

Sri Lanka
State of the Economy Report 2014

Chapter 8
Learning from Asia Best Practices in School
Education

by
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8. Learning from Asian Best Practices in School Education

8.1 Benchmarking Best Practices in School Education

The most recent Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) results released in December 2013 revealed that most of the best performing school systems are situated in Asia. Shanghai-China was the best performer in Mathematics followed by six Asian countries including, Singapore, Hong Kong-China, Chinese Taipei, South Korea, Macao-China, and Japan. But this result was not limited to Mathematics. The release of PISA results has unleashed a plethora of articles that seek to understand the reasons behind the success of the Asian countries in teaching children.

Along with the drive for innovation-led growth across countries, the global competition for skilled workers has intensified. This is evident in the migration policy changes of advanced countries favouring skilled workers. A new survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in assessing adult skills shows that, adults with poor Mathematics skills limit individuals' access to better paying, more rewarding jobs.¹ Further, unequal distribution of Mathematic skills has a negative influence on the wealth of nations. In this backdrop, countries have also turned greater attention to improving their own education systems to produce skilled graduates. Countries are increasingly looking beyond their

borders to learn from best practices in education and to find solutions for their education system problems.

PISA, a tool for assessing students across countries, was conceptualized in the mid-1990s by the OECD, and the first PISA survey was conducted in 2000.² Since then, a PISA survey has been conducted every three years covering OECD member countries and other partner countries. The PISA was designed to assess 15 year old students across the globe for their competencies in reading, mathematics, science and problem solving. This assessment is different from normal exams, in that, it is not meant to examine how well students know what they have learnt, but it tries to assess how well they can use that knowledge to solve problems situated in unfamiliar settings.

PISA identifies several policies and practices that contribute to the success of school systems.³ The results indicate that resources are important for improving educational outcomes. But, this is only up to a limit. After a certain point, injecting further resources will have marginal impacts on the educational outcomes. As much as the amounts that are invested in education, the way resources are allocated is also important. For example, the high performing school systems are more equitable

¹ OECD (2013), "PISA 2012 Results in Focus"; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

² OECD (2014), PISA FAQ, available at <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/pisafaq.htm> [accessed 9 May 2014].

³ OECD (2013), "PISA 2012 Results in Focus"; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

across schools coming from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The more successful school systems have schools that are better staffed and better equipped. Schools that have better autonomy over how they set the curriculum and how they assess students, perform better. Better schools tend to self-evaluate their performance and use student assessments to compare themselves to the performance of other schools in their districts or countries. Schools where students come to class late or are often absent tend to perform less well than other schools.

This Chapter compares the policies and practices of the education system in Sri Lanka with that of the best education systems in the world to assess differences and recommend changes. It raises several key questions: how are the education system practices different in Sri Lanka from that of the best performing school systems? What practices can improve teacher quality and distribution in the education systems? How can Sri Lanka improve equity in the education system? How are the best education systems financed and governed? How can education providers be made accountable to the performance of students? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this Chapter.

8.2 Teacher Quality Matters

One key feature that differentiates teachers in high performing school systems from the others is the quality of the teachers. High teacher quality results from a variety of policy measures taken by policy makers. The key measures identified from the review of literature on PISA results are summarized below.⁴

8.2.1 Better Compensation and Status Attracts the Best

In most of the successful school systems, teachers are highly respected, and teaching is a highly

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sought after occupation. This is partly due to relatively high compensation received by teachers. In South Korea teachers are paid well. The starting annual salary (US\$ 30,401) of a new teacher in South Korea is close to the OECD average (US\$ 31,687), while the highest paid teachers receive salaries that far exceed the average (US\$ 51,317) for top scale paid by OECD countries. Although teachers are paid slightly lower salaries in Japan, and the starting salary of a Japanese teacher is lower than the OECD average, the salaries of Japanese teachers in their mid and top career levels exceed that of the OECD average. Teacher salaries in Singapore are comparable with salaries of other professionals. The highest paid teachers can earn as much as twice the GDP per capita income of the country. The Ministry of Education periodically compares the teacher salary scales with other salary scales and makes adjustments to keep teacher salaries competitive. Successful teachers can earn retention bonuses and performance bonuses, some of which can be as much as 30 per cent of their base salary. The selections for these bonuses are done after rigorous evaluations, which also serve as a basis for teacher development. In 2009, the modal average annual salary for teachers aged 25-29 was US\$ 43,563, which was slightly

⁴ This section draws mainly from Center on International Education Benchmarking (2014), "PISA 2012", available at <http://www.ncee.org/pisa-2012/> [accessed 8 May 2014].

higher than the OECD average of US\$ 41,701. Teacher compensation depends on their position in the career path. Movement along the career path is based on performance and potential.

High teacher salaries are used to attract the best students to the teaching profession in the best performing countries. However, the selection process for recruiting teachers and for promotions, as described below, is also very rigorous in these countries. Thus, only the best are able to get access to the teaching profession, and they have to show continuous performance for moving along the career ladder.

8.2.2 Stringent Teacher Recruitment

In most successful school systems, ensuring teacher quality starts with recruitment. The best performers in the post senior secondary level exams are chosen for a career in teaching. For example, in South Korea students for different teacher education programmes are selected based on performance at high school and their performance at the College Scholastic Ability Test - a test taken by all high school students aiming to do higher studies. All elementary school teachers in South Korea are graduates of dedicated teachers' colleges (of which there are 11 in the country), while secondary school teachers can qualify in teachers' colleges or courses taken at departments of education at colleges or universities or through non-degree teacher training programmes conducted by colleges and universities. The competition for secondary teacher positions is high with only 30 per cent of all qualifying candidates securing a place. As a result, many good secondary school candidates opt to qualify as an elementary school teacher as the probability of finding a placement is higher for elementary school teachers. This has resulted in improving the quality of elementary school teachers as well. Those selected as elementary school teachers fall within the top 5 per cent of their graduating class. Teachers are hired based on a competitive examination held at the provincial or metropolitan level.

