

第7章

Education System of Sri Lanka:

Strengths and Weaknesses

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Abstract

As a result of the free education policy (1947) and introduction of Sinhala and Tamil languages as the medium of education, Sri Lanka achieved universal primary education by 1964, then 92% of literacy rate, gender parity and the third Millennium Development Goal of eliminating disparities in enrolment in education. However, present education system faces several major challenges related to poor quality, mismatch of curriculum with existing labour market demands, lack of training for school teachers and inefficient administration. Not only the limited government expenditure on education, but also factors like lack of clear national/state educational policy, un-planned policy changes done by the political leaders from regime to regime, politicization of recruiting procedures of school teachers and administrative staff, lack of proper teacher training, and some recent educational reforms mainly based on foreign donor agencies but not on real needs of the country have been pointed out as main factors for the deterioration of the education system by moderate educationist, researchers and policy makers in Sri Lanka.

Key Word

Sri Lanka, Education, mismatch, politicization, challenges

Introduction:

Sri Lanka enjoys a remarkable progress, in terms of basic education indicators, compared to many other developing countries in the world. As a result of the priority given to human capital development, the Universal Free Education Policy was introduced in 1945, by the government. It was designed in order to provide education facilities free to all students from Kindergarten to the University education. Establishment of Central schools, introduction of national languages- Sinhala and Tamil- as the medium of instruction in primary schools, free mid-day meals has helped to improve the school enrollment mostly among the poor families. After independence in 1948 until the mid-1960s, the government was able to back up its political commitments with adequate resources for education owing favorable economic conditions.

The government was able to spend about 4% of the GDP on education, resulting an improvement in literacy and school enrollment in both male and female. Nevertheless, the weak economic conditions since the late-1960s, strained the government's ability to sustain and strengthen the education system. As a result, in the 1970s, allocation for education fell below 3% of the GDP, limiting the expenditure only adequate to meet the essential recurrent expenditure such as teachers' salaries and the cost of expansion of schools in order to increase the enrollment rate. Furthermore, the Structural Adjustment Policies introduced by the government in 1977 led to the reduction of the education expenditure to less than 2% of the GDP, thus, deteriorating the quality of education, slowing down further attainment in literacy and increasing the regional disparities in education.

Later on, the successive governments in the 1980s and 1990s took measures in order to increase the deteriorated quality of education, school enrollment rate and the completion rate. Thus, provision of free school text books for grade 1-11 students, handing free uniforms, grade 5 scholarships and subsidized public transportation for students was introduced. In 1990, education reforms based on the recommendation of the National Education Commission (NEC) were introduced in order to transform and modernize the Sri Lankan education system to fit in the global landscape and socio-economic changes of the upcoming century. These reforms were focused on two main initiatives: a) to improve the quality of education and b) to provide education for all. Furthermore, the government enforced laws and took strict adheres to send children of 5-14 years in age

to school and initiated teacher training and development programs to develop an interest mainly in the field of Information Technology and English. General Education Project-2 (GEP2) funded by the International Development Assistance Program (IDA) and the World Bank in 1998, assisted to print text books and related publications, curriculum development for grades 1-9, rationalize school facilities and to develop school libraries.

Even though such measures were taken to increase the quality of education, Sri Lanka has been experiencing a number of problems. Some of the problems can be listed as the high dropout rates, low participation in education and the poor attendance, especially in the secondary and tertiary levels, poor performance in mathematics and science, unequal distribution of resources among schools – mainly rural and urban, over-loaded curriculum, lack of opportunities to continue up to higher education and issues pertinent to teacher training etc.

The Present Situation Analysis:

The general education system in Sri Lanka provides 13 years in three cycles. Children from 5-10 attend primary school (Grade 1-5), from age 11-14 junior secondary school (Grade 6-9), from age 15-16 senior secondary (for General Certificate Examination/Ordinary Level - GCE O/L (Grade 10-11) and from age 17 -18 collegiate or GCE Advanced Level - A/L (Grade 12-13). In Sri Lanka schooling is compulsory for children from 5 to 14 years of age. The national level examination –GCE O/L marks the end of the senior secondary and GCE A/L marks the collegiate education. For GCE O/L, there is a common syllabus and it includes both compulsory and optional subjects. It is compulsory for all students to study one's own language, second language (English), Maths, Science, History and Religion. Three other subjects such as civics, arts, dancing, commerce, entrepreneurship, agriculture etc. can be taken from the optional list. However, a student should take 9 subjects for GCE O/L examination and to continue for GCE A/L class one should at least pass 6 subjects (with minimum, 3 C passes for compulsory subjects) including mother tongue, maths and science. In the A/L class students are free to select one main stream out of three: Arts, Science, and Commerce. For Arts, many social science (economics, geography, logic, political science and psychology etc.) and Humanities (language, culture, drama, history and classical studies etc.) subjects are offered. There are two main streams for Science students: bio-science and physical science. The students who study bio science normally take biology, physics and chemistry and physical science students take maths, physics, chemistry etc. There

are very few courses such as agriculture, zoology and double maths as optional courses. Commerce students have to select course from such as accounts, commerce, economics and entrepreneurship etc. However, once students select his/her field he/she has to study three main relevant subjects, English and General knowledge as compulsory subjects. The university entrance is based on the results of GCE A/L examination. There are two types of under graduate programs in Arts: i) three year General Degree Program which offer three main subjects and the duration is 3 years; ii) the Special Degree Program offers more than twenty courses but relevant to one main subject. The commerce program takes 4 years and Medicine, vet science and dental courses are for 5 years. The science, engineering and agriculture etc. takes 4 years to complete the course.

