

## **The Impact of Decentralization on Local Educational Development: A Study on Provincial Council System in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the impact of decentralization reform on the development of local education introduced under the provincial council system in Sri Lanka. It was conducted with the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Secondary data were sourced through the use of printed materials while primary data were gathered through the administration of questionnaire and interview conducted on 450 respondents chosen from Western and North-Western Provinces of Sri Lanka using the stratified method. The descriptive analysis and statistics were used in analyzing the secondary and primary data obtained. The study found that though, decentralization reform contributed to the creation of healthy environment for educational development but it affected negatively, the effective and efficient delivery of services in Sri Lanka's education sector especially the management of schools and availability of qualified and trained teachers. The study suggested that, decentralization reform in Sri Lanka's education sector should be reviewed to ameliorate the problem of poor provision and delivery of services in the country's education sector.

Keywords: Decentralization, Impact, Education, Provincial, Council and Sri Lanka

### **Background**

During the past two-three decades, many countries in the world followed the state-centered governance strategy to achieve their development objectives (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983: 2; Oxhorn, Tulchin and Selee, 2004: 3). One of the main reasons that influenced this state-centered approach was the development impetus that prevailed in the contemporary world. According to the views of policy-makers in the respective countries, development was largely a technical challenge. If a country could come up with a national plan for investing a sufficient amount of capital in a manner consistent with macro-stability which itself is a precondition for development, then such a country could accomplish their development goal. Moreover, they envisaged that good advisors could devise good policies, and technically assisted and institutionally capable governments would implement those policies. However, this can be achieved only through a state-centered system, which endorses flexible implementation of policies formulated by highly competent technocrats and the degree of accountability of politicians and bureaucrats (World Bank, 1997: 2). As a result of such development planning led by the central development plan, many countries recorded a substantial improvement in some of the human development indicators such as literacy rate and life expectancy. However, despite such positive outcomes in those areas, most of these countries still had to face various problems such as slow economic growth, inefficient and corrupt administrations, increasing government expenditure, widening inequality, and waste of resources which resulted in the stagnation of

overall development process (Bangura and Larbi, 2006: 2). Therefore, theoreticians and development practitioners in the early 1970s were busily probing the root causes of such issues that were associated with the state-centered strategy.

Many analysts have attributed this particular situation to the domination of urban-elites in decision-making, rigid bureaucratic structures, and insufficient information flow, which in effect were the inherent drawbacks of the state-centered approach (Ebel and Yilmaz, 2003: 101), and the negligence of socio-economic and political factors of their countries as well. Consequently, there was an increasing demand for an alternative development strategy, which would sustain the socio-economic development. Under these circumstances, policy makers in many countries aiming at stimulating development thrust started to pay attention to a governance reform in the 1970s. Such attentions were primarily focused on formulating strategies to enhance the governance performance (Ebel and Yilmaz, 2003: 101). Thus, in order to achieve a development-oriented governance system while overcoming the shortcomings of the existing state-centered system, decentralization appeared as a strategy to enhance governance performance (Shah, 2004: 4). Over time, it came to be generally accepted that meaningful development was possible only if it was planned and implemented by the people who expected to be the beneficiaries of such development process (Maro, 1990: 673).

Further, a consensus emerged that development should follow a bottom-up approach which ensures community involvement. As a result of arguments in favor of decentralization, it became a part of the world-wide reform agenda, supported by multi-lateral and bi-lateral international donors and other development agencies such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Shah, 1997: 2). Therefore, over the past few decades, regardless of the political system, geographical location, history, level of economic development and cultural tradition of those countries, decentralization has become common process throughout the world (Winkler and Gershberg, 2003: 325). As Shah explicitly notes, by the mid-1990s, 62 of 75 developing nations counting a population of over five million have embarked on some form of decentralization reforms (Shah, 1997: 2). By following other developing countries, Sri Lanka too introduced decentralization under the Provincial Councils Act in 1987, which still continues in the form of Provincial Councils. However, even after 25 years of its introduction, a substantial study on its impact on development has not been attempted. Therefore, in an attempt to contribute to this academic discourse over the efficacy of decentralization in general, and in the Sri Lankan context in particular, this study intends to make an impact-evaluation of Sri Lanka's decentralization reform on educational development (1987) through a case study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study include:

1. To examine the impacts of decentralization on local educational development in Sri Lanka.
2. And to give policy suggestion on the need to review the decentralization reform in order to facilitate effective and efficient delivery of services in Sri Lanka's education sector.

### **Research Questions**

This research raised and answered the following questions:

1. What are the impacts of decentralization on local educational development in Sri Lanka?
2. How can the decentralization reform be reviewed to facilitate effective and efficient delivery of services in Sri Lanka's education sector?

## **Methodology**

This research is a case study conducted on two selected provinces out of the nine in Sri Lanka. The Western and North-Western Provinces were used for this research. The qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized. Secondary data were sourced through annual and periodical reports of Government Ministries, Central and Provincial Councils, Central Bank, Election Department, Financial Commission as well as Census and Statistics Departments all in Sri Lanka. Qualitative data were also sourced through journal articles, conferences and working papers as well as published and unpublished reports. Secondary data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis. Primary data were obtained through the administration of closed ended questionnaire and structured interview conducted using snowball sampling technique on 450 respondents chosen from the Western and North-Western Provinces using stratified method. The Provinces were represented by equal number of respondents in the study. The Western Province was represented by 225 respondents while North-Western Province was also represented by 225 respondents. And to avoid gender disparity in the choice and use of respondents, both male and female are represented by equal number of respondents (225 each). A total of 450 questionnaires were administered, completed, retrieved and analyzed using descriptive statistics known as Mean/Average.

## **Defining Decentralization**

In a general sense, decentralization indicates the process of transferring or relocating power and responsibility which was concentrated on center in an organization, to an alternative institution at a lower level (Silverman, 1992: 1). This move is designed to bring structural changes into the institutional hierarchy. This general outline of the decentralization process forms the backdrop of a detailed discussion on the definition of decentralization presented by many analysts such as De Guzman and Reforma (1993), Meenakshisundaram (1994), Cheema and Rondinelli (1983), Shah and Thompson (2004) and Hood (1991). De Guzman and Reforma define decentralization as a process of "... systematic and rational disposal of power, authority, and responsibility from the center to the periphery, from the top to the lower levels, or from the national to the local government" (De Guzman and Reforma, 1993: 5). Though, they describe decentralization as a process of transferring central power to the periphery, Meenakshisundaram views it as sharing of powers. He defines it as "... sharing the decision-making authority with a lower level of the organization" (Meenakshisundaram, 1994: 10). Slightly differently, Cheema and Rondinelli define decentralization as 'transfer' of responsibilities. For them, decentralization is "... the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to the field units of government's agencies, subordinate units or local government, semi-governmental, private or voluntary organizations (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983: 3). These authors representing three schools of thought provide three definitions, which emphasize both similarities and differences of decentralization. The common characteristic in all these definitions is that the power vested in the central government is handed down to alternative institutions at a lower level within the organizational hierarchy.

