

13-Year Guaranteed Education Programme: Implementation Status in Tamil Medium Schools

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ABSTRACT

The 13-Year Guaranteed Education Scheme was introduced in Sri Lankan schools in 2017 to enhance vocational education. Recently, however, student enrollment in the scheme has declined. Consequently, this study was conducted across nine Tamil-medium schools in the Colombo Central Education Zone to evaluate resource adequacy, student and community engagement, and the effectiveness of school management strategies. This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive research design. The sample consisted of 72 participants: 18 principals and vice-principals, 18 teachers, and 36 students. Participants were selected using simple random sampling, stratified by school, gender, and region. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documents were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. This study indicates that the building, teaching, and technological resources as well as learning equipment and social support necessary for implementation are currently insufficient ($M = 1.5 - 3.4$). Conversely, variables regarding student school attendance and truancy remain high ($M = 3.5 - 5.4$). Active student engagement, including willing participation, project completion, collaboration, and effective communication with teachers, was found to be low ($M = 1.5 - 3.4$). Furthermore, there is minimal involvement from the broader community, including parents, alumni, social organizations, and political entities. The study reveals that despite various measures taken by school management, implementation is hindered by inadequate cooperation from students, parents, alumni, and education officials.

Keywords: 13-year education guarantee Programme, vocational education, Tamil language schools, Students.

INTRODUCTION

Education the foundation for a nation's sustainable economic, social, and cultural development is broadly categorized into formal and vocational sectors. Vocational education specifically aims to prepare individuals for technical or craft-based roles through specialized training (UNESCO, 2015). This approach is supported by Human Capital Theory, which posits that investing in an individual's knowledge and skills directly fuels national economic growth (Schultz, 1961). On a global scale, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4.3) underscores the necessity of ensuring equitable access to high-quality technical and vocational education for all (UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, the strategic importance of vocational training has become a primary focus of modern educational policy. Technical education is very essential in today's modern world. The global economy depends on various sectors based on science and technology. Therefore, students should be prepared to face global challenges in a manner that is compatible with modern technology. To reduce the youth unemployment rate, there is a need to create youth who can face challenges with technology and appropriate soft skills (Sivananthan et al., 2024).

While vocational skills develop in various ways, the school system is regarded as the primary platform for fostering these skills in students (Carruthers & Jepsen, 2020). Consequently, school curricula are periodically updated to better foster vocational skills among students. In alignment with these goals, Sri Lanka's school system introduced the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme in 2017. This initiative established a vocational stream as a sixth subject category within the G.C.E. Advanced Level curriculum. Each year, an average of 25%–30% of students drop out of school without successfully completing the G.C.E. Ordinary Level examination. In response to these figures, the program was designed to mandate 13 years of schooling for all

students (Harsha, 2019). This initiative is regarded as a visionary project, designed to prepare youth for active participation in production and creativity within a knowledge-based economy (Perera, 2018). This program is currently implemented in nine Tamil-medium schools within the Colombo Central Education Zone. Within this zone, 10% of students who do not pass the G.C.E. Ordinary Level Examination participate in the program. However, 7% of these participants drop out after completing their schooling, declining the opportunity to enroll in a vocational training institution (Robert, 2017). Consequently, this study was conducted in this background.

Research Objectives

- To assess the adequacy of resources provided for the implementation of the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme at the school level.
- To evaluate the level of student engagement within the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme.
- To examine community involvement and support in the execution of the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme.
- To identify the strategic measures taken by school management to ensure the effective implementation of the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Human Capital Theory, and Social Capital Theory. Students are often unable to persist in the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme due to insufficient guidance, inadequate family support, and prevailing economic constraints (Gunawardena, 2019). Furthermore, a shortage of adequately qualified teachers has hindered the effective implementation of the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme (Silva, 2022).