In China, there were no standard mechanisms for teacher certification prior to the 1980s. Teachers usually served their home community in rural areas, although it was a competitive occupation in urban areas. However, since a policy shift in the 1980s, teachers need to get certified in order to become a teacher. Certification happens in several steps. First, all aspiring to be teachers need to get their general education certification. Individuals aspiring to be elementary teachers need to get a certificate from a special secondary school. While those aspiring to be junior and senior secondary school teachers attend a two and four year junior colleges, respectively, after completion of their secondary education. But, a general education certificate at the secondary or tertiary level is not sufficient to become a teacher. They must also pass the National Mandarin Language Test, plus qualify in four exams covering pedagogy, psychology, teaching methods, and teaching ability. Graduate teachers who have covered these areas of study in their degree programmes are sometimes exempt from these exams. These requirements are more stringent in Shanghai-China, where all school teachers need to have a general certification in education (the level of this certification varies with the grade level they wish to teach), plus be certified in teaching, as well as have practical training in teaching.

Teacher recruitment is extremely competitive in Singapore. Candidates for teacher training are in the top three percentiles of their graduating classes. Only one in eight applicants is accepted for teacher training. The selection process is rigorous and includes interviews to assess the personal qualities of the candidates, and review of school records to assess contributions to school and community. School leaders are also of good quality as they are chosen primarily from amongst school teachers.

8.2.3 Teacher Promotions as a Means to Improve Performance

In many of the better-performing Asian countries, having well defined career paths, compensations

and promotions based on performance, and special incentives to encourage teachers to teach in difficult areas and challenging schools have resulted in encouraging the best candidates to enter the teaching profession, and allocating them across the system to achieving best results.

In Singapore, teachers can get promoted along three different career tracks - teaching track, leadership track and specialist track. Teachers in the teaching track can be promoted along their chosen career paths to become principals or master teachers, while teachers in the leadership track can work their way up to becoming the Director-General of Education. In the specialist track, teachers are focused on research and teaching policy and can move up the ladder to become a chief-specialist. As teachers move along the career path, they receive salary increases and opportunities to train and develop themselves. Newly recruited teachers are observed for three years before recommendations are made for a suitable career path for them. In China, movement up the career ladder is based on professional evaluations, which include evaluations on teaching methods (based on mock teaching sessions), ability to mentor and orient new teachers, and publications related to

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education and teaching. Teachers in Japan can expect to move up the career ladder from teacher to head teacher to principal, along a 36 steps career ladder. Promotions are based on performance and experience. In South Korea too, teachers are evaluated based on experience as a teacher, evaluation results, and research publications.

8.2.4 Teacher Training and Development

Most successful school systems do not stop with recruiting the best candidates. They also invest in training and developing those chosen for teaching to do their best. Throughout the teaching career, teachers are provided guidance and support for teacher training. Successful teachers can move up the career ladder and expect better salaries and promotions.

In Shanghai-China, teachers are given space and are expected to undergo continuous development. One means of encouraging teachers to develop themselves is by allocating a significant proportion of their time for lesson planning. Teachers are provided with multiple avenues for development. One means of development is through peer support. Teachers regularly meet in small groups, according to their subject area and grade, to discuss teaching methods, conduct mock teaching sessions, and to comment and learn from each other. Teachers are also provided with facilities for self-development. For example, recently a web platform was launched in China so teachers can discuss curriculum ideas, teaching methods, and their research publications.

In Japan, since 2009, teachers are expected to renew their certification every 10 years, after undergoing professional development. This policy change has encouraged teachers to participate in professional development. Also, schools are able to not renew appointments of teachers who fail to upgrade or renew their certificates.

8.3 When All Benefit, the System Benefits

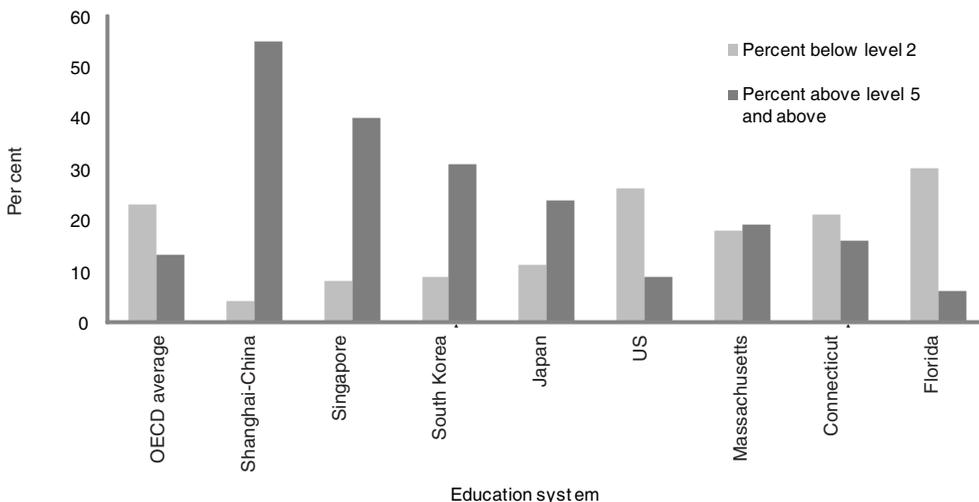
The best performing school systems did not succeed only because their systems produced more students that performed at a high level, but also because their systems had a very small proportion of students who performed at a low level (Figure 8.1). This is partly due to the strategic policies adopted by the best performing school systems 'to leave no one and no school behind'.

Over time, the best performing school systems have reformed to improve equity. The PISA results also show that the more unvarying school systems tend to perform better overall. The education system in Shanghai-China has changed in several ways to improve equity. In the past, Shanghai-China had a system of 'key schools', where selected schools received better resources than other schools. The students for key schools were selected based on exams. Given the privileges received by children in key schools, the competition to attend them was high. This resulted in children at very young ages

spending more time preparing for exams than concentrate on learning. Shanghai-China has managed to overcome this problem by eliminating the special status enjoyed by key schools, and by requiring children to attend neighbourhood schools. This policy was not well received by parents. In order to overcome the parent concerns, now children are allowed to attend schools in other neighbourhoods, but for a fee. The policy of neighbourhood attendance for primary and lower secondary levels has lessened the attention given to exams. In order to alleviate inequity between schools, the government has invested in upgrading buildings and providing resources to underprivileged schools.

