure the quality of accounting education includes tangibles, curriculum, competence, assessment and monitoring, corporate collaboration and counselling (Munasinghe & Bandara, 2009) and highlights the necessity of inclusion of skills as expected by the job market (Munasinghe & Weligamage, 2006). As per Lola (2013) quality dimensions can be grouped in terms of administrative measures and education quality measures.

With emphasis on the stakeholder's role in defining quality, some of these

stakeholders and their perceptions are highlighted next. As per the students' view, lectures, curriculum and the academic atmosphere are considered key dimensions. Having disciplined expertise, experienced and committed teachers and student caring and networking facilities are also considered as constructs of quality (Hill et al., 2003). As perceived by administrators and academics, quality of higher education can be grouped into 5 dimensions; reputation and expertise of academics as 'transcendent quality', and 'manufacturing-based quality' as graduates fit for the purpose, and third as 'product-based quality' which reflect the curriculum and academics as input towards graduates learning outcome and the forth, 'value-based quality' meaning quality of graduates matching with the price and performance and finally 'user-based quality' as meeting students' needs and wants (Koslowski, 2006).

Stakeholder perceptions are influenced by the contextual factors as well. For instance, a study in the context of Australian higher education reveals quality is not something static, but changed in keeping with national government priorities and differs over the periods of changing governments and their priorities. Ability of producing sufficient numbers of graduates fitting to the job market demands had been the key aspect of higher education quality during 2008. Whereas, later on during the year of 2013 realizing mass education impact on national budgets, quality of the academic standards brought forward as a major concern by the policy makers. As a result, higher education was later on considered as a market and of which efficiency and competition was considered as key quality measurement (Pitman, 2014). In

the context of developing countries, as Pham and Starkey (2016) reveals in Vietnam, academics, institutional leaders and quality assurance members perceive quality as of meeting social expectations and thus, producing employable graduates as quality. A study that examined the student's perceptions of private higher education universities in Bangladesh reveals that perceptions of quality differ amongst students and depend on students' demographic factors, parents' education, students' achievement during the course of study such as scholarships and progress. Challenging curriculum, learning environment, opportunity to engage in part time jobs, research work and extra-curricular activities are considered dimensions that they perceive as quality constructs of the education provided by the private universities (Husain & Hossain, 2016).

As it is evident from the literature the concept of Quality in higher education is perceived as fitness for purpose, value for money, perfection, transformation and distinctiveness. Having a consensus on higher education quality is not easy and thus, education policy developers tend to focus on how to measure quality such as how graduates produced by higher education institutions fit for the job market demands rather than bothering on to understand what quality means (Saarinen, 2010).

Many research studies have focused on Europe followed by North America and Asia. However, in the context of Asia, there exists scant literature about the higher education quality of South- East Asian



Countries, in particular, Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is recognized as a high literacy rated country and from recent decades external funding is used for the education sector developments. Thus, with the WB's involvement through funding for the higher education sector development, the researcher is motivated to contribute to the literature by examining the role of the WB, as a key stakeholder in framing higher education quality in Sri Lanka.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts the content analysis method to analyze and summarize data from available documentary sources and to draw inferences on quality with respected to the selected case study. The unit of analysis was the WB project guides of three funding projects and the six fund winning projects proposals. Other available related documentaries issued by the WB, Ministry of Higher Education and the academic departments relevant to the projects complemented that information.

Content analysis of these documents as the reliable source of evidence enabled to create initial coding of data in terms and conditions, objectives, compliance guides and requirements for each grant and as well as project proposals showcase how those requirements have

been transformed to implementation plans by the fund receiving departments of the faculty. The content of those were coded and tabulated in Microsoft Word documents to draw inferences on quality.

