

Influence of Ethnic Conflict on Attainment of Students in GCE (O/L) Examination in Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The conflict leads to adverse repercussions. It suppresses not only the development activities, but also the education of a country. The objective of the study was to find out the influence of ethnic conflict on the attainment of students in GCE (O/L) examination in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. A sample of 18 schools situated in Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts was selected using random stratified sampling technique. From each school 10 teachers and its principals were selected for gathering information. Content Analysis of Examination Results, Questionnaire on Impact of Ethnic Conflict and Interview were used as tools for collecting data. The results of the study revealed that the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka has affected the performance of the students who studied GCE (O/L) examination during the war period. For remedial actions, it was suggested to provide scholarships and facilities to the war affected students. The private investment in education was also motivated in the east.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflict; Attainment; Students; Eastern Province.

Introduction

The conflict causes adverse repercussions. It hinders not only the development process, but also education of a country. The impact of conflict on education affects the total student populace and the development of the country (Galtung, 2000).

Education is the backbone for the development of a country. Most of the governments allocate a large portion of their annual budget to the development of education. In this series, the government of Sri Lanka has, in the past, for the increased participation in the affairs of education, taken a series of measures to improve education in the country. It has introduced several educational reforms from time to time. Some of the notable reforms are the educational reforms 1972, the educational reforms 1981, and the general

education reforms 1997. Mostly all of which motivated the nation's education. They helped maintaining the free and compulsory education for the children below 14 years of age (Gunawardana, et al. 2009). Above all, the free education that was introduced in 1948 in Sri Lanka has paved the way for all categories of people to gain education in the country irrespective of caste differences, religion, and social and economical status of the people (Ibid). This could be the result for having a highest literacy rate among the South Asian countries.

These measures and reforms, in a nutshell, included the elements of several motivations to the students to increase their achievements as much as possible. Some of the notable measures taken to develop education are starting schools for learning in vernacular language and the free distribution of milk and bun, of mid-day meals, of biscuits, free school uniforms and text books. In addition, the government has appointed a large number of both trained and untrained teachers to the schools with the intention of increasing the achievement of the students.

In the aftermath of the development of science and technology, the access to education became easier, and the awareness among the parents and students increased about the need of education for survival.

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The parents are nowadays unprecedentedly intersected in educating their children. They seek better schools in the cities for their children (Silverman, 2005).

Despite all these positives measures and actions with regard to improvement of education, it is observed that the achievement of students in the public examinations, after nineties, has dramatically dropped in the schools in the east provinces, particularly in the schools which are located in the area where the influence of Tamil rebels were high.

The education of many children has relatively been affected in these "uncleared areas". In these circumstances, many a effort of the government to improve the quality of education in the east went awry (Keethaponcalan, 2006). The resources and fund allocated by the government seemed wasted and did not give dividend. The dreams of parents and children were shattered when their children failed in the public examinations and gave up studies half way.

This phenomenon causes grave concern to the educationists and the parents in the East and become serious problem in education. In this backdrop, I am, in this research, attempting to ascertain if the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, has caused any impact on education (the achievement of students in GCE (O/L) examination) and to find remedial measures possible to improve the achievement of the students in the East.

Significance of the Study

1. This study will through a light on the education of the students studying in the schools situated in the eastern province of the country
2. This study will also help to allocate more funds to the schools in the war affected region
3. This study will help organize remedial measure to restore the educational activities in the post war era.
4. The result of the study could be used as a step to improve the education of those who dropped out and give a new life to them, by organizing catch-up programmes.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To analyses thepercentage of students qualified for GCE (A/L) examination during selected war period and thereafter
- b. To find out the influence of ethnic war in the attainment of the students in the public examination

- c. To propose remedies to improve the achievement of the students in public examination in the east

Methodology

Method of the Study

For this study, an expose facto method was used

Population of the Study

The population of the study involves all the schools in Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, in the eastern province of Sri Lanka.

Sample of the Study

A sample of 18 schools situated in Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts was selected using random stratified sampling technique. The strata for selection were type of school, district, and community. From each school 10 teachers were selected on random basis for gathering information through questionnaire. The principals of the sample schools were interviewed.

Tools for the Study

1. *Content Analysis of Examination Results:* To compare the percentage of the students qualified for studying GCE (O/L) examination during the selected period in ethnic conflict and after that. The data provided by the Department of Examination of Sri Lanka was used in the study as they were considered standard tests conducted for all the students studying in Sri Lanka at the same time.
2. *Questionnaire on Impact of Ethnic Conflict:* This tool was used to gather information regarding the impact of ethnic conflict in the attainment of students who sat for the GCE (O/L) examination. The tool was developed by the researcher using experts opinion provided by Prof. Prema of Alagappa University. The Questionnaire consists of 15 items in a five point Likert Scale. Author of the Scale claims that the instrument has good reliability and it is 0.73 obtained through test retest method.
3. *Interview:* Interview schedule developed by the author in keeping with the objectives of the study and validated through experts opinion. The schedule has 05 major questions. The validity of the question was established through expert's opinion.

