

A Survey Conducted Focusing the Educational Development of a War Affected Zone in Sri Lanka (With reference to Ampara Education Zone)

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Introduction

In 1987 the 13th Amendment of the Constitution was enacted followed by the passage of the Provincial Councils Act No.42 of 1987 which provided for the establishment of Provincial Councils. Divisional Education Offices were established and was responsible for the implementation of all educational programmes within the division. In 1992 Education Zones each headed by a Director of Education were created by amalgamation of several Education Divisions. Ampara Education Zone is one of the six education zones situated in Ampara District in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka. This Study was conducted in the Ampara Education Zone which has four Education Divisions.

The population in Ampara Education Zone is multi –ethnic, multi-religious and multi –cultural in nature, where Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils live together. Farming is the main livelihood and fishing and dairy farming are optional livelihoods. Ampara is a war affected area, which is situated in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. It consists of war threatened villages where most of the villagers were wiped out by terrorists. Due to this, war threatened families in most of these villages have spent their nights in nearby jungles and the normal livelihoods and the education system were disrupted. This survey was conducted in the intention of identifying strengths and barriers in education in the Ampara Education Zone and to develop an action plan targeting the educational development in the zone.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were, investigation of the nature of education administration procedure, investigation of the nature of educational inputs, Examination of the nature of educational achievement of students, identification of strengths in education system, identification of weaknesses, problems and barriers in education in the Ampara Education Zone and development of an action plan to be implemented within a period of three years targeting, educational development in the Ampara Education Zone.

1.2 Research Method

Mainly two research methods were used. The survey method which is a descriptive research method was employed in this research. Secondly as this study was targeted at one education zone the case study method was also used in order to conduct an in-depth study.

1.3 Population and the Sample

Twelve education zones located in the Eastern Province were considered as the total population. The education zones which use Sinhala Medium (the medium of the majority of the country) Mahaoya, Dehiattakandiya, Kantalai and Ampara were considered as the target population. The Ampara Education Zone was selected for the study using purposive sampling method.

The total sample included the Zonal Education Director, two Deputy Education Directors, eight Subject Directors, twenty three In-Service –Advisors, three Zonal Education Directors, two Administrative Officers, Officers in charge of Ampara Teacher Centre and Psycho-Social Resource Centre, eight School Principals, sixteen teachers, and ten parents. The total sample consisted of seventy seven persons.

1.4 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, observation and documentary surveys were used as data collection methods. Triangulation of data was employed by collecting data from a multiple sample by using multiple methods for data collection.

1.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was used as the main data analysis method. The data collected from the multiple sample was integrated, coded and categorized and analyzed.

1.6 Recommendations and Suggestions

- **Human Resources**

- Academic and Non academic staff of the Ampara Zonal Office and Divisional Education offices

Three Deputy Director Posts, five Subject Director Posts and many In-Service Advisors' Posts were vacant. The existing staff is overloaded with responsibilities and efficiency of educational administration and the quality of education guidance provided have declined due to such understaff situation. Therefore, very urgent action should be initiated to fill these responsible posts.

Even through, a sufficient number of non-academic staff is available their training needs are not fulfilled. As such the administrative staff needs training and it is suggested to appoint Administrative Officers from the Education Administrative Service. One Divisional Education Director post out of four posts has been vacant and it is essential to fill this post also immediately.

- **Principals**

Fifty percent of the principals in the zone are working on an acting basis. It has led to create management problems at school level, lack of self satisfaction of principals and on the other hand the dissatisfaction of teachers and parents. Lack of management skills and weaknesses in internal supervision process of acting principals have created problems. All principals should be appointed on a permanent basis, most probably from the Principals' Service.

- **Teachers**

Lack of teachers in the subjects of Mathematics, Science and English in rural disadvantaged areas and excess teachers in the urban areas is a major problem faces by the zone. This problem has made a direct influence on student achievement levels in the subjects Mathematics, Science and English. Out of ninety eight schools in the zone only three schools conduct General Certificate in Education - Advanced level (G.C.E. AL) classes in Science stream.

Some teacher appointments, teacher transfers and teacher deployment are not being implemented based on the existing criteria developed. The Politicization has made a negative influence on these areas. As a result of political influence different imbalances of teaching force appear at regional levels. When appointing, transferring and deploying teachers, needs of regions, schools, subjects and grade levels should be taken into consideration.