## **Classification of Decentralization**

“Decentralization is multi-dimensional in nature”(Falleti, 2005: 328). Therefore, different views on classification of decentralization can also be seen throughout the world. However, in a broader sense, three main types of decentralization are discussed in literature; de-concentration, delegation, and devolution.

“De-concentration can be described briefly as a transfer of authority of decision-making relating to financial and management functions by administrative means to different levels under the jurisdictional authority of the central government”(Cohen and Peterson, 1999: 24). The term ‘administrative decentralization’ is used to denote the same process. “One of the main characteristics of administrative decentralization is that the field or divisional officers who are located at the local levels of the public administration hierarchy receive a relatively higher degree of power and responsibility to perform their functions within the mandate”(Falleti, 2005: 329). It involves the shifting of workload from central government ministry headquarters to the local agencies or staff who is located outside the national capital and having restricted authority. Nevertheless, the degree of authoritative power vested with local agencies or their staffs differs by the nature of the reform and the manner of execution of the reform.

These central governments decide how their tasks are to be performed, and may also decide to allow the local agencies to make routine decisions, plan, and adjust the implementation of central directives and guidelines set by the central ministries to suit the local conditions (Rondinelli, 1980: 37).

‘Delegation refers to the transfer of government decision-making and administrative authority to clearly defined organizations or firms that are either under the government’s indirect control or under independent agencies’(Manor, 1999:70). Typical delegations of authority from the central government to semi-autonomous organizations, which conform to an institutional arrangement, allow such semi-autonomous organizations to function with relative autonomy. However, they are largely accountable to the central administration. State-owned industrial or manufacturing enterprises, public utility boards, housing and transport authorities, and urban or regional development corporations can be regarded as examples of this type of decentralized units. “In the early 1980s, it was common for a given government to establish and delegate its authority to hundreds of such semi-autonomous organizations”(Cohen and Peterson, 1999: 27-28).

The delegation of functions from central ministries or departments to such organizations which comprise implementation units can be considered as a more extensive form of decentralization than mere administrative decentralization. These institutions particularly possess the technical and administrative capability to carry out service provision and the eligibility to plan and implement decisions relevant to specific activities without any interference from the higher administrative units. They often have semi-independent authority to discharge their duties without hindrance.

Devolution is referred to as the “political decentralization that involves the transfer of power, responsibility, and resources in the performance of certain functions from the national level to the local government level” (Rondinelli, 1980: 137). It aims at granting autonomy to sub-national, district and local government units, which are governed by the people’s elected representatives and institutions at the respective political levels of the country. Therefore, these institutions are entitled to self-government status and, accordingly, to improve their administrative and technical capabilities. Under the devolution of power, the national government discharges its functions that can be performed by the local government institutions. It provides an opportunity for them to improve their performance relating to functions that cannot be performed by the

national government. Hence, “devolution is considered as an arrangement in which one finds reciprocal, mutually benefiting and coordinate relationships that exist between central and local governments”(Rondinelli, 1980: 138-139). Many countries with heterogeneous communities suffer heavily from the rising demand for sub-national or regional rights fueled by independent sentiments of ethnic and religious groups. Such countries, since the late 1980s, began to introduce devolution reforms by “... a power sharing arrangement through self-governance in order to harmonize differences among groups and regions in societies”(World Bank, 1997: 3).

### **The Theoretical Argument of Decentralization**

In spite of the fact that the contemporary argument on decentralization usually takes place in terms of means of governance, the theoretical foundation of decentralization comes from the idea of local governance.

The origin of the idea of decentralization dates back to the 17th century, to the works of philosophers such as Rousseau, Mill, Tocqueville, Montesquieu and Madison (Ebel and Yilmaz, 2001: 2). However, in recent times the idea has taken definite forms with the idea of local governments, pointed out by Musgrave and P. Samuelson who introduced the concept of fiscal federalism by bringing the new concept for the public finance in 1952. Tiebout (1956) premised his idea of local finance by extending federal finance further into the local level. His colleagues and followers such as Stigler (1957), Musgrave (1959), Oates (1972), Bird (1995), and later Harold Wolman (1996), subsequently extended this idea of Tiebout.

Tiebout (1956) presented a new model on local expenditure and finance, aiming to reach development achievements via local governance by the provision of public goods and services, “... apart from the central government apparatus”(Tiebout, 1956: 419). Tiebout’s idea of local governance (local finance) is to convince that the local governance system, rather than the central governing system, is able to provide public goods and services tailored to suit consumer preferences efficiently in heterogeneous societies (Tiebout, 1956: 447). He highlights the fact that faster information exchange becomes fruitful to resource allocation, contributing to increased efficiency in public goods and service provisions, and in the process of decision-making on resource allocation and mobilization. Since the centrally governed system gives priority to national requirements, the regional or personal preferences are not being prioritized. Apart from this, he points out the importance of the competition emerging among the local government institutions for winning the voters in their respective jurisdictions. This competition, for him, could also accelerate efficient provision of goods and services, fulfilling public preferences, minimizing corruption and resource wastage, while ensuring transparency in management, which is impossible to expect from a centrally controlled ruling unit (Tiebout, 1956: 419).

Oates (1972) highlights the importance of a consumer’s choice on common goods and services and stresses that this can be achieved successfully through a decentralized ruling mechanism. The close relationship between the authority and the people provides the base to supply goods and services at an optimum efficient level (Oates, 1972: 32).

Wolman (1996) emphasizes the ability of decentralized systems to improve the economic development process. According to him, efficiency, governance and distributive values generated by decentralized governance could lead to economic development by successful service provision. In this regard, by acknowledging the fundamental difference between private enterprises and public sector, he points out the political priority of the public welfare service provision of the public sector. Moreover, he identifies the

limitations of national governments to fulfill local needs while prioritizing national preferences (Wolman, 1996: 27). This often creates a gap between the taxpayers' expectations and the public services provided by the government. What Wolman reveals is that the maximum level of public welfare cannot be guaranteed by such a central governance approach. This can be sustained only by decentralized governance which identifies the different public interests and volume of public welfare needed to be provided on some occasions. Hence, only decentralized governance can improve efficiency of the public welfare service provision.

