

# THE TUITION CLASS, SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES

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The system of free education was introduced in Sri Lanka nearly four decades ago, and free educational programmes have expanded steadily since then, yet all sections in society have not had an equal access to educational opportunities. But this has been subsumed in greater attention paid to the differences in education facilities among the various geographical regions, ethnic groups etc. This study is an attempt to look at some aspect of the unequal education opportunities for the different income groups and social classes.

In a study conducted in 1975 among the students in Peradeniya University to ascertain the extent to which education facilities had been distributed equally among the different social classes, it was revealed that there were large disparities in such opportunities among them. It revealed that a larger number of students entered the university from high income families and *vice versa* in contrast to the income group structure in the national population where higher income groups constitute a small percentage. (see table 1).

For instance though at that time the number of families receiving a monthly income of less than Rs. 200/- amounted to 34.2 percent of the total families in the country, students in the university from this category of families were only 11.3

percent of the total student population in the university. At the same time from the number of families receiving a monthly income of more than Rs. 1,000/-, a mere 2.0 percent of the total families in the country, the students in the university from this income group constituted 14.9 percent of the total student population. When faculties in the university were taken separately these inequalities appeared even more pronounced in the prestigious faculties.

A large number of students in the science faculties were from families of the high income groups while a very small number of students who entered such faculties were from low income families.

Analysis by parental occupations too showed a similar trend. For instance very small percentage of 2.5 percent of students in the university were children of unskilled labourers. But a comparatively larger percentage of 11.9 percent of students in the University were children of doctors and engineers. Once again faculty-wise the differences were greater in the prestigious faculties.

All this suggests that inspite of the free educational system comparatively better education facilities has been provided for the economically privileged social classes or such classes had greater access to such facilities.

Tuition classes as a phenomenon in Sri Lanka's educational system recorded a rapid growth in the 1970's. Today a large number of school going students receive private tuition and it has become a very important aspect of education and also been the subject of much discussion. In this once again more attention has been paid to matters such as reasons for students attending tuition classes, quality of education given in the tuition classes, tuition classes as a means to obtain more marks in the examinations etc. But little or insufficient attention has been paid to the socio-economic background of the tuition going students or which social classes have money to spend, on tuition, what proportion of their incomes are spent on tuition etc.

In this study we attempt to see whether there are any relationships between students attending tuition, money spent on tuition on the one hand and parental economic background on the other. This analysis is based on the data collected from school going students in Colombo City and Kegalle District. The necessary data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 729 students in grades 10 and 12 in eight schools in Colombo City and four schools in the Kegalle District. (see table 2).

While Colombo City with its social character and a visible high incidence of tuition attendance was an obvious choice yet those very characteristics it was feared would lead to a skewed data base. To correct this,

TABLE 1

Family Income of a Sample of University Students Compared with National Income Groups

Family Income (monthly In Rupees)	Arts Faculty %	Students in the University			Total %	Population in the island** %
		Science Faculty %	Engineering Faculty %			
Upto 199	16.4	2.8	4.2	11.3	34.2	
200 - 399	33.6	18.4	18.4	27.7	45.5	
400 - 599	19.5	15.5	22.5	19.3	12.7	
600 - 799	11.6	15.5	23.9	14.9	3.9	
800 - 999	9.4	18.3	14.1	11.9	1.6	
1000 and over	9.5	29.6	16.9	14.9	2.0	
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

SOURCE: \*Hemachandra H. L. The Nexus between Socio-Economic Factors and New Brahmins: A Social Survey of University Students. Economic Review, Vol. 6 No. 1 April 1980

\*\*Survey of Sri Lanka's Consumer Finances 1973. Central Bank of Ceylon.

TABLE 2

**Sample Student Population in Colombo City and Kegalle District  
Classified by Grade and Stream**

Area Grades/Streams		Colombo City Schools	Kegalle District Schools
Grade 10		182	75
Grade 12 Arts	25		47
Commerce	84		47
Medicine	108		60
Engineering	74		27
Total		291	181
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>473</b>	<b>256</b>

four schools from Kegalle District were included. Kegalle District was chosen because it occupies a middle position if the districts are placed on a hierarchy on the criteria of access to educational opportunities. (A District placed at the bottom of such a hierarchy e.g. Monaragala, would have been inappropriate for a study of this nature). The schools in Colombo City were selected on the basis of a purposive sample on a hierarchy of educational facilities and the social background of the students; while the four schools in Kegalle District were selected on a urban-rural dimension.