Some best performing school systems practice positive discrimination to improve equity. In South Korea, children from underprivileged families are more likely to be taught by better qualified teachers, than more privileged students. Teachers are also given various incentives to attend schools serving low income families. For example, schools with a higher proportion of children from low income families have smaller class sizes. The teachers

Figure 8.1
Proportion of Best and Worst Performing Students in Mathematics in Different Education Systems



Notes: PISA groups students into levels according to their capability in mathematics. The above figure shows the proportion of students performing at a very high level (level 5 and above) and a very low level (below level 2) in different countries and cities.

Source: Estimated based on OECD (2013), "PISA 2012 Results in Focus", Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

teaching them have higher salaries and lower instructional times, more credit towards future promotions, and a better choice in the location of their next school. Along with improving the quality of teaching children from low income families, South Korea also provides vouchers for children from low income families to attend extra curricular activities, and provides university scholarships. Singapore has started the Programme for Rebuilding and Improving Existing Schools (PRIME) initiative to renovate all schools built before 1997 to incorporate better science and computer labs and other facilities in the schools.

A challenge faced by most school systems is encouraging better teachers to move to rural areas and to teach in more challenging schools. The Shanghai government has taken steps to improve the quality of teachers and principals in underprivileged schools. In Shanghai-China, teachers are allocated to schools where they can make the most difference. Specific attention is given to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools have sufficient numbers of good quality teachers. On the one hand, these systems provide incentive programmes to attract better qualified teachers to the more disadvantaged schools. On the other hand, teachers in disadvantaged schools are sent for in-service training. In South Korea, teachers can earn bonus points for teaching in rural areas and teaching special education classes.

As with teachers, underprivileged schools are less likely to have better resources and better leaders. To overcome this problem, Shanghai-China has grouped schools. Each school cluster consists of a variety of schools with different performance levels. Each cluster is responsible for evaluating their resources and improving the performance of the whole cluster through resource sharing. For example, teachers and leaders from better performing schools within a cluster are sent to the less well performing schools, so that they can improve teaching and administrative capacity of the less well performing school.

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Children learn not only at school. A major part of their learning takes place at home. Students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to get support for their learning process for several reasons. Either, the parents of underprivileged children are more likely to be less educated than their counterparts. They are also more likely to have less time to invest in their children's education. Further, they are more likely to come from troubled home fronts, where the home environment is not suitable for learning. Some countries with best performing school systems have taken steps to support families to help children. Singapore has a unique programme to help families with special needs through community support. Local community councils are set up to identify and help families needing special help. In Shanghai-China, teachers meet with parents several times a term to brief them on what the children are learning. In some schools, parents are taught how to support children to learn.

8.4 Education Finance and Governance

There is no clear relationship between the amount of spending on education and the performance of the education systems. Some of the best performing education systems invest a lot on education. For example, South Korea spends 6-7 per cent of its GDP on education. This is far above the OECD average of 5-9 per cent of GDP on education. However, some countries spending below the OECD average level such as Hong Kong and China - spending 4.4 per cent and 3.3 per cent of GDP on education, respectively - are also amongst the best performers in education. Some of these low spenders on education, realizing the need for better funds in the sector, are reforming laws and regulations to improve investments in education. For example, in recent times, China has increased resources for education through the promotion of private schools. Traditionally, private schools in China were meant for internal migrants who were ineligible to attend public schools in their new location. As such, private schools catered to children from low socio-economic backgrounds. But, China is aiming to promote high-end private schools which can serve as role models for innovation in the fields of science, technology, and education.

In most successful school systems in Asia, children receive free education in their early years. In Hong Kong, the first 12 years of schooling is free for children. As recently as 2009, Hong Kong increased the number of years of free education from 9 to 12. In Singapore, all children are entitled to free education in state schools. In South Korea, children aged 5-15 years receive free education, although children in senior secondary schools have to pay a small fee. About 80 per cent of education in South Korea is funded by the central government, while schools also receive small amounts of funding from local government bodies, school assets, school fees, and other sources.

The governance of the successful school systems in Asia are mostly centralized systems, where the central Ministry of Education is responsible for setting goals, distributing resources and funds, and setting curriculums. But, there has been a recent trend in decentralizing different aspects of education. For example, China has moved from a highly centralized system of education financing to a more decentralized system. Initially, in China, all schools in the country were financed by the central government. But, in recent times local governments and municipalities have been given the authority to finance education. In some sense, this has created inequality, as less affluent local governments are less able to invest in education than the more affluent bodies. But, this policy change has also given opportunities for some local entities to change policies to improve equality across their jurisdiction. For example, Shanghai was able to remove an earlier system of 'key schools' where selected elite schools were given better funding and resources. Under the current system, all schools are treated equally. As the PISA results suggest, this has given more opportunities for the underprivileged students to flourish. The system has also allowed schools to receive funding from private sources in the form of donations and school fees, which has given schools more resources for development. Decentralization has also allowed Shanghai to reform policies and to take initiatives to help underprivileged schools. For example, the earlier discussed school clustering programme has helped schools to share resources and leaders so that underprivileged schools can benefit from resources available to better placed schools.

In South Korea too, education governance is centralized. All education offices must take general policy directions from the central Ministry for Education Science and Technology (MEST). But metropolitan, municipal/regional and provincial offices of education have authority over their budgets and hiring decisions. However, there has been an attempt to decentralize the decision making to the school level over some aspects.

8.5 Accountability to Ensure Performance

Another key aspect that is different in successful school systems is their willingness to assess, learn, and improve. In the PISA study, more than 90 per cent of the students were in schools that either self-evaluated themselves or evaluated their performance using external reviewers to improve quality. A smaller proportion of schools also used written feedback from students to evaluate their school. The PISA study results show that the schools that sought written feedback from students tended to perform better than those that did not.