Education is generally state-funded and offered free of charge at all levels, including the university level. The government also provides free text books and uniform (3 for a year) to school children. There are 10,763 schools in Sri Lanka (public - 9931, private - 98, and pirivena (mainly for Buddhist monks) - 734) (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013). The public schools offer curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education and the private schools offer local as well as the British syllabus. There is new set of private English medium schools established recently and they are approved and registered by the Board of Investment (BOI) - Sri Lanka. Though statistics related to them is not collected systematically between 200-250 such schools are estimated and they mainly offer foreign curricula and prepare students for international examinations (World Bank, 2011).

Currently there are 4,186,803 students (public -3,996,531, private – 125,669, pirivena - 64,608) and 231,988 teachers (public – 219,788, private – 6144, pirivena -6086) in Sri Lanka. The new admissions to all schools in 2012 were 337,901. The teacher student ration has been achieved from one teacher for 22.5 students in 2000 to 1:18.5 in 2010 (UNDP, 2012).

Sri Lankan tertiary education system consists of 15 universities, 7 post graduate institutes, 10 other higher education institutes and 1,138 technical and vocational education and training institutes. All of them are public institutions. Establishment of degree awarding institutions outside the University Grants Commission is a recent development. The University Act No 16 of 1978 has allowed non-state local institutions to conduct courses of study and award degrees. According to the Minister of Higher Education, The Board of Investment (BOI) has given license to 51 institutions but there

are 29 properly functioning private degree awarding institutions in Sri Lanka (www.lankauniverstiy.news.com). The National Policy Framework for Higher Education has identified a growing need to recognize the role of non-state institutions in higher education and in March 2011, the Cabinet of Sri Lanka approved preparation of a legal framework to guide the quality assurance, accreditation, registration and regularization of non-state higher education institutions. The University Grant Commission (UGC) has set up a standing committee on accreditation to regulate both state and non- state universities. However, the implementation is awaiting the parliamentary approval (Ministry of Mass Media and Communication, 2011). Admissions at undergraduate level to public universities are based solely on the results of the GCE A/L examination and the Z score which considers the difficulty level of the subjects. Due to restricted facilities admissions have become extremely competitive.

With the establishment of the Provincial Councils system in 1987, the central government handed over control of most schools to Provincial Councils. However, the old (elite and old central colleges) schools which have been around since the colonial times were retained by the central government thus creating 3 types of government schools: National; Provincial and Pirivena. Thus there are several types of schools in Sri Lanka: Public (national, provincial, pirivena and semi-government or assisted schools) and private (autonomous schools and international schools under BOI).

The medium of language can be Sinhala, Tamil or English. However, 1.4% students are studying in English and about one third of them are in the Western province.

Strengths of Education System:

Literacy rate is very high in Sri Lanka (2012- 91.2%- male 92.6% and female 90.0%) and youth literacy rate stands at 97%. In 1946, the overall literacy rate for Sri Lanka was 57.8% (male -70.1% & female – 43.8%). By 2006, the literacy rate of 15-24 years old was about 95.8%, the primary net enrollment ratio was almost 97.5% and the primary completion ration had reached 99.6%. The literacy rate for 15-24 year old female was 96.6% while that of male 94.8% in 2006. In 2012, it was 99% for female and 96% for male.

Sri Lanka has achieved universal primary education and gender parity in education. The primary enrolment rate is 99.4% for male and 99.9% for female

(www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri_lanka_statistics.html). Sri Lanka has a score of 0.691 on the Human Development Index, ranking at 97th of 187 countries and this is mainly due to its free education and health policy (UNICEF, 2011). Significantly, gender parity was achieved at the primary level by 2006, even in the historically disadvantaged tea estate sector with 94.4 for boys and 94.78% for girls enrolled (Dept. of Census and Statistics, 2006). In 2012, both male and female attendance in primary education is 94%, in secondary education female attendance rate is higher than that of male (female 61% and male 56%). As a result of free education policy female enrollment in universities has increased up to 65% in 2011, though it was only 7% in 1942. Moreover, Sri Lanka ranked at the 16th place at the Global Gender Gap Index Report and 74th rank at Gender Inequality Index in 2013.

Sri Lanka has achieved the third Millennium Development Goal of eliminating disparities in enrollment in education in primary, secondary and tertiary education as a consequence of the free education policy implemented over many decades. Girls have higher retention rates than boys in schools. Boys tend to drop out early from schools than girls to join labor market.

