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STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SECTOR IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE – SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Education and Employment can be clearly identified as prominent factors of socio-economic development of a nation. The importance of the relationship between Education and Employment can be scientifically expressed in terms of interdependency behavior and the consistency of economic, technical, political and cultural parameters. The vital skills and attitudes of employees for the operational excellence in their respective organizations are highly dependent upon educational qualifications and experience in their relevant fields. This paper describes the importance and the necessity of provincial development through the factors of Education and Employment. Further, statistics and related government policies are examined to investigate the influence and the effect of the linkage between prominent factors towards sustainable development in Southern Province, Sri Lanka. In addition, the importance and the background quality of proper education for the development of socio-economic development of people have been emphasized. Analysis has been done to validate the correlation between the Education and Employment, based on statistical data sets and recommendations that have been prompted by government authorities and provincial industries, in order to reduce the unemployment rate. The implementation challenges and remedial actions are discussed in terms of

economic, technical, political and cultural parameters. The induced results have been consumed for the construction of strategic solutions which includes the guidelines to facilitate and achieve the operational excellence and hyphenated development indicators through Education and Employment by satisfying the expectation of the industries.

Keywords: socio-economic development, education, employment, strategic plan

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic factors are extensively taken into consideration when evaluating the development of a country or a particular region. In that context, education and employment both are prominent socio-economic factors, which play integral roles in the improvement of a country in terms of the well-being of the general population. As a result of that, the education and employment can be considered as 2 of the most important factors of socio-economic development and it is vital to enforce both factors in order to achieve a substantial amount of development towards sustainability of a particular region. Education helps to enrich people from many aspects and ultimately aid to reform themselves to be competent against modern world demands [1]. The state of education has a huge influence on factors like productivity,

creativity, entrepreneurial and technological skills demanded by the employment sector. This paper is focused on evaluating the relationship between education and employment factors in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Further, it is expected to develop strategic solutions to enforce employment sector by providing necessary refinements to the educational sector. Since the focus of this study is to identify the practical situation of current states of employment and education in the Southern Province comprehensively, recommended solutions will be evaluated with the aid of relevant, available statistics. Upon the completion, developed strategic solutions could be used to address certain loopholes in the education sector in Southern Province and able to provide necessary remedial actions to counter them. Based on the amendments evaluated by the study, the education system would reform accordingly. It is expected that the education system will be able to produce a workforce with the necessary skills and attitudes demanded by the industries. Thus, the problem statement will be,

“How to establish the relationship between education and employment sectors in Southern Province of Sri Lanka? and How to utilize the result to suggest certain developments in the educational sector in order to develop the employment requirements in the Southern Province?”

After the development of strategic solutions for the Southern Province, the recommended actions could be adopted appropriately for other Provinces as well.

Primary Education in Sri Lanka

The free Access to education for all students in spite of their gender, class or social background is a salient feature of the Sri Lankan education system. Since the free education policy has been adopted for more than 60 years, 100% free education at primary and secondary levels has been

provided to the students continuously [2]. Free education structure of Sri Lanka can be categorized into three distinctively identifiable levels.

- Primary Education (4 to 10 year)
 - The primary education starts with grade 1 and ends with grade 5.
 - At the end of grade 5, students participate in the Scholarship Examination.
- Junior and Senior Secondary Education (10 to 14 years, 14 to 16 years respectively)
 - Grade 6 to grade 11 students are categorized under Secondary Level education system.
 - At the end of grade 11, students participate in the Ordinary Level Examination.
 - Qualified students from the ordinary level examination proceed to Collegiate Education.
- Collegiate Education (16 to 19 year)
 - After Ordinary Level Examination, students can choose Mathematics, Biology, Technology, Art and Commerce streams.
 - A competitive examination is held after two years.
 - The main purpose of the Advanced Level Examination is to select the most outstanding students for the University Education.