It was observed that a large percentage of children in families with higher income attend tuition while only a small percentage of children in families with low income do so. As shown in Table 3 in Kegalle District only 18 percent of students from families with a monthly income of less than Rs. 2,000/- attended tuition classes. But 58% of children from families with monthly incomes of more than Rs. 1,000/- attended tuition classes. In this district a signi-

ficant co-relation of 0.94 between income groups and percentage of students attending tuition classes from these groups is apparent. In Colombo City too a similar trend can be observed.

When one examines the parental occupation of children it reveals that while a small percentage of children of manual workers with low income attended tuition classes, a large number of children of fathers in white collar jobs with higher incomes attended tuition classes. For instance, in Colombo City 85 percent of the fathers engaged in professional and executive level jobs send their children to tuition classes while only 34 percent of fathers who work as unskilled workers sent their children to tuition classes (see table 4). The trend in Kegalle District was the same though a little less pronounced. Another interesting feature that was observed in both areas was that a larger percentage of children of teachers attended tuition classes than the children of those in other occupations.

The study also examined whether there was any relationship between money spent on tuition classes and the family income. As presented in the Diagram on page 12 in Colombo City with the increase of family income, expenditure of tuition going students in the families also increases. For instance, a tuition going student in a family with a monthly income of between Rs. 2,200/- to Rs. 4,400/- spent only about Rs. 81/- on his or her tuition fees per month on the average. At the same time tuition going students in a family with a monthly income of over Rs. 1,000/- spent as much as Rs. 199/- on his or her tuition fees per month. Co-relation between tuition going students' tuition fees and their monthly family income in Colombo City was tested and found to be significant at 0.55 level. In Kegalle district too the same relationship between family income and tuition attendance's tuition fees exists.

When tuition going students tuition fees were analysed according to parental occupations it also showed the same trend. In Colombo City a tuition going child of a father engaged in a professional or executive level job spent Rs. 108/- on tuition fees per month on the average, while a tuition going child of a father engaged in unskilled labour occupation spent on the average only Rs. 34/- on tuition per month (see table 5). In Kegalle District, this relationship was not so strongly evident as in Colombo City but resembles it in a less marked manner.

TABLE 3

**Tuition Attendance in Colombo City and Kegalle District Classified by Family Income**

Family Income (Monthly in Rupees)	0 - 200	201 - 400	401 - 600	601 - 1000	1001 - 2000	2001 - 5000	5001 and over
In Colombo City	0	55	58	78	85	88	90
In Kegalle District	18	41	47	59		78	

TABLE 4

**Tuition Attendance in Colombo City and Kegalle District Classified by Father's Occupation**

Father's Occupation	Professional & Executive	Trader & Proprietor	Teacher (non University)	Clerical Workers	Skilled Workers	Paddy Farmers	Unskilled Workers	Total
In Colombo City	85	78	87	71	61	71	34	75
In Kegalle District	67	76	90	58	46	60	57	67

