

Exploring the Parents' Expectations on the Sri Lanka's School System Concerning Their Children's Learning Problems

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Abstract

This paper attempts to clarify the aspects of learning problems faced by formal education at the primary level in Sri Lanka, with special focus on children from low socioeconomic groups. The study was done among 88 guardians to children aged 9 to 10 years from low socioeconomic areas in 3 primary schools around Colombo City. We investigated the features of the child's learning problems and parents' expectations. Factor analysis revealed 3 learning problems dimensions: inattention/clumsy, basic academic skills, and mathematical reasoning. Children whose score was higher than 3 points were considered as the learning problem-high group and someone lower than 3 points were grouped in to the learning problem-low group. The three subscale (learning situation/career guidance, arrangement of educational resources by the administration, and teaching skills/safety) scores regarding parents' expectations were compared between the two groups. The parents of children with severe learning problems sought support from school education in the form of informational input from the teachers and the enhancement of educational resources.

Key words: Learning problems, parents' expectations, school system

I . Introduction

Sri Lanka is known for its high excellent educational indicators such as literacy rate and enrollment rate. The literacy rate was 91.18% (male 92.58%, female 89.96%) in 2010, and the gross enrollment rate by primary education level was 101.27% (male 102.42%, female 100.11%) in 2014 (UIS Statistics, 2017). However, when indices such as literacy rates are examined by sector, they are lower for rural and farming area than for urban areas (Isobe, 2009), and educational opportunities for children with disabilities have not been sufficiently provided (Furuta, 2006).

Regarding the situation of education for children in Sri Lanka, what is pointed out by Sethunga (2010) is helpful. According to Sethunga (2010), the Government of Sri Lanka made a point in the interim report (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, 2008) that "Sri Lanka has succeeded in ensuring high level of access and a good coverage at the primary and secondary levels of education, however

the poor quality of education has become a major issue island-wide, and the goals pertaining to the life skills of young children, youth, and adults have been relatively neglected".

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education Sri Lanka (2008) defined plantation children, children with disability, working children, children of migrant women workers, street children, orphaned, abandoned and destitute children within and outside children's homes, children within remand homes, detention centers and certified schools, internally displaced children, children in conflict affected areas and children in slums as a group that has unreached the goal. The ministry set up the strategy for Education for ALL (EFA) achievement.

Under such internal situation, Kobayashi (2015), in cooperation with the National Institute of Social Development (NISD) of Sri Lanka, made field visits to investigate both the challenges faced of the adversarial childhood experiences, and the involvement of social workers and other professionals. The findings showed

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that there were impacts on children of low-income households with living support needs that teachers could not deal with. Local school social work services relied on financial assistance from NGO continuously and the sustainability of these services became demanding.

It is expected that children in low-income households and poverty are confronted with various difficulties. It is necessary to consider what kind of problems occurs and what factors influences the child's development. This study clarified the aspects of learning problems shown by children, focusing on formal education at the primary level. Specifically, this study had two aims: (a) to examine the structure of learning problems among children; and (b) to explore the parents' expectation on school system concerning their children with learning problems.

II. Method

1. Participants

The participants were 88 guardians of children aged 9 to 10 years old in the fourth and fifth grade of a primary school. The survey was carried out in 3 schools in one education zone within the city of Colombo. Those primary schools were located in a low socioeconomic condition. And most parents were residents of slum areas while their occupations were mostly wage labor. Among the survey respondents, 68% were mothers and 21% were fathers. The approximately 10% remaining were grandparents and others.

2. Questionnaires

The questionnaires were targeted to measure three areas: children's learning problems, the parents' expectation on school system and the sample's demographics.

There were suitable scales for our purposes. We referred to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2012) and Tsukimori (2005, 2008) in composing the measurement scale for locating the children's learning problems.

The educational administration in Japan carried out a survey to estimate the number of students who had special educational needs that may be Specific Learning Disorder (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder

(high-functioning ASD) in regular classes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2012). These survey items addressed learning and behavioral aspects ("inattentiveness" and "hyperactivity-impulsivity").

