



Factors Influencing the Disparity of Schools in the Urban Sector of Sri Lanka: A Case Study in Wattegama Urban Council

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Abstract – Although Sri Lanka has been providing Free Education since 1939, still access to a quality education throughout a child's schooling years remains a challenge for children in certain communities in Sri Lanka. Disparity of Education in Sri Lanka is merely not the unequal distribution of resources, but also a result of failing access to quality education. However, the disparity of education in Sri Lanka is not recent in origin. It traces back to the British Colonization where the Formal Education was formed.

It was not surreptitious that the disparity of education in Sri Lanka led to a greater trail with the establishments of education policies throughout the history. The weak points of the Kannangara Free Education Policy (1945), Language Policy in 1956, establishments of curriculum development centres in 1960s, introduction of Grade V Scholarship Examination in 1948 and emergence of private schools in 1977 have strengthened the disparity of education in Sri Lanka.

Majority believed the fact that, the disparity of schools remains in the rural and estate sectors in Sri Lanka compared to the urban sector. Urban sector is considered a place with better facilities and higher competition compared to the estate and the rural sectors in Sri Lanka, yet the Disparity of Education within the Urban sector was neglected. Even though a serious consideration has not been paid into this topic in the academia, this problem still exists in the urban sectors of Sri Lanka. It is questionable that why two government schools located in the same vicinity gets different demand from the parents. This study mainly focus on

investigating the factors which contribute to the disparities of the schools in the Urban Sector by taking the Wattegama Urban sector located in the central province in Sri Lanka as a case study.

Keywords: Education, Disparity, Schools, Ranking Criterion, Sri Lanka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a Social Institution responsible for systematic transmission of Knowledge, Skills and cultural Values in a formally organized structure (Kendal, 2016). According to the great Social Anthropologist, G.P. Murdock (1949), "Education is the most important functions of family institution Children are "Core Recruits" of a society and they learn the culture and behaviour basically through socialization process" (Silva, 1990).

Though the informal socialization was done at the families in ancient history, with the dynamic structure of the society, the education was transformed to the formal agencies and organizations. The "School" organization has come to the arena as one of the most influential socializing agencies which took over the responsibility of delivering formal education to the children from small age. The formal education was started in Greek period, where primary schools were established and later United States introduced multiple classroom public schools to the world in 1920s. Afterwards, schools have formally institutionalized, and functions of the schools changed the direction of paper and pencil tradition to far beyond. With the complex nature of



education, the school systems were caught up by the disparities spread in the schools.

The problem of disparity is not recent in origin. The emergence of the problem traces back to the classical period of great social scientists, Karl Marx. According to Marx, “the hidden objective of collective exploitation in school is schools leads to greater disparity among the powerful group called the administrators and powerless as the students” (Perera, 2004).

In addition, the theory of modernization emphasizes the fact that all modern theories start with a disparity between two ideal types as such: traditional and modern or rural or urban (Nolte, 2015). Due to the problematic dissatisfaction of the theories of modernization, Neo-Marxists studied the disparity of the developed and developing countries. This theory gave birth to the Dependency theory. However, there can be seen wide variety of criticism on the fact that dependency theory led to corruption, competition will be lacked, and the sustainability will be disappeared. This factor has become a reality in developing countries. Therefore, the disparity created through modernization process still exists among different nations and regions as well.

Modern Sri Lankan education system is a result of the British Colonization administration in Sri Lanka whereas the disparity also resulted in the period of colonization. Under the colonial administration system, “Buddhist Piriven” schools had to complete with “Seminary Schools”, “Parish Schools” and “Missionary Schools” in ancient Ceylon and that led continue the disparity of schools between Buddhist Piriven and English Medium schools under colonization administration system.

The weak points of the Kannangara Report in 1945 of classification of students into British system, language Policy in 1956, establishments of curriculum development centres in 1960s, introduction of Grade V scholarship examination in 1948 and emergence of private schools in 1977

strengthened the education disparity in Sri Lanka. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Education Policies formed in Sri Lanka made disparity of education from bad to worse.