Critical Issues:

Low Educational Attainments of the Population

Although Sri Lanka is recognized as a country with high literacy, and it achieved the universal primary education, these statistics mask major shortcomings of the education system. According to the Department of Education, in 2001 6.19% of children of age 5-14 did not participate in educational institutions while the 15-16 age group has a non-participatory rate of about 22.13%. A study done by Arunathilake (2004) in analyzing data in the 1990s and 2000s concludes that while 96% of children in 5-14 age group in richest families attend schools only 90% poor children attend schools. Furthermore the World Bank of 2005 suggests that about 18% of children have failed to complete their education up to the grade 9 (World Bank 2005). Evidence for the literature suggests a number of reasons for the non-attendance of schools which include lack of food and clothing, need for the child's earnings for the family, distance to school and inadequate transport, difficult terrain and frequent illness. Furthermore, quality of education, availability of teachers and opportunity cost of schooling are also important factors determining school attendance (Athrupane, 1998; Arunathilake, 2005; & Gunawardene, 2009). Furthermore, the World Bank (2005) also shows that the 18% of

students who fail to complete Grade 9 are mostly from poor families, economically disadvantaged regions, rural areas, conflicted affected provinces and estate sector.

Among educational attainments of the total population, the highest percentages were those who passed grade 9-10 (21.6%) and grade 6-8 (18.6%). Those who passed GCE O/L comprise 18.8% while those with GCE A/L was 9.4%. Only 1.8% of the total student population above age 5 record attainment of a degree. (statistics.gov.lk/education/schools_university.pdf.). Table: 1 shows that more than half of the population has not completed Grade 10 and that they join/ed the labor market without proper employment skills. This is a serious challenge to national development in Sri Lanka.

Generally, junior secondary enrolment of students ranges from 90-94% across most of the country, but it was only 84% for estate sector in 2010. An overall fall off began at the upper secondary level, with net enrolment at 80.6% for the country. Girls (82%) had a slightly higher enrolment than boys (79%). The disparity in access to upper secondary education was greatest in estates, where only 54% of students were enrolled, compared to 86% -81% for urban and rural areas respectively. In 2010, in the North it was only 70% due ethnic conflicts. For GCE A/L, the enrolment rate was 39% in 2010. In the estate sector it was 13%, urban 45.8% and rural 39.7%.

Across economic groups rates declined for poor people. The rate for the country primary enrolment was 96% (2010), but 89% for poor at the junior secondary level compared 96% for rich. At the upper secondary level for poor it was 71% and GCE A/L -21%. In the estate sector – for A/L enrolment of boys was 9% and girls 16.7% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2010). Male students are generally less likely to attend school at higher levels, particularly if they come from poor regions/families. One reason could be that boys join the labor market at an early age due to poverty.

The average pass rate at the GCE O/L examination is 37%, and it is around 31-32 in the less developed provinces such as North-Eastern, North-central, UVa and Central.

There is a visible disparity across regions in educational attainment or students' performance, with regard to facilities, quality of education, teachers etc. but adequate studies have not been done on such ground realities.

Table: 1
Educational Attainment of the Population 2000 & 2012

Educational attainment	2000 -%			2012 -%		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
No Schooling	8.7	5.0	12.2	7.1	n.a.	n.a.
Primary	26.3	26.9	25.8	23.9		
Secondary	37.2	39.3	35.3	39.6		
GCE O/L	17.5	18.2	16.9	18.8		
GCE A/L	7.9	7.9	7.9	9.4		
Degree/higher	2.3	2.7	2.0	1.2		

Source: www.statistics.gov.lk (retrieved on 2013.10.13).

Increasing the Drop-out Rates at Junior High School Levels

In Sri Lanka, children in the 5-14 year age group comprise the student population, for education is compulsory. Nearly 88.7% of this age group attends school, with almost no gender discrepancies. However, the average attendance of 15-19 years age group was 52.6% and it shows that a large number of students, (around 47%) dropped out from school before or after the GCE O/L examinations. Though these school leavers expect to join the labor market they do not have any formal vocational training or employment skills which suit the needs of the ever widening economy.

National drop-out rate is 3.9% but in the North and Eastern provinces it is 15.8%. This rate ranged from 7.8% in Puttalam to 31.8% in Manner. Qualitative information revealed that drop-out rates were high in general, the highest numbers being for displaced children in war affected areas. Irregular attendance was very common, with poor nutrition and health e status influencing attendance (De Silva, 2003). Of drop-outs, most (96.4%) had left school before completing lower secondary and 35.7% had left school before completing primary education (Gunawardena and Jayaweera, 2004). UNICEF estimates that 340,000 children aged less than 18 years have ben orphaned due to war and other reasons in Sri Lanka (UNICEF, 2011). These children are particularly vulnerable to non-schooling, mainly due to lack of birth certificates, poverty, lack of parents knowledge etc.(UNICEF, 2013).

