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Paper: Transformability

Youth aspirations, social mobility and goal attainment of education in Sri Lanka

Education is often seen as a means of obtaining employment, which in turn facilitates upward social mobility for individuals irrespective of their caste, class, region and ethnic identities (Hettige 2000, Gunawardena 2002). Even though Sri Lankan education system maintains relatively high standards, it has certain shortcomings especially when it comes to social mobility (Hettige 2000, Fernando 2008). Within this context this study will examine the educational need achievement and social mobility of Sri Lankan students.

The above research question was investigated in different stages of education; O/L, A/L and university level. Objectives of the study are; to investigate the decision making process at each level, to examine the possibility to reach their target and to identify what the restrictions are that they meet in achieving the target. The study was carried out at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka in 2010. The formal systematical random sampling method was used to select the sample. The sample consisted of 150 university students of third year from all faculties of the university. The structured questionnaire is the tool used for data collection.

The study reveals that the students determine their ultimate goal of education in the period of G.C.E.O/L. Although the decision making at A/L is mainly based on O/L results (82.7%) students are influenced by parents, family members (62.3%-2nd priority) and teachers, friends and others (47.6% -3rd priority). Parents' socio-economic background directly influences on decision making at A/L. After applying the Chi-square test statistics it was concluded that there is a relationship between selection of subject stream and family income at 5% level of significance (P value=0.043, probability 95%). Among respondents 31.3 % were not eligible to enter the focused stream because of competitiveness of Z-score. 67% of undergraduates have decided to follow a postgraduate degree due to challenges in the job market. Finally, youth aspirations and social mobility are based on education but they are restricted by their economic background and problems in the job market.

Keywords: Youth aspirations, Social mobility, Goal attainment of education