

# Corruption in Education in Sri Lanka



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Building a Nation of Integrity

“ *Corruption defeats the very purpose of education. In a corrupt education system, students don't acquire the skills and knowledge that would enable them to contribute meaningfully to their country's economy and society. They learn from a young age that a lack of integrity is an acceptable way of life, allowing these values to become the norm throughout society.* ”

**Transparency International**

# **Forms and Extent of Corruption in Education In Sri Lanka**

**May 2009**

**Research Report**



Transparency International Sri Lanka 2009

ISBN 978-955-1281-24-3

**Published by**

Transparency International Sri Lanka

28/1 Bullers Lane

Colombo 07

SRI LANKA

Tel: 0 11 2506419

Fax: 0 11 2592287

Email: [tisl@tisrilanka.org](mailto:tisl@tisrilanka.org)

Website: [www.tisrilanka.org](http://www.tisrilanka.org)

**Illustrations:**

**Cover :**

Raskin Mohamed Munaf

[TISL National Anti-Corruption Cartoon Competition - 2008]

**Back Cover :**

Preethi Kannangara

[TISL National Anti-Corruption Cartoon Competition - 2008]

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## List of abbreviations

A/L	Advanced Level
CD	Compact Disk
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CIABOC	Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption
DEO	Divisional Education Office
DS	District Secretary
ESDPF	Education Sector Development Programme and Framework
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
G.C.E.	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GN	Grama Niladhari
i.e.	That is
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSE	Ministry of School Education
MTET	Ministry of Tertiary Education
NETS	National Evaluation and Testing Services
NIE	National Institute of Education
n.s	Not Significant
O/L	Ordinary Level
PCs	Provincial Councils
PDE	Provincial Department of Education
PME	Provincial Ministry of Education
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association (Guru-deguru samithiya or Pettar assiriyar sangam)
SD	Standard Deviation
SDS	School Development Society (Pasal sanwardhane samithiya or Padasalai abivirithu sangam)
SLES	Sri Lanka Education Service
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TISL	Transparency International Sri Lanka
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank
WDC	Women's Development Centre
ZEO	Zonal Education Office



## Foreword

Transparency International Sri Lanka's (TISL) mission is to build a Nation of Integrity. To achieve this goal, all spheres of society – the public and the private sectors as well as civil society – should strive to eradicate corruption and unethical practices in their work. To devise strategies for curbing corruption, the nature and extent of existing problems have to be identified. It is in this context that TISL has decided to commission a number of studies to assess corruption risks in sectors that are particularly important to Sri Lanka's economic and social development. This report is the first in a series of studies to be published over the next year.

The Education Sector is a key area for curbing corruption: Besides transmitting skills and knowledge to the future workforce, it shapes the next generations' values and behaviors. Therefore, the Education Sector is expected by many to be particularly fair and equitable, and free of corruption and unethical practices. I hope that this report contributes to stimulating a constructive debate on how to curb corruption in education, and that it encourages the various stakeholders to jointly work together to build a Nation of Integrity.

This report is based on research carried out by a team led by Prof. Amarasiri de Silva from Peradeniya University from May to October 2008. I wish to thank Prof. de Silva for his commitment and continued support in the shaping of this report.

I wish to express my gratitude to Mr Nimal Bandara, Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Mr. S.U. Wijerathne, Additional Secretary Policy and Planning, Ministry of Education, for supporting the research and giving us the opportunity to share the findings with the Ministry.

Special thanks to Ms Kumudini Hettiarachchi for her patience and professionalism in editing the report.

I would also like to thank the research team at TISL, especially Ms Bettina Meier who spearheaded this project; Ms Sharmely Thatparan for helping with data analysis and doing the graphs, and Mr Senura Abeywardena for doing background research.

J.C. Weliamuna

Executive Director TISL

## 1. Executive summary

Education is considered a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economic and social development. While successive governments have introduced legislation -- including laws to ensure that children compulsorily attend school -- to strengthen the education system, there is reciprocity from parents across the country as they strive to provide a good education to their children. Even the most impoverished parents see education as the only way out of poverty.

Sri Lanka has a system of free education with 9,678 government schools<sup>1</sup> catering to almost all children (98% enrolment rate<sup>2</sup>) in the country. Learning outcomes are on the rise. However, the poor performance of children at examinations such as grade 5 and G.C.E. O/L and A/L have led to doubts whether education has reached satisfactory levels.

Equity, quality and efficiency are the key policy goals of the MoE but the general perception in society, reflected through media reports, is one of widespread discontentment, particularly with regard to equity.

Reports suggest a disparity between urban schools and those in the rural and estate areas not only with regard to facilities and student performance, but also in the allocation of teachers. The appointment of unqualified teachers seems to have adversely affected the quality of teaching. The non-stipulation by the MoE of payments when admitting a child to grade 1 has also resulted in confusion among parents, with some principals allegedly taking a free hand. All these factors have led to concerns with regard to equity in education.

Many also hold the view that irregular appointments of officers and directors have led to a decline in the quality of education management.

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1. Census of schools 2007, in: Ministry of Education: 'A future generation endowed with wisdom and virtues...' (2008)  
2. World Bank: 'Treasures of the Education System of Sri Lanka' (2005)

This study on ‘The forms and extent of corruption in education in Sri Lanka’ was carried out from May to September 2008 by Prof. Amarasiri de Silva. Based on interviews with parents in randomly-obtained 1,000 households, 100 teachers, 100 education officers and 59 informants in 11 randomly-picked GN divisions, it focused on alleged corruption and malpractices in the government school system from grade 1 (admission) to grade 13 (A/L). The households included schoolchildren numbering 1,800. The GN divisions were in the districts of Anuradhapura, Galle, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla and Puttalam.

The findings can be grouped into four:

- a) School-level corruption
- b) Fees and payments
- c) Administration-related corruption
- d) Complaints against corruption

Corruption being secretive by nature, it is very difficult to measure its prevalence. Corruption surveys usually collect information on perceptions as well as experiences of corruption. Findings in both categories have to be interpreted with caution as (a) perceptions do not necessarily mirror reality, and (b) experiences often go unreported due to fear of reprisals. Notwithstanding these methodological challenges, this study attempts to reveal forms and extent of corruption by profiling patterns of malpractices and highlighting structural problems.

TISL strongly believes that the value of this study lies in that it captures the viewpoints of all stakeholders including parents, teachers and officials. Therefore, this study hopes to stimulate public debate which, in turn, will be an asset in shaping educational policy, as a fair and high-quality education system is in the interest of all people of Sri Lanka.

## **Findings:**

### **Government school system**

The consensus among households, teachers and officers was that the government school system had declined when compared to what it was several decades ago. This was attributed to politicization of the education system including appointments and transfers and a shift in the view that teaching was a vocation, making this profession less prestigious.

- School system corrupt -- 21.5% of households said yes
- Teaching less prestigious -- 30.6% of teachers and 42.4% of officers agreed
- Appointments political -- 28.6% of households and 55.8% of officers said yes

### **School admissions**

All three categories of respondents from all study locations viewed school admissions as being highly corrupt. The allegations included bribing principals; having to seek favours from politicians and education directors; roping in intermediaries at a high cost; nepotism and mandatory 'donations' to schools or SDSs. Corruption, though under-reported, seemed a way of life when admissions took place, with the 'residency' criterion being manipulated. Such issues also resulted in some children falling through the system and being left out of the classroom.

- Bribing of principals -- 36% of teachers and 34% of officers said parents resorted to bribing
- Bribing of SDSs -- 15.5% of households said yes
- Bribing of education officers – 7% of households said yes while 98% of teachers and 89% of officers thought bribes helped
- Nepotism -- 95% of teachers and 85% of officers said it existed
- Corruption due to residency criterion -- 80% of teachers and 81% of officers agreed

## **School admission fees, 'quality inputs' and textbooks**

Mixed views were expressed about admission fees, in the light of MoE circulars not stipulating lower or upper ceilings, thus allowing principals to make arbitrary decisions. The study found that the average admission fee per child for 2008 was Rs. 3,977.09.

- Admission fees too high -- 81.4% of parents said yes, while over 90% of teachers and officers conceded the fees were a burden on parents
- No receipts -- 10% of teachers and 15% of officers agreed
- No audits of school funds, fees and grants -- 62.2% of teachers and 86.3% of officers agreed

'Quality inputs' (Gunathmaka yedavum or Thara ulledu) are monetary grants allocated by the MoE to schools to facilitate classroom teaching and learning. They are calculated on a formula based on the number of students in each school, the higher the number on the register, the bigger the grant. While 80% of households were aware of quality inputs, reservations were expressed whether they were utilized for the purpose specified, especially in the estate and rural schools.

- Mismanagement of quality inputs -- 35% of households said it was possible while 98% of teachers and 91% of officers agreed they were misused

Textbooks are prepared and printed by the MoE and are supposed to be free of charge. However, respondents reported problems not only with regard to the delivery but also the distribution of textbooks to underprivileged areas. A small percentage of children said they had to pay for their textbooks.

- Textbooks -- 6.2% of children, mainly from rural and estate communities, had not received them
- Textbooks on time -- 23.3% of children had not received them on time
- Payment -- 3.5% of children had paid for them

### **Study leave for O/L and A/L students**

Most schools send students in O/L and A/L classes on study leave towards the end of the second year when they are due to sit their examinations. Senior officers in the MoE viewed this practice as unauthorised.

- Study leave granted -- 35% of teachers agreed

### **Violation of the right to equality of opportunity**

The study found that all children did not get a level playing field with regard to education. The status of the parents and their level of education played an important role in securing better educational opportunities for children, compromising the principle of equality in education. There was a firm belief among those interviewed that the richer the household, the better the chance of the child performing well.

The other factor that came out strongly was that fewer facilities were provided by the authorities to estate and rural schools when compared to urban schools, violating the principle of equal opportunity in education. Parents, teachers and officers alleged that this disparity between estate and other schools had a ripple effect, leading to poor student performance and examination results.

Another interesting result is that poor as well as middle-class households seemed to bother less about corruption than the lower-middle class, who appeared to struggle most with the government school system.

- Sinhala and Tamil schools -- Over 80% of teachers and officers agreed that such branding was not only discriminatory but also inimical to ethnic harmony

### **Perception of parents on children's performance**

A large percentage of parents thought that their children were performing well in school, despite many perceived problems and corruption.

- Children's performance -- 79.5% of parents satisfied
- Syllabi coverage -- 75% of households satisfied
- Teaching in the English medium -- 41.1% of households dissatisfied
- New education system in grades 6, 10 and 11 -- Nearly 80% of households dissatisfied

### **Remedial measures taken by respondents to eradicate corruption**

The study found that very few parents, teachers and officers complained or reported corrupt practices in the school system.

- Corruption ignored -- 62% of teachers and 45% of officers agreed
- Complained against corruption -- Only 21% of households did

### **Teacher salary increments and transfers**

There was much dissatisfaction among both teachers and officers with regard to salary increments and loans, with claims that the system was highly politicized. Every study location reported delays in increments, with many teachers and officers stating that bribes had to be offered or political influence sought to expedite increments. The transfer system was also discriminatory, was the general view, with many alleging that teachers in urban schools got preferential treatment as opposed to those who had served in difficult areas for many years.



- Salary increment delays -- 82% of teachers and 75% of officers had experienced delays while 10% of both teachers and officers had paid bribes to expedite the process
- Political influence expedited loans -- 40% of teachers and 34% of officers agreed
- Bribes for transfers -- 47.5% of teachers and 34% of officers had heard of such instances
- Transfers on influence -- 79% of teachers and 72% of officers agreed that knowing or being related to an officer was an important factor, while 85% of teachers and 90% of officers felt transfers were given on political influence

### **Volunteer teachers, acting principals and in-service advisors**

In the absence of regulation on the recruitment of volunteer teachers, principals were appointing them at school-level without following a transparent procedure, was the general perception. At provincial level too, the respondents felt that many posts for acting principals and in-service advisors were filled with political appointees, even though some of them were unqualified.

- Volunteer teacher appointments -- Nearly 40% of teachers and 45% of officers agreed that principals appointed relatives or close affiliates
- Acting principal appointments -- 56% of teachers and 62% of officers agreed that political appointments were widespread
- Appointments of in-service advisors and directors -- 50% of teachers and 60% of directors agreed these were political appointments and many of them were not qualified



## 2. Introduction

### Achievements in education

Sri Lanka's achievements in education have been tremendous: With an adult literacy rate of 90.7%, Sri Lanka ranks far above other South Asian countries.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to its achievements in education, Sri Lanka has high levels of human development, especially when compared to its GDP per capita. Sri Lanka's government schools have produced intellectuals and leaders particularly in the 20th century. Today, the government provides compulsory education to all children in the age group 5-14 years, making primary and secondary education accessible even to those from impoverished homes. Enrolment rates at primary level are 98%<sup>4</sup>, with almost all children completing grade 5. Both girls and boys have education parity. Sri Lanka is bound to reach the Education-for-All goals set out in the UN Millennium Development agenda.<sup>5</sup>

In 2007, there were 9,678 primary and secondary schools in Sri Lanka, with nearly 3.94 million students and 209,198 teachers.<sup>6</sup>

### Education finance

The achievements in social development up to the early 1990s have been attributed to the far-reaching investments in education in a context of economic development.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the introduction of Education-for-All under the UN Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and commitments made by governments in the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, resulted in increased donor support for the education sector.

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3. Sri Lanka has a ranking of 99 out of 177 countries in the UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008, with a Human Development Index of 0.743. [http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_lka.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_lka.html)

4. World Bank: 'Treasures of.....' (2005).

5. MoE: 'A future generation....' (2008)

6. School Census 2007 in MoE: 'A future generation... ' (2008)

7. World Bank: 'Treasures of ....' (2005)

However, today public investment in education is comparatively modest. Education expenditure in Sri Lanka as a proportion of government expenditure is very low compared to other Asian countries (6.8% of the budget in 2005). In the past decade, only 2-3% of GDP were spent on education, while the South Asian average is 3.5%<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, recurrent expenditure is on the increase, leaving little scope for capital investments. Despite this, teacher salaries are extremely low, with teachers in Sri Lanka receiving about half or less than those in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand, as a proportion of national income per capita<sup>9</sup>.