### **The Provincial Council System**

The thirteenth amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Council Act no. 42 of 1987 was passed by the Sri Lankan parliament on November 14, 1987. The province, as a unit of devolution, represents an upward shift from district to a regional level for locating governmental power in the country. It allows a comprehensive focus on devolution, with greater functional autonomy for democratically elected PCs to function autonomously. Legislative and executive powers are vested on a popularly elected PC consisting of elected members and the governor, who is appointed by the president. In addition, the procedural arrangement for the exercising the devolved powers are set out in the Provincial Councils Act No. 42 of 1987.

By introducing the PCs, decision-makers at the center intended to share legislative, executive and fiscal powers with the provinces which had earlier been concentrated at the center. As explained above, the PCs comprised, literally, the representatives of respective provinces, elected through PC elections. Those elections, conducted separately from the national parliamentary election, came under the provision of the Provincial Council Election Act No.32. Under the Provincial Council's Election Provisions, the number of representatives in each council varied depending on the population, area size and development status of each province. Taking the province as a single electorate, representatives are elected under the proportional representation and preferential voting system. Candidates who have obtained more preferential votes through their party nomination lists are elected as legitimate members of the council for a 5- year term (Provincial Council Election Act No.32, 1988).

As a result of the PCs reform, the provincial council became the democratic governance body which is entrusted with legislative and executive functions in the respective provinces. Its legislative function is conferred upon the democratically elected council members while executive functions are vested on the Chief Minister (CM), the board of Ministers, who are selected from the elected council members and the Governor who is appointed by the President of the country. Therefore, except the Governor, the composition of the PC is based on the elected council members. According to the PC Act, the leader of the party that gained the majority of votes is invited by the Governor to form a government with a Board of Ministers. The CM who is appointed by the Governor becomes the political head of the province and commands support from majority of the members of the Council. However, in practice, it has been become the tradition for the winning political party to nominate the CM. The functions and duties performed by the CM make him the Chief Executive of the province. He is the foremost among the provincial ministers and hence must oversee the process of executive functions in the provincial system. The Board of Ministers comprising not more than four other ministers shall collectively be responsible and answerable to the PC. It will be the CM's responsibility to ensure such collective responsibility. Ministers including the CM are assigned to the functional responsibility of specific subjects. The CM himself takes over important



ministries such as finance, planning, personnel, and provincial administration, which would enable him to exercise effective control over the vital functions at the Provincial administration. The other members of the Board of Ministers coordinate their functions with the Governor, helping CM to exercise his executive powers (Marasinghe, 2010: 15). The Governor must be kept informed of all decisions and information relating to the administration and the proposals for legislation. In performing their functions, the ministers must coordinate all matters with the national ministries since they have to comply with the policies of the central ministries too. The Board of Ministers is responsible for translating national policy into provincial programs, and thereby, they perform a crucial role in linking the province with the central government.

Apart from the CM, the Board of Ministers and the council members, the Governor has been assigned to key role in the functioning of PCs. The Governor is the head of the executive in respect of the subjects and functions transferred to a PC, and thus he functions as the head of the Provincial Executive (13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1987: 154c). The Governor is appointed by the President according to his discretion (13th Amendment to the Constitution, 1987: 154b-1). The functions assigned to the Governor, who is appointed for five-year tenure is to ensure that the devolved powers are exercised within the framework of the law.

### **Power-Sharing**

Subjects and functions assigned to PC comprise mainly matters of a regional concern and focus, bearing directly on the day-to-day life of people. According to the Provincial Council Act, the separation of subjects and functions between the central government and PC has been set out in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. There are “Lists” as the ‘List One’ (Provincial), the ‘List Two’ (Central Government) and the ‘List Three’ (concurrent). The List One delineates the exclusive domain of devolved authority; ‘List Two’ sets out areas reserved for the central government and it includes national policy on all subjects and functions; List Three or the Concurrent List comprises subjects shared between the PCs and the central government. Any subject or function not listed under the PC List or the concurrent List will come under the purview of the central government. In this context, it must be noted that the subjects and functions devolved to PC are only what have been expressly set out in List One or List Three. However, there is no clear demarcation in some of the subjects and functions as to who has the absolute power to carry them out (Egalehewa, 2010: 149). For instance, land powers are vested on the PCs. But, the central government too has the same powers. In such a context, ambiguity arises as to who will control which. In such cases, the central government can often impinge on the areas which come under the purview of the PCs. What this highlight is that, in demarcating the subjects and functions of a PC, specific attention has not been paid in maintaining distinct boundaries between the two.

PCs are vested with both legislative and executive powers (Provincial Council Act No. 42, 1987). The legislative powers are listed under the PC List (List One) and the concurrent List (List Three). By virtue of the power derived from the constitution, PC is empowered to make statutes on any matter set out in List One (Provincial List) such as local road development, or List Three, (Concurrent List) which consists of functions such as land, irrigation and agriculture which can be worked out by the provincial government and the central government. With respect to the functions in the List Three (Concurrent), though, PC is entitled to make laws, those can be passed, reviewed, or rejected by the central government. However, when a PC passes a law on a subject already entrusted to it, and if that subject does not comply with the central government’s provisions, it would then become incompatible with that Act. Therefore, such law becomes inoperative within the province till it becomes consistent with constitution. Laws passed by a PC have to

be approved by the Governor of the province before they are enforced. The developmental projects designed by PCs within their provisions become laws and they receive funds during a fiscal year from the provincial fund (13th Amendment to the Constitution, 1987: 154g-9).

The legislative power on responsibilities and functions of the PCs, however, are subject to certain conditions and limitations. In respect of subjects in the Concurrent List, for example, the Parliament has the power to review the legitimacy of the related matter. “Therefore, PCs are not fully autonomous as their powers and functions are subject to parliamentary review” (Selvakkumaran, 2010: 75). In this context, it is apparent that PCs require the Parliament’s sanction to enact laws relating to certain matters. For example, when a PC’s bill had been referred to the Attorney General (AG), it can be passed or rejected by a simple majority of the Parliament. However, if one or more PCs disagree, then it would need a two-third majority to pass such a bill (Provincial Council Act No.42, 1987: 15a).