There are considerable amounts of students who leave their schools after facing each major examination in Sri Lanka. The dropout rate is lowest in the Grade 5 Scholarship examination, but it increases when the exams are advancing toward advanced level examination. Highest dropout percentage can be seen at the end of the Advanced Level examination due to the limited admission for the Universities.

Higher Education in Sri Lanka

In 2017, out of 258,193 students who sat for GCE Advanced Level examination, only 160,520 were eligible with minimum qualifications to apply for University admission which is a percentage of 62% [3]. From the eligible 62%, only 29,055 were admitted to Universities which is a percentage of 18% from the eligible fraction and the remaining 82% of students were not taken into the state Universities [4]. Which represents that more than 92% of students who face the Advanced Level examination stops pursuing government education. There is some fraction of students those willing to sit for the Advanced Level examination for the second time, hoping for a better result. Students who were eligible for the University admission, but have not applied for higher studies affirmed that there are few major reasons for them to discontinue their education. Government Universities having a limited number of seats, degree programs they were hoping to apply have been already occupied by a maximum number of students, their dissatisfaction about the current facilities inside government Universities, strikes which lengthen the time to complete the degree and life hardships due to financial constraints were some of them [5].

Above facts express that, not all the eligible students are admitted into government Universities. Compared to the other regional countries, the number of University graduates in Sri Lanka is extremely low [6]. As mentioned above, the Sri Lankan education system endorse the freedom of education for each and every child in the country without any restrictions invoked due to their social backgrounds and economic levels. All the children within the optimal age range are provided with free education. The government has been taking care of the direct and indirect educational expenses for over 60 years now.

The education system in Sri Lanka has appeared to have improved during the past

few years bringing an affirmative impact on the financial conditions of the country. Nevertheless, there have been certain difficulties where priorities have not been given for the education sector among other sectors like defense, infrastructure development, and transportation when it comes to funding [7]. Since Sri Lanka is a developing country with low capita Gross Domestic Products (GDP), most of its students come from rural backgrounds and from poor income families. With the soaring of the price commodities each day, it would be impossible for poor families to put their children through private educational institutes [8]. As a result, even the eligible students who are eager in receiving higher education find it impossible to pursue their ambitions due to lack of financial capability and social problems associated with state Universities. In present, the majority of students give up on their expectations for higher education due to limited amounts of placement in the state-funded Universities. Most of these dropouts are incapable of self-funding their educational carriers and they are not provided with any financial support by the government. This ultimately leads to complete termination of their educational careers.

So, even within the free education system in Sri Lanka, there are certain flaws and loopholes exist due to the underfunding situation and other issues arise with lack of sources, lack of simplicity and reliability in educational structure, and reliability. Hence, it can be very difficult to achieve the core objectives without any flaws in the conventional education sector. The core objective of the education system can be identified as providing as much as degree holders with high educational qualifications and form an able workforce within the school dropouts and the students who drop out from Universities due to the scenarios described up to the point. This scenario adversely affects the

employment sector too, especially in the case of Advanced Level dropouts. Even though the situation has been described explicitly for the whole country, provided facts are valid for the Southern Province also, given cultural or economic factors are not heavily diversified by the regional basis for the most part of the country.

Current Situation

When developing the sophisticated solutions to counter the flaws in educational and employment sectors inside the Southern Province by analyzing the statistical data corresponding to relevant fields, it was found out that availability of consistent statistical data was rather critical. Because of the limited budgets and negligence, censuses for some fields have not been conducted for 5yrs (last census in 2012). Thus, the critical analysis of many variables was done by effectively utilizing the available data. The main disadvantage of not having a consistent statistical data series on the analyzed variables is the inability to develop chronological trends of their growth or decline. Southern Province of Sri Lanka consists of 3 districts namely Galle, Matara, and Hambantota, which occupies 5,444km² on the furthest south section of the island. Southern Province can be identified as the 7th largest Province in Sri Lanka by the geographical area [9]. According to the 2012 island-wide census, the total population of Southern Province is stated as 2,477,285 [10].