Transparency in school performance is one means of ensuring accountability. In China, the public can easily obtain information on various parameters used for assessing school performance. As such, the public can easily determine performance of schools based on a variety of factors. In the past, school assessments were based on student assessments and, in turn, they influenced teacher salaries. However, recently attention was given more for rating schools rather than for ranking schools. Every three years, the Shanghai Education Commission inspects schools based on individual goals set by the schools, as well as a common set of criteria. These assessments are done based on research as well as feedback from parents and teachers. In Shanghai-China, teachers and principals are accountable to their peers and to the school administrators. Top performing teachers and school leaders are lauded and recognized. The operations of the poor performing schools are supported and assisted by the better performing schools through the cluster programme, where schools within a cluster share resources and support each other to develop.

In South Korea, schools are evaluated annually by external monitoring groups according to guidelines and standards set by the Ministry of Education. The evaluations examine the teaching and learning processes, as well as curriculum and student

needs. Recently, the Ministry of Education has started awarding bonuses to best performing schools. Low performing schools are given support and guidance to improve. The results of these school evaluations are available publicly, and parents are able to examine the quality of the schools attended by their children. Teachers are evaluated by principals. Although principals do not have the authority to reward or punish teachers based on their evaluations, these evaluations are instrumental in promotions and opportunities for studying abroad.

In Japan, a Board of Education comprising five members are responsible for appointing teachers at the primary and lower secondary level, appointing superintendents of education, and operating senior secondary schools. Schools are inspected by supervisors at different levels. Typically, these inspectors are former teachers or administrators. These inspectors are expected to provide guidance on school management, curriculum, and teaching. Japan also has a national level student assessment, called the National Assessment of Academic Ability, undertaken by students in grades six and nine. The results of these assessments are also used for planning purposes.

8.6 The Sri Lankan Education System

Sri Lanka has long enjoyed the accolade for being one of the most literate countries, despite being a low income country. But, the country's education system has not been able to keep up with the global changes in education. Like most best performing school systems, Sri Lanka provides free education to children. But, unlike most best performing school systems, even undergraduates in public universities are educated free of charge. This section describes the education system in Sri Lanka and compares it with those of best performing education systems in the world. Comparisons are done along several dimensions, as detailed below in separate sub-sections.

8.6.1 Recruitment and Promotions of Education Sector Professionals

There are four different services in the education sector in Sri Lanka. These are the Sri Lanka Teachers' Service, Sri Lanka Principals' Service, Sri Lanka Teacher Educators' Service, and the Sri Lanka Education Administration Service. All these different services have experienced problems relating to recruitment, promotions, and deployment as evident in the following statement:

"A perennial problem in Sri Lanka has been the recruitment and distribution of teachers to meet the needs of schools and the promotion of teachers without political bias...There appears to be considerable confusion regarding the status of the [principals'] service criteria for selection, qualification of principals, the service to which they belong, and their terms of service."⁵

Recruitments and promotions to different services in the education sector has deteriorated mainly due to deviation from established practices of recruitments and promotions due to political and other influences as described below.

In Sri Lanka, teachers are recruited to the teaching profession through a variety of ways. First, based on A-level results, some students are recruited to train as teachers to the National Colleges of Teacher Education and the departments of education in universities. Selection for teacher training under these schemes is highly competitive. Second, from time to time A-level qualified individuals and unemployed graduates have been recruited to the education sector through an exam. Both these types of candidates are selected to the teaching profession without any education and teaching related training. They have also not had any experience training students. The main reason for



choosing a career in teaching for these candidates is the lack of another suitable job. These teacher recruits obtain training on other aspects of teaching, such as teaching methods, pedagogy and child psychology, only after recruitment. Many of the graduates recruited under the unemployed-graduate scheme obtain teacher training through the Post Graduate Diploma of Education (PGDE). The A-level qualified individuals are recruited as apprentice teachers to the teacher service at the provincial level. These teachers are sent to National Colleges of Education to undergo training after completion of two years of on-the-job training. Lastly, in areas where there are severe teacher shortages, suitable teachers are recruited at the school level to the teacher service. These teachers, unlike teachers chosen under the earlier mentioned schemes, are not able to move to other schools for a period of time, usually five years.

The first method of recruiting teachers - i.e., teachers recruited from graduates of teacher colleges and departments of education in universities - to the education system mirror those practised by the best performing school systems. But recruitment of unemployed (both A-level qualified and graduates) is supply driven and has the danger of being

⁵ NEC (2003), "Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka", National Education Commission, Colombo, p. 223 and p. 226.

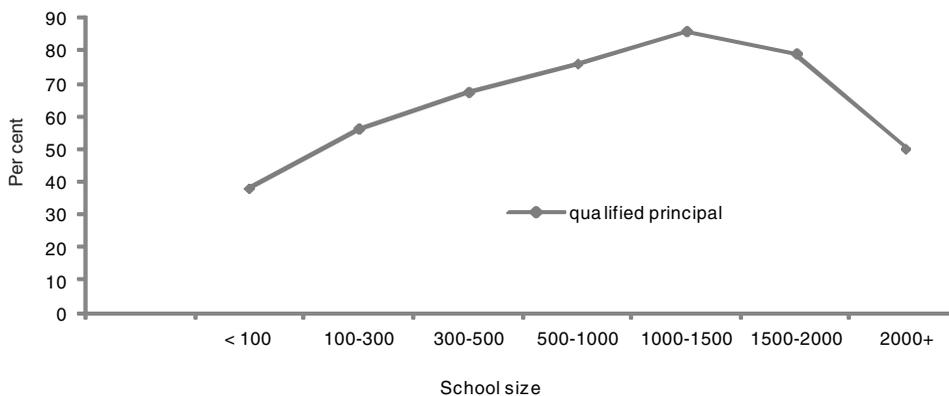
subjected to political influence. The third method of recruiting teachers - i.e., at the school level in areas with severe teacher shortages - is appropriate in the short-term until allocation of teachers across schools is made more efficient.