As far as the executive power is concerned, the power is vested with PCs which constitute democratically elected members and the governor appointed by the president (Provincial Councils Act No 42, 1987: 154c). However, in reality, the right of exercising such executive powers lies solely with the Governor who exercises it in consultation with the CM of the Board of Ministers. The reason for such a powerful Governor is that he has the final authority to enact the laws created by the Board of Ministers. However, the Governor in the normal course of events shall exercise his functions in accordance with the advices of council’s executive (Board of Ministers) except in such instances where he is expected to act using his own discretion.

However, it is important to note that under specific circumstances, the PCs will cease to function, and their administration will be taken over by the central government. These specific circumstances are (1) when a PC becomes a threat to the national and public security, (2) failure of a PC to comply with directions given to the Governor or follow the constitution, and, (3) failure of the administrative machinery of a PC and /or in a situation of financial instability (Provincial Council Act, No.42, 1987: 16a).

### **Decentralization of Educational Service under Provincial Council’S Reform in Sri Lanka**

Many factors have contributed to shaping of the current education systems in many countries. In the case of Sri Lanka, the indigenous cultural traditions and values as well as colonial influence have tremendously affected the development of education throughout history. Historically, Sri Lanka is renowned for having a well-established traditional system of education in the Sinhala and Tamil areas in medieval era. When it comes into the western colonial era, the education system of the county underwent major changes according to the colonial authorities’ requirements.

However, the colonial pattern began to change in the 1930s after legislative reform placed the MOE under the control of elected indigenous representatives. The government directly controlled the schools and teacher training colleges. With the ascendance of the Sri Lankan political elite into the power structure, reforms were enacted to bring universal literacy in the 1940s. Education was made free for all students in government schools in 1945. Thus, by the time of Independence in 1948, Sri Lanka inherited a well-developed educational infrastructure compared with other nations in the region.

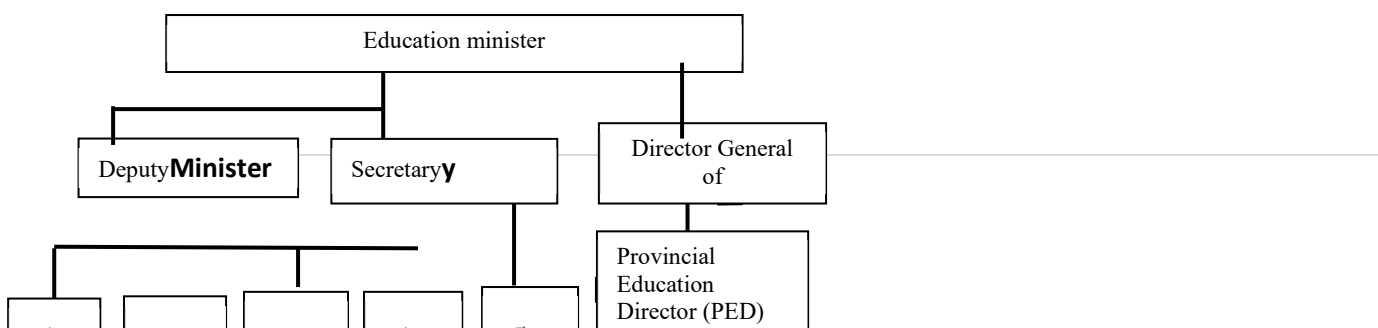
The post-independence governments have made education one of their highest priorities, and their policies have yielded excellent results. Within a period of less than 40 years, the number of schools in the country grew by 50%; the number of students has increased by more than 300%, and the number of teachers



increased by more than 400%. The literate population has grown correspondingly, and by the mid-1980s, it is officially acknowledged that over 90% of the population was literate (89% of them were above the age of ten years) with near universal literacy among the younger population (Ministry of Education, 2008). In this period, the Government has played even a larger role in education in 1972 by introducing a new education reform. These government efforts made in 1972, more or less, focused on the improvement of physical infrastructure and facilities, teaching staff and the improvement of school administration. Along with the public schools, there were also private schools functioning in the field of education. Since the beginning of 1980s, there has been a considerable increase in the number of private schools in the country. These private schools follow the local curriculum formulated by the MOE in all three mediums, namely Sinhala, Tamil and English.

Sri Lanka's current education system rests mainly on the reform introduced in 1976. Since then, no drastic changes have been made in the overall education system, although there have been changes in the education administration under the PCs reform in 1987. As shown in Chart 4.1, the formal education structure is divided into five levels: primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, collegiate, and tertiary. The primary education lasts five years (grade 1-5) and at the end of that period, the students sit for a national scholarship examination. This examination allows students with higher marks to move to leading schools in any area. After primary education, the junior secondary level lasts for 4 years (grade 6-9), followed by 2 years (grade 10-11) at the senior secondary level, which is the preparatory level for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) at the Ordinary Level (O/L). By law, it is mandatory for all children to attend school up to grade nine (age 14). Students pursuing tertiary education must pass the GCE O/L to enter the collegiate level. After a two-year study period (grade 12-13), they have to sit for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A/L). On the successful completion of this examination, students can move on to the tertiary education level (Ministry of Education, 2006). Students who obtain higher marks (the University Grants Commission determines cut off marks) are admitted to public universities. Currently, Sri Lanka has 16 public universities, all of which offer undergraduate courses while a few of them offer postgraduate courses as well. Until the introduction of the Provincial Council Act in 1987, education system in the country remained under the central government's MOE. At the time of the PCs reform, the MOE headed by the minister and assisted by the deputy minister was responsible to the masses to provide quality education for 5 million students who studied in 9,000 schools under 200,000 teachers all over the country (Annual Report, Ministry of Education, 1988). The administrative hierarchy consisting of the Secretary at the top, followed by the Deputy and Additional Secretaries of education, was responsible for the quality, access to and efficiency of the education system in the country. The Department of Education (DE), headed by the Director General of Education (DGE) under the MOE was solely responsible for education planning, implementation and management in the entire country. The role of the MOE was in advisory capacity, and it provided the necessary guidance to the DE.