DATA ANALYSIS

There is an interconnection between educational and economic factors in a particular region [11]. With the progressive growth of population and the overall development of a certain region, employment and educational factors are developed along, in order to satisfy the

socio-economic requirements. When job seekers with higher educational qualifications are entering the job market, supply and demand of the job market will be obviously impacted, proving a single aspect of the relationship between education and employment. Throughout the world, educational systems are expanding and more and more job seekers are entering into the job market with improved educational qualifications. The situation is valid for Sri Lanka also, since the people are thinking out of the conventional boundaries and starting to acknowledge the importance of education. In the practicality, between two people with and without educational qualifications, the one with educational qualifications will be inevitably prioritized. Thus, conventional educational and employment models are rendered less useful in the present context [12]. One boundary of the Southern Province is the Indian ocean, which fortifies the stability of the fishing industry and tourism. Aside from those 2, there are 4 additional industries practiced as the main income sources in the Southern Province [13].

- Tourism – Since Southern Province is placed on the southernmost boundary of Sri Lanka, one whole side is in contact with the Indian Ocean. There are several attractive beaches located inside the Province, and with combination the additional tourist destinations, tourism is a highly active industry inside the Southern Province.

- Fishing industry – Indian ocean which bound the lowermost side of the Southern Province is enriched with edible fish and other kinds of seafood. So, the fishing industry is heavily active throughout the three districts of the Southern Province. Many people living around the coastline are practicing fishing as the primary income.

- Tea industry – Mainly focused on Galle district area, the tea industry is also

highly active inside the Southern Province due to the smooth environmental conditions.

- Apparel and textile industry - Mostly centralized on industrial processing zones, the textile industry is one of the main export structures in Sri Lanka. The textile industry is one of the major industries in Southern Province as well due to the industrial processing zone in Koggala and garment factories scattered throughout the area.

- Agriculture industry – Agriculture industry inside the Southern Province is active in providing major outputs of rice, coconut, and grain, largely for domestic consumption and occasionally for export

- IT industry - Mainly focused on exporting information technological knowledge via freelancing and large scale firms

Aside from the six major industries, there are several other small-scale businesses and industries carried out inside the Southern Province too. It is vital to get an overall understanding of the industrial aspects inside the Southern Province, in order to develop optimal solutions to reinforce the employment sector.

The process of developing strategic decisions can be categorized under several sub-topics for both educational and employment factors.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Budget

Ensuring sufficient budgets are allocated for the education industry is the most critical responsibility of the governing party. Budget allocations for education in Southern Province were deduced from the annual budget report of National Treasury [14].

It can be seen a considerable budget reduction from the year 2016 onwards in

Figure 1. From the year 2017 onwards, the budget allocation seems to have increased by a little (3-5%). In the annual budget reports, there are claims that all the allocations have been used for both operational and development procedures of the educational sector. The claims are stated in the budget reports that even in 2015 and 2016, 100% of the budget has been effectively utilized in the educational operations. This situation clearly interprets the budget issues within the education system in the Southern Province. Since the number of students has also been increased over the past years, the present budget allocation is not enough to preserve the continuous improvement of the educational sector in Southern Province.

There are 1,115 government schools in the Southern Province, including some of the largest and most populated schools in the whole country. Also, there are 316 other educational institutes like semi-government schools and Piriwens [15]. Hence, there is a concern whether the allocated budget for education is enough to execute all the operational and development activities in an optimal way. Since the operational activities are prioritized when utilizing the allocated budget, many of the development activities, many development activities could not be carried out. This could decrease the potential of producing a workforce with increased qualifications demanded by the employment sector.