Due to the contributions that technology makes to human life and the development of global socio-economic relations, it has become a global necessity (Wedikandage, & Zahir, 2024). Similarly, a study by Anuradha (2019) identified economic challenges and a lack of parental support as the primary drivers of student attrition within the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme. Due to a lack of guidance at the school level and a low level of parental value placed on vocational training, some students are unable to pursue this program (Fernando, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design within a mixed-methods approach. The research was conducted across nine Tamil-medium schools implementing the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme in the Colombo Central Education Zone. The study's sample comprised 72 participants, including 18 principals and vice-principals, 18 teachers involved in the 13 Years Guaranteed Education Programme, and 36 students. The students were randomly selected and stratified by school, gender, and geographical area. The data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary evidence were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires (Likert scale: 5-very high, 4-high, 3-low, 2-very low, 1-not at all) were analyzed on an average basis. These results, combined with qualitative interview data, underwent thematic analysis and are organized below by objective.

Adequacy of Resources for the Implementation of the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Programme at the School Level

Resource adequacy for the 13-year guaranteed education program was measured across six variables: building, teaching, learning, financial, technological, and social resources. The resulting data were analyzed and are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Resource Adequacy

Variable	Responses of the participants		
	Principal (Mean)	Teachers (Mean)	Students (Mean)
Building Resources	2.2	3.3	3.4
Teacher Resources	3.3	3.2	3.2
Learning Equipment	2.8	3.2	3.3
Financial Resources	3.6	3.5	—
Technological Resources	1.7	1.9	2.2
Social Resources	2.9	3.4	—

According to Table 1, the means (M) of principal, teacher, and student perceptions regarding the adequacy of building resources (V1), faculty resources (V2), and learning equipment (V3) fall within the range of 2.5–3.4. Similarly, the means (M) of principal and teacher perceptions regarding the adequacy of social resources (V6) fall within the range of 2.5–3.4. Therefore, variables V-1, V-2, V-3, and V-6 demonstrated a low level on the Likert scale. The means (M) of principal, teacher, and student perceptions regarding the adequacy of technological resources (V-5) fall within the range of 1.5–2.4. This indicates a very low level on the Likert scale. However, the mean (M) of the principals' and teachers' perceptions regarding the adequacy of financial resources (V4) falls within the range of 3.5 – 4.4. This indicates a high level of agreement on the Likert scale. Therefore, the data reveal that, with the exception of financial resources, all categories—including building, teaching, equipment, technological, and social resources—are insufficient for the implementation of the 13-year guaranteed education program.

Student Engagement in the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Programme

To determine student engagement in the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Project, data were analyzed across eight variables: school attendance irregularity, truancy, willingness to participate in activities, engagement in procedural exercises, timely completion of activities, project accuracy, collaboration with peers, and effective communication with the teacher. These results are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Student Engagement

Variable	Average of responses	
	Principal (Mean)	Teachers (Mean)
School attendance irregularity	4.6	4.7
Dropout	4.3	4.2
Willingness to participate in activities	2.9	3.1

Willingness to engage in procedural exercises	3.5	3.7
Timely completion of activities	1.8	1.6
Proper completion of projects	2.7	2.8
Collaborative work with other students	3.3	3.4

According to Table 2, the mean (M) scores of the principals and teachers for students’ school attendance irregularity (V1) and student deviance (V2) fall within the range of 3.5–5.4. Therefore, variables V1 and V2 indicate a high level on the Likert scale. Similarly, (V4) willingness to engage in practical exercises shows a high level of agreement. However, the mean scores of the principal and teachers for (V3) willing participation in activities, (V6) project completion, (V7) collaborative work, and (V8) effective communication fall within the range of 2.5–3.4. This represents a moderate to low level on the Likert scale. Similarly, the mean (M) score for the Timely Completion of Activities (V7) falls within the range of 1.5–2.4, indicating a very low level on the Likert scale. Therefore, the high levels of student absenteeism and dropout rates indicate that students are less engaged with the 13-year guaranteed education program. Similarly, low scores in willing participation in activities, appropriate project completion, collaborative work with peers, and effective communication with teachers indicate that students are less engaged in the 13-year guaranteed education program. Based on these findings, it appears that student engagement with the 13-year guaranteed education program is low, with the notable exception of their willingness to participate in practical exercises.