This case sample of the Faculty of Commerce and Management studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka was chosen as it includes five departments of which three departments have won the above mentioned three competitive projects of the WB since 2003 as depicted in the table 1 below. As shown in the table, the sample of this study consists of six projects representing three departments of the Commerce and Management faculty and the faculty itself. Thus, the unit of analysis of the study constitutes of each study program proposals.

Table 1. World Bank funds awarded study programs

Name of the grant	Department	Funds SLR	Project period
<b>IRQUE</b>	Accountancy(DoA)	100 million	2003 - 2009
	Commerce & Management(COM)	60 million	
<b>HETC</b>	Marketing Management(DOM)	20 million	2011 - 2016
<b>AHEAD</b>	DOA	15 million	2019 - 2022
	COM	15 million	
	Faculty of Commerce & Management Studies (FCMS)	100 million	

To explore how those project guidelines have been interpreted and operationalized by the academic departments conducting study programs, funds awarded six project proposals were reviewed in detail which includes proposed key activities and aims and objectives, sub activities, activity plans, measurement indices and budgets and sustainability plans. They were compared with the project guides to draw inferences of quality adoption in the context of the undergraduate study programs conducted by the Kelaniya University. Next section analyses and discusses the findings.

#### **4. Analysis and findings**

This section first presents an analyses of aims and objectives of the three WB projects and then illustrates how selected fund recipient departments have proposed activities in line with the project guidelines to be implemented for the development of their study programs.

##### ***4.1 Aims and objectives of the WB projects***

Each project sets its aims and objectives to enable quality improvement of the sector as presented below.

**IRQUE** -This is the first WB grant received to the higher education sector in the year 2003 and universities were funded as competitive grants under two major components. Whilst one component focused on upgrading the capacities of the universities and the second component aimed to upgrade the study programs offered by academic departments of the national universities. The overall aim of the IRQUE project was to improve the quality and relevance of higher education offered by the

national universities in Sri Lanka (WB, 2012).

This paper focuses on the second component of this project which was awarded as a competitive grant by evaluating the proposals forwarded by the study programs of national universities. This grant was made available to national universities under three rounds of competitions. Universities were made aware about the project aims, objectives and requirements through workshops and project guide documentaries.

The key objective of the project was to enhance quality and relevance of study programs conducted by the national universities as a means of increasing graduate employability. Thus, feasible plans for increasing employability in the next three-year period together with investment and sustainability plans were a requisite of the project proposals. Another prominent objective aimed to promote through this project was inculcating social harmony through higher education.

**HETC-As** the second WB project granted in 2011, this funding project aimed at capacity building of the universities, academics and the higher education system to enable producing employable graduates for the 21st century. Project was granted under four components. Under the first component, it aimed at higher education sector developments at the national level and the component two focused on improving the study program quality and graduate's employability. Producing skilled human resources outside the state university systems was the focus under the

third component and human capital development, and quality assurance was focused under the fourth component.

Similar to the IRQUE project, one component of this project, component 2 focused on improving the quality of the study programs. Thus, the second component of this project was selected as the key focus of this study. The project aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of the graduates to make them ready for the 21st century job market.

AHEAD-As the latest project granted during 2019, AHEAD aims to enhance the higher education sector development furthermore and funds are disbursed under three key areas. First funding area focused on increasing access to higher education, the second area is on quality improvement of the higher education and the added third component focuses on promoting research, development and innovation. Of these, in line with the above two projects, this study focused at the second component of the project which aims at improving the quality of the study programs offered by the academic departments of national universities.

AHEAD as the latest WB project granted for improving the quality of study programs emphasizes on enhancing academic and English language skills of the students and introduces socio-emotional skill enhancement of students as another prime objective. This project was made available to individual study programs and to the faculties as well. Faculties were granted a maximum of Sri Lankan Rs 100 million and individual departments 15 million each.

Having stated the aims and objectives of each project funded by the WB the section next review how study programs have interpreted quality expectations and put them into activity and action plans to be implemented through developing project proposals.