Procedure for Data Collection

After selecting the sample, the investigator received the formal consent of the teachers and the principals to provide information to the investigator. Then, the questionnaires were distributed to the teachers selected and their response obtained in the questionnaires. After that, the principals were interviewed and the data recorded. The questionnaires were scored as per the scoring scheme and entered in to a spread sheet for statistical analysis.

Analysis of Data

The data gathered were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

The data collected by using the tools were tabulated and analyzed based on the objectives of the study and given below.

Analysis of the Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) Examination during Selected Conflict Period and Thereafter

The analysis of the percentage of the students qualified for studying in advanced level class during the year beginning from 2005 to 2005 are tabled below. As the conflict ended in the period 2007-2008, the year 2005-2007 is considered as the period of ethnic conflict and the immediate period from 2008-2010 viewed post-conflict period. The data gathered from the department of examination in respect of the percentage of students qualified for studying advanced level are given below in the Table 1.

From the Table 1, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the percentages of

students qualified in GCE (A/L) examination during year 2005 -2007 (during the conflict period) with the percentage during the year 2008 -2010 (after the conflict period). It can be concluded that the study during the period (during conflict) is affected by the ethnic conflict. This conclusion is further established by comparison of the percentage of the students qualified for GCE (A/L) with the percentage of students qualified for GCE (A/L) in all the schools in Sri Lanka which is given below.

It is also established that the percentage of the students qualified for GCE (A/L) in other schools is higher than the schools in the eastern province as can be seen from the Table 2.

Influence of Ethnic Conflict in Attainment of Students in GCE (O/L) Examination

When compared to the passing rate of the students during the periods of ethnic conflict and thereafter, it was found that there is marked difference in the percentage of students qualified for the GCE (O/L) examination. The percentage of the students is low during the conflict than the percentage after the end of the conflict.

The influence of the ethnic conflict on the performance of the students at the GCE (O/L) classes was endorsed by the views expressed by all the principals at the interviews. They categorically said that the studies of the students were affected during the war. The schools did not have enough resources and the students had to shift from place to place as refugees due to the war. They did not have enough facilities at home. The school had dearth of teachers for teaching important subjects. The economy of the parents too was affected. There were no peaceful environments for the students to learn at home and schools.

Table 1: The Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) Examination during Selected Conflict Period and Thereafter

Districts	Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) During the Period of War in East			Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) During the Period of War in East		
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Trincomalee	39.72	41.91	40.63	43.17	45.01	52.56
Batticaloa	45.56	47.58	45.65	49.48	38.4	58.34
Ampara	46.08	48.15	40.86	51.54	46.53	59.90

Table 2: Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) in all the Schools in Sri Lanka

Percentage of Students Qualified for GCE (A/L) in all the Schools in Sri Lanka					
2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
47.72	48.72	49.14	56.83	48.44	57.62

Remedies to improve the achievement of the students in public examination in the east

After coding the views of the principals, and the suggestions expressed by the teachers from the questionnaire, the following remedies were proposed to improve the achievement of the student in the east

a. Allowing private sectors to invest in education in the east.

The private sector can play a big role in improving the education of the country. Many students who are out of the east get opportunities in learning at the private sectors which provide enough training and education to the students using modern facilities. When such facilities are given to the students in the east, the performance of the students can be improved.

b. The war affected students should be given scholarships

There are many scholarship programs available for the students. However, there is no specific category of scholarship program available for the war affected students. These students should be provided scholarships so that they can be motivated and the expense of the education could be reduced to a great extent.

c. Initiating special projects for improving achievements

Initiating special study projects will boost the students. The projects can be designed to improve the performance of the students who are weak in the subjects identified. They can be given a series of remedial classes with task sheets.

d. Conducting Continuous Assessment

The students should be given continuous assessment to get used to writing examinations. They can check their improvement and weakness. The assessment process will help them to score more marks in the public examinations

e. Improving of Facilities

The facilities like study halls, infrastructure in schools and extracurricular activity rooms should be provided to the students.

f. Awareness program among students and their parents

The students and their parents should be given awareness about the importance of educating their

children. They need to understand the value of education. Then they will show interest in education. For that, a series of awareness program should be conducted to them.

Conclusion

The conflict leads to adverse repercussions. It suppresses not only the development activities, but also the education of a country. The influence of ethnic conflict is also found in the achievement of education in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. The analysis of the percentage of students qualified for GCE (A/L) examination during selected conflict period and thereafter has established the impact of the conflict on the achievement level of the students in the east. The schools did not have enough resources and the students had to shift from place to place as refugees due to the war. They did not have enough facilities at home. The school had dearth of teachers for teaching important subjects. The economy of the parents too was affected. There were no peaceful environments for the students to learn at home and schools. It was suggested as remedies that the war affected students should be given scholarships. Special projects should be started to improve achievements. Continuous assessment process should be followed and the parents should be given awareness to improve the achievement of the students in public examination in the east.

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