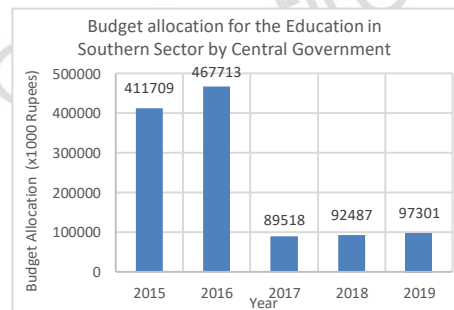


Figure 1 - Budget allocation for Education in the Southern Sector by Central Government

[14]

For the students who drop out from the schools due to many reasons like failing the major exams, or poor economic conditions, there aren't enough programs initialized inside the Province.

There are only three technical colleges active in the Southern Province, one per each district [16]. The intake capacity of all technical colleges has found out to be not enough to compensate for the dropout rate of students from schools. Because of that, only a few school dropouts get the proper technical skills to pursue good standardized job opportunities, while others are forced to be occupied with daily paying or low salary jobs. When it comes to improving the existing educational institutes, insufficient budgets could be a problem too. In mid-2018, authorities were forced to close down all of the primary schools in the Southern Province for 2 weeks due to the epidemic of influenza virus [17]. Around the same time period, closing down of Ruhuna University located in Matara due to the inability to provide clean drinking water for students also happened.

Both the above situations trace back to the insufficient budgets because if proper budgets were allocated in the first place, both situations could have been avoided by providing proper infrastructure facilities for the respective educational facilities. Thus, enough budget is an essential feature when it comes to empowering the employment sector through the development of education.

Universality

The effectiveness of free education criteria of Sri Lanka is significantly depended on the ability to provide equal educational facilities for all the optimal aged children despite any cultural, economic or societal status. But in reality, this situation is not as ideal as it should be. There are approximately 581,527 populations in the Southern Province

whom age inside the recommended range to follow primary and secondary education (6 to 18 yrs.). But 8% of the optimal aged population was found out to be not going to schools due to several reasons [3], [15]. When evaluating the reasons for the optimal aged children not having proper education, it can be found out that mainly it is due to poor economic backgrounds. After Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations majority of the students who haven't achieved the minimum results to pass and some of the students who even passed the are withdrawing from education with the purpose of feeding their own families. This situation leads to the violation of universality, and it will adversely affect the employment sector as it was described above.

In order to avoid the above situation, solutions must be provided to counter the very reasons which made the students drop out of schools. The situation persists in all 3 Galle, Matara and Hambantota districts among economically troubled families [15]. Just imposing rules to necessitate recommended aged children to pursue education is not a recommended solution since it should be done with willfulness off the children. Thus, necessary arrangements must be provided for the children in order to make them keep up with education. After series of conversations with children who work in jobs without going to schools and their parents, it was found out that, most of them do not know how the education will lead to a proper economic status of themselves. Instead of being encouraged to pursue up with the education, the children are forced to be occupied with day paying jobs or the same jobs passed on to them from their ancestors. Also, they do not possess the necessary qualifications demanded by external industries, thus there would be no alternatives left for them as well. Conveying the advantages of occupying proper jobs through the

knowledge gained from education and emphasizing how the students' economic backgrounds will be improved by it will be the fundamental step toward eliminating excessive school dropout rates. Both students and their parents should be made aware through awareness sessions and counseling. Then, proper programs must be implemented to support the students with poor economic backgrounds with the necessary educational instruments and facilities. The aforementioned problem can be eradicated through proper allocation of money for educational development.