### **Quality and equity in education**

The quality of Sri Lanka's education system, despite an improvement in recent years<sup>10</sup>, has been rated as unsatisfactory by international experts. The figures which speak for themselves indicate poor learning/teaching and inefficiencies in cost management: O/L (grade 11) pass rates were only 49% in 2007; repetition rates at key examination grades were high, the O/L recording 27% and the A/L (grade 13) 35%<sup>11</sup>. Education outcomes are poor: At the end of primary school, two out of three children had not achieved the targeted levels of language and numeracy skills and only 10% achieved the targeted level of mastery in English language in 2005<sup>12</sup>. There were also wide disparities in achievement among districts and provinces.

An urban bias exists, with popular schools with better facilities being located in urban areas. Students who gain admission to universities, especially to take up medical, engineering or science studies, are mainly from these urban schools. Therefore, there is intense competition among children particularly

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8. World Bank: 'Building the Sri Lankan Knowledge Economy' (2007)

9. World Bank: 'Treasures of.....' (2005)

10. Harsha Aturupane: 'Has the Holy Grail of education been sighted?' The Sunday Times of 6th July 2008

11. World Bank: 'Treasures of.....' (2005)

12. World Bank: 'Treasures of.....' (2005)

at the two school-entry points of grades 1 and 6 (following the year-5 scholarship examination) to get into these “good” urban schools.

Meanwhile, in 2005, nearly 30% of schools had fewer than 100 students each and 15.8% fewer than 50 students each, which resulted in fewer facilities being given for reasons of economies of scale<sup>13</sup>. Most of these schools did not have facilities for science education and these children faced double deprivation. There are about 775 primary schools (up to grade 5) in the tea plantations but children find it difficult to gain admission to secondary schools in the urban or non-plantation areas due to distance, economic factors and discrimination. Curricula reforms reportedly are ineffective in these schools due to lack of infrastructure development, textbooks and other equipment and trained teachers. The regional disparities in education have heightened due to the war in the north and the east.

### **Management structure of the education system**

The prevailing education management structure in Sri Lanka came into effect with the establishment of the PC system in 1987. This devolved administrative system was supposed to bring greater autonomy to and participation of local administrative bodies in decision-making processes. However, it has also increased politicization and interference, as reported by a number of respondents in the TISL study. The present decentralized management structure comprises five inter-linked layers:

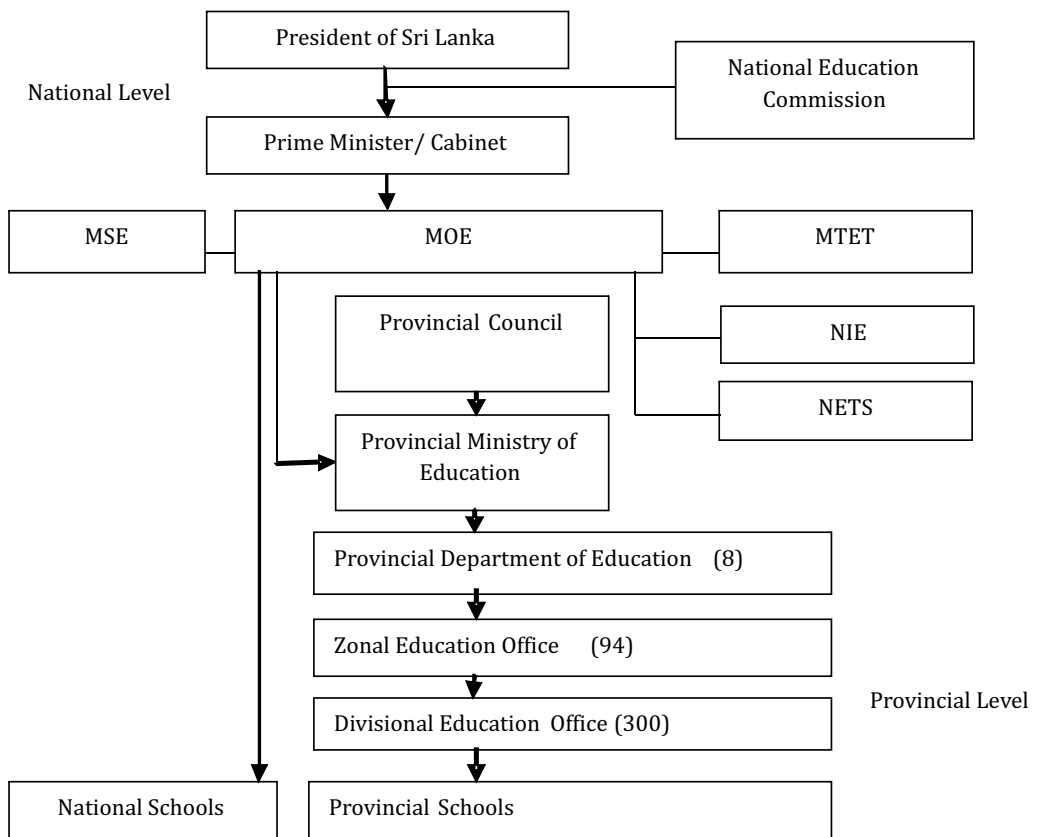
- The Ministry of Education (MoE)
- The Provincial Ministries/Departments of Education(PME/PDE)
- The Zonal Education Offices (ZEO)
- The Divisional Education Offices (DEO)
- Schools (Provincial and National)

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13. MoE, School Census 2005. According to this survey 50% of schools have less than 200 students each.

Eight PCs with their intermediary education agencies of ZEOs and DEOs administer 96% of all government schools. The PDE headed by the Provincial Director of Education, is responsible for the management and administration of education programmes including the transfer of teachers in the province. PCs develop education plans and budgets and employ and deploy teachers, principals and administrators at provincial level. Zonal education authorities transfer and deploy teachers and principals within zones<sup>14</sup>. However, zonal and divisional offices also report to the MoE as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Overall structure of Education Organization



Source: Website of the MoE at [http://www.moe.gov.lk/Education\\_his\\_3.html](http://www.moe.gov.lk/Education_his_3.html)

14. World Bank: 'Treasures of ...' (2005)

The Provincial Director is answerable to both the MoE and the PME and this creates a situation that is difficult to manage. As financial resources and personnel are allocated to each PDE by the PC through its Minister of Education, political influence is inevitable. This situation is conducive to political manoeuvring of transfers and appointments of teachers in the provinces.

### **Education policies**

The government has put in place an Education Sector Development Programme and Framework (ESDPF) for the period 2006-2010 that addresses many of the above mentioned challenges. Unequal access and poor quality of education and governance in this sector have been identified as problems and a number of strategies and projects developed to tackle them. The four thematic goals of the ESDPF are:

- Promoting equitable access to basic and secondary education
- Improving the quality of education
- Enhancing the efficiency and equity of resource allocation
- Strengthening education governance and service delivery

External support for this framework is significant: the Asian Development Bank and other donors have committed Rs. 11.2 billion from 2008-2012 for projects aimed at increasing equity and quality of education as well as governance<sup>15</sup>.

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15. MoE: 'A future generation endowed with ...' (2008)

## **Corruption and malpractice**

In general, corruption and poor management have a negative impact on service delivery, be it education, health or water. Many of the problems described in this study are not specific to the education sector, but rather the result of poor governance and poor public sector management. However, the impact of corruption on education is particularly bad as it affects the values and behaviour of future generations. Corruption in education impacts on all other sectors and spheres of society, and therefore deserves special attention.

Corruption affects education in various ways. At macro level, corruption affects the decision-making process in the country, distorts the allocation of resources for education and leads to inappropriate investments being made such as for infrastructure and development programmes. At management level, the quality of education is affected when poorly-qualified teachers are appointed; teachers are absent or not teaching; and textbooks are of poor quality and arrive late or not at all. Equal access to education is jeopardised when school admissions are manipulated; schools of lower status receive fewer resources, etc.

TISL defines corruption as “abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. However, in practice, it is often difficult to draw a line between intentional abuse of power, negligence, mismanagement (where power is abused without private benefit to the perpetrator) and honest mistakes. Sometimes procedures and regulations may be circumvented by officials in good faith in the interests of schoolchildren. However, the unethical behaviour of public/private officials may prevent access to resources and services, leading to discrimination. Inefficiency, mismanagement and poor work ethics, tend to go hand-in-hand with corruption and lead to inequity and lack of quality in education. These actions usually go against public will and interest.



Table 1: Causes, forms and consequences of corruption in education (examples)

Causes	Forms	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political patronage</li> </ul>	Favouritism in appointments and transfers of teachers and officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor quality of teaching and administration</li> <li>De-motivation of qualified teachers and officers</li> <li>Uneven distribution of teachers among geographical areas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political patronage</li> </ul>	Appointment of acting principals outside the regular procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor school management</li> <li>Poor quality of education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political patronage</li> <li>Neglect</li> </ul>	Favouritism in granting of teacher loans/ Non-adherence to criteria in granting of teacher loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor motivation of teachers</li> <li>Lack of equity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-adherence to criteria in residential criterion for school admission</li> <li>Unclear regulation</li> </ul>	Fraud in school admissions/ abuse of residency criterion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of equity in access to education</li> <li>Reinforcement of social inequalities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High competition for popular schools</li> </ul>	Bribery in school admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforcement of social inequalities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of regulated school fees</li> <li>Lack of adherence to regulation</li> </ul>	Undue and illegitimate/ illegal fees and payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burden on the poor</li> <li>Reinforcement of social inequalities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High competition to enter national schools through year 5 examination and for entry to tertiary education</li> <li>Low salaries of teachers</li> </ul>	Private tuition by mainstream teachers after school hours or on weekends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor are disadvantaged</li> <li>Reinforcement of social inequalities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-enforcement of controls</li> </ul>	Abuse of school property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of trust in integrity of public sector</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negligence</li> <li>Ignorance</li> <li>Unclear regulation</li> </ul>	Misuse/misallocation of quality inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor quality of teaching</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negligence</li> </ul>	Irregularities and delays in textbook distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor quality of teaching</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negligence</li> </ul>	Delays in paying salary increments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor motivation of teachers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negligence</li> </ul>	Delays in paying year 5 scholarship bursary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor motivation of students and parents</li> </ul>

Therefore, for the purpose of this study corruption may be defined as the exercise of official power against public interest. This broad definition encompasses most of the aspects discussed in this study of the state education system in Sri Lanka and includes any form of exercise of official power against public interest or public will as corruption. Under this definition, negligence, indiscipline, indifference to rules and regulations and lack of commitment on the part of teachers, officials and administrators are viewed as corruption. These aspects jeopardise the public interest of education, which is to ensure “efficiency, equity and high quality in performance ensuring stakeholder satisfaction” according to the mission of the MoE<sup>16</sup>.

The government recognized the problem of corruption and its impact on development as far back as the 19th century. Bribery has been an offence punishable under the Penal Code since 1883. In 1954, the Bribery Act was enacted to contain bribery in the Public Service and in 1994, the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) was created to help prevent, and investigate corruption.

However, public awareness is also important to contain corruption. Civic awareness of educational rights, and expectations that education is being delivered fairly and in good quality, are crucial to preventing corruption in education. International agencies also recognise the need for a framework for citizens to demand accountability from their governments as a measure to counteract corruption.

This study is an attempt to fulfil this requirement to make civil society aware of its responsibility to contain corruption. Secondly, it is intended to provide valuable information to the MoE to enable programmes to strengthen governance, equity and quality of education more effective, and to add value to the existing framework ESDPF. It specifically looks into the effect of corruption on equity and quality of education, by assessing the impact that corruption and related malpractices have on achieving these major education goals.

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16. [http://www.moe.gov.lk/about\\_us.php](http://www.moe.gov.lk/about_us.php) Viewed on 04-10-2008

### **3. Objectives and methodology of the study**

The study aims to provide a strong database and well-founded recommendations to the MoE to curb corruption in education, draw up anti-corruption activities and improve the value of expenditure on education. It also aims at triggering a public debate and stimulating action by the various stakeholders.

#### **Objectives**

To achieve this aim, the study identified the following objectives:

1. Understand the types and patterns of corruption in the state education system
2. Assess the prevalence and magnitude of these types of corruption in the state education system
3. Provide a platform for the development of a plan of advocacy to educate civil society and stakeholders about corruption in education and possible solutions to curb it

#### **Methodology**

The methodology of the study was a qualitative and quantitative mix. The study involved two phases of data collection -- formative and research which are mutually inclusive and interlinked. The formative phase used qualitative methods of data collection for identification of variables and patterns, while the research phase employed quantitative methods of data collection for measurements.

#### **Formative phase**

Qualitative information during the formative phase identified various stakeholders in the government school system in Sri Lanka. They included

current and past students, both male and female, at various levels of school education, parents and families of current students, village leaders, teachers and education officers at zonal, provincial and ministerial levels. Interviews, discussions and FGDs were conducted with the stakeholders to collect information on type, patterns, functions and organization and geographic distribution of corrupt practices.

The respondents for each of these methods were identified through snowball sampling. A minimum of 3-10 interviews, one or two FGDs and observations were conducted from each stratum, in addition to the collection of documents pertaining to these domains or sub-groups. The information collected during the formative phase was utilized to develop the survey instruments (questionnaires) and substantiate quantitative findings.

Measurement data were collected in three surveys during the research phase, using semi-structured interview schedules for selected samples of communities. Before commencing fieldwork, assistants were trained, the instruments field-tested, re-translated and printed.

Table 2: Interviews and discussions during the formative phase of the research

Current students	Parents of students	Past students	Civil society organizations	Village leaders	Provincial and zonal education officers	Teachers/ Principals	MoE and DoE officers	Total
7	13	10	4	3	6	9	7	<b>59</b>

The qualitative information written in vernacular languages was translated into English and keyed into computers for analysis using Atlas/Ti programme. The analysis identified 78 code segments within 26 major categories. The quantitative data were analysed using the SPSS programme.

## **Research phase**

### **Study areas**

The areas studied included low-income urban areas in the districts of Kandy; estate sector in Nuwara Eliya; coastal sector in the south -Ambalangoda and Hikkaduwa areas in Galle; rural sector in the less-developed districts of Anuradhapura, Mahiyanganaya and Girandurukotte in Badulla; and war-affected communities in Puttalam. In each district, two GN divisions were randomly obtained from a list provided by the respective DS. The northern and eastern districts were omitted from this study due to the situation prevailing there.

### **The sample**

A simple random sample of 1,000 households with schoolchildren from each GN division in the six districts of Anuradhapura, Galle, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla and Puttalam (11 study-areas) was selected using the GN's household list as the sampling frame. The random sample of 200 included a fair proportion of well-to-do households within the context of the community, which, in the analysis was grouped as affluent households (middle class) for comparative purposes, based on their socio-economic standing.