Majority believed the fact that, the disparity of schools remains in the rural and estate sectors in Sri Lanka compared to the urban sector. Urban sector is considered as a place with better facilities and competition compared to the estate and the rural sector in Sri Lanka. Parents tend to send their children to socially recognize popular schools in the urban area. Due to this problem, some of the schools in the urban sector have decreased the demand and have increased the disparity among schools at the same time. Even though a serious consideration is not paid into this topic in the academia, this problem still exists. This study mainly focus on investigating the factors which contribute to the disparities of the schools in the Wattagama Urban Sector locate dun the central province in Sri Lanka.

2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

As a Developing country, Sri Lanka Faces a greater disparity in the education sector. Disparity of education can be witnessed in many regions in Sri Lanka. Disparity has become much greater with the development of education policies. Unequal development policies have become a salient feature of the disparity in the education sector. But very few attempts have been paid to understand such disparities specially in the urban sector. Some schools are better facilitated compared to others and some schools are popular compared to the others. These type of perceptions and realities strengthen the disparity among schools in the urban sector. Though the schools are in the same locality and very closed by some schools have greater demand compared to others. Therefore, this study is basically to identify the factors that contribute towards disparity among government in the same urban sector, same zonal education



centres, schools which are located very closed by in the same town area.

At the initial stage of the study, a ranking Criteria has been created to evaluate the schools. It was evident that, there are many Internationally and nationally recognized criterion to assess schools in different angles. Some classifications and qualitative and relative. Popular and none-popular are demanding schools are one good example for such. Some indicators are created by the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka to understand different schools in different sectors as IAB, IC, 2 and 3 based on the availability of facilities for G.C.E. Advanced and Ordinary Level Classes and Hostel facilities. But they have neglected other physical resources, financial resources, academic and nonacademic achievement in their evaluations. Government schools, Semi-government schools and Private Schools, National Schools and Provincial schools are another two criteria developed based on the administrative system of the schools. Though there are many criteria available to assess schools, none of the criteria meets the need to assess the inputs and its outcomes of the schools.

3. OBJECTIVES

To Prepare an index to classify schools in ranking order based on inputs and out puts of the school organization.

To identify different disparities among schools.

To understand the contributing factors for the disparities among schools in the urban sector.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research area of the study is Wattegama urban Sector located in the Central Province in Sri Lanka and is administered by Wattegama Urban Council located in Kandy district. Three schools which are located in the Wattegama Urban Sector.

Wattegama Central College

Wattegama Girls` College

Yatirawana Maha Vidyalyaya

Above three schools belong to the Wattegama Urban Council, Wattegama Zonal Education Office. Further, all these three schools are government schools situated nearby and distance is not even a Mile in between.

Though these three schools share the same locality; parents have different perception towards these three schools. Some schools have better social recognition and demand compared to the other. Some schools are popular schools and some schools are not popular.

At the initial stage of the study, a descriptive index was created to rank the sample schools in Wattegama urban sector. In achieving this objective, initially a well-recognized school in Kandy was observed and was taken as the role model to create the Ranking Index. The school selected to do the Pilot survey is Mahamaya Girls' College located in Kandy Town. It is one of the most popular and demanding schools located in the Kandy Urban Sector. Ranking Criteria was created based on "Inputs" and "Outputs" of the school organization. At the second stage of the study, the selected schools in Wattegama urban sector were evaluated based on the index created in the first stage by allocating marks for each indicator stated under "Inputs". Maximum marks allocated was 6 and the minimum marks allocated was 2. Outputs in the ranking index based on the percentages obtained by the schools in Examinations conducted by the Ministry of Education. Extra curriculum activities listed under Outcome of the index were assessed qualitatively in the criterion.

In the third stage of the study, a comparative study was done among selected three schools in wattegama urban sector to investigate factors that contribute towards disparity. Semi-structured interviews were used in collecting primary data. Students, Teachers and Parents taken from a random sample for the study from three schools. Total number of respondents used for the study was 90.



The study was mainly focused on obtain Qualitative data as well as quantitative data. In the index analysis schools were evaluated from the percentages they received in the ranking criterion and the data gathered through semi- structured interviews were analyzed by using the descriptive method.

5. LITERATURE SURVEY

Education system in Sri Lanka has a longer history which trace back to the Buddhist Piriven (Monastery) system and Brahmana teachers when the education was nourished by religion in early Ceylon. Piriven systems were largely influenced by the “Nalanda” and “Thakshila” education institutions in India. However, the public has to depend on unsystematic norms governing education in this time period (Backer, 1998).