Expansion

Increasing the number of educational institutes in both government and the private sector in order to convey the best interest to students should also be taken into consideration especially when the employment sector enforcement is concerned. After the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations, most of the students get into jobs in order to facilitate own economic developments. This fraction of students consists mostly with the ones who failed to achieve minimum marks to step up to the next level and some fraction who voluntarily drop out even if they have the qualifications to get to the next educational level. With the minor second fraction, the employability is not critical, because they can get into standards jobs with Ordinary Level or Advanced Level qualifications. But, for the major first fraction, job opportunities are severely low because most of the employers demand either educational qualifications or technical qualifications. The first fraction of the employment candidate lacks both aspects of the necessary qualifications. Thus, it is essential to arrange the optimal means to make themselves suitable for industrial requirements. Improving the capacity of technical institutes and establish more technical institutes should happen in order

to counter this situation. Technical college pass outs will have the necessary technical knowledge to pursue carriers with technical backgrounds Even though they do not possess high educational qualifications. The University of Ruhuna is another special destination which can be utilized to improving the technical knowledge of employment candidates. Carrier guidance sessions and technical courses can be arranged under the supervision of the University, in order to improve the technical knowledge and skills of employment candidates. The students who drop out after the Advanced Level examination have improved educational qualifications than Ordinary Level dropouts. But, the percentage of schools which provide the students with advanced level education is low when compared to the total schools located in the Province.

Among all five subject streams which Advanced Level students could follow, the technology stream provides the most practical contrast for the real-world applications. That does not implicate other subject streams are underperforming when it comes to the practicality, but merely describes the immediate advantage students will have as employment candidates after dropping out from the school. However, adoption of the technology stream in government schools is considerably lower than the rate of adoption of other subject streams (Table 1).

Table 1 – Percentage of schools which offer advanced level subject streams by the year 2017 [15]

Subject Stream	Percentage of Schools (%)
Mathematics	12.7
Biology	12.6
Technology	4.5
Commerce	22.9
Art	32.6

Schools which provide art stream education is higher than any other streams. Thus, students who are not willing to continue further studies after Advanced Levels should be encouraged to follow the technology stream.

That way, they will have immediate technical qualifications to occupy job opportunities in the job market. The main obstacle when adopting this strategy is lack of schools which provide the technology stream for Advanced Level students. Thus, necessary measures should be taken to increase the adoption of the technology stream in government and private schools. Hence, it will pave the path even for the students who qualified, but planning to not continue their education after Ordinary Levels will be motivated to get into Advanced Levels.

From Figure 2, it is expressed that the percentage of students who pass the grade 5 scholarship examination is considerably lower than both other examinations. As far as employment is concerned, the effect of grade 5 examination is negligible, since the majority of students who face it are 10-year old. But, passing percentage of Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations are especially concerned when it comes to the employment sector because many students would start to seek for job opportunities after been dropped out from those two exams.

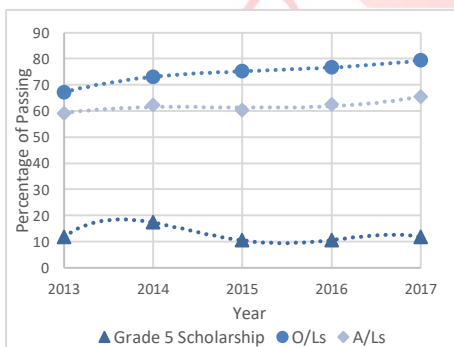


Figure 2 - Percentage of students who pass the advanced level examination with minimum results [15]

Slight increments can be seen in passing percentages of both exams, but at least 20% students from Ordinary Levels and 35% from Advanced Levels seems to have failed to score the minimum marks to pass [15]. The technical colleges in the Southern Province should have the capacity to at least cater all the dropouts from Ordinary Level examination. Advanced Level dropouts will have considerably high educational qualifications than Ordinary Level dropouts. When Advanced Level dominate in the job market with educational qualifications, the best way to make it possible for Ordinary Level dropouts to compete against them is improving their technical skills.

Total number of students who face Advanced Level examination seems to have not improved significantly from the year 2013 onwards. Technology sub

ject stream has introduced to the Advanced Level examination in 2015. Even from 2015 onwards, there is no significant improvement in total number of participants for Advanced Level examination (Figure 3). This proves that there were no additional students who have taken up the Advanced Levels because of new technology stream. Only some fractions of students who were supposed to follow other streams have taken the new technology stream.

