

Outcomes, Quality and Reform:
Education Trends in the Central Province in
Sri Lanka

Nireka Weeratunge

February 2003
Article Series No. 5 - 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Background	1
2. Methodology	2
2.1 Conceptual issues	2
2.2 Methods	2
3. Results of the study	3
3.1 Literacy rates	3
3.2 Education level of the sample population	5
3.3 School enrolment and avoidance	7
3.4 Drop-out rates	8
3.5 The quality of primary and secondary education	12
3.5.1 Pupil-teacher ratios	12
3.5.2 Teacher wages	13
3.5.3 Type of school attended	13
3.5.4 Assessment of the quality of education	14
3.5.5 Perceptions of corporal punishment	15
3.5.6 Preferred school	16
3.5.7 Preferred curriculum	17
3.6 Paying for education	18
3.6.1 Private tuition and training	18
3.6.2 Pre-school education	20
3.6.3 Non-formal education	21
3.7 Vocational education	22
3.8 Gender disparities in education	23
3.9 Aspirations from education	24
3.9.1 The purpose of education	25
3.9.2 Desired level of education	27
3.9.3 Preferred sector and type of employment for children	28
3.10 Institutional changes: Education reform	29
4. Conclusion	31
5. Policy implications	31
<i>References</i>	32

1. Background: Government programmes and donor-supported inventions in education

Since Independence, the state has focussed on making education accessible to all, reflected in the relatively high literacy rates and enrolment figures in the Central province and in Sri Lanka generally. However, as education expanded to include the greater population of school-age children, there has been a consequent decline in the quality of education, as well as regional and sectoral disparities. To increase enrolment and attendance the public school system offers school uniforms and subsidised public transport. To promote education quality and improve achievement free textbooks are distributed and the Grade 5 Scholarship Programme has been instituted. In 1997 the government introduced new reforms to deal with the deteriorating quality of education. These cover five major areas: extending opportunity, quality improvement, practical and technical skill development, teacher training and management/resource provision (Presidential Task Force 1996).

The state spent 2.74% of the GNP and 6.7% of total government expenditure on education in 1982 (UGC 1997). In 1996 the share of education had increased slightly to 3.41% of the GNP and 8.9% of total government expenditure. Of the allocation for education, the major share went into primary and secondary education. The share of tertiary education from the total expenditure on education fell from 16.6% in 1982 to 14.7% in 1996.

Table 1 Number of government schools in the Central Province by District

District	1991	1997	2000
Kandy	685	689	667
Matale	311	320	319
Nuwara Eliya	456	521	517
Total	1452	1530	1503

Source: Ministry of Education 1992, 1998, 2001

There was an overall increase in the number of schools in the Central Province between 1991 and 2000, and a marginal decline between 1997 and 2000. Nuwara Eliya district with a 13.4% growth in government schools contributed largely to this increase. By 2000, there were no disparities among the three districts in enrolment in government schools, considered as a percentage of the total population.

Table 2 Pupil enrolment as a percentage of the total population by District, 2000/2001

District	Total population	Pupil enrolment	Percentage
Kandy	1,272,463	296,817	23.3
Matale	442,427	104,300	23.6
Nuwara Eliya	700,083	165,941	23.7
Central Province	2,414,973	567,058	23.5

Source: Census 2001; Education Ministry 2001

Over a third (526) of government schools in the Central Province have been assisted under SIDA, GTZ, IDA, UNICEF, UNESCO, NORAD, FINNIDA, ADB, ISD-supported and other projects by 1997 with teaching materials, resources and teacher training. Over half (54%) of the schools in the Nuwara Eliya district where education indicators have been relatively poor for decades, have been assisted.

These constitute the activities and services of the education programmes and projects. The use of these outputs and services and the direct benefit to "target groups" are subject to some sort of evaluation by the institutions implementing these projects/programmes.

Methodology

2.1 Conceptual issues

In the JIMOD study, our primary interest was in both the direct and indirect impacts of these education interventions, by looking at the overall changes in education outcomes that have taken place in the Central Province. The assumption was that these changes could be dependent or independent of project activities. In education, trends and patterns in several areas were examined.

The study looked at both education outcomes and how these were perceived and assessed by members of households. Differences by district, sector, status of development, gender and ethnicity were examined wherever relevant. The literacy and education levels among the households interviewed were investigated. The type of school preferred and the reasons for this preference were explored. The incidence of school avoidance (non-enrolment) and drop-outs among households, the levels of the school cycle when this occurred and the reasons were examined. Parents' assessment of the quality of education received by their children was analysed. The rise in enrolment in pre-school education was investigated. The proportion of the population with formal vocational training was looked at, and the notions parents held about vocational training as an option for their children. The rise in attendance of private tuition and supplementary education was also examined. The overall purpose of education, as perceived by parents in their aspirations for the future of their children, was also analysed.