We referred to published books (Tsukimori, 2005, 2008) on teaching techniques written for elementary school teachers for children with problems in learning and behavior. A total of 41 items were categorized into 7 areas (i.e., "Difficulty in listening", "Difficulty in speaking", "Difficulty in reading", "Difficulty in arithmetic", "Forgets easily", "Difficulty in putting things in order", and "Clumsy").

Items were collected from both published research and books that focused on LD, ADHD, and high-functioning ASD. We assumed that even if children do not have LD, ADHD, and high-functioning ASD, their learning problems resemble the symptoms.

All of the items were on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 to be "does not apply at all" to 5 "applies very much", and each response was scored on a 1 – 5 point basis.

Items related to parents' expectations on school education were collected from previous studies (Uno & Horiguchi, 2000; Mizusawa, Kanno, & Kumagai, 2015). The items were selected from research done on parents of children who have, or suspected to have LD (Uno & Horiguchi, 2000) and parents whose children's disabilities showed rare symptoms that lacked recognition in the society (Mizusawa, et al., 2015). A total of 21 items were selected, related to the environment facility of the school, learning situation, expertise of the teacher, teaching skills, education system, curriculum, and career guidance. All of the items were on a scale from 1 to 5. 1 being "unnecessary" to 5 being "very necessary". Each response was scored between a 1 – 5 on a point basis.

The items on the child's demographic characteristics focused, (1) on the relation between the child and respondent, (2) birth order of the child, and (3) child's sex.

It was confirmed with the collaborators that all of the questions asked on the questionnaire accommodated to the situation of learning and education in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire was composed in English and was then translated into two languages (Sinhala and Tamil) by cooperative NISD researchers.

Table 1
Participants Profiles (%)

Sex		Born order				
Male	Female	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
42.86	57.14	40.00	29.33	20.00	6.67	4.00

3. Research Procedures

The investigation took place from October to November 2016. We requested the principal of primary school for the research and obtained consent from the participants. NISD researchers and school teachers explained the questionnaire at the meeting of the Parents' Association and requested the parents complete the questionnaire. The NISD researchers and school teachers collected the responses and enveloped it immediately.

4. Research Ethics

This study was conducted with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of Tokai University and the Academic Affairs Board of the NISD. We explained the purpose of the research to the participants in writing and verbally before the administering the questionnaire giving the participants the choice to participate in the survey or otherwise. Furthermore, they were ensured of the confidentiality of the acquired information and its handling. Questionnaires were distributed to those who gave their consent.

III. Results

1. Participant Demographics

The child's sex and birth orders are shown in Table 1. Many of the participants were female and were the first or second child in birth order.

2. Scale of the Child's Learning Problems

Some items with a ceiling effect or floor effect were eliminated. After this elimination, the questionnaire about children's learning problems contained 20 items. Factor analysis by the main factor method was carried out for these 20 items. Three factors were selected due to the reduction of eigenvalues, and Promax rotation was

performed. The factor pattern and the factor correlation matrix are shown in Table 2. There were three factors of the 20 items. The contents and naming of each factor are described as follows.

Factor I showed heavy loading on the following two items: "The child cannot put things in order" and "The child often leaves things behind." These items were related to "forget easily." Furthermore, Factor I contained "It is very hard for the child to make handicrafts" related to "clumsy." Factor I was named "inattention/clumsy."

Factor II contained "The child does not listen carefully to others" and "The child repeatedly asks the same thing," related to "Difficulty in listening," "The child forgets what others have told him/her," related to "Difficulty in speaking," and "Though the child can read letters and characters, he/she cannot understand their meaning," related to "Difficulty in reading." Moreover, it contained items related to basic arithmetic skills, such as "The child has difficulty in counting and makes many mistakes." Since Factor II was related to basic learning such as listening, reading, speaking, and calculating, we named it "basic academic skills."

Factor III contained only two items regarding advanced mathematical processing, "The child has difficulty in understanding the decimal system and the four basic operations of arithmetic: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division" and "The child cannot do mathematical reasoning, such as arithmetic word problems." Therefore, it was named "mathematical reasoning."

Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the factors used in this study to examine internal consistency. The results were $\alpha = .90$ for Factor I, $\alpha = .91$ for Factor II, and $\alpha = .81$ for Factor III. These results show that the factors were reliable and could be used for subscale scores for analysis.

The average of 20 items was calculated for each

Table 2
The Results of Factor Analysis: Children's Learning Problems
 (principal factor method, promax rotation)

	I	II	III
I Inattention/Clumsy($\alpha=.90$)			
The child cannot put things in order.	1.059	-.126	-.177
The child often leaves things behind.	.955	-.258	.126
The child cannot remember the stroke order of letters/characters.	.687	.118	-.126
The child makes many mistakes in reading.	.625	.096	.090
It is very hard for the child to make handicraft.	.558	.211	.013
The child cannot express what he/she wants to say well.	.550	.216	.077
The child loses his/her things such as study tools and homework.	.487	.244	.014
The child cannot configure forms (cannot write correctly).	.487	.321	-.081
II Basic academic skills ($\alpha=.91$)			
The child does not listen carefully to others.	-.114	1.060	-.336
The child forgets what others have told him/her.	-.234	.818	.195
Though the child can read letters and characters, he/she cannot understand their meaning.	.275	.604	.079
The child has difficulty in counting and makes many mistakes.	.146	.592	.125
The child repeatedly asks the same thing.	.053	.541	-.051
It is difficult for the child to understand long words and phrases.	.122	.493	.217
The child is hyperactivity, restless, and does not listen to what others are saying.	.250	.456	.081
The child cannot understand spatial relationships, and has difficulty in recognizing figures.	.097	.451	.016
It is difficult for the child to understand verbal instructions	.211	.451	.124
It is difficult for the child to understand numeral and quantity knowledges.	.254	.426	.047
III Mathematical reasoning($\alpha=.81$)			
The child has difficulty in understanding the decimal system and the four basic operations of arithmetic; addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.	-.093	-.141	1.108
The child cannot do mathematical reasoning, such as arithmetic word problems.	.110	.257	.463
Factor correlation matrix			
I		.729	.548
II	.729		.597
III	.548	.597	

participant utilizing the child's learning problems scale. There were 17 children (23.61%) who showed an average score higher than 3 points.

3. Scale of the Parents' Expectations on School System

Again, items with a ceiling effect or floor effect were eliminated. After this elimination, the questionnaire about the parents' expectations on school system contained 19

Table 3
The Results of Factor Analysis: Parents' expectations on school system
 (principal factor method, promax rotation)

	I	II	III
I Learning situation/Career guidance($\alpha=.96$)			
About interactions among children in the class and the whole school	.901	-.071	.034
About the establishment and implementation of individual education plans	.880	.126	-.135
About advice on learning and lifestyle at home	.836	.063	.052
About future career and career guidance	.771	.152	.058
About proceeding to the next stage of education	.765	.175	.050
About laying out the school schedule	.710	.236	-.029
About instructional method and contents in lessons	.709	.137	.108
II Arrangement of educational resources by the administration ($\alpha=.91$)			
About dispatching specialist such as school social worker, school counselor, speech therapist, pediatrician, or doctor to school	-.071	.854	.026
About barrier-free facilities in school	.172	.714	.082
About opportunity to talk with choosing schools and information about choosing schools	.176	.710	.001
About equipment and facilities in school such as classroom, playground, and gymnasium	.178	.686	-.172
About the briefing session on the school for parents or guardians before entering school	.205	.586	.122
III Teaching skills/Safety($\alpha=.85$)			
About the teachers' specialty and teaching skill	.145	-.204	.951
About the distance from home to school and safety of school zone	-.145	.212	.808
Factor correlation matrix	I	.802	.632
	II	.802	.496
	III	.632	.496

items. Factor analysis by the main factor method was carried out for these 19 items. Three factors were selected due to the reduction of eigenvalues, and Promax rotation was performed. Items showing heavy loading on multiple factors and items with small loading on any factors were eliminated from the study. Fourteen items were re-analyzed. The factor pattern and the factor correlation matrix are shown in Table 3. There were three factors of the 14 items. The contents and naming of each factor are described as follows.