**Figure 1: Educational Administrations under the Central Government**



Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Education, 2010

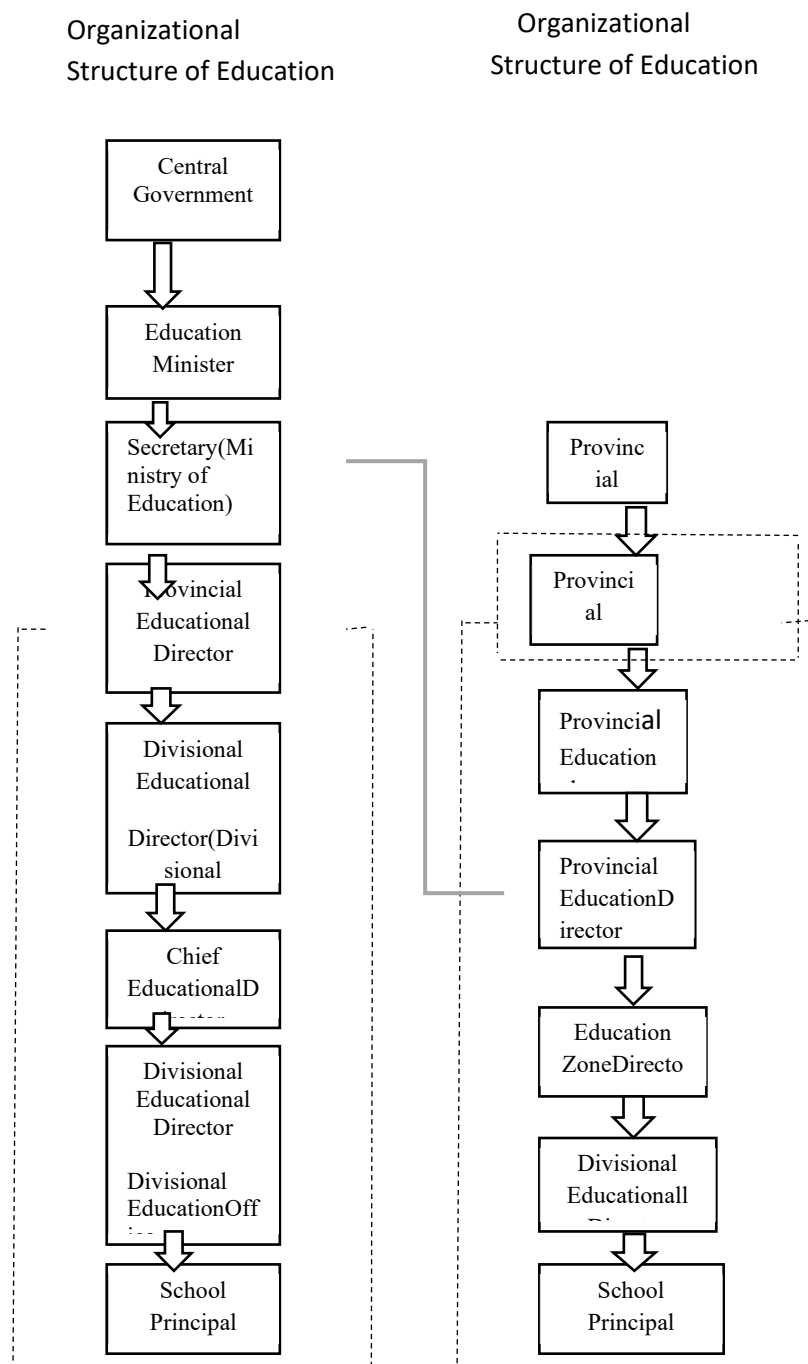
The secretary of education who becomes the Head of the administrative hierarchy is responsible to the minister for policy implementation in education. Several additional secretaries who are responsible for different sections in education sector assist him. In order to execute its functions properly, the MOE established a DE, which is solely responsible to the Education Minister through the secretary of education. The DE, headed by the DGE is located in Colombo. The structure of the DE consists of Provincial Director of Education (PED) for each of the provinces, Chief Education Directors for sub-provincial level, and Divisional Director of Educational (DDE) to serve at the divisional level.

### **Changes in Educational Administration**

As discussed earlier, with PCs reform, education was brought under the central government and Provincial Councils. However, the responsibility of administration of national schools remains under the Education Department. The PC was vested with the power to provide facilities and management including recruitment of teachers for provincial schools to facilitate public service. The PCs, which consisted of democratically elected members and led by chief ministers and governors, became responsible governance bodies in the realm of education in each province. The CM who generally becomes the Education Minister in his ex-officio capacity is responsible for

Overseeing the councils' functions in this area. Likewise, a national level PDE that is solely responsible to the provincial Education Minister through the provincial secretary of education was established in each province

Figure 2: Governance Changes in Education



Source: Annual Report, Department of Education in Sri Lanka, 2010

The provincial education secretary is the Head of the provincial education administration, and the Provincial Department of Education (PDoE) headed by the Provincial Director of Education carries out the functions at the provincial level. It reflects the functions and statutes pertaining to education of the National Education

Department. As in the previous state-centered system, the provincial administration in education is further delegated through Educational Zonal office at the district level under Zonal Directors, and the Divisional office at the divisional level under the Divisional Directors. With the introduction of these changes, the Divisional Directors in educational divisions and Zone Education Directors in education zones assumed the position of administrative authorities who are responsible for implementing of human and physical resources management at relevant levels. According to these changes, however, the final decision-making authority with regard to provincial education development became a responsibility of the PDoE, which functioned in the capital cities, namely Colombo and Kurunegala in WP, and NWP respectively. Thus, the management of education, previously looked after by the DE in the central ministry became the responsibility of the PDoEs in the provinces. However, the formulation of national education policies, regulation of PDoE and improving the quality of provincial education remained a responsibility of the central government. In order to facilitate these, a vertical relation between secretary of the MOE and the PDEs has been established through legal provisions.

Apart from those institutional changes resulting from the PCs reform, it has also created parallel education administration systems in the country. As far as central and provincial education system are concerned, DDE in Divisional Education Office, as the Head of the administration at Divisional level is now functioning at a lower level in the hierarchy. These directors are responsible for the administration of the national schools as well as provincial schools simultaneously and both these government authorities guide them. Similar to the lower level, PDEs at provincial level are responsible for educational administration acting under the guidance of the provincial education secretary and the education director in central DE.

### **Impact of the PCs Reform on Enhancing Efficiency of the Educational Service Provision**

In the literature, evaluation of the impact of decentralization reforms has been conducted by using various criteria in empirical studies (Wollar and Philip, 1998; Bardhan, 2002). In this study, evaluation of the impact of the PCs to improve education services is measured in terms of the change in students' performances at the General Examination of Certificate Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) and the Gross Graduate Teacher/ Pupil Ratio (GGTPR). In addition, people's perceptions and policy-makers' and policy implementers' views have been collected by a survey and interviews conducted in the WP and NWPs.