2.2 Methods

The analysis of this study is based on available regional-level secondary data, as well as primary data from the JIMOD Household Survey and the Participatory Assessment. The Household Survey comprised 440 households from the three districts of the Central Province, Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya, stratified according to sectors, "more developed" and "less developed" areas (based on a set of indicators), ethnicity and gender. It was based on a structured questionnaire. More details are provided in the overview paper in this series¹.

The Participatory Assessment used a qualitative open-ended questionnaire and was conducted among a smaller sample of 60 households selected from the larger pool. The purpose of this component was to understand the processes and causes of development/stagnation within communities in the Central Province. Altogether 12 units (6 villages, 3 estates, 3 urban neighbourhoods in the three districts) were covered indicative of "less developed" rural (LDR), "more developed" rural (MDR), estate and urban sectors within the three districts. The *urban* units covered were in the DS divisions of Gangawatakorale (Kandy), Matale and Nuwara Eliya. The *estate* units covered were located within the DS divisions of Doluwa, Rattota and Nuwara Eliya. The *"more developed"* rural units covered were in the DS divisions of Udunuwara, Yatawatte and Kotmale. The *"less developed"* rural units were located in the DS divisions of Doluwa, Galewela and Walapane.

The results of the Participatory Assessment are not necessarily representative of the sectors, but indicative of significant issues and problems surrounding education. Percentages have not been calculated for the data generated from this process as the sample size was small but tables with numbers are provided to distinguish between dominant and minority views/tendencies. The quotes from respondents are more important than the numbers to understand the processes and causes influencing education outcomes among households in the Central Province.

As the proportion of university students in the sample was small, the paper does not address trends relating to university education.

¹ Centre for Poverty Analysis. 2003. Understanding development trends in the Central Province of Sri Lanka: A project-transcending model of impact monitoring. Colombo

3. Results of the study

3.1 Literacy rates

The adult literacy levels in the Central Province have increased in the period between 1990-2000, according to available macro statistics; precise data by province and district are unavailable since no Census was carried out in 1991. According to the UNDP report for 1998, Kandy district had an estimated 90% literacy rate, in keeping with the national average, Matale recorded 87%, and Nuwara Eliya 78%, the lowest rate of all districts in the country. However, the literacy rate is a misleading indicator, as it merely reports the number of people who claim to be able to read and write their name, and does not say anything about whether the person can actually read or write or the person's ability to function in the written language. While the JIMOD study by its nature could not attempt to measure functional literacy it attempted to establish what was termed "proven literacy" by administering a reading test to all those who had less than seven years of schooling to verify claims of literacy.

Table 3 "Proven" literacy (persons above 10 years), percentages

Category	Kandy	Matale	Nuwara Eliya	Central Province
Urban	84	96	78	85
Rural	81	80	80	80
Estate	61	61	65	62
More developed	89	82	77	72
Less developed	71	74	69	84
Male	80	83	80	81
Female	78	74	68	75
Total	79	79	74	78

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

According to the JIMOD household Survey results, "proven" literacy (of persons above 10 years) in the Central Province was 78%. Kandy and Matale districts had a rate of 79% and Nuwara Eliya 74%; the difference between the three districts is not as wide as in macro-level statistics. The estate sector in Matale has the lowest rate of 61%. The disparity between urban and estate sectors in Matale is as wide as 35% points. Moreover, the difference between "more developed" and "less developed" areas is significant, as much as 18% points in Kandy district. The female literacy rate is lower for the Central Province as a whole while the difference is marginal only in Kandy district. The disparity in Nuwara Eliya between males and females is 12% points, particularly due to the presence of an older generation of women who did not have access to schooling.

Table 4 "Proven" literacy (persons above 10 years) by ethnicity, percentages

Ethnicity	Kandy	Matale	Nuwara Eliya	Central Province
Sinhalese	82	81	73	81
"Sri Lankan" Tamil	68	55	80	70
"Indian" Tamil	44	57	66	56
Moor	89	89	88	88
Burgher	100	-	-	100
Mixed	100	-	-	100
Other	-	-	-	-
Total	79	79	74	78

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

In terms of ethnicity, literacy was highest among Moors in all three districts, as well as in the province as a whole. It was lowest among "Indian Tamils" in Kandy and Matale districts, as well as overall in the province. The disparity between the two ethnic groups is as large as 32% points in the province as a whole. The literacy rate among Sinhalese was also low in Nuwara Eliya district.