Due to political and economic changes of the colonial administration, education system in Sri Lanka underwent many changes in the 16th Century in the historical process of development. The Portuguese established “Parish” and “Seminary” schools in order to distribute the Christianity among people in coastal area. It did not obtain the intended outcomes. However, the importance of compulsory education system was introduced by the Dutch administration.

The features of the current education system appeared under the British Period in the 19th Century Missionary schools introduced by British aggravated the disparity of education in Sri Lanka. This created English Medium schools for Prestigious and middle-class minority in Ceylon and vernaculars for ordinary Sinhalese and Tamil majority (National Institute of Education, 2003).

In 1901, British Census Report publicized the inadequate provision of education in Ceylon the Education system in British period was unplanned and strongly in favoured the urban areas. The quality of education was attached to English medium fee levying schools with qualified staff and

best facilities in the urban sector. Employment opportunities were also provided to such prestigious group and the schools in the rural remained deprive and helpless (Baker, 1988).

However, with the emergence of the Universal Adult Franchise in 1931, this system tends to change. In the same year, C.W.W. Kannagara became the first Minister of Education. Free education policy established in 1945 had made a drastic change in almost all sectors in education. Free levying schools became free, but private schools chosen to keep their fees. This factor created a great demand for the English Medium schools and central colleges were established to face the situation (Baker, 1988). Four hundred (400) new schools were built during the four years 1944– 48 and student enrollment reached 1.2million. The reforms provided night schools for adults as well. Dr. Kannagara proposed three types of schools – secondary schools leading to university education, senior 3 schools leading to polytechnics, and practical schools leading to Agricultural colleges. Although evaluation supported the Practical schools experimented with under Handessa Schools system in 243 schools, it had an abrupt ending. If the Handessa school system (Grameeya Pasala) was continued and expanded the crisis of unemployment that Sri Lanka has had to face throughout the recent history (post-independence period) would have been better addressed (Sedere, 2016).

One key weakness of Kannagara reform was that it allowed the students to continue the British classification system. According to Walter Zindel and Robert Bridge that “this system of outsourcing was not suitable for Sri Lanka. They pointed out that this system of education would make the younger generation look down on traditional culture and would have to wait at the office gates to find work. And a French educator pointed out that teaching in English to Sinhala and Tamil children is dumbing their brains. The problem with the English education was that these schools were located only in the city.



As a result, children living in rural areas were denied the right to education. And this education was only open to the children of wealthy families. These English schools taught based on economic values. The only way to a higher status in society is to study in these English schools” (Rev. Kalyana, 2020).

In 1956, newly elected government implemented a New Language Policy for Sri Lankan education system. “Sinhalese” was renamed as the national language and that affected Tamil Speaking students who have been educating in English Medium as well. In 1961, all assisted schools were taken to the state control and private schools were directed to follow government policies and curriculums. The curriculum development centre was established in 1966 and that resulted in providing training for teachers to increase the quality of education. However, the teachers in rural and estate community had a very little chance to get into these trainings. The schools in the urban sector received the privileges from these developments and that made teachers in the deprived rural communities decreased day by day (Backer,1988).

Unequal distribution of resources further strengthens the disparity of schools in the urban sector the grade Five scholarship Examination (1948) had increased the disparity. Intention of the policy makers was to provide equal opportunity for the disadvantaged communities. But it further drained talented students to the urban sector and further widen the disparity of schools in the urban sector (NIE, 2003).

Many studies have been done in the academia considering the disparity of schools in the rural and estate sectors. The study done by Victoria Backer (1988) emphasized that, the general kind of the problems and constrains in the rural sector. In her book called “Black board in the Jungle” further emphasize the fact that disparity between the rural and urban sector basically entangled with teacher training issues, teacher transfers, lack of

experienced and dedicated teacher communities in the rural sector and even the insufficient administrative officers and supervisors worsen the disparity (Backer,1988).

Coalition for Education Development in Sri Lanka further emphasis that “ever increasing demand for the prestigious schools are created several problems and it has led to overcrowding in Urban prestigious IAB and National Schools, malpractices in admissions and imposed a threat of closing down small rural schools”. This factor clearly visible in the rural sector compared to the urban sector, based on resources, unequal distribution of economy among parents do influence the disparity of education in the rural sector compared to the urban sector (CED Sri Lanka, 2007).