Table: 2
School attendance by age and sex – 2011

Age in Years	Total	Male	Female
6-9	94.4	94.3	94.4
10-14	92.2	91.7	92.8
15-19	52.6	50.6	54.6

Source: Dept. of Census and Statistics, 2012.

The lack of a birth certificate also prevented street and some poor children from enrolling in school (Manchanayake, 2000). A study by the Centre for the Study of Human Rights (2004) of 319 children living in children’s homes found that,, of the nearly 10% of them who did not attend school, 23.3% said they did not have a birth certificate.

Abuse and violence against in schools also are factors influenced students negatively. Although the Ministry of Education has issued a circular prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, there is evidence of high incidence of such violence still continuing. A recent study on school participation noted that 60% of principals and 71% of teachers said that corporal punishment was administered in their schools and children often complain of harsh punishments as a reason for dropping out (Jayaweera and Gunawardena, 2009).

Lack of Opportunities to Enter the Higher Educational Institutions

Sri Lanka has 15 public universities and only around 9% of students who sit for the GCE A/L examination can obtain admission to universities as at present. This examination is highly competitive, and only about around 58% of the candidates qualifies for university admissions. For example in 2011, 239,775 students sat for the GCE A/L examination. Out of these, 141,411 (58.9%) qualified for university entrance. However, in 2011 only 22,016 students were admitted to the state universities and that represented only 15.6% of the total qualified (at least minimum ‘S’ pass for all 3 subjects) students and 9.2% of the total who sat for the GCE A/L examination. It shows that the balance 90.8% of the students (except the small number who enters private or public technical and vocational institutes or local branches of foreign based private universities or foreign universities) do not have a clear path to continue their formal education due to limited opportunities in the public universities and limited access to

private sector universities, due to considerations of both affordability and quality education. According to the University Grant Commission Statistics – 2012, more than 79% of students who are eligible but not selected to enter higher education institutions. In 2009/10 it was 82.80%, 2010/11- 84.55% and 2011/12 - 79.56%. Compared to other developing countries, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education is extremely low in Sri Lanka. The average tertiary enrolment rate for lower middle income countries and upper middle income countries were around 23% and 43% respectively in 2009. However, Sri Lanka is leaving out hundreds of thousands of young students from obtaining higher education (Jayawardena, 2012). Those who cannot enter public universities have few options for pursuing higher education and only those from highly affluent families are able to obtain university education outside the country. One way this is not equitable, and it results in a significant outflow of foreign exchange and indirectly promotes brain drain. On the other way Students who drop out of schools after GCE O/L and A/L examinations, even though recognized as academically 'educated; they would still not be attractive to the labor market due to their lack of specific job skills.

Table: 3
Performance of Candidates –GCE O/L and A/L and University
Admissions 2010 - 2012

	2010	2011	2012
All sat for GCE O/L	433,673	443,298	451,039
Qualified for GCE A/L %	57.62	56.54	60.87
All sat for GCE A/L	233,354	239,775	233,634
All qualified for university entrance	142,415	141,411	144,745
Qualified for university entrance %	61.3	58.99	61.95
Total admission to university & % of eligible	21,547 (17%)	22,016 (15%)	28,908*

***1964 with special intake due to old and new syllabus issue**

Source: statistics.gov.lk/education/school_university.pdf (retrieved on 2013.11.17)

There are around 30 degree awarding private institutions currently functioning in the country, but successive government have not recognized them as higher education institutions and there is also no proper quality assurance, quality control or monitoring mechanism to measure the quality of the programs offered by such institutes. Though the government tried several times to pass the Private University Bill with the objective of introducing a legal framework for such institutions due to protests came from various groups it has been shelved.

Over-loaded School Curriculum and ‘Examinations Hells’ :

A recent survey done by Business Times (2011) shows a large majority of Sri Lankans believe that country’s education system is facing a crisis today given the tough syllabus’ and examinations (69.25%); children are over-burdened with work leading up to the

GCE A/L examination – (69.63%) and private tuition has become essential rather than an option because of the present system (67.36%) (<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/110306/BusinessTimes/bt08.html>). Several studies have found out (Jayaweera, 2010; Lekamge et.al. 2008; Perera, 2008 & 2009 McCaul, 2007) that the present school curriculum is over-loaded and tends to be centralized and therefore in-sensitive to local conditions, providing minimal space for activities and student participation. Moreover, these studies illustrate that the teaching methodologies are not modern and innovative, current assessment systems lacks flexibility and are mainly based on traditional examination system and student still require only to memorizes information. Since the 1950s mainly the primary and junior secondary school curriculum have been revised several times with the assistance of various funding agencies, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNICEF and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) etc. Despite such substantial policy inputs there appears to be little change quality of education (Jayaweera, 2010; Perrea, 2009). Lack of participatory approach, proper coordination, monitoring and lack of systematically gathered data and proper analysis on implementing such polices etc. have been identified as factors influenced negatively.`

Studies have noted that some children who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping gout have experienced failure in that they have attended school but have not acquired adequate knowledge or sills or become alienated and have withdrawn from school in the context of an unattractive curriculum and poor teaching. Sri Lanka has a common curriculum in primary and lower secondary grades but curriculum reforms over the years have failed to replace old-leaning methods by a meaningful, creative and activity-based approach (Jayaweera, 2010; MOE and UNICEF, 2008).