These issues relating to teacher recruitment in the Sri Lankan education system has been well identified in education sector related policy documents in the country. For example, they include recommendations such as "recruits to teachers' service should be only National Colleges of Education graduates or graduates who had followed a three month course in education. This should be valid for primary teachers as well. Under special circumstances, only if there are not enough teachers with these qualifications to be recruited should anyone below this level be given appointments".⁶ This shows that Sri Lanka already has a system for recruiting best teachers to the profession. The only issue is the ad hoc recruitment of teachers outside this system from time to time. A first step towards improving the teacher quality in the country is avoiding deviations from the established system of teacher recruitment.

Teachers are able to move up several different types of career paths in Sri Lanka. Teachers can sit for exams to enter the Principals' Service, the Education Administrative Service, or the Teacher Development Service. On entry, successful candidates can move up the career path based on their experience, success in examinations and interviews. However, this process of recruitment and promotion is not entirely straightforward. On several occasions, individuals have been selected for these careers outside the formal system based on 'political victimization'. That is, when there is a change of government, some individuals who claim to have been victimized on political grounds have received appointments and promotions on political grounds. Although there may be genuine incidences of political victimization, individuals without proper qualifications have also used this as a loophole to enter the education sector at various positions. As a result, all those serving in different education sector services have not been recruited based on merit.

Again, these anomalies in the system have been well identified in policy documents, and there have

Figure 8.2
Proportion of Qualified Principals by School Size



Notes: Principals in the Sri Lanka Principals' Service (Class 1, 2 or 3) are considered to be qualified principals.

Source: Arunatilake, N. and P. Jayawardena (2013), "School Funding Formulas in Sri Lanka", UNESCO, Paris.

⁶ Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2013), "New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka", Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo, p. 38.

been attempts to rectify this situation. For example, the Sri Lanka Principals' Service,⁷ established in 1997, clearly details a cadre through the Sri Lanka Principals' Service Minutes, and the mechanism through which principals are to be recruited for different grades in the Sri Lanka Principals' Service. For example, the recruitment for the lowest level of the Principals' Service (Grade 3) is based on a limited competitive examination, which can be taken by trained teachers with at least five years of experience. Recruitments for subsequent levels of the Principals' Service is based on examinations relevant for each level, and through promotions based on merit and seniority. However, despite this policy to establish and streamline recruitments to the Principals' Service in Sri Lanka, by 2009 nearly one-third of the schools in the country were being managed by 'Acting Principals', most of whom were political appointees.⁸ Although the Ministry of Education advertised for vacancies for principals in 2005, these vacancies were not filled until 2009. An examination was held in 2005 for the recruitments to the Principals' Service, but recruitments were delayed for various reasons till 2009. The delays were at least partly due to issues relating to 'Acting Principals'.

Again, policy documents on reforming the education services sector have correctly identified the main issues relating to recruitment, compensation, and promotion of principals. These policy documents call for recruitment based on the results of an examination and for those with relevant qualifications, as well as based on personal characteristics that are essential for performing well in their different positions.⁹

The irregularities in the recruitment of principals have affected the smaller rural schools more. As shown in Figure 8.2 smaller schools are less likely to have qualified principals, and the probability of

having a qualified principal increases steadily with school size. However, the largest schools too were less likely to have qualified principals than the medium sized schools. The results also show that the proportion of schools without properly qualified principals is quite large. With the move towards decentralizing management to the school level, as discussed below, well trained and dedicated principals are essential for developing schools in the country. As such, it is especially important to adhere to established practices when recruiting and promoting principals.

8.6.2 Teacher Allocation

As mentioned earlier, the distribution of teachers according to need has been a problem facing the country over a long time. Teachers are often recruited only taking into account the availability of teacher vacancies. But, often these vacancies are for specific subjects at specific grades. Recruiting individuals who are unable or unqualified to teach the subjects for which there are vacancies have resulted in a wastage of resources. The ad hoc

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⁷ Government of Sri Lanka (1999), "Minutes of the Sri Lanka Principals' Service", Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

⁸ Dissanayake, C. (2009), "4,000 New School Principals to Take up Duties in October", *Sunday Times*, 16 August, 2009.

⁹ NEC (2003), "Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka", National Education Commission, Colombo; and Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education Sri Lanka (2013), Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

recruitment of teachers has made it more difficult to plan the supply of teachers to match demand. On the one hand, certain schools have a surplus of teachers for some subjects, while there are deficits for other subjects. Some schools have taken measures to retrain teachers to teach subjects in which there are vacancies. But, this is also not an ideal solution. As seen in Figure 8.3, larger schools (with more than 2,000 students, and typically more privileged schools) tend to have higher paid teachers (who are more likely to be better qualified and more experienced), while smaller schools tend to have teachers who are paid less on average.

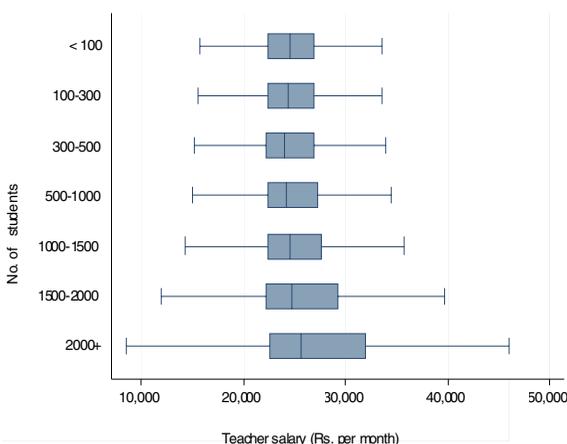
Ad hoc teacher transfers are creating other inefficiencies in the system. Teachers who are allocated to difficult areas spend a considerable amount of time trying to move to more convenient locations. This practice has also created administrative issues at the zonal level education offices. On days when teachers are allowed to visit the zonal offices to ask for transfers, long queues of teachers waiting to see the zonal directors of education are to be seen. Some zones have appointed deputy directors to especially look into the issues of teacher transfers. Decentralization of

teacher appointments, and appointments based on school and subject based vacancies, can reduce such inefficiencies in the system for the most part.