- **Resource Persons**

The zone should attract qualified resource persons to enhance the quality of education. Some problems were visible when obtaining resource persons for different specialized educational activities. A very attractive payment package including travel expenses should be introduced to attract resource persons to provide their services to the zone.

- **Community**

Most of the schools specially located in disadvantaged rural areas do not receive sufficient support from the community. Low education levels of parents, low levels of aspirations on education of their children, incidents of war conflicts faced and poverty conditions have created such a situation. Mostly they receive manual support and a culture to link school with the community is not visible. All schools should follow the 'Community School' concept allowing provision to schools and to the community to support each other in a positive manner.

• **Physical Resources – Zonal and Divisional Level**

Ampara Zonal Education Office and the four Divisional Education Offices have minimum physical facilities and equipments. Only one official vehicle is available in the whole of Ampara Education Zone. In order to enhance the quality of academic and administrative tasks these office premises

should be provided with quality physical resources such as good buildings with essential facilities, officers' quarters, furniture, vehicles and other appropriate electronic devices and equipment.

- **Physical Resources – At School Level**

Imbalance of physical resources in schools is visible between urban and rural areas. Urban schools have all needed physical facilities and rural schools suffer from scarcity of physical resources. It is a prime need to provide all essential basic facilities to all schools in order to provide equal opportunities for all. Principals' and teachers' quarters should be built in all schools located in difficult areas in order to attract staff. It is suggested to introduce a 'Cluster School System' allowing a cluster of schools to share common facilities of a pool of resources such as science laboratories, computer laboratories, libraries, sport facilities etc.

- **School Text Books / Teachers' Guides / School Uniforms**

School text books and material for school uniforms are provided by the government on welfare basis. Anyhow, Supply of school text books and teachers' guides from the Line Ministry is not implemented in an effective manner. It has affected negatively on the teaching learning process and on the performance of students. Uniform material are supplied and distributed in due course. An efficient mechanism should be introduced to supply all text books and teachers' guides before the school sessions commenced.

- **Need of Establishing a Zonal Multiple Resource Centre**

Lack of resource Centres for different subject areas is a hindering factor towards teacher development and teacher training. Therefore, it is suggested to establish a 'Zonal Multiple Resource Centre' consisting of Common resources and subject specific resources. The proposed centre should have a well-equipped seminar / conference hall with furniture and electronic devices, a quality library, a computer centre and accommodation facilities to cater for teachers who attend training sessions from distant areas as common facilities. A model home science resource room, a science laboratory, an aesthetic resource centre, audio-visual Centre, an exhibition gallery, resource material centre should be established as subject specific resources. This resource centre should be allowed to be used by all teacher trainees and trainers.

- **Non – Governmental Organizations**

Non-Governmental Organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, FORUT, GTZ and WFP are playing a leading role providing financial and material resources in supporting education enhancement in the Ampara Education Zone. It is suggested to attract NGOs to provide support especially to serve the disadvantaged student groups in the area.

- **Special Education Centres**

The Ampara Teacher Centre is playing a leading role in organizing and conducting in-service teacher training programmes. This is the only Teacher Centre established in the zone. However, it is not sufficiently equipped with essential human and physical resources. Therefore, it should be provided with qualified academic staff, buildings and hostel accommodation facilities. The Psycho-Social Centre is providing guidance and counseling services to students and to the community. The said centre should be further developed by releasing trained staff available in the schools at least on part time basis and by enhancing awareness of the importance of guidance and counseling services and by extending their services to a wider clientele.

- **Special Education Programmes**

Special education programmes on Non-Formal Education and Special Needs Education are providing useful services to school drop outs, non school participants and to children with special needs. These programmes should be encouraged and motivated to provide more efficient services by providing more services and linking these programmes to schools and also by introducing inclusive education.

- **Training and Development of Teachers**

Most of the training sessions conducted are short term and mainly focused on developing subject knowledge and making awareness on the new curriculum. These training programmes are not focused on developing variety of competencies in teachers. Teacher training and teacher education programmes should be more comprehensive and more focused on developing competencies in teachers and be accessible to all teachers. The opportunities to obtain higher education qualifications and overseas training with financial assistance and leave benefits should be made available.