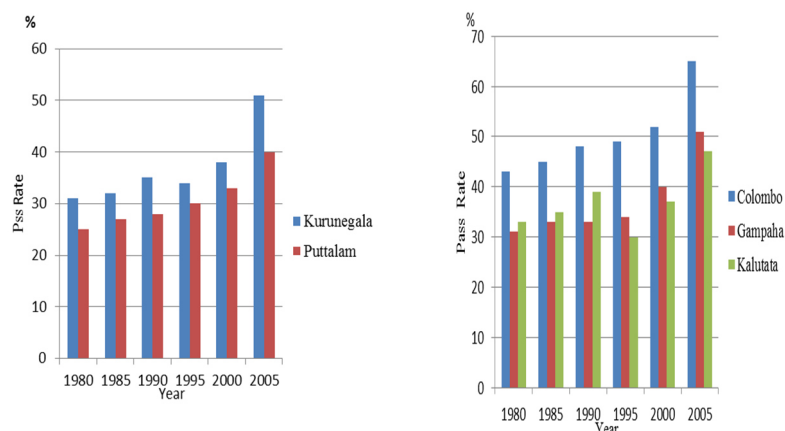
The education standard of pupils is determined by several factors. Among them, the quality of the input is identified as decisive. Efficient and effective education management, which is considered as an important input, plays a key role for achieving the educational development goals. Figure 3 illustrates the students' performance in both pre-and post-reform periods. Since any government reform requires some time to take effect, the percentage of students passing G.C.E. O/L in 1990 may still be taken to reflect the performances of the pre-reform state-centered education system. The figures after it would be interpreted as showing the result of the devolved education system both in the WP and in NWPs.

Figure 3 compare the changes of student performances in G.C.E. O/L examinations from 1980 to 2005 in the districts of the Western (Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara) and the North Western (Kurunegala and Puttalam) provinces respectively. The percentages of those passing the examination mark an upward trend, except in Kalutara district, in the WP until 2000. Nevertheless, from the statistics shown in the charts, it is hard to identify significant improvement in the rates of passing examination during the period 1990-2000 in both provinces while there is an increase in the rate from 2000.

However, it cannot be argued that the percentage has increased due to the contribution of the PCs reform. It seems that the improvement of the student performances has been affected also by some other factors such as the increasing encouragement received from parents and the expansion of opportunities for education. The encouragement by parents regarding their children's education is attributed to the social and economic changes that had taken place in the Sri Lankan society in the recent past.

**Figure 3: Students' Performance in G.C.E. O/L Examinations in the WP/NWP (District-Wise)**

**(b.) North Western Province (a.) Western Province**



Data Source: Annual Reports, Provincial Education Departments in WP and NWP, 1980 -2005

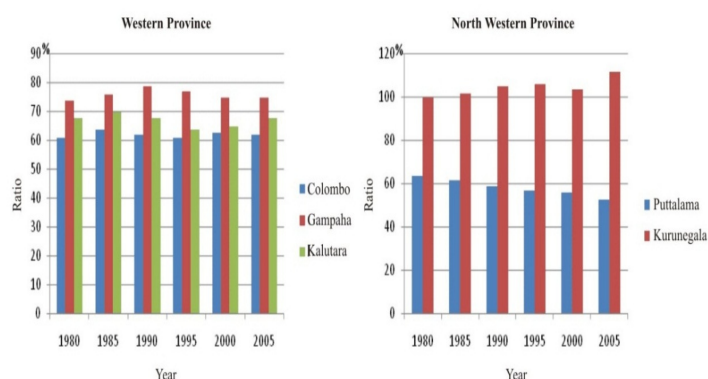
As a direct result of the structural changes in economy since 1977, both the opportunities and the competitiveness in socio-economic spheres increased simultaneously. The increasing competition in the open market economy also affected the education system of the country (Arunathileke, 2000). In order to grasp the opportunities of the open economy, high education qualification became crucial. Thus, notwithstanding their economic hardships, the parents of almost all the children in the country show a keen interest in sending their children to evening and weekend tuition classes in anticipation of high result at G.C.E. O/L and A/L examinations. Parents tend to show such a great dedication as they foresee that the higher education is the only possible means to make their families' future bright and to secure their socio-economic status. Consequently, during the past few decades, one could perceive significant achievements in respect of education and better pupils' performances in the relevant examinations. The argument that the increase in examination pass-rates from the year 2000 onwards is due to PC reform may be too premature. Many high profilebureaucrats such as Additional Director in Administration in planning division of PDoE in the NWP and former Provincial Commissioner of the country also support this argument. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain whether the contribution of PCs reform on education development in both WP and NWP has contributed anything significant.

The GTPR, which stands for the proportion of teachers in relation to the number of students, is one of the indicators widely used in studies for measuring education development in international contexts. However, the use of the GTPR as an indicator to measure the availability and or deficiency of teachers is inefficient in the Sri Lankan contexts (Arunatilake, 2000:23). The reason for such a supposition is that it would not

indicate the actual situation of teachers' presence in the schools. Due to the increasing popularity of some urban-based schools, parents are making every possible effort to send their children to those schools. Consequently, the number of students in the classroom and the number of classes for each grade are multiplying in these schools, thus leading to a higher rate of the GTPR in urban schools. On the other hand, rural schools, which are marginalized by the authorities as well as parents project a low GTPR ratio as the number of students in classes as well as the classes meant for each grade, are numerically small. The low GTPR in those schools does not indicate that those schools are well facilitated or developed by the authorities. Therefore, arriving at such a conclusion based on this indicator is misleading.

- In order to rationalize the evaluation, therefore, this study uses the changes in the GGTPR. The justification of this selection is the fundamental requirement of human resources at Advanced Level (collegiate level) education in schools. All schools, which have Advanced Level classes, require graduate teachers to cover the curriculum properly. It is a responsibility of the related authorities to provide an adequate number of graduate teachers for relevant subjects in relevant schools. Therefore, one of the measures to see actual educational management is the GGTPR in schools located in the peripheral areas of the province during pre-and post-reform period (Arunatilake, 2004:12).