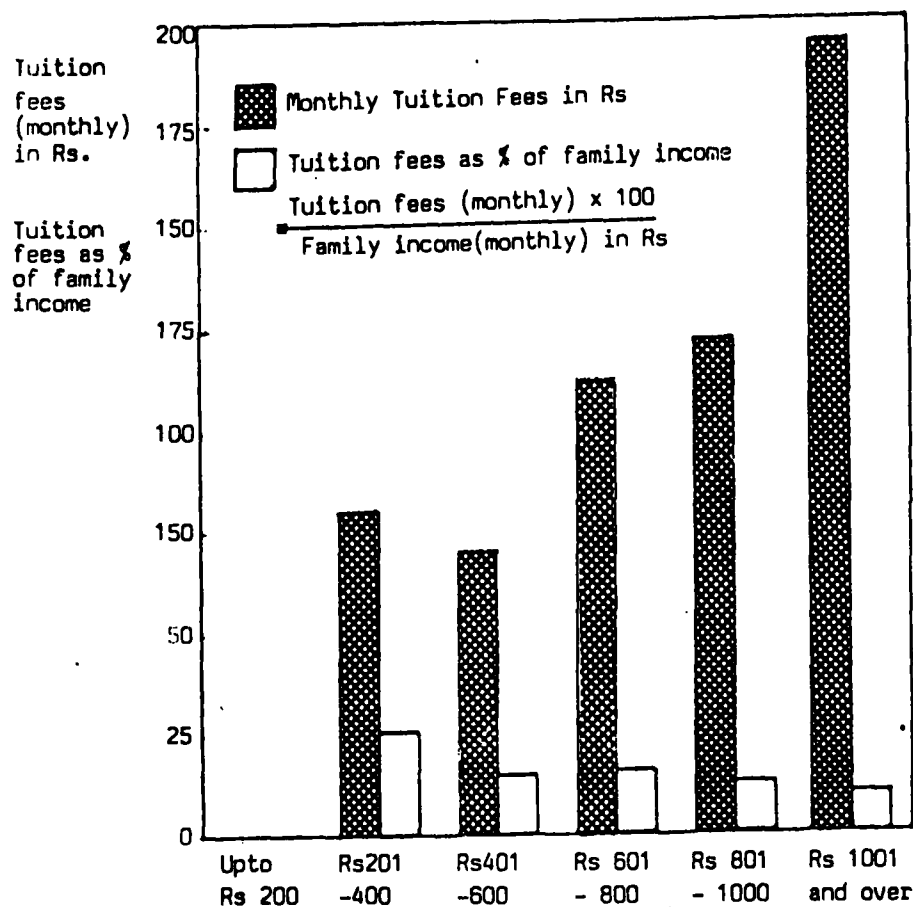
TABLE 5

Average Monthly Tuition Fees paid by a Tuition going Student in Colombo City and Kegalle District  
Classified by Fathers Occupation

Fathers Occupation	Professional & Executive	Trader & Proprietor	Teacher (Non. Univ.)	Clerical Workers	Skilled Workers	Paddy Farmers	Unskilled Workers
In Colombo City	108.14	83.99	70.04	50.61	38.68	36.00	34.50
In Kegalle District	29.83	26.95	27.89	22.89	22.00	28.19	23.67

DIAGRAM

AVERAGE MONTHLY TUITION FEES PAID BY A TUITION GOING STUDENT IN RUPEES AND AS A PERCENTAGE OF FAMILY INCOME



Though the parents with a higher income spent more money to send their children to tuition classes this expense constituted a smaller percentage of the household expenditure than in the case of parents with a low income. For instance, though a family in Colombo City with a

monthly income of between Rs. 200/- and Rs. 400/- spent only Rs. 81/- on their child's tuition fees, this amounted to as much as 27.9 percent of their total income. But for a family with a monthly income of over Rs. 1,000/- the expenditure of Rs. 199/- is only 9.9 percent of their total income (see Diagram).

Conclusion

It is therefor evident that the degree of tuition attendance has a close relationship to family income levels. A larger percentage of students in the higher income groups were found to be attending tuition classes and were paying higher tuition fees than the students from the lower income groups who attended tuition classes.

As indicated at the outset, as a result of the unequal distribution of school educational facilities among the different socio-economic groups a higher proportion of students in the economically unprivileged section of society have been deprived of higher education opportunities.

If the tuition system helps students to gain admission to the Universities, the disparities already existing in the education system, particularly in the field of higher education, are made further disparate by the operation of the tuition system. For this study strongly suggests that a greater number of children from the privileged socio-economic groups or strata have greater access to tuition. Indeed it can be interpreted that this is a mechanism by which such privileged groups are enabled to restrict privileged educational opportunities to themselves and furthermore it is a mechanism which hinders even the limited opportunities of the free educational system infact to provide an equitable access to education to all sections of society of whatever socio-economic background.