The selection of the sample of 100 teachers was a two-stage process, which involved selection of schools and then randomly selecting teachers from the school lists. Ten to 15 teachers were selected from each school. In some schools where there were over 100 teachers, more teachers were randomly obtained. In all instances, the advice and support of the respective principals were solicited. The teachers were enumerated for the survey using a separate survey instrument either in the school or in their homes. On a few occasions, the chosen teachers were called to a classroom setting for questionnaire administration.

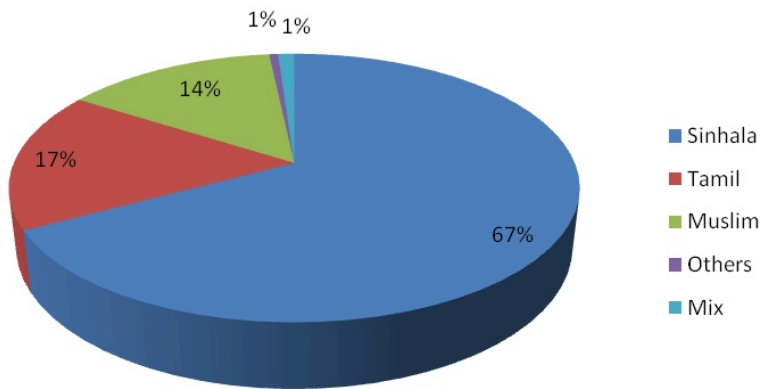
The sample of 100 education officers was selected randomly from the ZEOs in the respective study areas. Some officials were provided the questionnaires with an explanation in a classroom setting, while others were given the questionnaires with instructions and a request to return them on a particular day.

Although the total sample was 1,200 questionnaire interviews, the households, teachers and officers were analysed separately but brought together in the analysis when relevant.

### Sample composition

The household component of the sample was heterogeneous. It comprised various categories of respondents such as parents and caretakers (82%), school-leavers (3.9%), relatives of students (4.8%) and village leaders (6.9%)

Figure2: Ethnic distribution of household sample

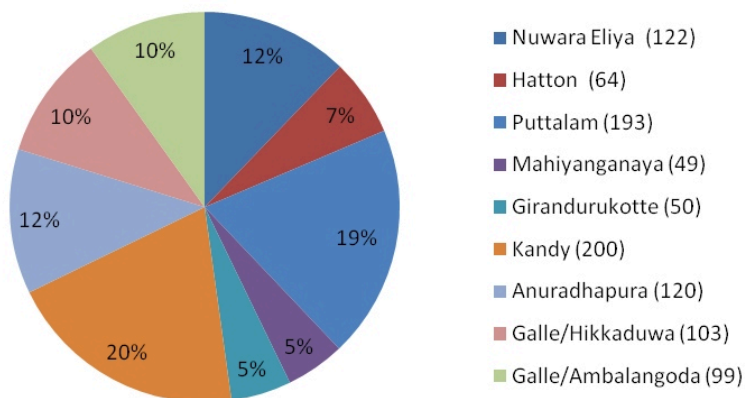


Of the 100 teachers, 23 were in Mahiyanganaya, 18 in Kandy, 8 in Puttalam, 12 in Galle and 23 in Nuwara Eliya. The other 16 teachers were residents of the same locations but taught in schools in Kurunegala (1), Badulla (5), Ampara

(1), Batticaloa (1), Trincomalee (4), Hambantota (1), Moneragala (2) and Matara (1).

The officers interviewed were from Kandy (29), Puttalam (14), Nuwara Eliya (17), Anuradhapura (30) and Galle (10). They included 1 additional secretary, 6 directors, 61 assistant directors and 32 other officers.

Figure 3: Geographical distribution of household sample



### Sample characteristics

The total population in the sample of 1,000 households was 4,934, with an average family size of 4.93. The smallest household size was two persons and the largest 19. The large households often formed two or more families. In poor low-income households in Kandy there were many families sharing the space. In such instances, only one family was randomly selected for the study.

In some instances, the parents of schoolchildren were not the head of the household, with the grandfather, the grandmother, an uncle or an aunt who owned the house acting as the head. When the parents were not available for the survey, after two visits, the most likely senior or willing respondent was

interviewed. In a very few cases, where persons other than parents looked after the children, they were classified according to the relationship to the heads of the households. Therefore, the respondents were not necessarily the parents.

### **Schoolchildren**

The total number of schoolchildren in the 1,000 households was 1,800. They ranged from 1 to 4 per household. A very few households (less than 7%) had four schoolchildren each. The median number of schoolchildren per household was two.

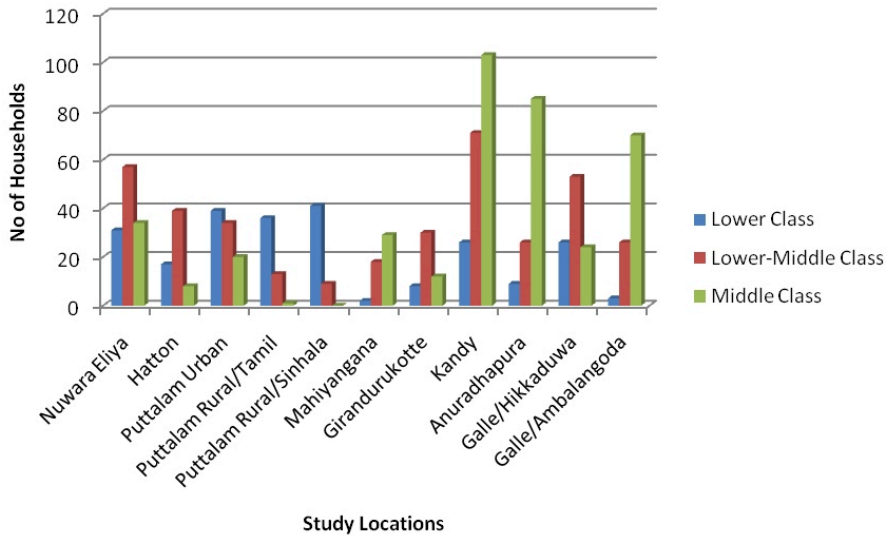
### **Class position**

The class position of the households and the number of schoolchildren did not show any association although it appeared that the number of schoolchildren in the lower-class families was high. The 45 children reported as not attending school were largely from the lower-middle and lower-class households.

The households were grouped into three categories – lower, lower-middle and middle classes. These categories were based on the facilities and amenities such as electricity, source of drinking water, a refrigerator, a TV and a phone, available in their homes. This class-scale made of these five variables was statistically sound for the measurement of class differences in the sample population. Thus, the class-scale identified the following households:



Figure 4: Class position of households by study locations



The fact that a large percentage of the household sample was from the middle class probably had a bearing on the results of the survey. Therefore, the findings should be read with caution: They do not come in the guise of being representative of the Sri Lankan population in general.

### Parental education

About one-quarter of the parents, 24.7% of mothers and 27.9% of fathers were educated up to grade 9 or lower, while another quarter of them, 25.2% of mothers and 22.4% of fathers had completed grade 11 or higher. About 41.1% of fathers and 44% of mothers had completed grades 9, 10 or 11. Only 0.3% of fathers and 1.3% of mothers had no education.

The Tamil and Muslim parents were less educated compared to the other ethnic groups. Nearly half of the Tamil parents, 47.3% of mothers and 47.3% of fathers, and Muslim parents, 45.5% of mothers and 49% of fathers, were educated up to grade 9 or less. Only 0.7% of mothers and none of the fathers among the Muslim parents had been to grade 13 or higher, while among the Tamil parents none of the mothers and 0.6% of fathers had been to grade 13 or higher. The education level of the father was significantly associated with that of the mother.

The class position of the parents and their level of education were positively correlated. Only 17.6% of fathers whose education level was below grade 9 were in the middle class, while 79.2% of fathers whose education was up to grade 13 or more were in the middle class. When considering the mothers' education, 86.7% of mothers whose education level was equal to or more than grade 13 belonged to the middle class.

## **Employment**

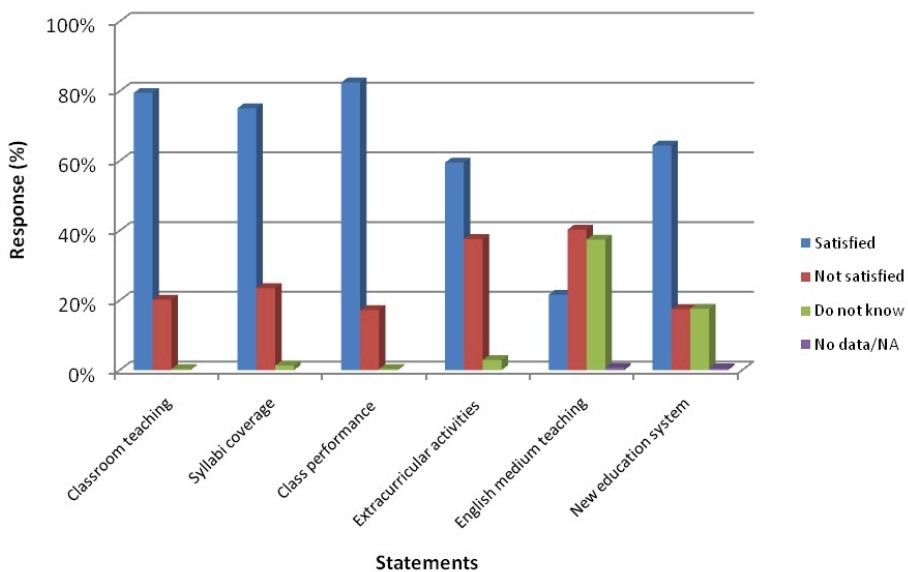
Only 896 households (89.6%) specified the employment of the head of the household. While higher order employments reported were restricted (5.5%), business and trade occupied 19.8%. The largest category was mechanical employment, with labour work and unemployment comprising about 22%. Class position and employment categories were highly correlated.

## 4. Findings

Overall, the household survey revealed high levels of satisfaction with the system of education in general. The parents' view of teaching was often guided by their children's performance in class. If the child came within the first 20-25% in the class, the parents viewed the teaching as being good. The other factors that guided parents were teacher attendance, homework administration, syllabi coverage and clarity of teaching.

Of the 1,000 households surveyed, 968 (comprising 1,756 schoolchildren) responded to the question on classroom teaching, with nearly 80% marking it as satisfactory.

Figure 5: Parental feeling about child's education in the school



Notwithstanding this generally positive picture, interviews revealed the existence of many forms of corruption and malpractices in education. For ease of reference, the research findings have been structured around the following four categories:

#### **4.1 School-level corruption**

This wide area includes major issues with regard to school admissions, weak financial administration and management of quality inputs, misuse of school property, teachers conducting tuition and neglecting classroom teaching, poor teacher behaviour and favouritism and principals recruiting relatives as volunteer teachers.

#### **4.2 Fees and payments**

This category attempts to determine the cost of education for households by identifying various payments, some authorized by the MoE and others not. One reason for high and uneven costs may be the surreptitious payments to principals, SDSs and officers, in return for favourable treatment in school admissions and to get into the good books of the school authorities. Although such payments are hard to prove, they can be a reason for parents to stop their child's schooling. Therefore, these payments have an impact on children's right to equal access to education.

#### **4.3 Administration-related malpractices**

These deal with malpractices at the zonal, provincial and ministerial levels, particularly in connection with teacher/principal transfers, appointments and promotions. The interviewees often spoke about promotions to higher administrative positions being granted to unqualified but politically-connected officers.

#### **4.4 Complaints against corruption**

Attitudes towards corruption and malpractices in general and how the public reacts to these problems, whether they complain or remain apathetic come under this category.

## **4.1 School-level corruption**

The findings in this section focus on a wide range of concerns that have an impact on children such as school admissions including the much-discussed residency criterion, textbooks, quality inputs and how the ‘district quota’ system introduced to give a hand to students from disadvantaged districts to enter university is misused. Classroom happenings such as favouritism are also dealt with.

Overall, the majority of households (57.1%) rejected the view that the system was generally corrupt. The government school system was more or less corrupt, agreed 21.5% of households (one-fifth), with another 21.4% remaining non-committal either way.

When asked whether the school system had deteriorated when compared to the pre-1970 era, 29% of households said yes, while 30.6% teachers and 42.4% education officers agreed that teaching as a vocation had also declined.

### **4.1.1 School admissions**

A widely discussed topic within the school system is the admission of children particularly to grade 1 and the alleged corruption involved. A large majority of survey respondents, however, did not report resorting to illegal payments or using influence to get their children admitted to school.

The prestige of schools plays an important role when parents consider admission of children to grade 1. The middle class households took into account the prestige of the school (whether it was a ‘classy’ school), extracurricular activities, sports facilities and English teaching in addition to examination results when seeking admission for their children. Many parents were of the view that even if their children failed the examinations, being “old students” of a good school would help them secure jobs in the private sector.

This demand for classy schools led to high competition, creating disparities among schools, reflected by student performance at the year-5 scholarship and O/L and A/L examinations. According to the survey, 50% of officials agreed that increased competition gave rise to corruption, indicating that MoE circular no 2006/20 spelling out the procedure for school admissions and section 1.5 prohibiting the levying of fees other than facility fees and fees for SDSs were violated. This was aggravated by the fact that no upper or lower ceiling for fees was stipulated in the circular.

#### **4.1.1.1 Abuse of residency criterion**

The grade 1 admission procedure requires children to fulfil certain criteria, being in residence close to the school being an important one. This, however, has given rise to corruption.

The survey revealed that many parents made preparations for school admission long before the due time, sometimes as soon as the child was born. While purchasing, renting or leasing a house close to the school was one of the often-attempted measures, many parents also sought shortcuts, resorting to corruption in the process. Often, though GN certification that the family was residing close to the school was not required, principals requested the GN to check residency. This sometimes led to parents buying rather than obtaining this certification.

On the other hand, over 90% of teachers and 95% of officers agreed that the residency criterion affected a large number of children who lived in rented or leased houses and those from poor families who lived as squatters. Many families had been living on rent/lease on land owned by temples for generations, especially around most of the popular schools in Kandy. Yet, some instances were reported where their applications to nearby popular schools were turned down on the grounds that they did not possess “proper” documents to prove residency.