A part of the problem in allocating teachers is due to the fact that teachers are centrally appointed and allocated at the national and provincial levels. Recent policy related documents have called for several reforms to reduce disparities in appointment of teachers. These include: a) appointment of teachers based on subject and school level vacancies, so as to minimize issues of teacher surpluses and deficits; b) recruitment of teachers for a minimum period of six years; and, c) transferring of teachers only when new appointments are made to positions being made vacant.¹⁰

The problem of distributing teachers according to need is not a problem unique to Sri Lanka. This is an issue experienced by even the best performing school systems, partly because like in Sri Lanka, in many of the systems, teachers are recruited and deployed at the central level. Along with recommendations already made by some of the policy documents in Sri Lanka, practices of some of the best performing school systems, such as faster promotions, better compensation, and better recognition for teachers serving difficult areas could also encourage better teachers to move to less privileged schools. Also, like in Shanghai-China, clustering schools and encouraging school clusters to share teachers to overcome issues concerning teacher shortages and teacher competencies could solve problems of teacher distribution.

Figure 8.3
Distribution of Teacher Salaries, by School Size



Source: Arunatilake, N. and P. Jayawardena (2013), "School Funding Formulas in Sri Lanka", UNESCO, Paris.

8.6.3 Opportunities for Self-Development

Teachers have limited opportunities for self-development in the Sri Lankan system. Teachers in urban schools have very large classes. As a

¹⁰ Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2013), "New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka", Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

result, teachers have to spend a considerable amount of time correcting student assessments. Many rural schools experience teacher shortages, and as a result, the available teachers have to undertake an extra workload. Many successful teachers spend their free time providing private tuition to students. Even if there is time, teachers have little incentive for developing themselves as teacher appraisal is weak, and teachers are not recognized and rewarded for good performance. The National Education Commission (2003) calls for the implementation of the Teacher Performance Appraisal scheme developed by the Ministry of Education.¹¹ However, this has not taken place. There is no formal mechanism for evaluating teachers, other than by principals and inspectors. The resources available for self-development are also very limited. Although many schools have IT labs and access to Internet, these labs are not generally intended for teachers to use for conducting research, designing lessons, and improving teaching styles. Even in the best schools in Colombo, limited IT facilities available at schools are not sufficient to even give all students adequate exposure to computers.

There have been several attempts to bring in policy reforms to improve the professional development of teachers in the country. A recent guidebook recommends several ways in which to improve teacher development at the school level (Table 8.1). Although this is a good practice, the implementation will be difficult unless teachers are given a motivation to develop themselves, they are appraised through transparent methods, given space in their time tables, and provided with necessary facilities.

8.6.4 Governance

Sri Lanka has experienced various changes to the governance structure of the education system over the past several decades. The first change was with

the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1987. With this, education became a devolved subject and the structure of the education system in the country became more hierarchical with the provincial level education departments entering the structure. With this change, the main responsibility for supervising and managing schools was vested with the Provincial Councils through their ministries and departments of education. However, the centre kept the right to retain and supervise 'national schools' - i.e., schools that have been especially selected for development. However, as in the best performing countries, there has been a recent movement towards decentralization. The National Education Commission identified school level management as a means for improving the performance of schools in its 1996 Report on General Education.¹²

A first step towards this is the introduction of the Education Quality Inputs (EQI) scheme in 2000 to give greater authority to schools and teachers to make decisions to improving teaching and learning methods in schools. A main feature of the programme was to ensure the improvement of learning achievements of all children through decentralized decision making at the school level, to decide on teaching methods and to empower teachers and schools to procure required resources using funds directly provided to schools. In order to ensure equity, the amounts of funds to be allocated are determined through a formula that take into account the grades offered by the schools, and the size of the school. Further, schools with fewer facilities were given special provisions.

In the initial period of implementation of the EQI, although there were issues of utilization of funds given to schools due to various implementation problems, funds were distributed to schools equitably.¹³ Since the formula used for distributing

¹¹ NEC (2003), "Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka", National Education Commission, Colombo.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Arunatilake, N. and P. Jayawardena (2013), "School Funding Formulas in Sri Lanka", UNESCO, Paris.

Table 8.1
School Based Teacher Development

Activity	Participation	Location	Specific Feature/s
Case discussions	A group of teachers	School or a common centre (Teacher Centre)	Teacher writes a case, reflects, shares, enriches
Action research	Individual or a couple of teachers	Classroom/school	Teacher/s engage in reflective practice
Regular study groups	A group of teachers	School or a common centre (Teacher Centre)	Regular collaborative interactions on topics
Peer coaching	Two teachers	Classroom/school	Learning from each other, mutual development
School based mentoring	A teacher and a senior teacher or external facilitator (ISA)	Classroom/school	Less experienced teacher/ Learn from senior teacher
Partnerships with other	Teachers of two schools	In another school	Good practices schools observed and shared
Professional networks	In large schools within the school or school complexes in the case of small schools	School or a common centre (Teacher Centre)	Linking in person through electronic means with other teachers
Using technology for professional development	Individual or group	School or a common centre (Teacher Centre)	Use various technology to learn, i.e., computer, CDs
Examining student work	Individual or group	Classroom/school	Examining students' work to improve instruction
Demonstration lessons	In pairs or a couple of teachers	Classroom	Work in a live class followed with discussion
Teaching & learning material preparation	Individual or group, a demonstrator may help	School or a common	Developing teaching and learning materials
Academic facilitation	Teacher and experienced teacher or external expert	Classroom/school	Individual consultation guided by experts

