

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOME
CONCEPTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES AMONG STUDENTS
COMPLETING JUNIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION FROM
DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN
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Abstract

The present state system of schools claims to provide equality of opportunity by the provision of an almost uniform education in all schools. All state schools provide a common curriculum without streaming upto the end of the junior secondary level which till 1977 terminated at grade nine. All state schools also provide free education. Education in these is through the mother tongue. Teachers are appointed to state schools irrespective of the locality of the school and without discrimination. Students from all state schools sit for a common state examination which from 1975 came to be known as the National Certificate of General Education.

It was hoped therefore that all students have equality of opportunity and equal accessibility. As a result of the enforcement of a radius rule for admission, the expectation was that a child would enter a school in close proximity to his residence and complete the junior secondary level with the N.C.G.E. examination, each according to his ability and not according to his socio-economic circumstances.

Despite this claim a distinct difference exist in the demand for each school. There is a rush for entry

into prestigious schools which are in consequence overcrowded. As against this there are schools which are less attractive to parents and have therefore remained under utilized. The prestigious schools located in affluent environments cater to the wealthier classes and children from "lower classes" are shut off from these schools despite the radius rule. At the same time there are some schools which children from richer classes shun. Different types of schools catering to different classes located in different environments can thus be identified.

The main purpose of this study is

- (1) to identify several types of schools among the Sinhala medium state schools of the Western Province, educationally the most developed region. Six types of schools were identified by the researcher by a system of subjective classification.
- (2) to ascertain whether significant differences existed in achievement:
 - (i) between urban and rural schools
 - (ii) among the six types of schools,
 and,
- (3) to assess whether
 - (iii) sex differences
 - (iv) teacher differences: whether taught by graduate and non graduate trained teachers, had a significant impact on achievement.

Achievement was measured by a concept test in social studies. The test was constructed and standardized by the researcher. A sample of 2400 students from the population of junior secondary school leavers of 1976 (Western Province) was selected for this study. The sample consisted of equal numbers from the urban and rural sectors, each type of school and each sex.

Significant differences were found between urban and rural schools, among the six types of schools and among the sexes. The results of this analysis and the researcher's interpretations of his findings (aided by a questionnaire administered to the sample and teachers, and follow up interviews) are presented in the hope that they may contribute to the development of strategies and methodologies designed to reduce educational and social imbalances which are a barrier to the promotion of equality of educational opportunity.