Table 5 "Proven" literacy (persons above 5 years), by age, percentages

Age group	Kandy	Matale	Nuwara Eliya	Central Province
5-19	87	77	86	84
20-35	85	91	77	85
36-55	75	75	61	72
55+	62	62	61	61
Total	80	78	74	78

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

In order to understand how effective comparatively the school system was in teaching literacy, "proven" literacy levels by age groups were analysed. In the Central Province as a whole literacy is higher for the younger groups. However the rate for the 5-19 age group is marginally lower than that for the 20-35 age group. In Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts 5-19 year olds have a higher level of literacy than their counterparts in the age group between 20-35 years. However, in Matale district the literacy level of the 5-19 age group is considerably lower than that of the 20-35 age group, indicating lower performance in the school system.

Table 6 Differences in "proven" literacy in the school age population (5-19) years, percentage

Category	Kandy	Matale	Nuwara Eliya	Central Province
Urban	81	75	59	71
Rural	84	77	86	83
Estate	69	58	81	70
More developed	86	80	73	81
Less developed	78	64	91	77
Male	77	73	79	76
Female	86	70	81	81
Total	82	72	77	78

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

The lower outcomes in the Matale district are corroborated by examining differences in literacy within the school age population of the province. The “proven” literacy level in the 5-19 age group is the same as the overall literacy level recorded for the Central Province. In Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts literacy among 5-19 year olds is slightly higher than among the general population. In Matale district the rate is somewhat lower than in Nuwara Eliya district; literacy levels are lowest in the estate sector of this district. The rate among 5-19 year olds in the urban sector in Nuwara Eliya district is significantly lower than among the general urban population. There is also a big disparity in the literacy rates between the more and less developed areas; this is particularly acute in the Matale district. Moreover, while literacy levels are generally higher among girls than boys in the Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts, as well as the province as a whole, in Matale district it is lower among girls.

3.2 Education level of the sample population

The education level of the general population covered under the Household Survey revealed the many disparities within the province, showing the uneven outreach of the education system.

Table 6 Level of education of the total population surveyed, percentages

	Primary 1-5	Junior secondary 6-9	GCE “O” level 10-11	GCE “A” level 12-13
Kandy	24.3	24.8	27.8	12.5
Matale	28.7	22.7	27.8	9.8
Nuwara Eliya	26.3	28.8	22.9	8.3
Urban	15	21.2	31.6	19.8
Rural	25.9	25.6	28.9	10.5
Estate	36.8	25.8	14.9	4
More developed	22.2	24.1	31.4	14
Less developed	29.7	25.7	22.3	8
Male	28.5	27.6	26	9.7
Female	25.9	24.9	27	11
Central Province	25.9	24.9	27	11

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

* Percentages do not add up to 100, as the population with no schooling and the minute proportion of people with tertiary education has been left out of this table.

Out of the four categories, the larger proportion (27%) of the province's population comprises those with 10-11 years of senior secondary level schooling. This category is highest (31%) in the urban and more developed sectors. The estate sector has the lowest proportion (14.9) in this category. Of the three districts, Nuwara Eliya has the lowest percentage of people with 10-11 years of schooling, thus consistent with the overall literacy levels within that district.

Kandy district has a bigger proportion (12.5%) of the population with 12-13 years of schooling, as does the urban (19.8%) and more developed (14%) sectors in the province as a whole. The proportion of women with 12-13 years of schooling is somewhat higher than of men, and the percentage of women with 10 -11 years of schooling is also slightly higher than of their male counterparts.

On the whole, around 38% of the population surveyed in the Central Province had a senior secondary level education (counting both groups 10-11 and 12-13 years of schooling). The enormous disparity between the urban sector with over 50% of its population having a senior secondary education, in comparison to only 19% in the estate sector is significant. It is consistent with the continuously high drop-out rates at junior secondary level in the estate sector, as discussed in the section below.