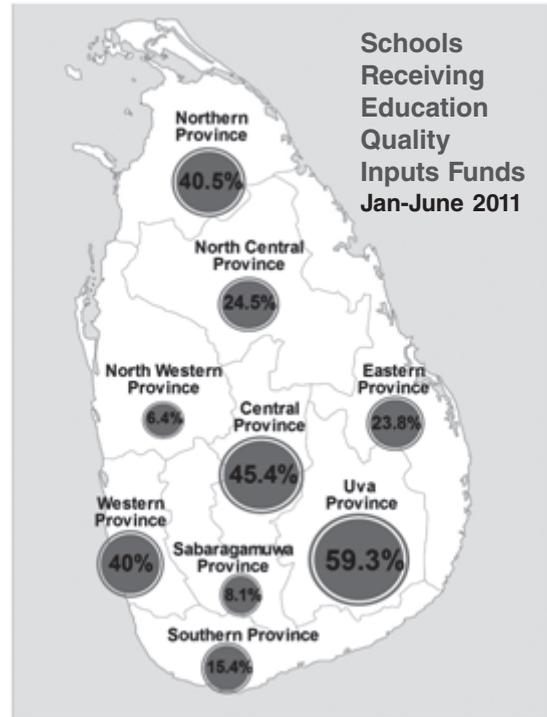
Source: Ministry of Education (2012), "Guidebook on School Based Teacher Development", Colombo.

the funds favoured the smaller underprivileged schools, these schools received more funds than the bigger schools. However, over time the implementation of the EQI programme has come under threat. This is partly due to limited availability of funds. The funds for EQI are allocated to the schools through the Provincial Councils. When Provincial Councils are faced with financial difficulties, they restrict the amount of funds made available to the schools. In some years, no schools were given EQI funds, while in other years the

amounts distributed to schools were less than the amounts stipulated by the formula. Also, there are delays in receiving the funds from the Treasury. In such instances, schools receive funds later in the year, compromising the effectiveness of the utilization of the funds. As seen in Table 8.2, in 2011, less than 30 per cent of the schools in the country have received EQI funds, and the proportion of schools receiving funds varies substantially across provinces.

Another initiative for decentralizing education management to the school level is the Programme for School Improvement (PSI) launched in 2005 by the Ministry of Education. This programme is designed to bring together principals, teachers, parents, students, past pupils and well-wishers for the purpose of school improvement. Under this programme, each school is required to prepare a five year development plan for the school and yearly implementation plans, according to guidance provided by the Ministry of Education.¹⁴ The school has the power to undertake projects and spend money on projects to improve teaching learning processes, and the learning environment in schools. The schools also have authority to raise funds from the school community for the implementation of these programmes.

Interviews with school principals and teachers in Sri Lanka show that greater autonomy can improve school development. But, school development under a decentralized system at the school level rests to a great extent on the competence of the principals. Also, not all schools and the communities served by them have the capacity or the ability to mobilize funds for school improvement.



Education practices in Shanghai-China shows that decentralized management of schools (at the local level) can improve quality, through promoting innovation and customized solutions to overcome problems. But, decentralized management and resource mobilization can also lead to inequality.

Table 8.2
Receipt of EQI Funds, by Province (First Six Months of 2011)

	Total No. of Schools	Schools Receiving EQI Funds by June 2011 (No.)	Schools Receiving Funds (%)
Western	1,291	516	40.0
Central	1,405	638	45.4
Southern	1,057	163	15.4
Northern	739	299	40.5
Eastern	880	209	23.8
North Western	1,164	74	6.4
North Central	747	183	24.5
Uva	808	479	59.3
Sabaragamuwa	1,058	86	8.1
Total	9,149	2,647	28.9

Source: Arunatilake, N. and P. Jayawardena (2013), "School Funding Formulas in Sri Lanka", UNESCO, Paris.

¹⁴ World Bank (2013), "School-Based Education Improvement Initiatives - The Experience and Options for Sri Lanka", World Bank, Colombo.

School development under a decentralized system at the school level rests to a great extent on the competence of the principals.

To improve equity, Shanghai-China has taken measures to divert resources to underprivileged schools, and to provide better support to those schools to uplift their performance. For example, Shanghai-China has taken measures to send their best school leaders and teachers to the most challenging schools so that their performance is improved. Also, Shanghai-China practises a system of school clustering so that under-performing schools have access to the human and physical resources of the more privileged schools, as well as the support and guidance from more capable professionals to improve their performance. Hence, along with giving schools greater autonomy, measures are needed to improve equity and provide more assistance to underprivileged schools.

8.6.5 Accountability at Different Levels of Education

In Sri Lanka, school performance tends to be measured on the basis of the performance of students at national exams at various stages. Often, the schools producing the most successful children are rewarded, without considering the performance of the school, based on its ability to teach all children. At the post-primary level, performance is based on grade-five scholarship exam pass rates, while at higher grades it is based on the

performance at O-level and A-level exams. In Sri Lanka, although there is a system for appraising schools based on school visits made by zonal level officials, the results of these evaluations are not available publicly. Further, remote schools are visited rarely for inspections as it is costlier and takes longer to visit these schools. This is partly due the lack of time available to inspectors to visit these schools, as well as unavailability of adequate funds to visit all schools in a locality. Due to these reasons, school inspections are not taking place regularly. The public has very little information on the quality of teachers available in the school, and their ability to teach.

With the introduction of school based management and development, Sri Lanka now has the opportunity to introduce mechanisms for assessing school performance based on goals set by schools themselves, as well as based on some common benchmarks. In order to improve accountability of the schools, it is essential that such evaluations are made, and the results released for public scrutiny.

At the same time, teachers should also be evaluated for performance. Their performance should not be limited to the number of well performing students they produce. The evaluations should also look at the progress made by all students over a period, and their improvements.

8.6.6 Equity

Sri Lanka has a culture of giving some schools special treatment. This practice is akin to the 'key school' scheme previously practised in Shanghai-China. A good example of the key school scheme in Sri Lanka is the 'national schools'. The rationale behind the establishment of national schools was to allow bright students from rural areas the opportunity to enter good schools. However, many national schools are integrated schools (which have both primary and secondary sections). As such, some students enter national schools without having to sit the competitive entrance exam (the

grade five scholarship exam), simply because they attend the primary section of those schools. This has restricted the merit based places available for good students, and put undue pressure on the grade five scholarship exam. Although there have been attempts to separate the primary and secondary sections of national schools, this has not been possible due to influence by past pupils and parents who benefit from the current system. In recent times, there have been other initiatives to give schools special treatment.