The residency requirement had many pitfalls, was the view of 80% of teachers and 81% of officers, with about 60-70% of teachers and officers admitting that it could give rise to corruption.

The marks granted to a child under the admission scheme were also questioned by some parents.

#### **4.1.1.2 Role of 'mediators'**

In some areas, mediators prepared the required documents and assured admission, for a fee. These mediators who allegedly had close links with principals and officers on admission interview boards charged a large sum of money, sometimes several hundreds of thousands of rupees. The role of mediators was reported in Galle, much more than in other areas.

*Although I gave Rs. 80,000 to a go-between to get my daughter admitted to a well-known popular school in the area, it didn't work out. Now the go-between is repaying the money to me in small instalments.*

*-- A parent in the central hills*

A strong fact that surfaced was the reticence of survey respondents in answering questions on school admissions, in spite of repeated assurances of confidentiality. As their children were already in those schools the household respondents were reluctant to talk, fearing reprisals.

#### **4.1.1.3 Money and influence**

A few households (8.1% or 81 households) admitted to having bribed the principals, 38% of these from Kandy and 18.5% from Anuradhapura, with the other significant areas being Galle/Hikkaduwa and Nuwara Eliya.

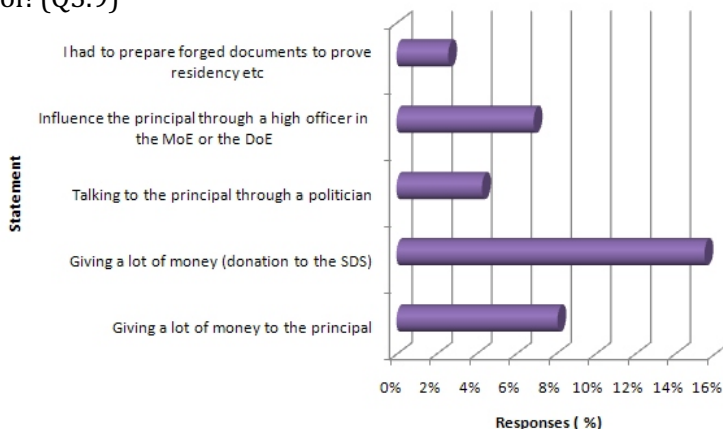
About 57% of households which bribed the principals were from the middle class. Even 14% of teachers and officers had allegedly provided a large sum of money to principals/schools to get their children in.

*How do principals in popular schools maintain private vehicles and live in luxury houses? We all get the same salary.*  
*– A principal from a school in a difficult area*

When asked whether they were aware of any family which bribed principals over school admissions, the response of 36% of teachers and 34% of officers was in the affirmative. Principals usually took bribes to admit children to schools, was the view held by 89% of teachers and 81% of officers. Interestingly, 90% of teachers and officers condemned this practice.

About 155 households (15.5%) reported that they had given large sums of money to SDSs while about 5% said they contacted a politician and 7% a higher education officer. Nineteen percent of teachers and 41% of officers reported they were aware of incidents where politicians were contacted by parents. Education officers helping known families and relatives to admit children to schools was reported by 98% of teachers and 89% of officers.

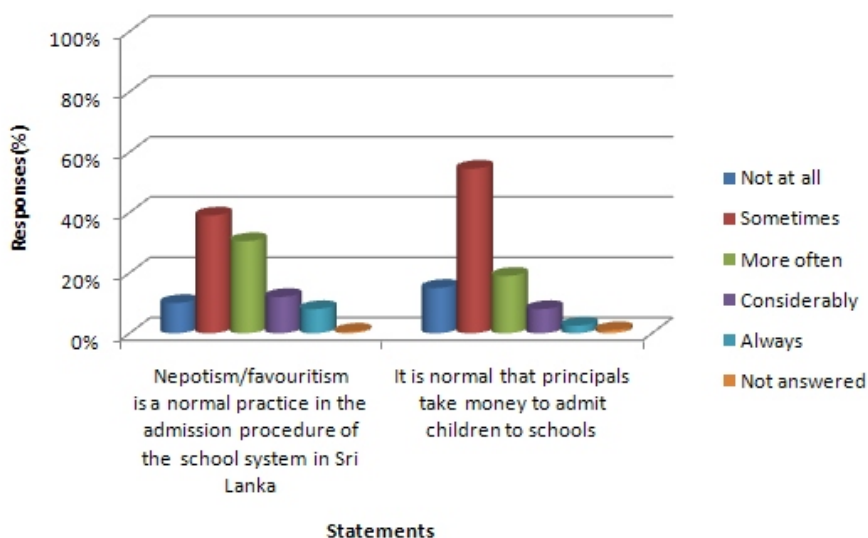
Figure 6: Did you do/ face any of the following when your child was admitted to school? (Q3.9)





Parents also often gave money to schools as donations when seeking admission for their children, while some went beyond such payments and constructed classrooms or bought furniture for the school. When asked whether these were corrupt practices, 21.4% teachers and 23% of officers did not think so but considered them “voluntary contributions” to improve the schools. However, the balance 78.6% of teachers and 77% of officers conceded that such practices had a hint of corruption.

Figure 7: School admission (Q 2.0)



Not having a “proper” scheme for school admission, as many respondents have mentioned was a factor behind different forms of corruption. About 80-85% of teachers and officers were of the view that the new admission procedure as per circular 2008/21 could give rise to problems, while parents claimed it did not help those who lived close to schools or past students of schools much in getting their children admitted.

*The children whose parents provided cement bags to the school were given extra marks when admissions were being carried out.*

*– Interview with a mother*

Due to problems in the admission procedure, some children lost out on school time, sometimes as much as one year. About 8% of teachers and 22% of officers said they knew such children.

Despite low levels of reportage, malpractices were apparently seen in school admissions, with loopholes in admission criteria and intense competition for popular schools heightening corruption. This had an impact not only on children's access to education but also on equity, as more affluent parents were able to pay bribes or use influence to get their children into schools while others were handicapped.

*When my nephew who passed his O/L well, sought admission to a National School in the south, the principal demanded Rs. 75,000. When told that the family did not have that much of money, a letter from the provincial director was requested but when it was produced, money was demanded once again to put up a classroom. Build a class or pay the money, was the ultimatum. The case is still pending and the student has not been admitted to the school.*

*– An officer of the MoE*

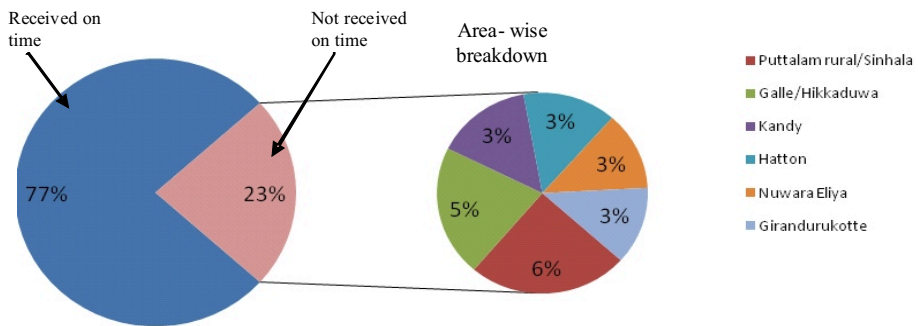
#### **4.1.2 Textbooks**

Although delays in the distribution and the poor quality of textbooks cannot be categorized as corruption in the narrow sense, these problems indicate structural inefficiencies and bottlenecks such as poor planning and supervision. In Sri Lanka, the government provides textbooks and uniforms free to schoolchildren.

In the household survey guardians of 96.7% of children (1,741) responded to questions on this issue, with 6.2% reporting that they had not received textbooks and 23.3% stating that they had not got them on time.

While over 95% of teachers and officers agreed that there were delays in textbook delivery which affected education, 58% of teachers and 56% of officers blamed it on poor transport arrangements.

Figure 8: During this school year, did the child receive the textbooks on time? (Q 3.1)



Only a small number of students mainly from Nuwara Eliya, Hatton and Kandy alleged they had to pay for their textbooks. Analysis of payments on purchase or photocopying of textbooks by these students found that each student had spent an average of Rs. 525 per month during 2008.

Although only a minority were affected by the lack of textbooks or having to buy them, the delays in distribution impacted on the quality of education.

### 4.1.3 Quality inputs (Gunathmakayedavum/ Thara ulledu)

The grants for quality inputs are meant to be utilized to purchase the basic requirements of students -- without burdening parents -- such as stationery, other than books, for practical work in the classroom and also extra teaching aids. Several circulars and a booklet have been issued and many training programmes at zonal and provincial levels conducted for principals and teachers on how to utilize quality inputs.

As a result of these efforts, a large percentage of households seem to know about quality inputs. When the household respondents were asked about the possibility of misuse of quality inputs by teachers and principals, only 20% were not aware of their existence. Only 35% of households mentioned the possibility of mismanagement of these grants.

*An active member of the PTA, I am unaware of quality inputs. The PTA treasurer (mudal paalaka) is usually appointed from among the parents and (at the time of the survey) it is a Pradeshiya Sabha member of the area. Although at the last PTA meeting, I wanted to ask various questions about the accounts, they were not allowed as the politician got the budget approved quickly in a crafty manner. The assistant treasurer who was a teacher came to my shop several times seeking new receipts for stationery etc that I had bought for the school, on the excuse that the originals were lost. I realise what might have happened to the quality inputs. I will enquire about them at the next PTA meeting.*

*-- A parent*

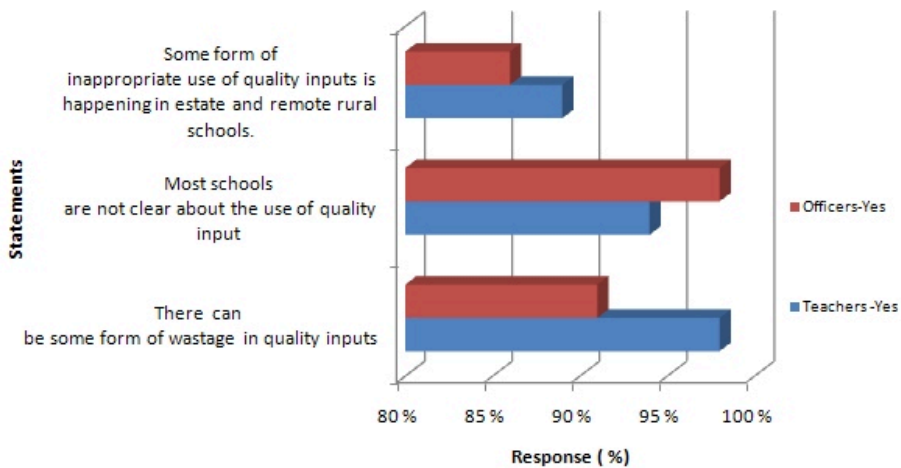
Ninety-eight percent of teachers and 91% of officers admitted that there was some form of wastage of quality inputs, while 94% of teachers and 98% of officers agreed that most schools were not clear about their use resulting in mismanagement. Some form of inappropriate use of quality inputs occurred particularly in estate and remote rural schools, was the view of 89% of teachers and 86% of officers.

*Quality inputs are wasted partly because the money allocated is not utilized as principals fear financial regulations, despite MoE guidelines. In most instances, problems arise due to lack of knowledge or lethargy of principals.*

*Quality inputs do not benefit students in most schools, with teachers and principals misappropriating them by giving falsified receipts. These schools ask students to bring stationery and material such as pencils at the beginning of the term to be kept in stock in the class, but only a small quantum is issued to the students. We do not know what happens to the balance stocks.*

*-- Discussion with teachers*

Figure9 : Quality inputs (Q25.0)



Non-utilization, improper use or misuse of quality-input grants, not presenting these accounts at the SDS meetings and not educating parents about quality inputs are forms of corruption on the part of principals and teachers. This too raises queries on the quality of education.

#### 4.1.4 Year-5 bursaries

Although less frequently mentioned, the non-provision of year-5 bursaries on time to needy students was perceived as corruption.

#### 4.1.5 Study leave for students

Most schools send students particularly those in O/L and A/L classes on study leave, sometimes over 3 months, towards the end of the second year when the examinations are scheduled. This is in contravention of circular 2006/45 of the MoE.

Students should be taught up to the last day of the last term, said a senior MoE official during an interview, pointing out that if study leave is granted, it will be difficult for students to meet the 80% attendance requirement to sit the examination. If any school sent students on study leave, it was a grave violation of rules and a form of severe corruption, according to him.

*Students are given study leave for 3 months before they sit the A/L examination. What do the teachers do? Very often they conduct tuition classes. Many teachers do so in the afternoons for the same students who attend their classes in the morning. This is a gross violation of ethics and it is also a form of corruption.*

*– A representative of a CSO at a FGD*

About 35% of teachers stated that their schools granted study leave lasting 1 to 3 months to O/L and A/L students while 25% of officers were aware of this malpractice but had taken no preventive action. A civil society organization mentioned that teachers conducted tuition classes for students who were on study leave, for a fee.

#### **4.1.6 Abuse of district quota system for university entry**

Students who sit the A/L from the two districts of Nuwara Eliya and Moneragala, considered to have fewer facilities, are given special concessions when their marks are considered for entry into universities.

However, the survey found that students studying in districts such as Colombo, Galle or Kandy with ample facilities come there to sit the examination. Principals and officers were allegedly taking bribes to give such students places in schools in these districts, the survey found.

*An official who researched this aspect found that students who passed their A/L and gained places in university from a particular district were mostly residents of other districts. This was in the case of both Sinhala and Tamil students, some of whom came in the guise of refugees.*

*Since most schools in the district do not have science and maths teachers, students cut school to attend tuition classes in the district as well as outside. As students need 80% school attendance to sit the exam, teachers allegedly connive to mark them present.*

*-- Provincial officers at a FGD*

Affluent parents from Colombo, Kandy and other districts purchased land and houses in Nuwara Eliya and Moneragala districts but once the children passed the A/L and entered university, sold them at appreciated values most probably to other such parents, the survey found. Many newspaper advertisements on houses for sale or long lease in those districts were due to this need.