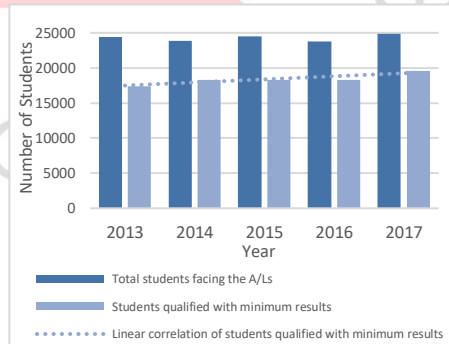


Figure 3. Total number of students who sit for the advanced level examination each year [15]

Promoting the technology subject stream among the students will be a significant step towards forming an able workforce through education. There are many technological job opportunities available side the Southern proving because of the fishing industry, tea industry, Koggala export processing zone etc. When inquiring, it was found out that considerable number of factories in Koggala export processing zone are suffering from lack of labor force. Some are on a verge of closing down due to that. Thus, it is clear that unemployment is not only caused by the lack of job opportunities in the Southern Province. Existence of a considerable fraction of the unemployed population who do not possess the necessary skills to undertake available job opportunities is also a reason.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

Industry

As described above, there are six main industries actively practiced inside the Southern Province. Aside from Tourism, tea industry, apparel and textile industry, agriculture industry, IT industry and fishing industry, there are several small-scale industries as well. With the combination of general jobs that can be seen in any place of the country, regardless of the place, these major and minor industries provide a considerable number of job opportunities for the Southern population. When enforcing the employment sector, each and every aspect of the industrial context should be taken into consideration. It was found out from the field studies conducted by authors that, the fraction of young generation giving up on inherited industries are progressively increasing. Inherited industries mean the industries passed on to them by their family lineage. This situation can be

critically seen among fishers, farmers and the people in the tea industry. Most of the young ones stated that they are giving up on their inherited industries because of the following reasons.

- Ability to earn large amount of money from outside jobs and Willingness to move to urban areas
- Fewer resources and government support
- Conventional instrument and methods with expired technologies
- Difficulty and unwillingness to handling a whole industry rather than a single task

Because of all those reasons, huge downfall can be seen in traditional fishing, tea, agriculture industries. By preventing younger generation abandoning traditional industries, not only the preservation of traditional industries is assured, but also vast amounts of job opportunities are generated. Providing possible solutions for the problem should be done through the younger generation itself.

When providing technical consultancies, University of Ruhuna can be utilized as the main resource. Even at the moment, Engineering Faculty of the University of Ruhuna is conducting technical awareness sessions and designing technical instruments for the entrepreneurs and small-scale industries. If the younger generation has experienced the newly added benefits of those new machinery and technical advice, they would be encouraged to keep up with traditional industries. The program could be later expanded to the point where all the possible improvements for the industries in business, technical and marketing aspects are provided by the University.

Unemployment

In a particular region, the fraction of population who are able to work collectively forms the labor force. From region to region, the definition of labor

force differs based on rules and regulations invoked by the governing authority [18], [19]. According to the census and statistics department of Sri Lanka, all the able citizens who are above the age of 15 are considered as able workers. The workforce comprised of both employed and unemployed citizens. Figure 4 demonstrates that the unemployment rate in the Southern Province is higher when compared to the unemployment rate of Sri Lanka (male around 1.4% and female around 2.6%). Until recently, active participation of women to the employment sector was very weak inside the country. Because of that, the graph delineates the female unemployment rate is higher than the male unemployment rate. But currently, the female employment rate is rapidly growing in Sri Lanka [20]. Majority of females are indirectly participating in the economy as housewives (Figure 5).