**Figure 4: Changes in Gross Graduated Teacher-Pupil Ratio (1980-2005)**



Data Sources: Educational Senses Reports, Education Departments in Western and North-Western Provinces, 1980-2005

Figure 4 shows the changing GGTPR in the five districts in the WP and NWP from 1980 to 2005. As illustrated in the chart, the GGTPR during this period does not indicate any significant improvements in both provinces. For instance, except Kurunegala district in the NWP which showed a gradual decline from 60 to 58 which means slight improvement, all the other districts do not indicate any apparent changes during the study period. However, figures of Puttalam district show a relatively higher ratio, starting at a ratio of 99 in 1980 and ending at 105 in 2005. Therefore, the devolving education to PC did not result in any noteworthy improvement in students test performances or in graduated teachers–pupil ratio in at least in these two provinces.



Apart from the statistical analysis of government sources, the responses of the beneficiaries who personally consume the public goods on related services are also important in an evaluation of service provisions. The data collected from the questionnaire survey produces some evidence relating to the impact of reform to education. Regarding the effect of PCs on development of local education service provision, a majority (68%) of responses indicates the beneficiary's dissatisfaction with the educational service provisions of the respective PCs. Therefore, it can be argued that PCs reform did not contribute significantly to the improvement of the management, human and physical infrastructure facilities of local education.

**Table 1: Reasons for Dissatisfaction on Educational Service**

S/N	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of required physical infrastructure (building/labs/computer-center/library, etc.	54	12
2	Insufficient trained and qualified teaching staff (human resource)	18	04
3	Political influence over the management	45	10
4	Distance and jeopardized relationship between teachers and parents of the students	27	06
5	Inefficient management of the school	36	08
6	Inefficient and ineffective administrative process of education	270	60
7	Total respondents	450	100

Source: Author's field survey, July 12th -28th, 2009

When we consider the reasons for such insignificant contribution, it is evident that some of the institutional and procedural changes introduced by the reform have hindered the development of the local education service provision in respective provinces. This impediment can be observed in different ways. According to the beneficiaries' perceptions on their dissatisfaction as shown in Table 4.5, the failure of the reform can be attributed to the inefficacy in providing necessary facilities as well as ineffective administration of the

education. Nevertheless, some of the experienced and influential personnel in the education sector have diagnosed defective designing of the reform itself as the reason for this situation.

Particularly, due to the defects of the reform, PCs have not been able to provide necessary resources for the education sector as well as to form an effective and efficient management system. For instance, the inability to recruit adequate number of teachers for schools, insufficient physical resources such as buildings, labs and libraries point to the resource constraint in the implementation of development projects in education. The main claim is that, apart from the financial constraints, which result in lack of physical, and human resources, lack of political directions and an inefficient and ineffective education management has resulted in the failure to improve the provincial education

### **Effectiveness of the Educational Service Provisions**

The availability of teachers is an integral part of the effective education service provision in any context. Securing appropriate human resource which is a vital factor to distribute equal educational opportunities among the regions is a responsibility of the central as well as the local government in a decentralized system.

**Table 2: Change in Teachers' Deficiency and Surpluses in the WP and NWP (1980 -2008)**

Province	Type	North Western Province			Western Province		
		Deficien	Surpl	No. of	Deficien		No. of
2008		420	2,454	28,321	138	2,234	45,621
2006		316	2,445	28,345	124	2,301	45,623
2004		1,998	0	25,687	108	372	42,673
2002		2,056	0	25,638	167	365	42,575
2000		2,184	0	25,079	190	380	42,829
1998		2,383	0	25,074	199	387	41,898
1996		2,355	0	24,713	256	356	41,860
1990		N/A	N/A	24,115	N/A	N/A	42,568
1985		N/A	N/A	18,907	N/A	N/A	38,278
1980		N/A	N/A	18,039	N/A	N/A	35,393

Data Source: Education Department and Provincial Education Departments in Western and North-Western Provinces, 1980-2008

Table 2 illustrates the statistics on teachers' deficiency and surplus in provincial schools in the two selected provinces from 1980 to 2008. Even though the data for deficiencies and surpluses were unavailable before 1996, the existing data exposes the teachers' deficiency and surplus in both provinces. Significantly, the deficiency numbered more than 2000 in NWP most of the study period, while the WP has recorded an average deficiency of around 200 (teachers) until 2004. At the same time, when the surplus in the NWP was zero, the WP has recorded an average surplus of 360 until 2004. The surplus increases after 2006 in both provinces due to the recruitment of many graduates to the teaching service by a national policy to provide jobs for the unemployed graduates of the country. As a result of this central government policy to recruit graduate teachers for the provincial schools, these PCs had to take the responsibility of paying them despite their financial constraints. These recruitments were done with underlying political motives (Lankadeepa, March 24th, 2008).

However, before this politically motivated recruitment, the WP had recorded a relatively low teachers' deficiency while recording more than 350 teachers' surpluses whereas the NWP recording a significant number of teacher's deficiency. Therefore, what this situation indicates is that both PCs have mismanaged their human resources, which has directly led to an ineffective service provision in the education sector.

Apart from the quantitative evidence revealing the ineffective service provisions in education, some observations of the respondents support the argument that the present educational service management is ineffective as compared with the pre-reform system. A number of reasons have contributed to such a situation. First, political interventions in positioning the educational administrative personnel rendered the system fragile by wrecking the human and physical resource mobilization of the provincee. The mismanagement of the educational service at divisional and zone levels have been widespread in the post-reform period. Particularly, promoting of lower level directors such as zone and divisional directors often takes place to satisfy the political supporters of the ruling parties. According to the views of the Deputy Director in Education Administration in Planning Division in the NWP, and retired school principal in NWP, the majority of divisional directors in particular, are, allegedly, truly political activists or pro-government trade union leaders who support their parties on all policy matters. In addition, several instances of unethical conducts of unqualified officers are pointed out by an opposition leader, a member of the JVP in the NWP. Some national and electronic media also substantiate this argument. The reasons for these malpractices are attributed to ineffective and inefficient management for which incompetence is responsible. This ineffectiveness in the management of the education sector can be identified as a negative impact of the PC reform in WP and NWP because such mismanagement due to political interferences could not be seen under the national education service

### **Equitable Service Provisions**

As indicated in the literature review, there are both positive and negative impacts of the decentralization reform on development with respect to service-provisions (Herath, 2009:4). There is a possibility of deepening the disparity of service-provision, instead of securing equity. In order to measure the impacts of PCs reform in securing equity, the GGTPR, which was used as criti in the previous section, and the availability of resources in education and road development sectors are used as indicators in this section.