*Students from poor districts especially before attempting the A/L for the second time, go for tuition in developed districts such as Kandy or Matara but sit the exam in their districts. This gives them a competitive edge at the exam. We know cases where people have rented houses in poor areas to produce documents that they are residents. This is an organized crime. People are taking advantage of a facility given to the poor.*

*– FGD with an NGO*

*People from developed districts rent houses in Siyambalanduwa and Moneragala on the pretext that they live there and send the children to schools there. Actually what they do is that they send them to schools in Kandy, Matara and Colombo. Finally, they sit the exams in Moneragala district. Those who do the A/L from Moneragala area for the second time, come to Kandy, Galle and Matara to attend classes. The teachers and principals in some of the poor schools in Moneragala district should also be blamed for this. They try to please the MoE and show that their schools have the required number of students and good results at O/L and A/L examinations. These teachers and principals are given various gifts and rewards by the parents of those children. This is corruption.*

*– Community leader*

Such misuse of the district quota system by parents in cahoots with principals and officers deprived students studying under difficult circumstances from getting access to tertiary education.

#### **4.1.7 Teacher behaviour and favouritism**

Teachers are required to prepare lesson plans and all teachers and officials approved of this requirement. However, many teachers did not adhere to this, according to 61.6% of teachers and 82% of officers. Teachers, principals and education officers were of the view that most teachers went to their respective



classes unprepared. Seventy-five percent of parental satisfaction on syllabi coverage should not be accepted as an indication of the success of teaching programmes. The other factors that need to be taken into account are teaching aspects such as appropriate methodologies.

Meanwhile, favouritism was acknowledged by many with regard to prize-givings and prefectships and also when children had to be chosen for special events. When asked whether prefects were appointed from among the teachers' favourites, 68% of teachers and 87% of officers agreed that it was so. Prizes at the prize-giving were not given on merit but to those selected by the teachers, was the view of 68% of teachers and 79% of officers. Prize-winners were sometimes selected after a special examination and not based on regular term tests, the survey found.

*Parents give gifts to entice teachers to award prefectships and prizes to their children and it was widely known that a doctor's son got the English prize this way. The teachers also vote when selecting prefects and there is favouritism. When events such as English Day or concerts are held children are chosen on the social status of their parents, with those of doctors and high officials being given preference.*

*– Discussion with a mother*

About 65% of teachers and 74% of officers agreed that there were instances where college colours (for sports etc.) and prizes were not given to deserving students or sometimes delayed. About 30-35% of households were also aware of such malpractices.

The view that malpractices were the order of the day when rewarding students with prizes and posts surfaced in the qualitative interviews as well.

The study found that lack of preparation especially under the new system of education where teachers are supposed to get student participation without doling out lessons has a major impact on the quality of education. On the other hand, favouritism by teachers -- who are meant to be role models with high moral standards particularly of being just and fair -- will have a long-term impact on the minds of children, leading them to believe that anything is acceptable.

## **4.2 Fees and payments**

Children are expected to be in school from grade 1 to grade 13, under the much-vaunted free education system in Sri Lanka. In this section, the hidden costs of education are dealt with in addition to the fees stipulated by the MoE. The indications were of many discrepancies and corrupt practices under the label of fees.

The views of teachers and principals differed on how much a student should pay as admission fees as there was no ceiling stipulated by the MoE. Although circular 2006/20 states that no fees other than facility and SDS fees should be charged from parents, in reality various types of fees were levied, often activity-based.

Nearly 21% of households found the cost of education to be too high but most middle-class families took an opposing view that they were not so, arguing that without such fees the schools would not be able to maintain their activities. Parents who felt that the fees were high were from less-developed communities such as the Puttalam rural Sinhala area, Hatton Tamil area, Girandurukotte, Mahiyanganaya and Galle/Hikkaduwa and the low-income communities in Kandy.

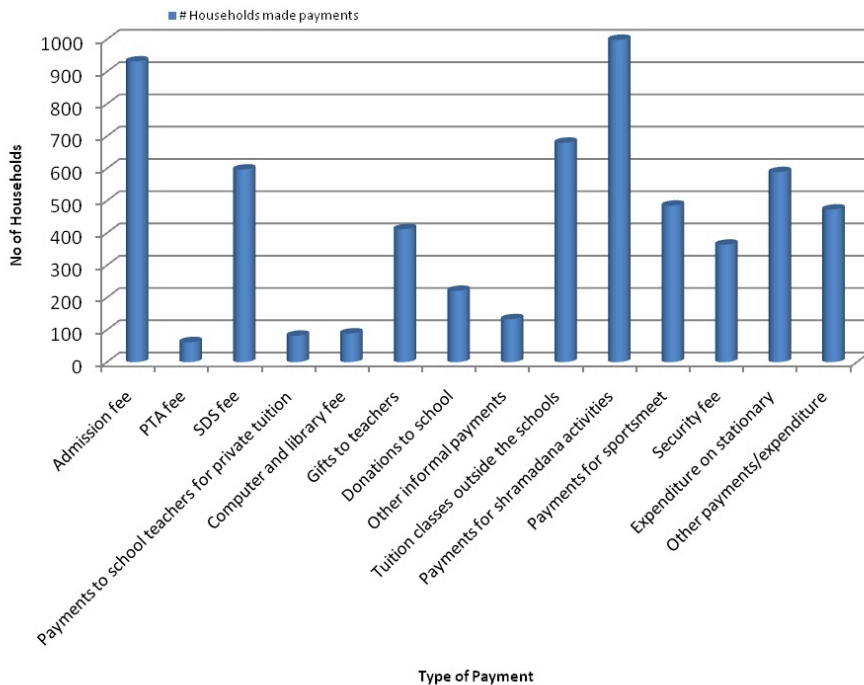
### **4.2.1 Fees and ‘donations’**

There is no government-approved fee structure when students are admitted to grade 1. As parents are not familiar with regulations, they called all fees or charges they paid at the time of admitting their children to school ‘admission fees’. Many students had paid varying amounts, which in some instances were exorbitantly high. While 62% of children surveyed reported that they paid admission fees, only 52% spelled out the amount paid. The average admission fee per child for 2008 was revealed as Rs. 3,977.09.

A breakdown of these figures by study locations showed that students in Galle/Hikkaduwa, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya paid very high admission fees as opposed to those in the Puttalam rural Tamil and urban areas and Galle/Ambalangoda.

Nearly 91% of teachers and officers admitted that such fees were a burden on parents. However, there appeared to be a good level of transparency in the charging of admission fees by schools: 57% of officers agreed that receipts were issued, but 10% of teachers and 15% of officers said they were not.

Figure 10: Summary of payments to schools by households



Fees were necessary to maintain schools and for extra-curricular activities, said 16% of teachers and 19% of officers.

Accounts of school fees are revealed to the PTA/SDS according to the majority of teachers (60.2%). Various funds, fees and grants that came to schools as income were not audited, according to 62.2% of teachers and 86.3% of officers.

With regard to other payments, 22.1% of households with 349 children had paid donations amounting to an average of Rs. 1,543 being paid per child per year. The donations ranged from Rs. 4 to Rs. 20,000 mostly being paid by households in the Puttalam urban area where the people were largely Muslims, Kandy, Galle/Hikkaduwa and Anuradhapura on a decreasing level. Fewer donations were reported in Hatton, Girandurukotte and Ambalangoda areas, while households in the Sinhala and Tamil areas of Puttalam district had paid none.

*The daughter of a judge was taken to school at grade 8 after he provided granite stones for the construction of the school's swimming pool.*

*-- A parent*

#### **4.2.2 Payments to SDS**

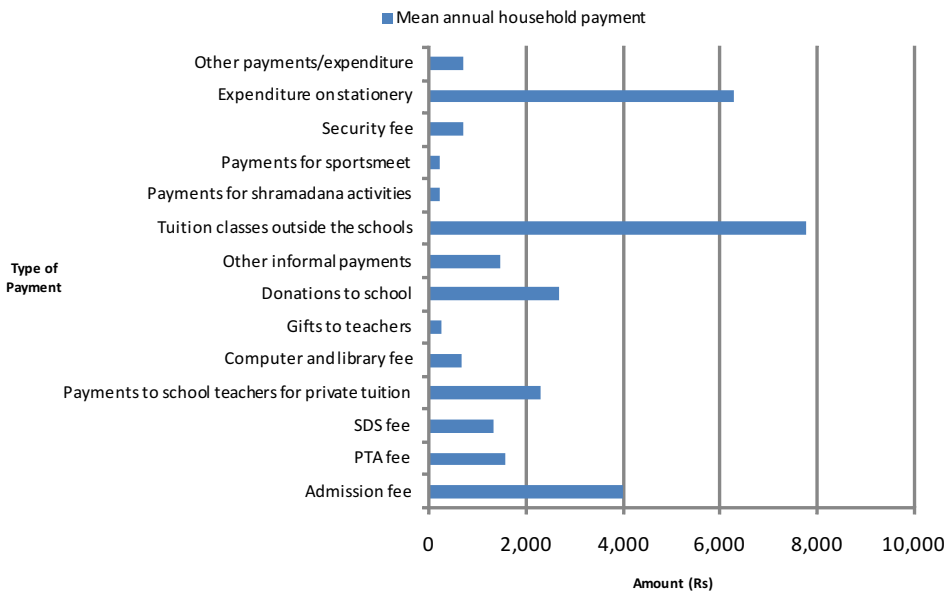
Despite the fact that PTAs no longer exist, having been replaced by SDSs, parents confused the two associations. The PTA was an informal body that met at the end of each school term to discuss student performance and problems. The SDS, meanwhile, is a formal body with an elected president, a secretary and a treasurer. It holds annual meetings and plays a significant role in raising funds for school activities.

About 10% of the children (in 94 households) had contributed to the PTA, with an average of Rs. 1,021 per family. This figure, however, varied from one study location to another, with most payments being made by households in Ambalangoda, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya.

Guardians of about 66% of children had paid money to the SDS, with the highest number of families being reported from Kandy, Puttalam urban area, Galle/Ambalangoda, Hikkaduwa and Anuradhapura. Six-hundred and eighty nine households with 1,198 children said they paid money to the SDS but only 597 households with 999 children provided the figures paid. The average amount paid per child was Rs. 794.

The survey found that SDS fees were levied more in urban rather than rural schools and more parents from the middle class than the other two classes made these payments. Sinhalese and Muslims were the prominent ethnic groups who contributed to the SDS.

Figure 11: Mean annual household payment



### 4.2.3 Purchase of stationery

In the sample, 58.9% of households had provided money to purchase stationery and the average expenditure for a student per year was Rs. 3,653. About 55% of the lower and lower-middle class and nearly 50% of the middle-class households reported that teachers asked the children to buy stationery for classroom work. These requests are a considerable burden for parents

### 4.2.4 Gifts to teachers

Gifts including cash were given to teachers by 41.2% of households with 702 children. On many occasions, parents also collectively purchased gifts. The Puttalam urban area, Anuradhapura, Galle/Hikkaduwa, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya respectively had the highest number of households that provided gifts to teachers with the average cost per student per gift being Rs. 250 (the range was Rs. 5 to Rs. 5,000).

*When my child was in grade 1, the class teacher showed us a necklace and asked for a similar gift. However, some parents telephoned the MoE and the teacher was warned. Gifts to teachers have become a practice especially from grades 1 to 4.*

*– A parent in the South*

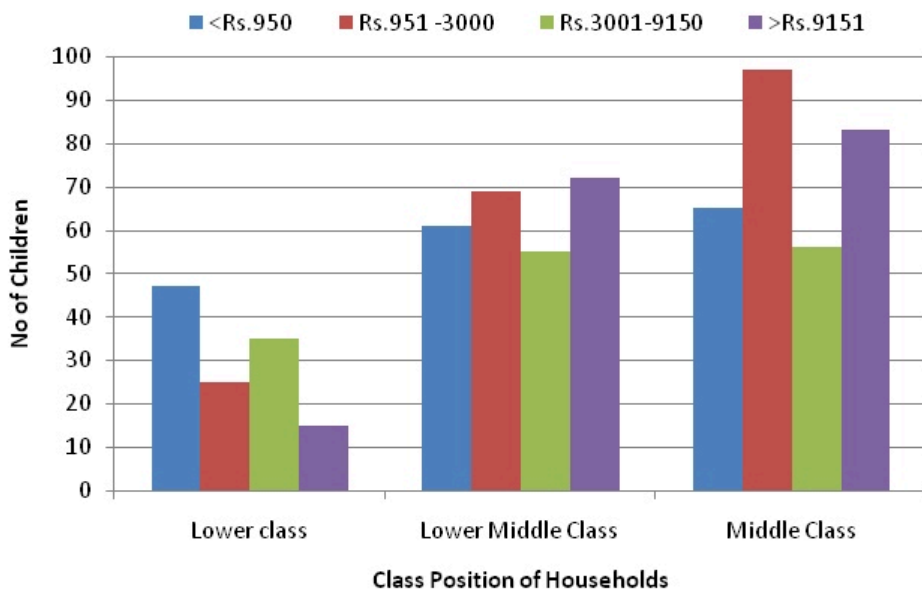
Token gift-giving (for example betel leaves) is customary in the school system, as a means of showing gratitude and appreciation. However, if gifts are expensive and aimed at influencing teachers, they constitute an act of corruption.

### 4.2.5 Tuition

The survey found that tuition classes for a fee were not only conducted by regular tuition teachers but also schoolteachers, some of whom insisted that their students attend those classes. Tuition classes were held during school time, despite MoE circular 2006/45 prohibiting such activity, as well as after-school and on weekends.

Tuition was a way of life and 68% of the households with 1,118 children had paid for such classes. The average tuition fee per student per year was Rs. 4,695. These figures, however, varied in keeping with the class position of the households (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Tuition expenditure by class position





About 9% of households (82) with 107 children made payments to teachers as tuition fees for after-school teaching in the school itself. This may have tempted teachers not to teach the essentials of the curriculum in their regular classes, thus forcing pupils to attend their private tuition classes. The average fee for this type of tuition per student per year amounted to Rs. 1,760 during 2008.

These incidents took place mainly in Nuwara Eliya, Hatton, and Puttalam urban areas where Tamil-speaking students were a majority, indicating that teachers serving in difficult areas were engaging in tuition after school.

Instances were reported where teachers who conducted tuition classes favoured students who attended them at the prize-giving or by giving high marks at the term/annual tests.

Interestingly, a majority of teachers and officers disapproved of this practice. Forty percent of teachers and 46% of officers agreed that conducting tuition classes outside the school on a commercial basis was not acceptable. About 65% of teachers and officers agreed that if the class teacher conducted tuition classes for students after hours and on weekends for a fee, it was a corrupt practice.

