

ABSTRACT

In Sri Lanka, in the past few decades, several reforms were undertaken in the educational system aiming at equalization of educational opportunities. Nevertheless, it is felt that there are disparities in the provision of educational opportunities in the country as there are some regions and some social segments which are educationally disadvantaged.

The present study is concerned with the assessment of educational opportunity in the Polonnaruwa District which appears as one of the disadvantaged areas in the country. It is hoped that the assessment of educational opportunity in the District by way of considering the socio-economic conditions, provision of material and manpower resources for education, rates of participation in education, levels of educational attainment and home environmental factors would provide evidence to determine the prevailing inequalities in the sphere of educational opportunity.

Polonnaruwa District situated in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka belongs climatically to the dry zone. The district comprises mainly of the rural sector. The area is sparsely populated and most of the land area are covered with forests. Social facilities like communication, health and education are poorly supplied. Thus the area remains socio-economically disadvantaged.

Regarding the availability of facilities for education, the District of Polonnaruwa remains disadvantaged. It was

observed that the physical location of schools has created problems of access to school, especially in the rural areas. It was also observed that the schools in the district on the average are lower grade schools. Many of those schools are 'small schools' with meagre facilities.

Schools in the district on the average are in short of qualified teachers. Most of the teachers working in the schools of the district have been recruited from outside and they are not sufficiently motivated to work in this district with an interest.

Rates of participation in education appeared to be at low levels. The rate of school enrolment of school age population is at a low level. Early leaving appears to be a common feature in the school system. It could be observed that the rates of repetition in the district were high. Attendance of pupils in school was found to be irregular.

It was observed that the percentages of population that have attained specific educational levels in the district were below the national level rates. Results of public examinations too showed that the failures were more in number than the achievers in education. University admissions from the District, too, marked low levels.

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It could be observed socio-economic and educational environment prevailing at homes on the average was at a low level. Most of the children belong to low S.E.S. families. Parents are little interested in the education of their children.

It was revealed in this study that the causes for educational backwardness and inadequacy of educational opportunities in the Polonnaruwa District lie in a complex set of factors including shortcomings in the allocation of resources, Socio-economic conditions and home environmental factors. Solutions for these problems too are found in those interrelated complex factors.