Table 3 illustrates the changes in GGTPR in the schools in the five districts in the pre-and post- PC reform period (1980-2005) in WP and NWP. Puttalama district in the NWP claims the highest GGTPR while Colombo district in the WP claims the lowest. Colombo district, which starts at 61 in 1980, shows some fluctuation within this period. Puttalam district, which maintained the all-time highest rates show a negative trend from the pre-reform (1980-2005) to post-reform periods. These statistics also show that there is not only disparity between the two provinces, but also among districts in the ratio of graduated teachers. Therefore, the main revelation from the statistics is that the PC reform which was introduced to secure equitable access to education service to people in different regions has not actually produced a significant impact in both WP and NWP.

	Year
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District	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
Colombo (WP)	61	64	62	61	63	65
Gampaha (WP)	74	76	79	77	75	75
Kalutara (WP)	68	70	68	64	65	68
Kurunegala (NWP)	64	62	59	57	56	53
Puttalama (NWP)	100	102	105	106	104	112

**Table 3: Changes in Gross Graduated Teacher-Pupil Ratio in the Districts of WP and NWP (1980-2005)**

Data Source: Education Census Report, Education Department and Provincial Educational Departments in Western and North Western Provinces, 1980-2005.

## Discussion of Results

Decentralization reform in Sri Lankan education sector has culminated in shortage of physical infrastructures required for the development of education in the country. As national population grows with time, increase in number of schools to accommodate the growing number of school going aged children has been minimal. In addition to the fact that new schools are not coming up, existing ones' bear faded features which are demonstration of poor management and funding of the sector in the country. In some of the existing schools, laboratories for science and technology practical are insufficient while some schools do not even have laboratories but teach science only in theory. Computer centers in some of the schools have no systems for students' usage while in some schools, the number of available ones are not sufficient for the students. And in some, there are no computer centers. Library facilities are inadequate in some of the schools. And in others, the book shelves are filled with outdated books which do not provide current ideas and data needed to address the present day societal problem and requirements.

Human resource required for the development of education in Sri Lanka has also been affected by the decentralization policy and reform in the education sector. The number of qualified and trained teaching staff is inadequate for the available schools in the country as some of the qualified ones are drifting from teaching to other professions in which condition of service is more lucrative. The decentralization reform also made the education sector vulnerable to political penetration. And the politicization of the sector as allowed by the decentralization reform thus, resulted in the political influence over the management of education in Sri Lanka. This is in addition to the distance created by the reform between teachers and parents of students. Parents, Teachers Association (PTA) had ceased to exist in some schools on the Island due to the fermentation of friendship between the duo caused by the decentralization reform.

Although, new schools are not being established due to the decentralization policy and reform in Sri Lanka's education sector but then, the existing established ones are also suffering from under funding and inefficient management. Shortage of classroom demonstrated by over crowdedness of available ones as well as inadequate teaching facilities and aids portrayed inefficient management schools in Sri Lanka are suffering from. And structure wise, some of the schools are experiencing rustication with minimal efforts toward

renovation. These all translated in inefficient and ineffective planning and administration of education process in Sri Lanka courtesy of the decentralization policy and reform in the country's education sector.

### **Major Findings**

The study found that the impacts of decentralization on local education development in Sri Lanka include:

1. Rusticating infrastructures in the education sector without new ones emerging as replacements and substitutes.
2. Shortage of qualified and trained teachers in some schools.
3. Politicization of management of education.
4. Fermentation of relationship between teachers and parents of students against the old custom of cordial friendship between the duos.
5. Under funding and poor management of schools.
6. Inefficient and ineffective planning and administrative process of education.

### **Conclusion and Policy Suggestion**

This study arrived at three main conclusions based on the findings of the study. First, the present study has shown that the PCs reform is significant as it established a second-tier governance body in Sri Lanka for the first time in the modern history. As observed in the conventional theories, (Livack, Junaid, and Bird, 1998: 2), decentralization reform has brought the governance to the sub-national level. The democratically elected PCs have been entrusted with power guaranteed by the constitution. One can see that the newly established PED reflect the administrative and structural changes in education sector which replaced the state-centered bureaucratic hierarchy. Further, the establishment of the FC as well as the Provincial Courts reflected institutionalization of new procedures for the transfer of financial authority from the center to the provinces, and structural changes in the judicial system in the country respectively. These tangible changes lead one to conclude that the PCs reform has brought new structural changes in governance, and procedural changes in educational service provisions.

Second, the study concluded that the normative argument of Tiebout, the advocate of decentralization concept who argued for an improvement of performances of the local service provision (Tiebout, 1956: 47) does not apply across the board. This conclusion is verified by the insignificant improvement of performance-indicators of the proxy functions such as student performance at the G.C.E. O/L examination and the gross teacher-pupil ratio in the pre-and post-reform periods in WP and the NWP.

The third conclusion of the study was that the PCs reform has affected the education service provisions in different ways. The creation of a healthy atmosphere for introduce innovative such as new curriculum fit to the local needs in education can be cited as another positive impact of the reform.

As for the negative impacts of the PCs reform, the study found that PC reform has aggravated the disparity and ineffectiveness service provision. As far as disparities in development are concerned, contrary to the theorization of decentralization as the key to a balanced regional development, its operation in Sri Lanka raises questions on those standpoints due to the persistent inter and intra-provincial disparities in the country. For example, it could be mostly observable that there is a disproportionate distribution of the educational service provisions in the provinces. The criteria used for this study, GTPR and teacher's deficiency and surplus, showed the prevailing inter-and intra-provincial disparity among the districts and provinces in the education service sector.



The impact of decentralization reform on development is determined by different factors under different contexts. Lack of resources, poor coordination, legal constraints, incompetence of PC management and the domination of the central government are found to be the major drawbacks of this system. Lack of political commitment on the part of national and local level politicians in the decentralization of power and responsibilities was identified as another negative factor. Another drawback was the inappropriate designing of the reform itself to which other defects can also be attributed. Based on these facts and findings, the present study concluded that decentralization reform, as a means of developmental governance, did not make the desired impact on educational development. It also concluded that the nature of the impact of a reform was mainly determined by the design of the reform itself and the contextual factors.

However, we cannot have criticized the decentralization reform in totality. In as much as it has its defects, the reform also has its positive effect which is the healthy environment for educational development it has created in Sri Lanka. But then, its negative impacts as found in this study surpassed its advantages. Therefore, it cannot be condemned as a whole. And owing to this fact, this study suggested that, state and non-state actors as well as policy experts in Sri Lanka education sector and system come together, rob minds and review the decentralization reform and policy with a view to adjust those part of the reform that impact negatively on the development of local education in the country

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