#### **4.2.6 Other payments**

These included payments for shramadana and sports activities, library and computer use and also for the maintenance of security (See Figure 11).

Most payments whether called fees or donations, were a burden on the parents and could lead to children dropping out of school. The non-stipulation by the MoE of a ceiling for facility and SDS fees could allow corruption to flourish, with principals making arbitrary decisions.

In conclusion, findings of the study suggest that parents contribute substantively towards the provision of education to their children. Sri Lanka is proud of its government free education system. But is education really free? While the government allocation for education is low, parents seem to be bearing hidden costs to give a quality education to their children.

## **4.3 Administration-related corruption**

Teacher transfers, salary increments or loans, there was much heartache and frustration among teachers that influence or bribes were needed to get them approved. Nepotism and politicization were also felt to have infiltrated the system, starting from the lowest appointments of volunteer teachers by principals to higher appointments ranging from acting principals to directors.

Politicization was seen as the main contributory factor for increased corruption, with 28.6% of households conceding that appointments in schools and the MoE were political but 15.5% taking an opposite view. Those who thought that appointments and promotions were political were mainly from the middle class and the others largely from the lower classes. Qualified persons were not appointed, said 41.1% of households, while only 13% thought appointments were given on merit. When analysed for class, the results were similar to the previous finding.

Education planning was highly politicized was the thinking of 31.4% of households, which was supported by qualitative interviews which reflected the view that the education system was politically manoeuvred by successive governments.

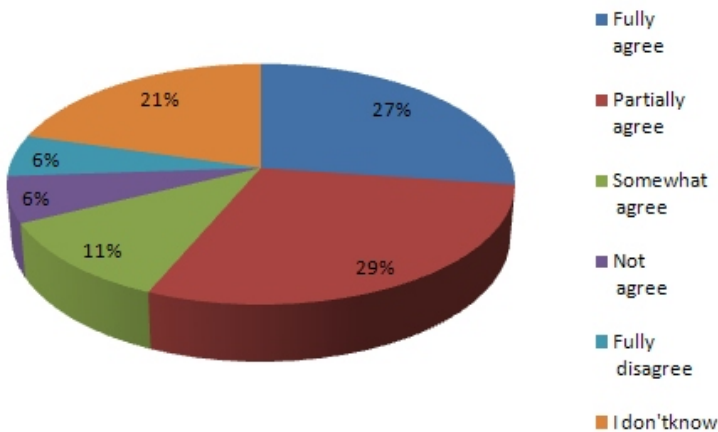
### **4.3.1 Problems relating to schools – Tamil translations**

Zonal education directors in Nuwara Eliya and Puttalam viewed as discriminatory the late or non-provision of Tamil translations of circulars and other documents to needy schools and zonal offices in Tamil-speaking areas. A senior director of education in Colombo attributed these delays to the MoE having only one Tamil translator.

This hampered planning, was the view of 56% of officers who pointed out that they found it difficult to get information from schools because the relevant forms were not available in Tamil.

Non-availability of circulars and other documents in Tamil contributed to many teachers, principals and officials being unaware of regulations and not following procedures. They were also unable to claim the resources they were entitled to. This potentially creates many administrative problems, hampers educational planning at central level and impacts on the equity of education, as Tamil schools may be left at a disadvantage compared to Sinhala schools.

Figure 13: "We as directors find it very difficult to get information from the school particularly because forms are not in Tamil" (Q34.1)



#### 4.3.2 Irregularities in schools and education offices

Rural schools in agricultural areas have many acres of land, to be cultivated under officially-accepted procedures. However 32% of teachers and 27% of officers were aware that many principals leased these lands to private cultivators and collected money for themselves.

The assertion that principals were corrupt when dealing with construction work, was rejected by 54.8% of officers, with only 30.5% stating that they were aware of a school where corruption in construction occurs.

Meanwhile, about 77% of teachers and 63% of officers were aware of unnecessary procurement of goods and services in education offices.

#### **4.3.3 Delays in salary increments**

While delays in salary payments and processing of increments do not necessarily indicate corruption, they are often symptomatic of administrative inefficiencies that allow malpractices to flourish. They may also occur due to late transfer of funds from the Treasury to the MoE. Increment delays were experienced by 82% of teachers and 75% of officers, with teachers taking part in qualitative interviews stating that although they received their promotions about 2-4 years before, increments had not been included in their monthly salaries. Fifty-two percent of teachers and 37% of officers had complained to the MoE and some teachers had been able to secure a percentage of the increment until such time as the full increments were added to their monthly salaries. About 10% of teachers and officers admitted to having bribed the clerks to expedite the process and the thinking was that delays in increments caused widespread frustration among teachers, as the take-home salary was comparatively less.

*Salary increments are not made effective for a long time. The clerks do not pay attention to these matters. They expect bribes to expedite the process. The principal or the teacher has to go to the clerk, talk to him and give him 'something' to get the papers ready. This is not good for the status of the teachers and the principals.*

*-- Teachers at a FGD*

*When we get increments, it takes more than a year to work out the effective salary. This is one of the pressing problems most teachers face.*

*-- Interview with female trained teacher*

#### **4.3.4 Difficult area allowance**

Teachers and officers during their first appointment are expected to serve in a difficult area for 3-5 years under the 2007 National Transfer Policy (2007/20 – 2007/12/13). Under this scheme, all of them are paid an additional 'difficult area allowance' (Dushkara dimana or Kashta pirathesha padi) by the MoE.

While about 76% of teachers and 70% of officers stated they had served in difficult areas, 46% of teachers and 38% of officers claimed they were not paid this allowance. In qualitative interviews too, teachers mentioned that the processing of this allowance was based on favouritism and political patronage, while it was also withheld sometimes to victimize them.

This has an impact on motivation of teachers which leads to low morale and may even filter down to the classroom with poor-quality teaching.

#### 4.3.5 Loan scheme (Guru naya or Aasiriyar kadan thiddam)

Many teachers mentioned that their salaries were inadequate to cover their monthly expenses<sup>17</sup>. Those who served in difficult areas spent a large sum of money, sometimes as much Rs. 1,000 per week or nearly Rs. 5,000 a month, to travel home during weekends. After paying for food and lodging, they were left with only a few hundred rupees for other expenses. In addition to resorting to tuition, almost all teachers applied for government loans (Agrahara insurance for medical expenses incurred by the teachers and their families, distress loans and housing loans known as the 'seven year property loans').

*Distress loans are not given on time. Those who are closely associated with the zonal office and the department get priority. The watcher of the office who had applied very recently obtained Rs. 80,000 as a distress loan, but the principal who applied for it years ago is still on the waiting list.*

*– Teacher at a FGD*

It was very difficult to obtain these loans and it took years to get the money into their hands, was the general view, due to the fact that the high demand gave rise to corrupt practices including political interference and bribery.

*Since there is a lot of competition for housing loans which are granted at a low interest rate of 4% per annum, only politically-powerful teachers can obtain them. The Agrahara insurance is also obtainable by politically-powerful teachers, who bypass the waiting list. The other most-sought after and seemingly corrupt are the distress loans given to a limited number of people, over a year. Those who obtain them are the politically-powerful teachers or those who have good connections. Teachers unable to get these loans have to turn to informal means like 'seettu' or loans from rich teachers (tuition masters) who act as moneylenders.*

*– Interview with a female teacher*

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17. Teacher salaries in Sri Lanka are the lowest in South Asia. World Bank: 'Treasures of ...' (2005)

Political influence can expedite the processing of loans, 40% of teachers and 34% of officers agreed and that was how many teachers obtained loans quickly, avoiding the long waiting list. Thirty percent of teachers and officers stated that political influence was necessary to obtain Agrahara insurance, while 60% of teachers and 41% of officers said that teachers who had connections with the provincial administration could expedite the processing of loan applications.

*Almost all teachers, officers and other staff in the province, numbering about 10,000 have obtained loans from the MoE through the Provincial Council. Every month each one repays the loan on an installment basis which amounts to a huge sum. This could easily be paid out as new loans to other needy teachers. But teachers who apply for loans have to wait several years to get them approved because the repayments are used as recurrent expenditure by the Provincial Ministry, which is not a good practice. Since recently, the PC Kandy has stopped issuing this loan, to the detriment of many teachers and officers,*

*-- Interview with a director of education*

#### **4.3.6 Transfers**

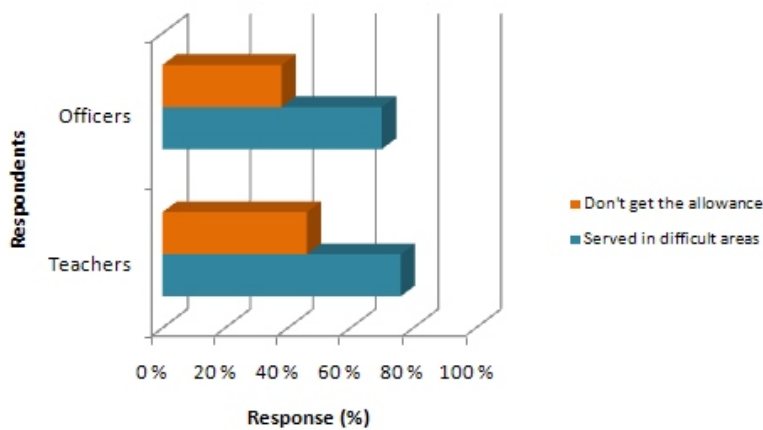
A teacher who seeks a transfer should have served a minimum of 3 years in a 'very difficult' or 'difficult' school; a minimum of 4 years in a school which is not congenial; or a maximum of 8 years in a school having privileges; or a maximum of 6 years in a school having more privileges, according to the Teacher Transfer Policy. The school classification has been made by the MoE based on general criteria and the ZEOs have been made aware of these issues.



There are also special instances when teacher transfers are effected such as: Transfers on disciplinary grounds; transfers on recommendations of Medical Boards and mutual transfers between difficult schools and congenial schools.

The instances when transfers are halted are: Upon appeals made by pregnant teachers, in the case of male and female teachers over 53 years of age and female teachers having infants below the age of 01 year.

Figure 14: Transfers before completing three years in difficult area



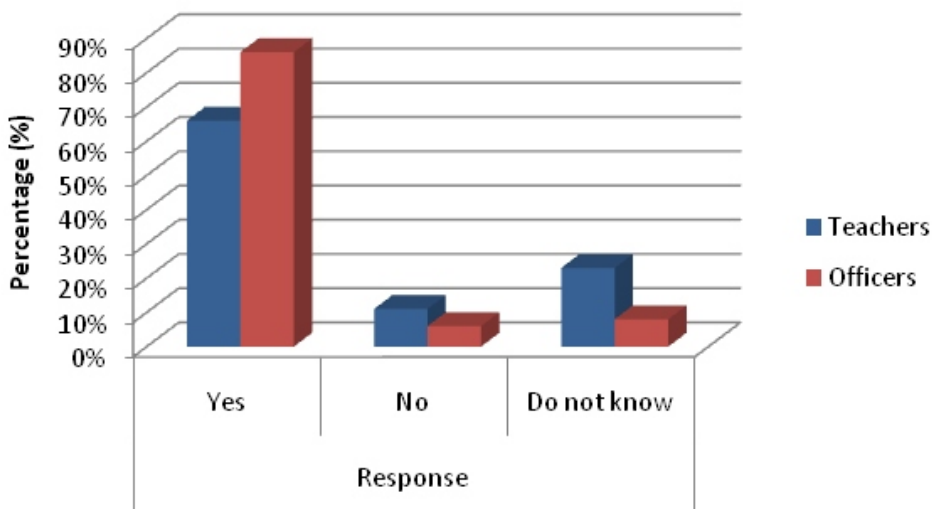
Even with detailed circulars, there was a strong perception among teachers and officials that corruption was an underlying factor when teacher transfers were effected. The transfer policy was not implemented to the letter, according to 67.7% of teachers and 58% of officers and over 85% of teachers and officers said they had heard that teacher transfers were corrupt. Only 4% of teachers and 2% of officers thought the transfer system was not corrupt.

*Teacher transfers and other transfers in the MoE are not properly done. There are many malpractices. Politicians directly promote third-grade teachers to the posts of additional directors. There are about 120 new positions like these created in the Central Province.*

*-- An additional director of education*

Premature transfers from difficult to other areas were seen as spawning corruption, with many teachers working out transfers to a developed urban area before the stipulated three-year period was over. This was done through political influence, was the view of 66% of teachers and 86% of officers. With a heavy imbalance in the distribution of teachers, irregularities in the transfer scheme further exacerbated the disparities between urban and rural schools, in turn, jeopardising the quality of teaching.

Figure 15: Do you think that many teachers get transfers to better areas from difficult areas before they complete the three-year period? (Q 3.3)



More teachers, 47.5%, but fewer officers, 34%, said they had heard of bribes being paid to make teacher transfers effective. Knowing an officer in the MoE, provincial or zonal office was an important factor in working out a transfer. Knowing or being related to an officer helped, according to 79% of teachers and 72% of officers. An interesting point was that personal connections were considered more effective than bribes. Nepotism and favouritism were alleged as the most common form of corruption in transfers rather than the exchange of money.