Sri Lankan school studies are mainly targeted at several main examinations; Such as Grade 5 Scholarship, GCE O/L and GCEA/L examinations. The students are forced to go to private tuition classes and to cram – even from the Grade one. Mainly students in rural areas have to obtain very high marks (at least 170 from 200) to enter a good school in an urban area. If six subjects at the GCE O/L are not passed with 3 ‘C’ s, a student is unable to enter A/L classes. If the student needs to enter Commerce or Science stream, definitely he/she should obtain better results with A or B passes for 9 subjects. Similarly, to enter a prestigious program such as medicine and engineering of a university a student has to have 3 As, 2 As and one B. In 2012, there were around 6000 students who got 3 As for commerce stream but due to lack of facilities only around 1000 will get

chance to enter the university.

However, this situation has made student mentally ill and the Minister of Education recently pointed out that “the Grade 5 scholarship examination causes several mental issues to students. A special parliamentary advisory committee for education has been appointed to look into this matter (www.dailynews.lk/local.no-grade5-scholarship-exam-2016). Thus, such examinations restrict the time and energy of students to learn thing or to do any other activity and as a result, the product of schools are not much creative or innovative.

Another serious issue related to examinations is deteriorating the quality of them. There have been many recent cases on releasing question papers before the exam day – mainly to tuition masters, errors in question papers, including questions not based on the syllabus, delay in releasing results and other mal practices due to mis-governance and inefficiency of administrators.

Poor in Quality of Education – mainly in Maths and Science:

Although Sri Lanka has managed to achieve high levels of literacy, it has been unable to provide students with high quality educational services (World Bank, 2013). Sri Lanka ranks poorly in terms of **science and math** education and internet access in schools. Recently, Sri Lankan educational authorities took a decision to allow students who fail to obtain a ‘s’ pass in GCE O/L maths to proceed to A/L studies in the Arts stream. Earlier maths was compulsory for all streams. However many academics have criticized this as prescription for creating a maths-illiterate generation in Sri Lanka.

Lack of English Language Skills:

In Sri Lanka, English is taught as a second language up to GCE A/L in all schools. However, only 10% of students achieve a targeted level of mastery in English language skills while English writing skills are virtually non-existent with only 1% of students exhibiting the required skills level. These skills are mainly restricted to urban areas where 23% of students master English compared to only 7% of rural students (World Bank, 2005).

Unequal Distribution of Resources:

There are wide disparities in facilities between urban and rural schools. Generally there are 4 types of schools in Sri Lanka: i) the schools offer science subjects for A/L- IAB, ii) schools offer Arts and commerce for A/L –IC, iii) Type 2 up to grade 11 and iv) Type 3 – up to grade 8. Only 7.4% of public schools offer science subjects in grades 12-13 or for the GCE A/L. The highest percentage of IAB schools and IC schools are in the Western province – (23.2%) and Central province (16.8%). Arts and commerce subjects for A/L are offered by 21.0% of the schools of the country (Dept. of Education, 2010). Majority of secondary schools in remote areas do not have qualified teacher and other facilities or they have only the Arts courses. This has resulted in exclusion of most rural children from access to science education, which is perceived to be an effective avenue to upward socio economic mobility (Jayaweera & Gunawardena, 2007).

Financial resources for recurrent expenditure in schools are allocated more or less according to the size of student populations, with favorable treatment to less advantaged schools in underprivileged regions. Despite this, there is disparity in the availability of resources at the school level. Financial resources for capital expenditure, on the other hand are allocated according to needs. However, as the sector suffers from severe funding limitations, the administrators are unable to meet all capital requirements. As a result, funding for capital requirements are allocated on a priority basis. These funding decisions made in the complex five-tier administrative structure in the country often do not result in efficient outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2004). Political interference in allocation of funds for capital projects also further lessens the equity outcomes (Arunathileke, 2005; Perera, 1999).

From all schools in the country, about 15% have less than 5 teachers, while around 10% have more than 50 teachers. One fourth of total schools have 21-50 teachers. About 95% of the teachers in public schools are either graduates or trained teachers. Generally schools are classified according to levels of attainment and type of upper secondary education. Two thirds of primary schools and around 30% of all schools have less than 100 students and are located economically disadvantaged districts. Overt neglect of these schools, failure to appoint qualified principals, and teachers and the absence of basic minimum facilities has resulted in their marginalization. As poor, ill-equipped schools, they are unable to retain their students and are often closed down, depriving children in poor areas or access to education (National Education Commission, 2003).