#### ***4.2 Operationalization of project quality dimensions by the study programs***

This section presents an analysis of the project proposals and project guides to understand how study programs have interpreted project guides and operationalized them at the study program levels. Contents were analyzed using themes emerged during the content analysis of the documents.

Study program development plans are structured in terms of number of key activities and sub activities. These activities showcase how the study programs have interpreted the project expectations and plan out executions. These vary from a minimum of three key activities under HETC project to a maximum of 10 key activities proposed under the IRQUE project. These specifies the nature and scope of planned actions, required resources such as procurement of goods, services, consultancies, works or others requirements, time line and measurement indices and sustainability plans.

Analysis of activities under the three project reveals that they revolve around three common dimensions; curriculum, graduate skills and teaching & learning across all three projects. However, depth



and scope of these dimensions keep changing over projects in order to enable the project aims and objectives. For instance, a key requirement of the IRQUE project was to show the development plans proposed towards increasing graduate employability over a period of three years.

Universities would be invited to submit development plans elaborated by degree programs. Each development plan would indicate. (a) how the degree program would improve the employability of future graduates in the coming three years, .... (IRQUE-project guide)

Whereas in the second project, HETC, development plans were encouraged to focus on producing skillful graduates for the 21st century. Under the current project, AHEAD, emphasis is given on graduate 'outcomes' rather than 'outputs', that is not just producing employable graduates but also emphasis on graduate's capacity towards an impact on the economy and the society positively. To enable the project requirements, a common activity that has been proposed across the three project is curriculum development, which is analyzed next to understand the mode of operational plans.

**Curriculum:** Academic departments have initiated stakeholder consultations to obtain feedback for existing curriculum and for required revisions and thus, 'employers' have been identified as the key stakeholder;

Employers are a major stakeholder of a study program. The graduates who join as employees to the industry/profession should be able to provide the necessary

contribution expected by employers. In order to perform the tasks assigned, the graduate should have a certain set of attributes that were mentioned before the employer will be looking for. The graduates should also have the theoretical knowledge along with the skills and attitudes in applying the theory into practice (IRQUE-COM)

Based on feedback, study programs have initiated to revise their core-curriculum to make it relevant for the job market. In revising, new course units are introduced, existing credit structures are amended;

The DoA restructured its accounting curriculum to better fit into the needs of the private sector, public sector as well as the stakeholders. Consistent with global trends and norms, the DoA revised its syllabus in 2002/2003 and increased credit value from 96 to 120 (IRQUE-DoA)

Non-core course units and auxiliary courses introduced into the curricular giving students an opportunity and flexibility to select optional course units;

.... at each cycle considerable effort was made to incorporate industry requirements through revision of existing course modules and new course modules introduced. Thus, there are 72 credit giving modules from the core Marketing Management discipline of DMM, and 48 credits on offer from number of modules under noncore disciplines. In today's multi-tasking business environment, incorporating such a balance of

different disciplines in to the curriculum, whilst keeping priority to core discipline is timely and is very justifiable (HETC-DOM)

Some course units are introduced outside the curriculum but as compulsory. For instance, accounting packages SPSS and Sage Line 50 have introduced to Accounting students under the IRQUE project plans. To keep up with the past changing business world, study programs are gradually incorporating innovative content to their curricular.

Traditionally Commerce and Business graduates focus on enhancing their business side knowledge and skills, while ignoring the technical innovation skills, entrepreneurial intention, business analytic skills, technology savviness and practical living skills in technology driven society... Therefore, the DCFM intends to make a breakthrough effort to empower the B.COM graduate with m-shaped knowledge, skills and competencies (AHEAD-CoM)

Furthermore, existing internship programs have been strengthened by establishing collaborative industry linkages between the university and industry. Internship is incorporated to the curriculum as a credit bearing course unit and that is monitored and assessed. For instance, DoA proposed to establish an Accountancy Professional Secretariat to facilitate and promote industry link. Considering the necessity of study programs being relevant to the industry, during IRQUE project, Accountancy departments have introduced a new degree

program, B.B. Mgt. (Finance) special degree by the department of Accountancy; ... students have the option of choosing Finance specialization or accounting career path. Department is dedicated to design relevant and innovative curricular ...(IRQUE-DoA)

Widening the scope of the curriculum development plans, departments have proposed to align curricular with local and international frameworks and standards such as SLQF and subject benchmark statements and to obtain accreditations for their study programs, such as ISO certification and AACSB.