Figure 16: You can get a transfer because you know the officers (Q 3.5)

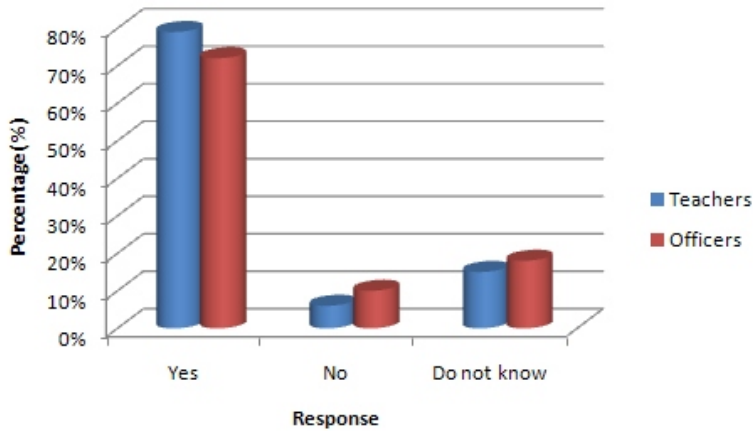
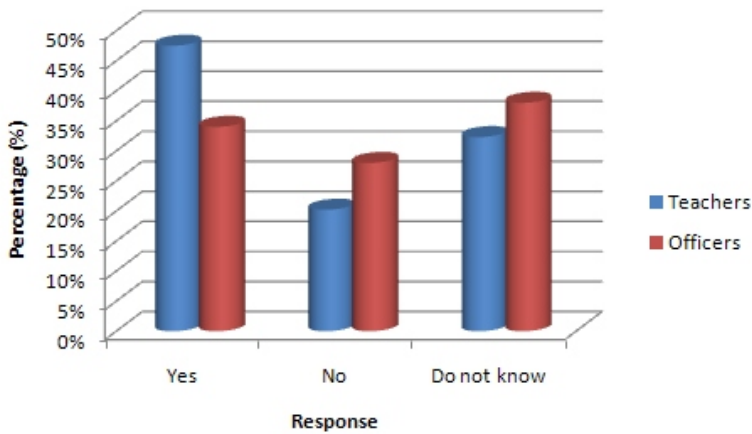


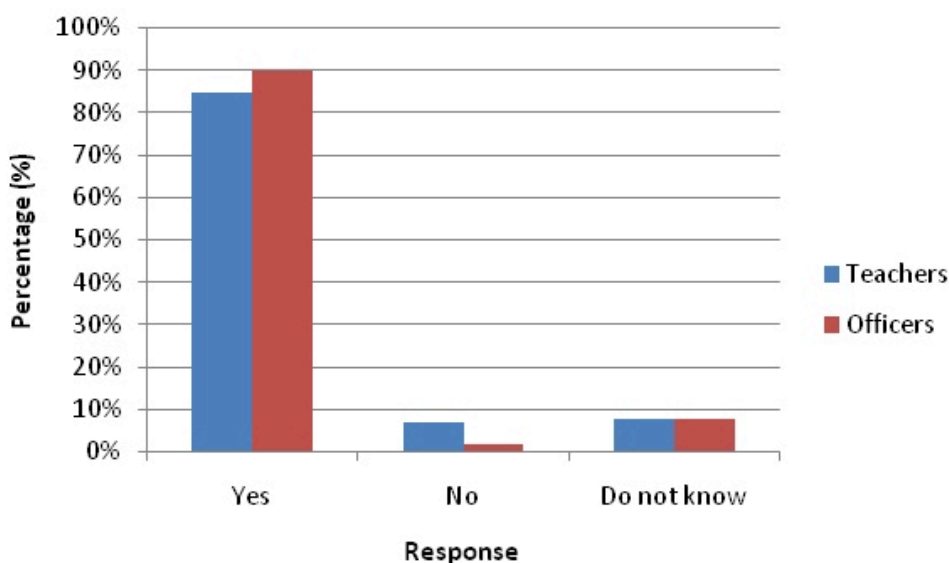
Figure 17: Have you heard that teachers give bribes to a make their transfers effective? (Q 3.4)



Teacher transfers were made effective through politicians, agreed 85% of teachers and 90% of officers and political influence wielded by teachers was seen as a deterrent to transfers being made to needy schools in the periphery. About 50-60% of teachers and officers were of the view that teachers in urban/popular schools were from highly-connected families and the spouses

of doctors, engineers, university teachers etc. Their power and connections helped them remain in the same school throughout their service. On the other hand, 65-75% of teachers and officers stated that many teachers who had served in difficult areas for more than five years had to remain in the same schools and were unable to get their transfers implemented. Trade union action was also seen as an obstacle in the implementation of the transfer policy by 50-60% of teachers and officers. Around 85% of teachers and officers agreed that political interference deterred the transfer system/policy from effective implementation.

Figure 18: Do you think that teacher transfers are often made through a politician? (Q3.7D)



Meanwhile, 50% of teachers and officers agreed that there was poor coordination between zonal and provincial education offices with regard to teacher transfers in the zone. Many problems arose as zonal offices were not informed of the transfers made by the provincial offices, was their view. When the zonal directors were attempting to improve schools, committed teachers were suddenly transferred to other schools by the provincial office, thus

affecting the improvement of the education system in the zones. This pointed to a lack of communication, with indications of a structural problem, where lower echelons of the administrative hierarchy were not adequately involved in key managerial processes, thus being unable to perform their role. This leads not only to inefficiencies, but also frustration among lower-level officials who might not see a benefit in performing to their optimum capacity.

The Parliament Commissioner of Administration (Ombudsman), Dr. R.B. Ranaraja<sup>18</sup> has identified 16 problematic areas pertaining to teacher management in a letter to the Education Secretary of the Western Province.

1. Transfer of teachers without request by the teacher or by any transfer board.
2. Transfer of teachers without adequate notice.
3. Transfer of teachers without any administrative requirement or need.
4. Transfer of teachers who have not committed any disciplinary misconduct.
5. Transfer of teachers without giving them a work schedule or allowing them to relinquish the role performed before.
6. Transfer of teachers without relinquishing of their role who are not permitted to work in the new position from the day of transfer.
7. Transfer of teachers in the middle of a term.
8. Teachers who are not liked by the zonal director or principal not being given work in schools.
9. Those who are especially trained for certain subjects not being given those subjects to teach.
10. Less qualified teachers being promoted while qualified teachers are available.
11. Teachers qualified and trained to teach in the classroom being sent as librarians.
12. Teachers who are transferred being allowed to idle without any work in the schools.
13. Teacher transfers being taken up as issues by students and parents.
14. Teachers of age being kept in service without any reason.
15. Those who are above 60 years of age being kept in service without any reason.
16. Reports submitted by directors not being taken into consideration.
17. Opposition when teachers report such malpractices to the Ombudsman.

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18. Dr. R.B. Ranaraja has given verbal permission to use the content of his letter of May 28th 2008 for this report

### 4.3.7 Appointments

#### 4.3.7.1 Volunteer teachers

The appointment of volunteer teachers is an area viewed as being rampant with malpractices. Legally, there is no provision for volunteer teachers, but due to a shortage of teachers in the north and the east, such appointments have been made in the past with the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. Volunteer teachers are expected to work in schools for three years before being made permanent on the recommendation of the principals.

The survey revealed that principals often appointed relatives or close associates as volunteer teachers, without following a transparent procedure. This was the consensus among 39% of teachers and 45% of officers.

*These appointments are corrupt. Principals should maintain log records of the work done by volunteer teachers and it is only after several years of such work that they are considered for recruitment as teachers. Until recently principals adhered to this practice, but not anymore.*

*To be appointed a volunteer teacher, a person should have 3 passes at the A/L and a vacancy should exist in the school. Now despite qualified persons being available, the relatives of the principals get these appointments.*

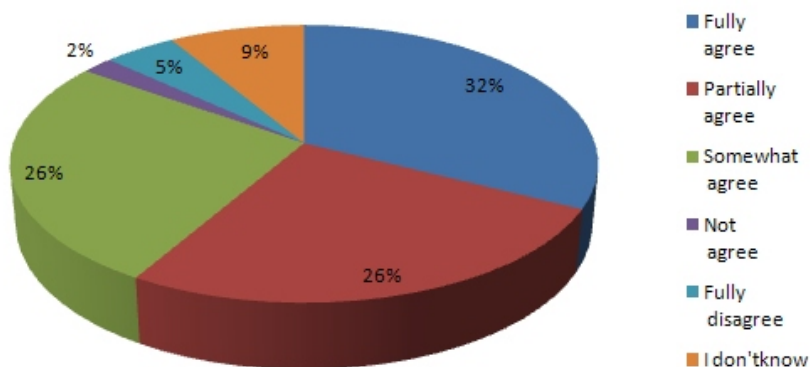
*Many instances have also been reported of principals being bribed to obtain log records as some volunteer teachers have not been to the school after the appointment. Volunteer teachers also do not know how to teach, the pattern of letters etc., and this has an adverse impact on the students.*

*– Teachers at a FGD*

#### 4.3.7.2 Acting principals/principals

Principals are appointed through the Principals' Service after a qualifying examination. However, at the time of writing this report almost half of the 9,678 schools are headed by acting principals who have not sat this exam. This contravenes the provisions of circular 34/2000 of the MoE that prohibits the appointment of acting principals.

Figure 19: Do you think there are anomalies in the procedure of appointing and selecting people for the posts of principals? (Q 33.6)



Political appointments of acting principals were construed as widespread corruption by 56% of teachers and 62% of officers, while 50% of teachers and 62% of officers said there were qualified teachers who should have been appointed to these positions. Fifty percent, of teachers and 60% of directors said most of the important positions in the education sector were political appointments.

*Most acting principals are not qualified and are politically appointed. Senior and qualified teachers are not given promotions. There is no proper structure for appointments of acting principals. Sometimes principals are appointed by politicians and not by the commission. A high-level politician does that kind of political appointments. Everything is done according to the 'Lokka Mahattaya' (Big Sir).*

*-- Teachers at a FGD*

This practice, once again seriously impacts on the quality of teaching. It not only brings unqualified people into the public service, but also affects the morale and motivation of regularly-appointed principals.

#### **4.3.7.3 Directors and in-service advisors**

In the survey, teachers and principals often criticized the appointment of too many education directors and in-service advisors (experienced teachers who are supposed to improve the quality of teaching of the relevant subjects). Instances were reported where some of these in-service advisors, who were expected to work in schools, did not do so, with allegations that they were tuition masters, spending most of their 'field' or 'visiting' time at tuition classes. A zonal area selected for the study had many additional directors and in-service advisors while some of the schools did not have an adequate number of teachers.

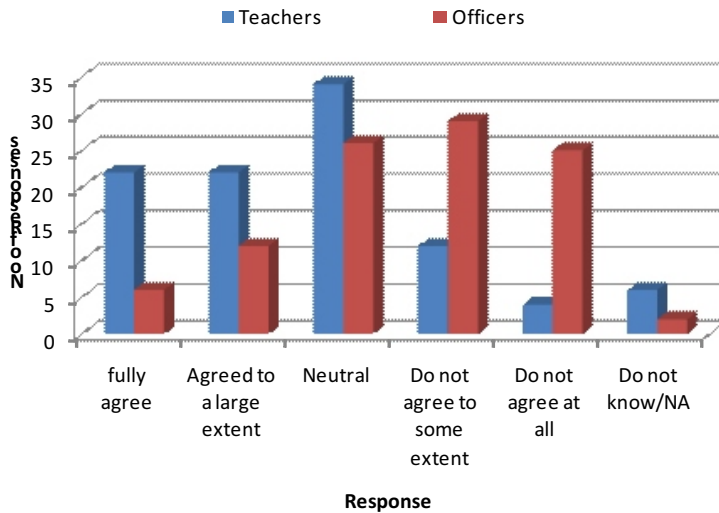
Most of the newly-appointed directors were not qualified to hold those positions, was the view of 50% of teachers and 55% of officers. When asked about the presence of many directors under the new education system<sup>19</sup>, 44% of teachers and 18% of officers saw them more as a problem than a solution.

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19. The MoE has introduced student-centred learning methods in schools under the new education system. The first pilot phase is effective in grades 6, 10 and 11 with special training for the teachers involved.



Figure 20: Do you agree that the presence of many directors under the new education system has given rise to problems more than solutions? (Q 26.1)



*There are allegations that in-service advisors are involved in various activities such as tuition and other private work during office hours.*

*--A zonal director in the central hills*

Although in-service advisors come under the supervision of zonal directors, a zonal director mentioned that he had no control over them. This either indicates reluctance on the part of the zonal directors to exercise their

authority over the in-service advisors or ignorance about their power and supervisory role. When the zonal director in question attempted to introduce a procedure to monitor where the in-service advisors were during field visits, they had protested on the grounds that it was not his responsibility. There is apparent confusion on administrative structures and the lines of authority, leading to inefficiency and waste of human and financial resources.

In conclusion, measures by the MoE to improve the quality of school education through close supervision by in-service advisors is appreciable but in practice many problems surfaced.

Overall, there was stoic resignation among most respondents that nothing could be done about the situation, which has major repercussions on the education system, spreading poor quality teaching by unqualified and unmotivated people and ingraining political influence not only in appointments but also transfers and loan schemes.

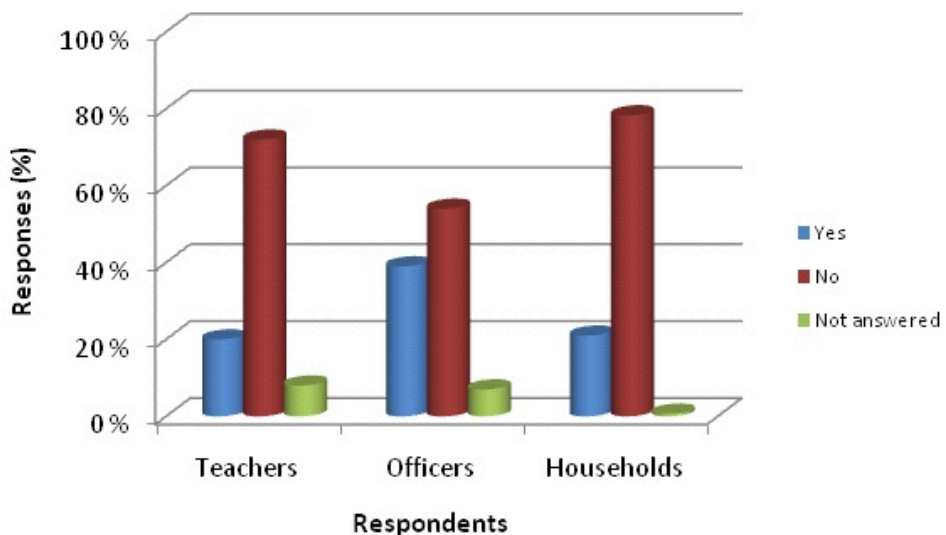
## 4.4 Complaints against corruption

The issues are many, affecting children and their households at school-level and teachers, principals and officers at administration-level. Some had heard of corruption, others had experienced it. What did they do?

Seventy two percent of teachers and 54% of officers never made a complaint. Eight percent of teachers and 7% of officers did not respond to the question.

Of the households, 21% or one-fifth had made complaints against corruption, mainly to teachers or principals, while 78.3% had not done so.

Figure 21: Have you ever made a complaint against corruption in Education? (Q 30.6 & Q 3.4)



While respondents seemed reluctant to ask for redress themselves, a majority believed that misconduct should be punished more consistently. Seventy-five percent of officials believed that misconduct was not always punished and half

of them that reports submitted by directors on the misconduct of teachers were not considered seriously. However, 41.7% of households and 42.7% of officers agreed that wrong-doers in the teaching profession should be punished but 19.6% rejected this.