Department of Census and Statistics found that nearly 30% of schools had computers in working order. The computer-student ratio is 1:137. Internet and e-mail facilities were only available in 6.4% and 4.1% of schools respectively. This study found that more than 60% of teachers lack the computer literacy (Dept. of Census and Statistics -School Census, 2006). According to a School Health & Nutrition Unit of the Ministry of Education (MOE), 17.0% of schools has no access to water in 2010; this ranged from 0.9% in Colombo to 21.9% in Moneragala, 22.9% in Anuradhapura, 23.9% in Badulla, 26.9% in Nuwara Eliya and 29.2% in Ampara (MOE, 2011). Additional data indicate that 74.3% of schools have teachers' toilets and 73.5% students' toilets, while 81.9% have electricity and 37.2% to telephones (MOE, 2010).

In 2007, the Ministry of Education classified schools according to a level of 'congeniality' with a low score indicating poor infrastructure and facilities. As Table: 4 shows, the conflict-affected northern and Eastern provinces, the North-Central province and central province with its concentration of plantations have the highest percentage of schools classified as 'uncongenial' or 'very uncongenial'. The quality of the school has a profound impact on whether children enroll in school or decide to drop out early.

Table: 4
Classification of Schools according to Level of
'Congeniality' by Province - 2007

Province	Very Congenial	Congenial	Non-congenial	Uncongenial	Very uncongenial	
Western	24.4	41.4	27.7	5.9	0.5	
Central	10.5	18.6	30.3	30.3	10.2	
Southern	11.7	31.0	34.0	18.1	5.1	
Northern	4.1	18.6	15.8	13.4	47.8	
Eastern	5.4	19.3	17.4	21.0	36.9	
North-western	11.5	21.7	30.1	23.5	13.2	
North-central	7.2	17.0	15.9	31.8	28.1	
Uva	6.7		23.2	32.5	26.7	10.8
Sabaragamuwa	15.9		25.2	31.1	23.7	4.2
Sri Lanka	11.6		24.6	26.8	21.3	15.6

Source: Ministry of Education, 2007.

Many elite schools and old central colleges established under the CWW Kannangara policy in the 1940s are under the direct control of the Ministry of Education and they are given better resources. Moreover, the alumni associations of these schools assist them in various ways to improve their facilities etc. But vast majority of schools are run by the provincial government, but they depend on the funds given by the central government. The funds are mainly used for recurrent expenditure and the status of schools and quality of courses and examinations also have deteriorated due to mis-governance, political influence, lack of facilities and lack of qualified teachers etc.

The government of Sri Lanka has identified this issue and introduced several projects to give more facilities to schools in rural areas. Several ministers in the past initiated school development programs and selected some schools for projects called 'Jathika' 'Navodaya', 'Isuru' etc. The current Minister too has started a project "Transforming School Education Project 2012-16" with the objective of enhancing access and quality of primary and secondary education to provide a foundation for the knowledge based economic and social development of the country. At least 3 schools will be developed with human and physical resources in every Divisional Secretariat division. By doing this the government planned to provide equal opportunities for every child (www.dailynews.lk/local/no-grade5-scholarship-exam-2016). However, due to the political and individual nature of these projects, corruption and mis-governance they have not yet brought positive result as expected.

Unplanned policies of education expansion, and particularly since 1970's the absence of priority on reducing urban-rural and socio-economic disparities have created school system characterized by disparities that adversely impact the quality of education available to the poor. Policies responsive to strongly articulated demands from more developed districts have resulted in the relative marginalization of less developed districts such as in Moneragala and Puttalam (Jayaweera, 1971).

Another major issue that impacts the quality of education available for children in disadvantaged communities is the inequitable distribution of qualified teachers and shortages of teachers in critical subjects – mainly maths, English and science. The causes behind this are many – lack of willingness of teachers to work in remote areas, politicization of recruitment, transfer and promotion procedures and lack of basic facilities and incentives to teachers who work in such areas.

International schools started in the late 1980s mainly due to the competition to get admission to so called 'popular' schools. They come under the BOI and the standards of them are varies greatly between schools and with lesser levels of student discipline compared to the government schools. Though the BOI monitor their management the quality and standards of education is not monitored.

Less Spending on Education:

Sri Lanka currently devotes a comparatively small percentage of its government expenditure towards education. Sri Lanka's public expenditure on education has remained at between 2-3 % of GDP during the past decade and a half, compared to a 3.5% average in the rest of South Asia (Asia Development Bank, 2006). In 2005, it was 2% and after it has become 1.9% and in 2013 it is 1.7% of GDP. For example, India spends 3.1% of GDP on education. Sri Lanka's public investment in education is much less than the average of 4% spent by lower middle income countries. General education which includes basic and secondary levels absorbs the largest share of total expenditure followed by higher education and technical and vocational education. The share of expenditure for primary is 32%, secondary 50%, higher education 14% and Technical and vocational education 3% (World Bank, 2005). These funds are mainly used for teachers' salaries and administration and only 20% of the expenditure is spent in quality inputs (Ibid.).