DCFM has already taken measures to align the degree programs with Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF), which is the locally accepted framework for ensuring the quality in higher education in Sri Lanka. Through this proposed activity, the DCFM expects to benchmark the teaching, learning and assessment process with the business degree accreditation guidelines (AHEAD-COM)

Changes to curriculum are proposed to effected through proposed changes in teaching and learning aspect of the study programs as stated next.

**Teaching and Learning:** This is another key dimension emerged from the data as a means to improve the quality of the study programs. Development plans of the project proposals suggest how departments aim to overcome existing weakness in the teaching and learning

process to enable improving the quality of study programs. In IRQUE project plans, departments have aimed at improving the academic qualifications of the staff and improving the teaching and learning resources and facilities. As reported in a project proposal;

Physical facilities are insufficient to perform educational process in an appropriate way. The space occupied for students is very limited, equipment for practical works are insufficient, library collection is inadequate and outdated, .... staff members are encouraged to use Overhead Projectors. However, only a single multi-media projector is available to serve nearly 2000 students....(IRQUE-DoA)

As revealed through the other project recipient department,

Minimum use of IT in teaching and learning, (computer to student's ratio = 1:20), Insufficient learning materials, No practical work experience or internship programme, No dedicated website for the study programme... (IRQUE-COM)

Thus, development plans suggested for developing split sized postgraduate programs in collaboration with foreign universities, opportunities for the participation for short term programs conducted by foreign institutions. New mode of teaching such as group lecturing method suggested to overcome lack of academically qualified staff.

Group assignments, presentations, practical group work, case studies have been proposed

since the IRQUE project as novel teaching and learning techniques aiming to improve the industry sought graduate's skills.

The 'original industry related case studies' will allow students to get accustomed to the applicability of their learning to the real business world, and the learning is likely to be more effective with customized case studies been used. .... Industry specialists will be invited for the case study developments at a levelheaded payment, and will be expected to work with DMM in unison in developing the case studies. (HETC-DoM)

Use of web-based learning is initiated from IRQUE and have widen the scope throughout the other projects.

activity 2, proposes a full implementation of LMS, where students will be able to access learning materiel (lecture notes /slides/ podcast /vodcast) in priori and posterior of each lecture, eventually leading to online course modules offering to the undergraduates. Subsequently, DMM will link with SAP University Alliance Program (SAP-UAP) in introducing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) based teaching and learning to students, allowing greater exposure to students on IT orientation in to other subject disciplines (HETC-DoM)

Those include plans for use of latest teaching and learning modes;

At present, all the study programs of FCMS use classroom presentations, group and individual assignments,

case study teaching etc. .... With the introduction of AHEAD project, FCMS is planning to revisit and restructure the above-mentioned teaching and learning strategies. Among others, FCMS proposes to apply outcome-based teaching and learning strategies such as flipped classrooms, blended learning techniques, online learning tools such as Kahoot, Zoom, Mentimeter, Gosoapbox etc.(AHEAD-Fcms)

Proposed development plans include improvement of physical facilities, library collections, web based teaching and learning to transform of teaching method from teacher centered to student centered teaching and learning.