- **Educational Achievement**

As a whole results of Grade 5 Scholarship Examination (a competitive examination for grade 5 student to offer scholarships) is at a lower level. In the years 2004 to 2006 eighty seven percent

of students have failed the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination and results of 44 schools are at a zero level. These statistics indicate low quality of primary education in the area.

Even through, the achievement level of Science, Mathematics and English is low at the General Certificate in Education (Ordinary Level) Examination and General Certificate in Education (Advanced Level) Examination, the students have performed well in Commerce and Arts streams. Measures should be taken to enhance achievement in subjects Science, Mathematics and English Language. It was evident that these low achievement levels in above subjects is a result of a lack of physical and human resources available at rural level for the students

- **Strengths in Ampara Education Zone**

After the end of prolonged civil war conflicts had for thirty years the present peaceful environment and the political stability which prevail in the Eastern Province is considered as a major strength. Commitment of most of the teachers, students with multiple talents and potentials, specific projects implemented to enhance educational achievement and the scheme of appointing teachers on secondment as a temporary solution to solve teacher scarcity in certain subject area have become strengths in Ampara Educational Zone. It is suggested to take the fullest benefit from these strengths through empowering teachers and students and also obtaining support from Non-governmental Organizations, Private Enterprises and regional resource providers.

- **The Problems/ Limitations/ Constraints that Prevail in the Zone**

The nature of the physical distribution of the selected education zone which covers a huge area of 350 square km s is a major problem faced in the administration and monitoring of educational tasks. The maximum length of the zone from Panama to Magalagama village is 151 kms and the maximum width is 58 kms from Wadinagama village to Akkarepaththu area. Therefore, it is suggested to re-structure the Ampara Educational Zone in to two separate zones in order to fulfill the administrative responsibilities more efficiently.

Psycho-Social and Socio-economic problems prevail as a result of the past war situation and it is a constraint faced by the Ampara Educational Zone. Hence expanding guidance and counseling services towards students and parents is being recommended.

Migration of students from small rural schools to schools in urban and sub-urban areas is also visible as a problem. Anyhow, it is suitable to maintain these small schools using Multi-grade teaching methodology in the intension of serving the most disadvantaged and to meet the goal

'education for all'. However, it is recommended to train teachers in multi-grade teaching and provide extra incentive to teachers and also remove the negative attitudes of parents and the community towards multi-grade teaching.

Small schools situated in the Ampara town area where there are sufficient number of schools in the close vicinity is suggested to close down to minimize educational wastage.

Student absenteeism due to involvement in income generating tasks is also a problem faced by the Zone. Some adolescent students prefer to catch lobsters in the Arugam Bay (a bay situated in Ampara District) rather than schooling as they could earn 50 US Dollars by selling one lobster. It is recommended to introduce flexible school holiday system which is linked with the economic activities in the zone. Negative effects of politicalization which takes place at provincial level should be stopped.

- **The Action Plan**

Based on the findings of the survey an Action Plan under 19 major areas to be implemented within three years (2010-2012) focusing the educational development in the Ampara Education Zone is forwarded. The major areas which activities are proposed are,

- (i) Decentralization of more powers to Divisional Education offices in the Ampara Education Zone
- (ii) Enhancement of academic staff of the Ampara Zonal Education Office
- (iii) Enhancement of non-academic staff of the Ampara Zonal Education Office
- (iv) Enhancement of staff of the Divisional Education Offices
- (v) Development of human resources at school level
- (vi) Attracting resource persons to the zone
- (vii) Implementation of "Community School Concept"
- (viii) Enhancement of physical resources in Zonal and Divisional Education Offices
- (ix) Development of physical resources at school level
- (x) Efficiency in supplying and distributing of text books and teacher's guide books
- (xi) Establishment of a Multiple Resource Centre
- (xii) Quality development of the Psycho- Social Centre and the Teacher Centre
- (xiii) Quality enhancement of teacher training and teacher development
- (xiv) Financial benefits
- (xv) Enhancement of student achievement

- (xvi) Student welfare
- (xvii) Maintenance and closure of Small Schools
- (xviii) Removing Negative effects of politicization
- (xix) Restructuring Ampara Education Zone into two Education Zones