Currently Sri Lanka is considered as a middle-income country but her public spending on education is smaller than the average for middle income countries. Of the amount spent on education in 2010, 80% went towards recurrent expenditure with salaries for teachers, comprising the largest component at 75% Coalition for Education Development, 2008).

High competition and increasing private tuition:

Due to high competition of examinations such as Grade 5 Scholarship, GCE O/L and A/L examinations, parents send children to private tuition (individual, group or mass class), which are very expensive, even from the grade 1. The government has not yet been able to regulate them and these private classes are now conducted on all days from Monday to Sunday. As a result the students, especially the GCE O/L and A/L students are prone to private tuition classes rather than going to schools. Though there is a 80%

attendance requirement to sit for the examinations, the regulations are not implemented very effectively.

Corruptions, Over politicization and Mis-governance:

The highest number of complaints, the Bribery and Corruption Commission in Sri Lanka has received is against the education sector (<http://www.tisrilankd.org/?p=1-610>). The Grade one admission has become a serious issue in Sri Lanka and more than 5000 parents seek the justice from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka by sending petitions for injustice happened to their children in school admission. Due to the high competition to enter 'popular' or national schools some parents bribe principals of some such schools or higher administrators of the Ministry of Education. For example, according to the media (www.dailymirror.lk) on 26th Feb 2014 –three principals of reputed schools were arrested while taking bribes from parents to enter their children to grade and two.

Politicization at the ground level has also hampered the implementation of education policies to a certain extent. For example, politicization of the process by which schools were identified for development as 'center of excellence' in the *Navodaya* School Program resulted in the selection process being impaired. A study done on this program found out only 15% of schools reached a satisfactory standard, though resources were spent to develop infrastructure, equipment and quality of teachers etc. (Kularathne, 2003).

A Member of the Parliament (MP), attached to the governing party mentioned recently that the education policies of Sri Lanka have been changing from one political regime to the other. Various structural changes, curriculum development, changing examinations and teacher training etc. have been done mainly after the 1960s, but not after assessing the real needs of the country. Just to implement the 'political agendas' of some ruling leaders. He says: "though in theory state educational institutes are independent, that many decisions, from the appointment of officers to selection of students to prestigious schools are made by politicians" (Education Political commentary – 2012.10.13).

The same MP further says: Wasting money for printing text books more when syllabuses are changed – without having any plans is a serious issue. Printing contracts are given to those who then print posters for politicians responsible for awarding

contracts”.

Another main issue is the incompetency and inefficiency of some provincial administrators. Until 1987, Sri Lanka has an extremely centralized education system and after establishing the Provincial Councils (PC) in 1987 most of the educational responsibilities were granted to the PCs. However, due to lack of required capacity and competency the administration has become somewhat complicated and inefficient (UNICEF, 2013).

Mismatch between the labor market supply and demands:

The unemployment rate among Arts graduates is very high in Sri Lanka compared with the normal rates. Unemployment rates of secondary and university graduates in the 19-29 group range between 26% and 34%. Sri Lanka's recent economic growth has not been matched by growth in employment. And yet there are a large number of jobs that go unfilled as employers cannot find workers with the relevant skills (World Bank, 2013). An absence of linkages to the private sector has led universities to be too academic and impractical, demonstrated by the high levels of unemployment among university graduates (World Bank, 2007).

National Education Commission, which did a sector review, (2003) found that the education system of Sri Lanka has failed to enhance the quality and relevance of education and thus to prepare people adequately for work. Similarly, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2009) revealed that principal issue, is the need to bridge the mismatch between skills acquired through the education system and the requirements of the labor market. Several recent academic studies have shown that the Sri Lankan higher education system has not changed to meet the evolving demands of a globalizing world (Jayawardena, 2012; Arunathileke & Jayawardena, 2010). The public sector is not in a position to absorb the Arts graduate any more, but there is a gap between the courses offered by the Sri Lankan public universities and competences needed by the private sector. Major reasons for this mismatch are the outdated curricula and the lack of interaction with the private sector (Jayawardena, 2012). A senior Minister of Sri Lanka at a recent national level seminar mentioned: that “There is a significant gap between the requirements of the private sector enterprises and the quality of the average young person sent out of the formal system of education, often lacking in the practical orientation considered imperative in the private sector. The education system has greater

emphasis on scholastic achievements of students, industry-useful skills/competencies these students have acquired and developed through from education are minimal” (<http://www.nhrep.gov.lk/index.php?option=content&view=article&id=73&Itemid=73>).

The National Human Resource Development Project (NHREP) also criticized the school curriculum for being ‘too academic’ and focusing only for GCE O/L and A/L examinations. Inadequacy of career guidance, weakness of technical and vocational education and absence of vocationally useful elements in the secondary school curriculum have been identified by the NHREP as reasons for this situation (<http://www.nhrep.gov.lk/index.php?option=content&view=article&id=73&Itemid=73>).