Department has aligned its objectives of transitioning into Learner-Centered Teaching with a shift towards blended learning with the aim of improving meta-learning abilities, character and skills pertaining to Foundational Competencies (AHEAD-COM)

Similar plans suggested by another recipient;

as moving with the global pedagogical trends we, wish to take OBE - LCT approaches to all these revisions of curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment methods. (AHEAD-DoA)

Adoption of new teaching and learning methods are encouraged through training of the academic staff

In aligning the curriculum to OBE – LCT approach, the academic staff should be competent with needed OBE-LCT techniques. For that purpose, the

staff members will be undergone workshops, training programs to enhance their skills of new teaching methodologies(AHEAD-DoA)

All these aims at improving graduate skill beyond emphasis on knowledge improvement.

**Graduate skills:** Necessity of skills improvement of graduate was another key dimension emerged through the content analysis. Amongst, identified different types of skills, English language skills requirement is a continually sought skill in all three projects and study programs have given prominence attention.

In fact, recent information shows that businesses are looking at 21st century skill sets such as those involving computer technology, multi-tasking, critical thinking, problem solving through communication, and self-direction through potential graduates to be recruited(HETC-DoM)

To quote from another department;

However, a considerable percentage of the Sri Lankan undergraduates, who will soon become internal stakeholders of various businesses lacks with desired level of English language skills. Competency in English language skills is reported to be one of the essentials skills for employability and also it helps to become a high caliber professional in the corporate world(AHEAD-DoA).

The mode of assessments of course units have changed in line with curriculum

revisions to incorporate stakeholder feedback. Of these English language skill improvement is recognized as a project requirement and as well as a demanded skill by the employers. Thus, English language skills is identified as a must to produce competitive graduates and identifies that existed capacities as insufficient:

..it could be said that the existing approaches to upgrade the English language knowledge are comparatively narrow (IRQUE-COM)

Plans proposed under IRQUE project to improve the language skills include setting up the programme to hire native speaking English professionals through British council and American centre, Establishing English language study centre, having linkages with English training institutions Conducting study programme in English medium, developing course materials in English medium,improving reading, writing and speaking habits in English. In the latest project, AHEAD, English language improvement is incorporated into project as a unique Component and as requested study programs have allocated specific funding amount from the total budget creating a key activity for improve the language skills of the graduates.Thus operationalization plans include;

Introducing a 120 hour pre-sessional English and academic skills development course for the first year's students prior to the commencement of studies, Course modules in English for specific purposes and establishing a self-access English language Learning Zone based at the Faculty of Commerce

& Management Studies in collaboration with the Department of English language Teaching (AHEAD-Fcms)

At the study program level individual departments that won the AHEAD grant have proposed to take further initiatives such as developing mobile apps to facilitate English learning at any time anywhere and creation of formal clubs for English learning.

Considering the necessity of improving English and as well as soft skills, under the HETC project a new soft skills qualification was suggested to uniquely position marketing graduates asstrategists and justified its plan as quoted below;

DMM has developed a novel concept blending the following points; 'importance of different types of soft skills', 'any soft skills development should be done affiliated to the industry', and 'also to carve out a niche for the graduates who are conversant in soft skills', by introducing a new professional soft skills qualification to be branded as Activity 03: Crafting a new soft skills qualification known as Certified Professional Marketing Graduates (CPMG), in uniquely positioning DMM graduates as strategists. (HETC-DoM)

Other proposed soft skill development plans include formalization of extra-curricular activities through recording and evaluating student performance;



DoA supposed that the ongoing extracurricular activities of students (Challenge Sports Day, charity activity, Poson Dansela, Annual Dharma Deshana, Christmas Carol, seminars and workshops, Musical programmer etc.) are not formally evaluated and officially endorsed by the university. .... DoA by formalizing the ongoing social and intercultural activities and introducing new activities to the DoA activity schedule. Then they are recorded in Student Skill Profile (SSPs) of each student and evaluated formally. The SSPs are given university validation and student are able to utilize them for future job opportunities. (AHEAD-DoA)