Table 7 Level of education of by ethnicity, percentages

Ethnic group	Primary 1-5	Junior secondary 6-9	GCE "O" level 10-11	GCE "A" level 12-13
Sinhalese	24.6	23.6	29.1	12.5
"Sri Lankan" Tamil	32.7	27.4	19.6	6.9
"Indian" Tamil	33.6	28.5	13.9	2.2
Moor	18.6	31.4	33.3	10.8
Burgher	-	33.3	33.3	33.3
Mixed	33.3	66.7	-	-
All	25.9	24.9	27	11

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

*Percentages do not add up to 100, as the population with no schooling and the minute proportion of people with tertiary education has been left out of this table

Leaving Burghers and the "Mixed" category out of the analysis, as the number of individuals in the sample was small, the ethnic group with the best overall educational attainment is the Moors. The highest proportion (44%) of the population completing a senior secondary education (years 10-13), as well as a junior secondary education (31%) is within this ethnic group. The Sinhalese have a higher attainment only in the category of 12-13 years of schooling. The lowest educational outcomes are among the "Indian" Tamils, with only 16% of the group having a senior secondary education. The ethnic disparities in educational levels of the population within the province are consistent with the literacy data analysed above.

3.3 School enrolment and avoidance

While pupil enrolment increased by 26% between 1981-1991 in the Central Province, there was a decrease of 1.6% between 1991 and 2000 (Ministry of Education 2001). The increase in enrolment seems to have peaked, and Kandy and Matale districts both show decreases in enrolment between 1997 and 2000.

Table 8 Pupil enrolment in the Central Province, 1991 -2000

District	1991	2000	Change
Kandy	306,358	296,817	- 3.1%
Matale	109,033	104,300	- 4.3%
Nuwara Eliya	161,121	165,941	+ 3%
Central Province	576,512	567,058	- 1.6%

Source: Education Ministry 1992, 2001

The combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment rate for the province was 43.9% in 1994 (UNDP 1998). Nuwara Eliya district where the combined enrolment rate at 45.42% in 1994, was the highest out of the three districts, shows a marginal increase in enrolment between 1997 and 2000. The higher enrolment rate in Nuwara Eliya where other education indicators, including secondary school enrolment rates, have been poor, needs to be accounted for. While the primary gross enrolment rate for the Central Province in 1994 was 111% (this might reflect over-aged children who are repeating), the secondary gross enrolment rate at 86%, was the lowest of all provinces in the country (Nanayakkara 2000).

The education ministry maintains no statistics about school avoidance. Thus, district level data are unavailable. The school avoidance (non-enrolment) rate as a percentage of the school-going age group, estimated for Zone 4 (which includes the Central Province as well as Uva and Sabaragamuwa) was 8.8% in 1996/7, reduced substantially from the 14.5% rate in 1986/7 (Central Bank 1993, 1999). However, one of the main reasons for avoiding school, the inability to provide basic requirements, which was cited by 17% of the Central Bank sample, remained unchanged 10 years later. The highest drop in school avoidance has been from the estate sector, which however continued to have the highest sectoral school avoidance rate of 12.7% in 1996/7.

Table 9 Those who have never attended a school in the 5-19 age group in the Central Province

Category	No	As % of age group
Kandy district	9	3%
Matale district	4	3%
Nuwara Eliya district	1	0.8%
Urban	4	4.6%
Rural	5	1.5%
Estate	5	4.6%
More developed	5	1.9%
Less developed	9	3.4%
Male	6	2.3%
Female	8	2.9%
Central Province	14	2.6%

Source: JIMOD Household Survey 2001

According to the JIMOD Survey data, school avoidance in the 5-19 age group was very low in the Central Province. It was lowest in Nuwara Eliya district. It was highest in the urban and estate sectors. It was higher in the less developed areas and marginally higher for females than males. The main reasons for school avoidance according to the JIMOD Household Survey data was housework and illness (23% each), with financial constraints having decreasing importance (8%) relative to those (19%), who had never gone to school in the entire sample. Mental disability and five/six year olds who had not yet been admitted to school also accounted for some of the school avoidance. Work on the family land and the lack of a nearby school, which were significant reason for an older generation who never went to school, did not emerge as reasons at all, among the current generation of children.

3.4 Drop-out rates

Drop-out rates up to Year 9 in the Central Province was 3.31% in 1991 and had decreased slightly to 2.93% in 1997, according the Education Ministry statistics (1991,1997). However, drop-out rates in Year 9 reached 7.31% in the entire province and up to 13% in plantation schools in the Nuwara Eliya district in 1997. However, the highest drop-out rate is at "O" level which over three quarters of students in the Province fail. Additionally the number of students enrolled at "A" level is quite low in Nuwara Eliya in relation to its population size, in the macro-level statistics.

Drop-out statistics produced by the Education Ministry remain unreliable, especially since 1991. Thus an attempt was made to examine school attendance as a proportion of the population under 18 years of age. Since the school avoidance rate is low and the proportion of students in the school system over 18 years of age is also low, this provides a rough estimate of those students who have