Factor I showed heavy loading on the following two types of items: items about the child's interactions with

peers in the class and the whole school and items about the establishment and implementation of individual education plans. These items were related to the child's learning situation seen at school. Furthermore, Factor I contained items about the child's future career and career guidance and items about proceeding to the next stage of education related to the child's career, such as occupation. Factor I was named "learning situation/career guidance."

Factor II showed heavy loading on the items about dispatching a specialist such as a school social worker, school counselor, speech therapist, pediatrician, or doctor to school." Factor II also contained items about barrier-

Table 4
Correlations Between Scores for Child's Learning Problems Subscales and Scores
for Parents' Expectations Subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Children's learning problems									
1 Children's learning problems		.927**	.946**	.673**	.400**	.358**	.023	42.07	19.15
2 Inattention/Clumsy			.773**	.517**	.377**	.429**	-.037	2.16	1.11
3 Basic academic skills				.610**	.385**	.327**	.064	2.19	1.01
4 Mathematical reasoning					.240*	.153	.281*	2.22	1.19
Parents' expectations on school system									
5 Learning situation/Carrer guidance	.400**	.377**	.385**	.240*		.845**	.570**	3.75	1.41
6 Arrangement of educational resources by the administration	.358**	.429**	.327**	.153	.845**		.557**	3.33	1.44
7 Teaching skills/Safety	.023	-.037	.064	.281*	.570**	.557**		3.04	1.69

Note. *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

free facilities in school; equipment and facilities in the school, such as the classroom, playground, and gymnasium; opportunities to interact with school representatives and information on selecting schools. These items seemed to be solvable through the involvement of the educational administration, although they cannot be solved by the school alone. Factor II was named "arrangement of educational resources by the administration."

Factor III contained items about the teacher's specialty and teaching skill as well as items about the distance from home to school and safety of the school zone. It was named "teaching skills and safety."

Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the factors used in this study to examine internal consistency. The results were $\alpha = .96$ for Factor I, $\alpha = .91$ for Factor II, and $\alpha = .85$ for Factor III. These results show that the factors were reliable and could be used for subscale scores for analysis.

4. Relation between the Child's Learning Problems and Parents' Expectations on School System

The correlation coefficient was calculated for the child's learning problem subscale score and the parents' expectations on school system (Table 4). The child's learning problem scores were significantly correlated with both learning situation/career guidance scores and arrangement of educational resources by the

administration scores. Inattention/clumsy scores and basic academic skills scores on the scale of the child's learning problems were found to be significantly correlated with learning situation/career guidance scores and arrangement of educational resources by the administration scores. Mathematical reasoning scores on the scale of child's learning problems were significantly correlated with teaching skills/safety and the arrangement of educational resources by the administration scores.

The average of 20 items was calculated for each participant utilizing the child's learning problems scale. Children whose score was higher than 3 points were considered as the learning problem-high group. Children who scored 3 or under were grouped in to the learning problem-low group. There were 17 children in the learning problem-high group and 55 children in the learning problem-low group (the total did not reach 88 because of missing values). Figure 1 shows group comparisons for the mean of the school support needed by parents.

A two-factor ANOVA (2 groups $\times$ 3 subscales of school supports needed by parents) showed that the interaction was significant ($F(2,140) = 7.04, p < .01$). We examined the simple main effect of subscales by high-low group, learning situation/career guidance ($F(1, 70) = 9.82, p < .01$), and arrangement of educational resources by the administration ($F(1, 70) = 7.51, p < .01$). Teaching skills/safety was not significant.