Colonization brought European-style education to Sri Lanka, especially to prepare students for positions in the colonial administration. But the fact is that Neo-European system of education provides knowledge base to each and every sector while Sri Lanka continues to be aiming at public sector occupations. It is true that the system is continually introducing different structures and styles to education but the basic attitude towards a public sector employment among the public does not change in that speed. Educational institutes- mainly universities in Sri Lanka provide basics of theories but no a chance to practice. It is emphasized that the highly academically oriented school system in the country prepared students for certificates-oriented examinations without equipping them with life skills oriented jobs; they were mostly looking for white-collar jobs in the public sector, which is a continuing issue in Sri Lanka (Tharmaseelan, 2007).

The delayed in admission:

Due to university strikes and demonstrations etc. almost every year the scheduled dates for new admissions is postponed. For example the students who sat for GCE A/L examinations in 2011 August, expected to enter the university in September 2012. But due to the strikes organized by the Federation of University Teachers Association (FUTA) on reducing state fund allocation for education and wage differences and the students against the Private University Bill and punishment imposed to students who were identified as “rag leaders”, the universities did not function properly more than 3 months. As a result, the students were given admission only in April or May 2013.

Similarly, the students in 2012 (GCE A/L) could not enter the university and they were given admission only in February, 2014.

The District Quota system that is in place for university selection also has some weaknesses. First, though it was introduced as a temporary measure, still it has been used without introducing a national merit system complemented by equal distribution of resources. Second, since there are privileged schools in every district, it is the elite schools of those districts which benefit from quotas than the most backward ones. Third, it helps rural elite and the expense of urban under-class. Finally, it is subject to abuse and manipulation. Some students who are originally from urban elite families, register in schools in under-privileged districts, but go to private tuition etc. in urban areas. They just rob the quota allocation of students from less privileged districts.

The level of university is deteriorating rapidly. Due to **standardization policies, children from remote districts can get admission to universities** with lower marks. The students who are in that category are economically and socially different from the urban based students. In the universities, now there is a division between these two groups (so called ragging and non- ragging). The ragging group is mainly led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) political leadership. With their political motivation they do group activities for first years and socialized them in a backward manner. As a result, they will not develop their leadership skills and qualities. Though they are very active in doing various community activities assigned by their leaders, they have limited opportunities to do things independently. Though the non-ragging group behaves more independently in the university, there freedom to organize group activities and to use some common facilities such as students' cafeteria and common room etc. are not permitted by the leaders of the ragging group.

Issues Pertinent to Teachers:

There is a huge gender disparity among school teachers. Among primary school teachers, 78.5% are female and in the secondary level the female rate is 63.2%.

Teacher Training:

Teacher training is conducted from diploma to graduate and post-graduate levels by university faculties and departments of education, the National Institute of Education (NIE), 17 National Colleges and 9 Teacher Training institutes. For primary school, a two year teacher training is conducted at *Vidya peeta* training colleges. The students

who got good results but could not enter the universities mainly sit for the teacher recruitment examination. The selected candidates are given the two year training on primary education. University graduates who become teachers, generally are not given a training but some of them voluntarily follow Diploma or MA courses in Education, mainly with the purpose of obtaining promotions. For such studies the teachers are given necessary leave. In-service training is conducted by the NIE, Education Ministry and provincial ministry to a limited extent, by the 100 Teachers Training Centers that were established for training purpose the last decade but have been underutilized as a conduit for part- time in-service teacher development at the local level.

The NIE has been given the responsibility for providing leadership for the development of general education with quality, equity, relevance in a pluralistic society. Its' mandate is design and develop curriculum for general and teacher education, provide professional development of education community and to spearhead change through research and innovation (www.nie.lk). It conducts MA, Diploma, Certificate courses in mainly in Education, Education Management, Counselling, English teaching as a second language etc. However, evaluation studies have been critical of the resultant uneven and poor quality of training received by teachers (Perera, 2008, 2009; Jayaweera, 2010). The consequence of these training inadequacies are seen in the statements made by some students who have dropped out of schools that they found lessons boring, teachers negligent and abusive, and schooling unattractive (MOE,et.al, 2009; Jayaweera and Gunawardena, 2009).According to these studies, as potential change-agents teachers do not appear to have acquired knowledge of and sensitivity to issues such as human rights, social equity, gender equality and national harmony that impinge on the issue of equal education opportunity and 'education for all'.

Lack of Incentives to Teachers:

Salaries of teachers, including University lecturers' are not attractive in Sri Lanka. For example, a senior lecturer with a Ph.D. earns around US \$ 450-500 a month. Teacher motivation and work attitudes have deteriorated over the past few years due to lack of incentives to teachers. Also many blame the teachers for doing private tuition as a business to earn more.

What should be Done

The present study illustrates that the literacy along will no longer suffice in the knowledge area. The governments' development plan, *Mahinda Chinthana: Vision for a new Sri Lanka*, intends to transform the education system into one that will provide the technological skills, educational content, and methods to promote the development of inquiring and devoting increased resources to modernize the school curriculum, develop the teacher training, and upgrade the examination and evaluation system.

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