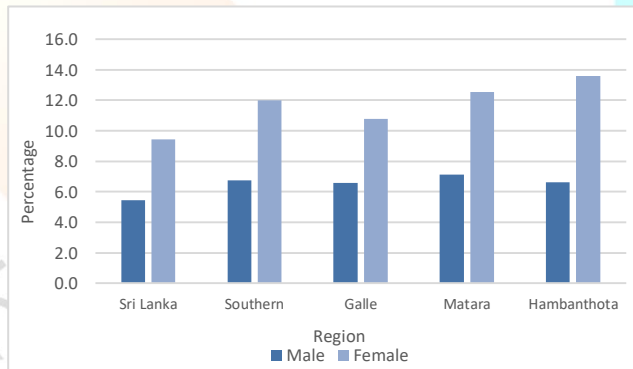


Figure 5 - Gender wise employment percentages for different types of industries inside the Southern Province

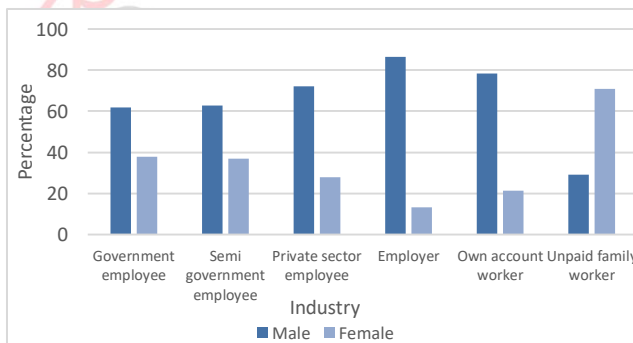


Figure 4 - Percentage of unemployment with respect to the active workforce

Females who would make a success from their self-employment tasks will be able to expand their businesses and become self-made entrepreneurs [22]. They will automatically become employers as well.

CONCLUSION

Southern Province is the 7th largest Province in Sri Lanka by the geographical area. It is located at the south most part of Sri Lanka, consisted of three districts, namely Galle, Matara, and Hambantota. The Province is bounded with the Indian ocean from one side. Population of the Southern Province is spread among urban, rural and state areas. A cluster of government and private educational institutes can be seen and they effectively participate in providing free education. People of the Southern Province are occupied with major industries like tourism, tea industry, textile industry, agriculture, IT industry, fishing industry and many more general types of jobs.

In this research paper, the basic process of making necessary amendments to reduce many unfavorable situations in employment sector inside the Southern Province was described through both educational and industrial point of views.

- In Galle district alone, service, technical and agriculture industries have unemployment rates of 39%, 28%, and 33% respectively.

- Possible reasons for those kinds of problems were addressed in the paper and convenient solutions were provided to overcome those issues within a general criterion.

- Solution generation process for improving the socio-economic stability of the Southern Province through education was carried out under budget, universality, and expansion subcategories.

- When generating the solution to improve the employment sector, industry

and unemployment subcategories were concerned.

- All the solutions were generated with the ultimate expectation of improving the socio-economic stability of the people in Southern Province.

- When generating ideas, statistical data on several variables were taken into consideration. Also, the information gathered through fields visits and discussions with people were effectively utilized when identifying problems and generating feasible solutions.

- Certain complexities arose in the middle of the solution generation process, due to the shortage of statistical data available in some areas. Lack of data seems to obstruct the tasks of developing chronological trends and deducing some ideas in certain situations.

- In those kinds of scenarios, critical analysis of available data was effectively used to generate as accurate as possible information.

With the aid of this paper, it will be able to clearly identify the specific areas where education and employment sectors are failing to provide optimal state of affairs for the general population in Southern Province, with the feasible solutions which can be initiated in order to counter them. The document can be correlated into other regions of Sri Lanka too, with a careful orientation of proper research methodologies. The strategic solution generation process will be almost the same for other Provinces because of nearly alike cultural and economic factors. However, there are some regions this homogeneity discontinues; thus, one must be cautious not to make baseless assumptions.

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