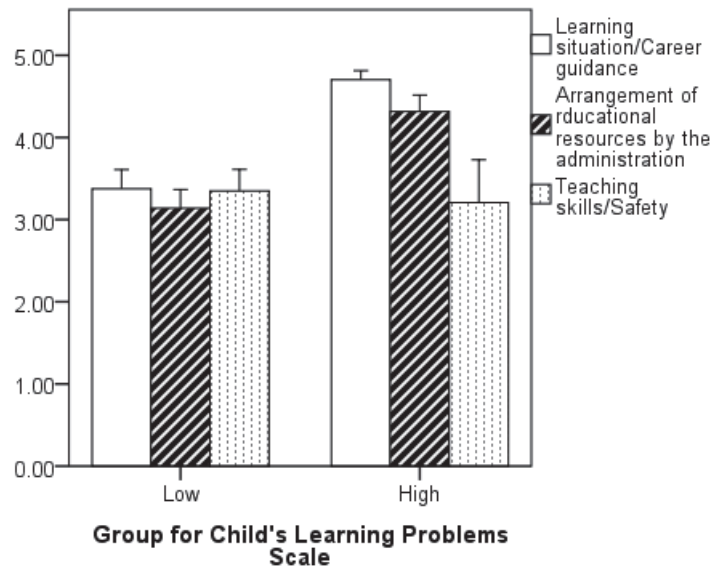


Figure 1. Scores for parents' expectations subscales across low and high groups. Error bars represent standard errors.

When the study examined the simple main effect of groups by subscales, a significant difference was found at the 1% level in the learning problem-high group ($F(2, 140) = 20.12$). The multiple comparisons using the LSD method showed the difference between learning situation/career guidance and arrangement of educational resources by the administration was not significant. Teaching skills/safety was significantly smaller than learning situation/career guidance and arrangement of educational resources by the administration ($MSe = 0.8357, p < .05$). It was found that although teaching skills/safety did not differ between the two participant groups, the score of the learning problem-high group was high in learning situation/career guidance and arrangement of educational resources by the administrations.

IV. Discussion

1. Structure of Each Scale

The scale of the child's learning problems was assumed to have seven areas when the questionnaire items were collected, but as a result of the factor analysis, it became a three-factor constitution. The areas of "Forgets easily" and "Clumsy" were mainly summarized as Factor I "inattention/clumsy." Factor III "mathematical reasoning" contained items related to advanced mathematical processing and knowledge, within the area of "Difficulty

in arithmetic." Factor II "basic academic skills" mainly consisted of items extracted from the three areas of "Difficulty in listening," "Difficulty in speaking," and "Difficulty in arithmetic." The questionnaire items were gathered from surveys and books targeting teachers. Following the factor analysis, a new scale on the children's learning problems that are easily perceived by parents was created. It was founded that parents tried to understand their children's learning problems from the perspective of inattention/clumsy, basic academic skills, and mathematical reasoning.

The questionnaire was based on items related to LD, ADHD, and high functioning ASD. The subscale of inattention/clumsy might be regarded as evidence of the difficulty faced by children with ADHD, and the subscale of basic academic skills might be regarded as evidence of the difficulty faced by children with LD. However, within the factor structure, the items related to the characteristics of ADHD and those related to LD were not distinguished and were composed of mixed features. It is considered that how learning problems emerge is not entirely the same for children with LD, ADHD and High functioning ASD, slow learner, children who have poor learning opportunities due to poverty, and children who lack motivation to learn due to abuse. This scale is not a tool for interpreting the cause of problems in children's learning but a tool for recognizing parents' perception of

their child's learning problems.

It is difficult to treat learning and behavioral problems effectively if the background problem is not assessed and addressed. That is, regarding children with a serious degree of learning problems, it is necessary to identify what caused the problem such as LD, ADHD, high-functioning ASD, slow learner, poverty, abuse. It is important to assess and to draft individual educational plan.

When the average score on the learning problems scale was calculated, 23.61% of the participants had a score higher than 3. It can be estimated that about one in four of the students had problems in learning. The participants in this study lived in areas with low socioeconomic status, and it has been suggested that there are many students who have problems learning in slum areas.

The items about parents' expectation on school system were collected from two studies that targeted parents of children with LD or suspected to have LD, and children with disabilities that were not fully recognized. The questionnaire contained items about the school's facility environment, teachers expertise, education system, educational content, course, and the items fell into three factors.