Education reforms were largely successful in improving access to education among the general populace post-independence. However, efforts to facilitate the equitable distribution of educational opportunities, primarily by targeting rural schools for development, in the early 1990s, 1997 and 1999 were largely unsuccessful (Little 2011).

Therefore, it is evident that the disparity of rural and urban sector is being focused on academia, but the disparity within the urban sector itself is neglected. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on finding the factors that affect disparity of education in the urban sector.

6. RESULTS/ DISCUSSION

School organization focused more on investment of “inputs” in gaining intended “outcomes”. This idea was basically used for in creating the ranking criterion of the schools in this study.

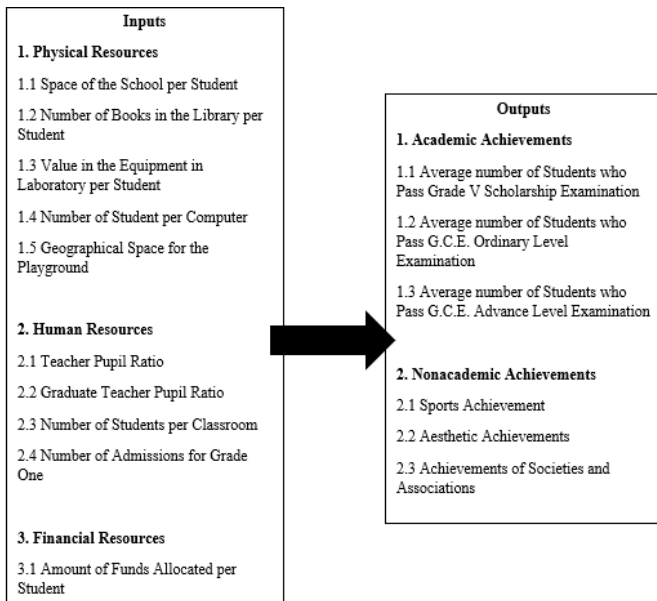


Fig-1: Ranking Criteria

Under **“inputs”**, Physical Resources, Human Resources and Financial Resources were selected and further through the observations of Mahamaya Girls’ College, Kandy, it could be visible that said resources are crucial for school organization to succeed its outcomes.

Under **“outcomes”**, academic achievements and nonacademic achievements were assessed. Average number of students who pass grade Five, G.C.E. Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations for past five years were taken as keys for academic achievements. Sports, Aesthetic and achievements of societies and associations were taken as evaluations for nonacademic achievements.

Under physical Resources, Space per students, number of books in the library per student, value of laboratory equipment, number of students per computer and geographical space for the playground was taken for the measurement. Under Human Resources, Teacher Pupil ratio, Graduate teacher pupil ratio, number of students per classroom, number of admissions for grade one was considered for the evaluation and amount of funds

allocated per student taken as the financial resource measurement.

Among the indicators of physical resources, Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked top on Space of the school per student, number of computers per students and number of books in the library per student. Whereas, Wattegama Girls’ College ranked top on value of the laboratory equipment, size of the Playground. According to the total evaluation of the physical resources, Mahamaya Girls’ College, Kandy obtained 26 marks out of 30 for the physical resources among Wattegama Urban Sector schools, Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked Top among Physical resources by obtaining 22marks and Wattegama Girls’ College which has a reputation as the most demanding school in the area ranked bottom by obtaining 16 marks out of 30. Therefore, there could not be seen any co-relationship between availability of physical resources and the demand towards a school in wattegama Urban sector.

According to the evaluations of key indicators of human resources, Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked top by obtaining 20 marks out of 24 that was higher compared to Mahamaya Girls’ College, Kandy which was the highly demanding school in Kandy District. Also, it was evident that Wattegama Girls’ College, which has the highest demand in Wattegama Urban Sector ranked bottom by obtaining 16 makes.

In analyzing financial resources of the schools, it was revealed that there are several sources that a school get financial resources. Among them, Facility and Service Fee, School development fund, Quality investment fund and parents’ donations are key financial sources of schools. According to the evaluations, Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked top by earning 6 marks out of 6, Wattegama Girls’ College and Wattegama Central College earned 4 marks and Mahamaya Girls’ College ranked bottom by obtaining 2 marks.