These findings indicate that a large percentage of teachers, officers and parents had not been able to or did not want to exercise their civil right of making a complaint when faced with a problem or corruption. Poor awareness that they have a right to complain and in fact need to do so in the public interest and the unavailability of an institutional setting may have been the factors influencing this behaviour.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Maintaining quality and equity in education is in the public interest as well as the mission of the MoE<sup>20</sup>. Corrupt practices lead to quality loss, inequity in access to schools and ultimately social inequality (see Table 1). This study found that corruption was prevalent mostly in the areas of school admissions and in appointments, promotions and transfers of teachers, principals and officers.

Irregularities in these areas have a detrimental effect on the morale and motivation of teachers and officers, resulting in less than optimal teaching and poor management of education. To restore motivation, a reward structure for good performance should be put in place. Training coupled with case studies of good behaviour and effective teaching can be an incentive. Clear parameters for professional behaviour could be set out in a Code of Conduct. Impartial ethical advice and complaints mechanisms should be made available. Education resources should be focused on improving working conditions and salaries of qualified teachers, rather than appointing additional personnel.

Corruption occurs due to poor organizational ability or poor governance. The inability to implement circulars/laws, particularly with regard to fees when admitting children to schools, create inequality in society, resulting in hardship to the poor and lower-middle class families.

To improve transparency in the admission process, the MoE should further disseminate circular 2008/21, which regulates that only facility fees (Pahasukam gastu) are legal. There should be a ceiling on the level of fees to be charged from parents. Efforts to reduce fraud in the application of the residential criterion for school admission should be strengthened.

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20. [http://www.moe.gov.lk/about\\_us.php](http://www.moe.gov.lk/about_us.php) Viewed on 04-10-2008

Private tuition has been beneficial to students in seeking entry into universities, particularly those who seek professional degree programmes. However, private tuition mostly benefits the students in high-income families and discriminates against the poor students who cannot afford it and who live in distant rural areas. Low salaries may also serve as a temptation to teachers to offer tuition to their own pupils after school hours for a fee, a practice that is controversial because it can be exploited by teachers to the detriment of poor pupils. This legal loophole may easily be mended by prohibiting private tutoring of the teachers' own pupils, as is the case in many countries such as Australia and Singapore<sup>21</sup>.

In the management of quality inputs, more transparency can be achieved if principals provide accounts to the SDS, present them during SDS meetings, and/ or put up the accounts on the school notice board. The SDS should be consulted when planning the use of quality input grants.

In general, public trust in integrity of school management, particularly finances, appears to be low. Closer links should be established between students and their parents and the principal and teachers, so that parents will feel more confident to voice their concern where there is abuse of power by teachers or principals. Through more participation in school management, planning will be more relevant to the needs of the students. SDS and school management committees should be educated about roles and responsibilities in managing school finances.

The unequal distribution of resources, particularly teachers, has a significant impact on education. In Sri Lanka, as in many countries, remote rural schools often lack teachers while a surplus exists in urban schools. The dearth of teachers in rural schools leads to poorer education outcomes and leaves the

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21. Bray, M. Adverse effects of private tutoring. (2003)

rural children at a disadvantage. For example, the study revealed that students in rural and estate schools did not have a choice of subjects, especially in the areas of aesthetics and technical studies, due to the dearth of teachers. Unequal distribution of teachers brought about by non-enforcement of transfer regulations can also reinforce corrupt practices: More teachers will try to avoid postings to disadvantaged areas by using personal connections or paying bribes. Families who are better-off will also do everything possible to prevent their children from attending under-resourced schools and may use personal connections or bribes to get them into better schools.

It is clear in the study that education-related corruption, especially at school and provincial levels, is due to many factors, lack of regulation and enforcement being an important one. Planning at the central level has not been able to resolve the regional differences and inequality in education. The intense competition to get into universities and professional degree programmes has resulted in a severe struggle, particularly at GCE O/L and A/L and at the year-5 scholarship examination. Precautionary measures introduced by the government to facilitate educational opportunities for the poor masses in rural, less-developed areas are being utilized surreptitiously for the advantage of the affluent classes. The abuse of the district-quota system for university entrance, as found in a large percentage of entrants to the universities from the Nuwara Eliya district being non-residents, is a clear case.

Most of the corruption witnessed is due to inactive or non-enforcement of circulars and regulations. In some instances, the laws and regulations are interpreted in an errant manner and in others; the authorities do not enforce them. For example, PCs are expected to enforce the equivalent to the Public Service Commission in teacher appointments and transfers in the provinces,

but due to political reasons, the Governors, Chief Ministers and Provincial Ministers play a decisive role on these ‘commissions’ or ‘committees’.

The study revealed many problems in the management of teachers, principals and officials. In teacher transfers, use of undue influence seems to be a common phenomenon, with connections to politicians and officers being the most important criteria for transfer. This is despite a National Teacher Transfer Policy that clearly spells out the criteria for teacher transfers and an existing institutional framework (National and Provincial Transfer Boards) to implement the policies.

Another area of concern is the appointment of volunteer teachers and acting principals. Untrained teachers continue to be recruited<sup>22</sup> despite the lack of any legal provision for this practice, which again seriously impacts on the quality of teaching. Under MoE circular 2000/34, appointments of acting principals are prohibited. Yet such appointments outside the regulation of the Principals’ Service seem to be rampant, while qualified applicants are apparently not being given their due posts, not only bringing unqualified people into the Public Service, but also affecting the morale and motivation of regularly-appointed principals.

There also seems to be a high frequency of political appointments to the Education Service, with an adverse effect on the quality of education management. The MoE has acknowledged this problem by setting up a commission tasked with providing recommendations on how to bring irregular appointments in line with regulations<sup>23</sup>. However, more steps need to be taken to ensure that future appointments are done in line with the legal requirements. Appointments to positions in the SLEAS, the Principles Service, the Teachers Service, and the Teachers Educator Service, should be made

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22. In 2006 7,463 non-regular teachers were recruited, amongst them 5,259 untrained teachers, 856 trainee teachers and 1348 other teachers. In: MoE, Census of schools (2006)

23. Telephone interview with P.W. Gunasekera, Advisor to the MoE, 17th February 2009



according to the Establishment Code, the Sri Lanka Principal Service Code 1999, and the Teacher Service Code 1995. To prevent political appointments, the national Public Service Commission should be able to work according to its statutes, and the Provincial Public Service Commissions should be made fully independent and adequate resources need to be put aside for them.

Not only appointments, but all decision-making in education should be depoliticized. Education decisions should be objective, equitable and free of biases and prejudices.

The study showed low levels of reporting of corruption. However, to effectively curb corruption, victims of abuses should be able to report malpractices without fear of reprisal, and those accused need to be guaranteed an impartial enquiry. The strengthening of complaints mechanisms, particularly at the provincial and zonal levels, would be an important step towards more transparency.

Although parents seemed to be satisfied with the quality of teaching overall, teacher interviews revealed a great level of frustration with education management. Given that teachers are the most important resource in education, this should be a serious concern. The government has made a commitment to improve teacher development in its Education Sector Development Programme and Framework for the period 2006–2010. Goals set out in this framework include the enhancement of teacher competency and commitment as well as teacher motivation, skills and performance. These efforts should not be undermined by irregular appointments and promotions, and indeed by any unfair treatment. For teachers to be effective, they need to be treated fairly and equally, they should be well-trained and given career prospects; and they should be compensated adequately and increments be given on time.

Non-enforcement of laws appears to be a frequent phenomenon, as evidenced in appointments outside regular procedures and interference in school admissions. Sometimes, regulations may not be implemented due to lack of awareness. The non-availability of circulars in Tamil has been highlighted as a reason for poor implementation of regulations, and can be amended by ensuring that all circulars are translated and made available at zonal and school levels, as well as on the website of the MoE.

If the lines of reporting are not clear (an example being whether in-service advisors come under the supervision of the zonal director or not), management can hardly be efficient. Another reason for non-enforcement of regulations is that officers do not want to exercise their authority. This leaves much room for abuse. Good governance requires officials to comply with their tasks and to use their authority in the exercise of their duties. In the absence of control and disciplinary action, abuse of power can go unhindered. It is absolutely necessary to ensure that existing laws and regulations are put into practice. More effort should be made to enforce existing laws, and to penalise actions that are illegal.

The inequality in school education is revealed in expenditure on books and stationery and also payments including fees when children are admitted to school, which are highly correlated with the class position of the households. Matters of critical importance such as syllabi coverage are concerns of the affluent households (middle class) more often than that of lower-class households. Parental participation in school-related activities also shows that middle-class parents are more involved. Outside school too, on matters such as expenditure on tuition over weekends, the inequality becomes apparent.

The class position of the family, which is a reflector of educational inequality, shows that children in families with fathers employed in higher order positions and business get access to good schools<sup>24</sup>. In addition, it has been shown that perception and knowledge of corruption vary with the education and economic background of the households. The poor households seem ignorant of corruption and are not bothered much about it. The middle class households also do not seem interested that much in pursuing matters pertaining to corruption in education, although they are aware of them, either because they do not come across such problems or have well-established ways and means of overcoming them and making them work to their advantage. The most important stratum of households is the lower-middle class who often struggle for a better education for their children. They are the government and private sector employees, businesspersons and traders who mostly live in urban settings and aspire to educate their children and send them to universities or higher education institutes. These households, because of their high aspirations, are involved in a constant struggle with the government school system, invest a huge amount of their household budget for children's education and also provide them with additional teaching and tuition.

Certain measures that the government has introduced such as the year-5 scholarship programme to facilitate education of the rural poor are now being used by the middle and lower-middle classes for their benefit, partly because of the competition. In the government school education system, social class compromises the importance of talent and merit of the child. Hence, equal opportunity in school education has been threatened. More needs to be done to raise awareness amongst the poor on their educational rights so that they become less prone to abuse and neglect, and to ensure equality for all social strata in accessing good education.

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24. 'Our results show a very clear positive association between family background and the education decision. Children of affluent families seem to derive more benefits from the free education policy. In particular, mother's education and parents' income have a strong effect on the education decision.' In: Hartog/ Ranasinghe (2002)

In conclusion, when corruption is rampant, particularly in school education with the consequences of social inequality, there is a danger that the social trust that people have towards the education system and good governance would be eroded with a huge impact on the overall development process of the country. The youth and adolescents would begin to think that corruption is a way of life or the norm. This development is a grave threat to the basic premise of education - to impart morality, ethics and behavioural values to the population of today and tomorrow and the mission of the MoE, which is to guarantee “efficiency, equity and high quality in performance ensuring stakeholder satisfaction”<sup>25</sup>.

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25.[http://www.moe.gov.lk/about\\_us.php](http://www.moe.gov.lk/about_us.php) Viewed on 04-10-2008

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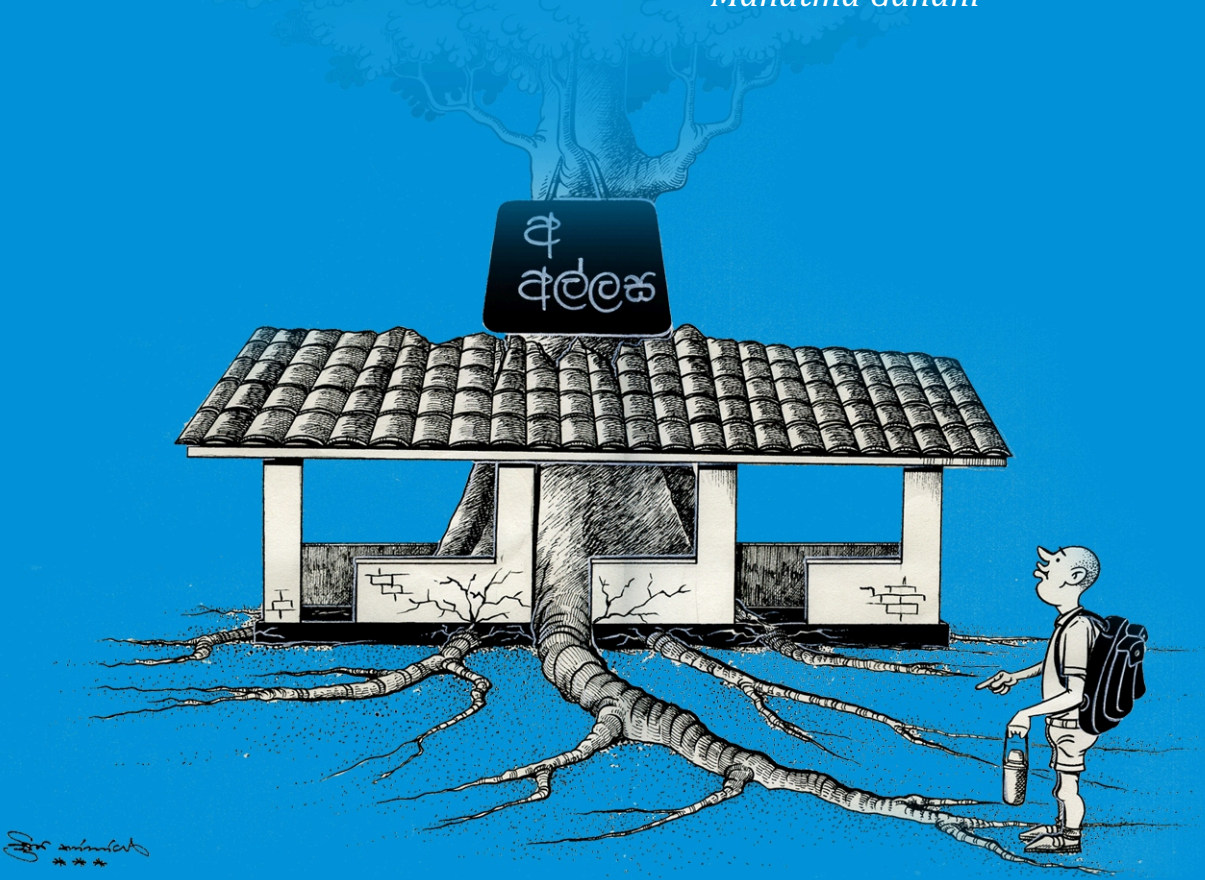






*“What is really needed to make democracy function is not knowledge of facts, but right education”*

*- Mahatma Gandhi*



අ = First letter - Sinhala alphabet  
අදාලය = Bribe