Community Engagement with the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Programme

To determine community engagement with the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Scheme, data obtained from measuring and analyzing five variables—parental support, alumni support, support from community organizations, media participation, and political support—are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Community Involvement

Variable	Average of responses		
	Principal (Mean)	Teachers (Mean)	Students (Mean)
Parental support	3.2	3.1	3.2
Alumni support	2.7	2.9	2.6
Community organization support	3.4	2.7	-
Media support	3.6	3.5	-
Political support	2.7	2.9	-

According to Table 3, the mean scores (M) for parental support (V1), alumni support (V2), support from social organizations (V3), and political support (V5) fall within the range of 2.5–3.4. Consequently, variables V1, V2, V3, and V5 indicate a low level on the Likert scale. However, the mean scores (M) of the principals' and teachers' perceptions regarding media involvement (V4) fall within the range of 3.5–4.4, indicating a high level on the Likert scale. Therefore, while media participation (V4) shows a higher level of involvement, parental support (V1), alumni support (V2), community organization support (V3), and political support (V5) were found to be low. This indicates that overall community engagement with the 13-year guaranteed education program remains limited.

Measures Taken by School Management to Effectively Implement the 13-Year Guaranteed Education Programme

The results of the thematic analysis of the interview data obtained from principals, concerning management strategies for the effective implementation of the 13-year guaranteed education program, are presented below.

- Although awareness campaigns regarding the 13-year guaranteed education program have been conducted among students, their actual engagement with the scheme remains low.
- Despite the clarifications provided to parents and alumni regarding the 13-year guaranteed education program, their involvement and cooperation with the scheme remain notably low.
- There is a deficiency of appropriate infrastructure and equipment necessary for the effective implementation of the 13-year guaranteed education program.
- There is a shortage of qualified teachers required to effectively implement the 13-year guaranteed education program."
- There is insufficient coordination from regional and provincial education authorities, which hinders the effective implementation of the 13-year guaranteed education program."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In addition to financial constraints, resources for implementing the 13-year education guarantee programme—including infrastructure, teaching materials, technological tools, and social support—were found to be insufficient ($M = 1.5 - 3.4$). Similarly, the levels of student truancy and irregular school attendance were found to be high ($M = 3.5 - 5.0$). Findings indicate that student engagement in the 13-year Guaranteed Education programme is low ($M = 1.5 - 3.4$). Specifically, students showed low levels of participating willingly in activities, completing projects appropriately, working collaboratively with peers, and communicating effectively with teachers. Similarly, community involvement in the 13-year Guaranteed Education programme is low ($M = 1.5 - 3.4$), characterized by a lack of engagement from parents, alumni, social organizations, and political entities. Furthermore, this study found that despite the various steps taken by school management to implement the project, cooperation from students, parents, alumni, and education official's remains insufficient. The results of this study are consistent with those of Kantharuban and Sritharan (2023), who found that a lack of physical resources in Tamil-medium schools impacted the effective implementation of the 13-year Guaranteed Education programme. Furthermore, Silva (2022) found that a lack of adequately qualified teachers has contributed to waning student trust in the 13-year Guaranteed Education programme, a finding consistent with the conclusions of this study.

Solution Suggestions

Specific funds should be allocated annually, and their use should be monitored transparently. A building and laboratories with modern facilities for vocational education courses should be constructed. New, industry-specific equipment needed for teaching should be purchased immediately. Qualified, experienced, and permanent teachers should be appointed for vocational education, with continuous training provided to enhance their technical skills. Furthermore, the management team should be trained to manage school-level resources efficiently and effectively. The curriculum should be reviewed and adapted to suit both students' interests and the needs of the job market. Additionally, compulsory career guidance and counseling should be provided to students joining the program. As Sivananathan (2021) mentioned, parents should systematically discuss with students about their learning problems, their academic progress, and other educational needs.

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