Evaluations of the academic outcomes, Wattegama Gils’ College ranked top and Yatirawana Maha



Vidyalaya ranked Bottom though, Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked top on **“inputs”**, still that school ranked bottom in the academic outcomes. Whereas the bottom ranked Wattegama Gils’ College, ranked to among academic outcomes.

Among nonacademic achievements, Wattegama Girls’ College ranked top as they have facilities for sports like Netball, Athletics and Chess. Also, there are National Level achievements as well. Further, Wattegama Girls’ College annually participate in Art, dancing, and Music like aesthetic activities in National Level and have obtained achievements as well among Societies, Wattegama Girls’ College has many societies, and they are actively participating in inter school competitions.

Yatirawana Mahavidyalaya ranked bottom in the nonacademic evaluations as they have no proper facilities for sports. However, they have achieved certain Zonal Level aesthetic competitions.

As per the Ranking criterion, selected schools were evaluated as top ranking and bottom ranking schools. Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked top according to the availability of **“Inputs”** and Wattegama Girls’ College ranked bottom. Whereas Wattegama Girls’ College ranked top among **“outputs”** of the school organization and Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya ranked bottom.

According to the evaluations, it could be visible that Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya also have equal level of Inputs compared to Mahamaya Girls’ College, Kandy which is the role model of the Criterion. But it has received the bottom in the ranking criterion in outputs and Wattegama Girls’ College ranked top in outputs. Wattegama Central College remained in the middle in among inputs and outputs. Therefore, it was visible that there are many factors affect the disparity of schools in the urban sector apart from the inputs and outcomes.

According to the study, it was clear that the **“economic background of the parents”** highly contributes towards the disparity of schools in the urban sector. Parents who are economically

wellbeing send their children to the best schools. Parents who have no choice must remain with the only choice they have which is the closest to their residence. When parents economically contribute to the development of their children’s schools the demand of the schools increases. Therefore, it can be highlighted that the economic background of the parents highly contributes towards the disparity of the schools in the urban sector.

The study findings revealed that **“Uni-Sex schools”** strengthens the disparity of schools in the urban sector. According to the parents, same sex schools whether it is a Girls’ School or Boys’ school uni-sex schools has a great demand compared to the mix schools. Therefore, Majority of the parents prefer sending their children to same gender schools compared to the mix gender schools. The study further revealed that parents tend to send their children to uni-sex schools as it reduces them issues like love affairs and other problems related to studying uni-sex schools.

“Availability of talented student population” also increase the disparity. There is always competition among the students. Students who are talented can earn highest results and that upgrade the position of the school not only in the academic level but also in the extracurricular activities. Therefore, it was evident that availability of a talented student crowd in the schools contribute to the disparity of schools.

Thirdly, **“availability of quality and essential resources”** also contributes to the disparity among the schools in the urban sector. Allocation of more and more resources does not enhance the outcomes of the school organizations. According to the interviews with teachers and parents of the school, it was revealed that though Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya had equal space of the school per to students as Mahamaya Girls’ College, Kandy, it did not have the facilitated classrooms as the classrooms of Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya was small. Further, it was evident that there were enough books at the library for the students at Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya, but there were not many subject



relevant books in the library. Teacher/ pupil ratio was smaller in Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya, but as per the interviews of the parents it was evident that the availability of qualified teachers was not sufficient in the school. Further, this study revealed that though Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya Ranked Top among the “inputs”, it was ranked Bottoms among the “Outcomes”. The main issue behind this disparity was though Resources are available in Yatirawana Maha Vidyalaya, no availability of quality and Essential Resources matters for the achieving the intended outcomes.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study reveals that the Disparity of Education is not only visible in Rural sectors of Sri Lanka compared to the Urban Sectors. Disparity within the urban sector is greatly visible, yet it has been neglected in the academia. The study findings shows that economic background of the parents, availability of talented student populations, availability of quality essential resources and unisex schools have strengthened the disparity among schools in the urban sector. Therefore, a special attention should be given to understand the disparity of education in the urban sector in Sri Lanka.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is worthwhile to create a School Classification Index to evaluate the schools without any biases in understanding the existing Disparity among schools in Sri Lanka. The Government should evaluate the existing resources of the schools and distribute resources to all schools without any biases. There are some instances where some highly demanding schools receive unnecessary facilities which other schools require. Therefore, there is a great disparity among distribution of resources among schools and that should be properly addressed.

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