Factor I "learning situation/career guidance" showed that the parents expected information on the state of their child's school life and information on the next courses from the homeroom teachers. It seemed that the parents expected informational input from the teachers. Factor II "arrangement of educational resources by the administration" contained the items related to the dispatch of specialists to schools, information provision before the child entered school, and educational environment improvement. The parents wished that specialists other than teachers would visit the school and that educational services would be provided from a more multifaceted perspective, in consequence. The results also showed that the parents desired information on educational resources in the area. It was found that the parents needed enhanced educational resources. This could be inferred from extracting Factor III where parents asked to improve the safety of the school zone and security of the area, teacher's skills and specialty.

2. Relationship between the Child's Learning Problems and the Parents' Expectations on School System

The three subscale scores regarding the parents' expectations on school system were compared between the two groups. It was found that the contents of the parents' expectations varied according to the levels of the child's learning problems.

All the subscale scores for the low group were below 3 points. It was found that the parents in this group did not need this support strongly. On the other hand, both the scores of learning situation/career guidance and the score of arrangement of educational resources by the administration in the high group were above four points. The parents expected the teachers to provide informational and enhanced educational resources. They did not ask for teaching skills/safety.

Almost all the parents wanted equally the safety of the school zone and security of the area, teacher's skills and specialty. Furthermore, the parents of children with severe learning problems sought support from school education in the form of informational input from the teachers and the enhancement of educational resources.

Horiguchi and Uno (2000) who examined the educational supports needed by parents of children with LD indicated that the training system for teachers, dispatch of specialists to schools, vocational training, job counselling, and team teaching were important. The items on team teaching could not be included in the questionnaire in this study because they were not accommodation to the classroom situation in Sri Lanka, but other related items showed that the high group needed these supports. The participants in the present study were not parents of children with LD but parents of children with learning problems. It was found that these parents, for various reasons, also needed supports.

Mizusawa et.al (2015) researched the satisfaction with school education of the parents whose children's disabilities showed rare symptoms that lacked recognition in the society. Despite the low profile of the disability per se as well as the factor that showed the low satisfaction from the parent in how the specific syndromes and disabilities were understood by the school teachers, the parents found satisfying at the level of the curriculum and the teachers' understanding of their children's characteristics. The high needs for planning individual

education plans and advice on learning showed at this study may be indicated that few teachers have knowledge of the content and method of education for children with needs. Alternatively, even if teachers have knowledge, it may be the teachers cannot demonstrate their ability in school. It seems necessary to consider the method of support for children with problems in learning from some viewpoints of teacher training, school system, educational administration, collaboration with parents.

3. Future Study

Parents of children with a high degree of learning problems had expectations about school system. For children with learning problems, it is necessary to carry out assessments and draft individual educational plans. It is also important to provide information to parents. It is expected that similar further research is carried out on expanding target areas and in relation to actual educational services.

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〈抄録〉

南アジア・スリランカ国における子どもの学習困難と保護者の学校への期待

スリランカ・国立社会開発研究所のソーシャルワーク部門との連携のもと、子どもの学習上の困難に着目し、学習困難の様相について明らかにするとともに、保護者の学校への期待を検討することを目的とした。コロombo市の小学校1校に在籍する9～10歳の子どもの保護者88名を対象とし、子どもの学習困難尺度、保護者の学校教育期待尺度を用意し、回答を依頼した。因子分析を行なった結果、子どもの学習困難尺度は、「不注意・不器用さ」、「学習の基礎」、「数量についての知識・技能」の3因子が抽出された。保護者の学校教育期待尺度は、「学習の様子・進路」、「行政の教育資源整備」、「教員の指導力・通学路の安全」の3因子が抽出された。学習困難度の高いグループと低いグループにおける保護者の教育への期待を比較したところ、学習の様子・進路および行政の教育資源整備において、学習困難度が高いグループの得点が高いことが示された。

Key words：学習上の困難、保護者、学校への期待