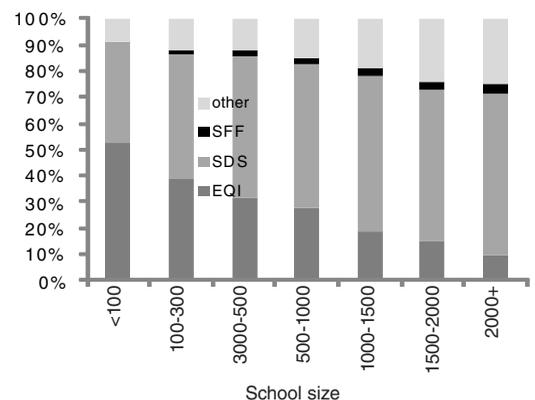
As experienced by some best performing countries, such special treatment of schools for funding and resources increases inequality in the system as the more privileged students are likely to obtain places at the better schools. A better approach is to treat all schools the same, and to invest funds according to needs. Education systems that managed to improve equity at the primary level were able to abolish the need for a post-primary exam, which has given space for children to concentrate on learning a variety of things, rather than cramming for an exam. For example, South Korea abolished the middle school entrance exam in 1969 and introduced a system of admitting children according to a lottery system in urban areas.¹⁵

The inadequacy of funding for the education sector has been a topic that has received much attention in recent times. According to official statistics, Sri Lanka spends 1.8 per cent of GDP on education.¹⁶ There has been a call to increase this amount to 6 per cent by the Federation of University Teachers' Associations (FUTA). In general, the best performing schools in the world are receiving more than 1.8 per cent of GDP from public funds as discussed earlier. But, evidence suggests that simply increasing public funds for education alone is not sufficient to improve quality. Increasing public funds should go hand in hand with measures for improving effectiveness and efficiency of funds.

Realizing the need for better resources for the sector, the government has taken measures to improve the availability of funds to schools by allowing schools to source funds from well-wishers, fundraising projects and other means. However, too much reliance on other sources of funds could increase inequality in the system.

Figure 8.4 shows expenditure by schools, by size and source of funds. Of the sources listed, EQI funds are directly allocated to schools by the government according to a formula. School Development Society (SDS) funds and School Facility Fees (SFF) are funds mobilized by schools at the school level. As seen, smaller schools - which are more likely to be situated in rural remote areas - depend more on government funds (i.e., EQI funds). Their ability to raise funds through the community and students (that is SDS and SFF funds) is low compared to that of the bigger schools. Some small schools are unable to even collect SFFs, which are very small

Figure 8.4
Per Student Expenditure by Type of Funds and School Size (First Six Months of 2011)



Notes: SDS = School Development Society, SFF = School Facility Fees, EQI = Education Quality Inputs. Averaged over all schools (including those receiving zero funds). Other expenditure includes funds received for the higher order process (HOP), past pupil's associations, and other funds.

Source: Arunatilake, N. and P. Jayawardena (2013), "School Funding Formulas in Sri Lanka", UNESCO, Paris.

¹⁵ Center on International Education Benchmarking (2014), "PISA 2012", available at <http://www.ncee.org/pisa-2012/> [accessed 8 May 2014].

¹⁶ CBSL (2013), *Annual Report 2013*, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

amounts of funds collected from students for maintaining facilities in schools. These inequalities are likely to further widen with irregular distribution of EQI funds to the schools, as this is the main source of funds for small schools.

8.7 Conclusion

With the global competition for skilled workers, countries are increasingly looking at means of improving the performance of their school systems. The OECD has conducted the PISA surveys with the intention of identifying best performing school systems amongst surveyed countries, and learning from the experience of those countries. This Chapter compared the education system practices of the best performing school systems in Asia with those of Sri Lanka. These are summarized below.

Sri Lanka has already established some of the key features of the best performing school systems in Asia. For example, the system for recruiting teachers through National Colleges of Education and Departments of Education in universities are similar to the way teachers are recruited in the best performing countries. Although, the selection process for these programmes can be improved to match the personalities of selected individuals for teaching, the existing mechanism for teacher recruitment is competitive and encourages the best students to enter the teaching profession. However, the ad hoc recruitment of individuals to the profession through other means has reduced the quality of teachers available in the system. It has also made it difficult to plan the supply of teachers to match the demand according to need. The formally stipulated recruitment to the Principals' Service is also competitive and seeks to attract the best to the profession. However, again the irregular appointment of principals has diluted the effectiveness of the implemented mechanism.

The education system in Sri Lanka can learn from some of the best practices of the best performing

school systems. For example, the system for developing, appraising and promoting teachers in Sri Lanka is not well developed. Maintaining the quality of teachers cannot be achieved only by recruiting the best. Once recruited, the system needs to support and encourage the development of the recruits so that they improve their performance and keep up with changes taking place globally. Although Sri Lanka has a system of teacher appraisal, it is not functioning effectively. This is partly due to financial and time constraints, and partly due to the limited emphasis given for teacher appraisal. The system should place more attention for encouraging and supporting teachers to develop themselves, and recognize and promote those who perform well.

Another area where Sri Lanka can improve is in accountability. The Sri Lankan education system lacks a proper mechanism for holding different stakeholders accountable for improving performance to assess performance in various dimensions of education provision, and help to identify inefficiencies in the system and improve performance. Here again, Sri Lanka can learn from the best practices of the best performing systems in Asia.

Lastly, Sri Lanka can do more to improve equity in the education system. The Sri Lankan education system already recognizes the need for positive discrimination of schools. For example, it gives special treatment to underprivileged schools when allocating EQI funds. The current system of giving special treatment to some schools, such as national schools, has created inequality. The movement towards decentralized management of schools is likely to increase this inequality. Sri Lanka should eliminate special treatment of schools, and intensify positive discrimination to underprivileged schools in order to improve equity.