A new activity suggested to improve students' skills include organizing student research symposia and as well as include mechanisms to ensuring equity and equality among student community by creating student databases to facilitate grouping of students for activities. Under the AHEAD project, a concept of 'socio-emotional skill' development has been introduced and encouraged and perceived by departments as:

The Business world has come to realize that productivity depends on a work force that is socially and emotionally competent. Workers who are capable of managing their social and emotional interactions with colleagues and customers, as well as their own emotional health, are more effective in improving the bottom line and in making workplaces more efficient... thus

social and emotional education is targeted to help students develop the attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions to become "healthy and competent" socially, emotionally, academically, and physically, because of the close LINKA okrelationship among these domains(AHEAD-Fcms)

Reviewing the activities proposed by study programs under the three funding projects, and project guides this study draw inferences on the quality dimensions emphasized by the funders. The table below depicts a summarized view on the dimensions identified to improve the quality of study programs

Table 2. Higher Education quality dimensions

<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Career Ready Curriculum</b> -Local and international accreditation of the study programs (e.g. SLQF, ISO, AACSB) -Course content to be innovative and contemporary -Students flexibility through inclusion of non-core course units -Shift from knowledge based assessment to knowledge & skill combined assessment
<b>Graduate Skills</b>	<b>Employer Demanding Skills</b> - English language skills - ICT and soft skills and socio emotional skills
<b>Teaching &amp; Learning Mode</b>	<b>Transformation from Teacher Centered to Student Centered Approach</b> -New teaching, learning techniques/approaches & facility improvements -Focus on 'outcome' rather than 'output', i.e. graduates

One key construct is 'relevant curriculum'. Study programs conducted by the national universities to be relevant to the job market demands and thereby open up employment opportunities for graduates. Relevance and quality to go hand in hand to produce employable graduates. The second dimension is 'graduate skills' and encompasses a skill set that is considered necessary for producing graduates ready for the 21 century and beyond. A novel term known as socio-emotional skills are emphasized and encourage through the latest AHEAD projects. Third dimension relates to the improvement of the teaching and learning process as a 'transformation from teacher centered to student centered teaching approach'. Furthermore, throughout all the projects promotion of values such as social harmony, improvement of socio-emotional skills is encouraged and promoted by the study programs aiming to ensure graduates future to live in the country as of multi religious and ethnic groups in harmony.

## 5. Conclusion

In Sri Lanka, the WB has become a key stakeholder interested in developing the higher education sector by funding through the Ministry of higher education. Thus, this paper aims to reveal the influence of the WB as a lending body in framing the quality conceptions in the Sri Lankan higher education sector. The WB encourages a higher education system that can produce skilled, hard-working and enterprising graduates in Sri Lanka (WB, 2009).

Three WB projects received since 2003 to date IRQUE, HETC and AHEAD were the focus of this study. Accordingly, the Faculty

of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaniya was selected as a case study to examine how the WB funding project mediates in framing the quality perceptions and operationalization in upgrading the existing study programs of the faculty.

Review of documentary evidences reveals that in the context of the WB projects, quality is perceived as producing 'employable graduates' by the state universities, which is in line with the literature described as 'fitness for purpose', which in turn reflects performance based definition of quality. Throughout the three projects, quality has been conceptualized as capability of the study programs and their graduates' ability in finding a relevant job after the graduation and the ability of producing future graduates to fit for the future job market, both locally and at the international level.

This perception has been supported by the local policy makers as free higher education becoming rather a burden to the economy and unemployed graduates becoming a political issue of the country. Despite project guides requires inclusion of qualitative aspects such as improvement of social harmony and socio-emotional aspects, review of project proposal shows no strong evidences to support that their inclusion into curricular nor assessments. This study is purely based on review of proposal documents and related documentary evidences and not explored their implementation issues. Thus it is suggested to conduct further studies in the form of case studies to explore their implementation and evaluate the real

impact on the study programs who have won the projects.

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