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YOUTH ASPIRATIONS, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND EDUCATIONAL TARGET ACHIEVEMENT IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to identify how young students set educational targets in major competency levels of their education namely, GCE Ordinary Level (O/L), GCE Advanced Level (A/L), First Degree and Post-Graduate level, and how far they achieve those targets or deviate, which can be used as a yardstick to measure the impact and relevance of education in Sri Lanka. The study was conducted in the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka in 2011. A questionnaire was provided to 150 respondents who were selected based on formal systematic random sampling method. The study reveals that students select their future field of education during the period of GCE O/L based on their performance and set future targets accordingly. The 'white collar job mentality' is infused to most students during this period with considerable contribution from parents, family members, teachers and other social networks, which intensifies competition in the job market later on. The Chi-square test concluded that there is a relationship between the selection of subject stream at A/L and family income at 5% level of significance (P value=0.043, probability 95%), which later determines job prospects and their payoffs. Additionally, 67% of the undergraduates in the sample have decided to follow a postgraduate degree due to the challenges in the job market. The paper concludes that though youth aspirations and social mobility are based on education, they are also heavily conditioned by structural realities such as family wealth, status, and life opportunities, as well as unequal distributions of education facilities.

Keywords: Youth aspirations, Social mobility, Competency levels, Educational target achievement

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INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, education is the major path of social mobility particularly for socially disadvantaged groups such as the poor, women, people in backward areas, and people who belong to lower castes. Sociologically, social mobility refers to a shift from one social status to another, commonly to a status that is either higher or lower. Further, social mobility explains changes in social status. One's ability to achieve a higher social status can depend on factors such as social connections, wealth, effort, and education (Haralambos and Heald 1991). In Sri Lanka, since education is seen as the major avenue of social mobility irrespective of one's social position, there is high competition in each level of education such as primary, secondary and tertiary, to utilize opportunities presented by education. It can be assumed as obvious that the more important purpose of education is to help its beneficiaries achieve a satisfactory job and claim a prestigious position in society than to produce a literate society or to live morally, creatively, and productively. According to Fernando (2008) "education is often seen as a means of obtaining employment, which in turn facilitates upward social mobility for individuals irrespective of their caste, class, religion and ethnic identities…" (Fernando 2008, p. 100).

As many scholars have pointed out, Sri Lanka has been able to achieve one of the highest literacy rates among developing nations as a result of its welfare education system. Higher literacy rates (in 2012, 95.6%) (Department of Census and Statistics n.d.) and primary and secondary enrolments, reducing gender inequality through greater opportunities in education, and achieving international standards such as the Millennium Development Goal of eliminating disparities in enrolment in education are frequently highlighted by researchers and scholars as unique achievements of state funded education (Gunatilaka et al 2010; Gunawardena 2002; Hettige 2000; Liyanage 2014; World Bank Group 2003). Implementation of a free education policy in 1947 and the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil languages as the medium of education can be seen as landmarks of the education sector in Sri Lanka which opened the door for lower and middle class categories to reach social mobility irrespective of their caste, class, gender or ethnicity (Hettige 2000; Gunawardena 2002). This is especially important in light of the fact that education till then was a limited luxury accessible only to the English-speaking upper middle class under the colonial administration. The new arrangement, hence, promised upward social mobility to those classes that were till then sidelined from claiming high positions in the country. Further, every successive regime after the independence has taken actions to expand free education through the introduction of policies such as providing school text books, uniforms, meals, transport facilities, etc.

However, despite these achievements, the present education system faces a number of challenges. Mismatch of education received and skills required by the labour market that results in unemployment and underemployment among youth, deterioration of the quality of school and university education, unplanned and ad hoc policy changes by political leaders, lack of proper training for school teachers, poor infrastructure and supportive facilities in schools and universities, and limited government expenditure on education are a few of them (Handaragama & Rasnayake 2011; Liyanage 2014). Among these, the biggest challenge faced by the education

system in Sri Lanka is the mismatch of education received and skills required by the job market. Due to this disparity, unemployment rates among the educated youth have roughly doubled the national unemployment rate. For instance, in 2007, the unemployment rate for young people with advanced-level education qualifications or better was 10.5% compared with a national rate of 5.6% (Amarasuriya 2010). Senarath & Patabendige (2014) have documented that the formal economy in Sri Lanka (public sector + formal private sector) has failed to generate enough jobs to absorb the graduates of local universities and therefore an excess supply of graduates has been created. Further, they have mentioned that this excess supply of graduates will have no proper job opportunities and therefore they will have to take up jobs which require low levels of education, skills and competencies than what they have acquired. At the same time, private sector employers complain of a lack of skilled personnel. This feature of the educated being unemployed while the job market looks for individuals with a different set of skills is a critical issue in the country's employment situation (Sanderatne 2011).

Meanwhile, analyzing the present free education system, deteriorating quality of school education and unemployment among the educated youth, some researchers have mentioned that free education is really challenged.

> If the existing system of school and university education were to continue for the sake of preserving the concept of free education, its immediate victims would be the vast masses of persons of lower and middle class backgrounds, whose children are destined to receive a low quality, substandard and goal-less education through the public education system…Our real problem now with Sri Lanka's free education is not whether education is free of fees or not, but whether Sri Lanka's younger generation receives a quality education… (Gamage 2008, p. 66).

Further, scholars have observed that the state's failure to provide satisfactory jobs for the youth has contributed to the civil unrest in Sri Lanka since the early 1970s. Those of the early 1970s and late 1980s particularly involved Sinhalese youth in the Southern parts of the country. Unrest involving the Tamil youth began in the late 1970s and then morphed into a secessionist conflict with regional overtones (Amarasuriya 2010; Silva 2005). As Amarasuriya (2010) argues, sections of the youth are discriminated and excluded from the job market due to certain structural reasons. Most young people who do not have strong social connections are reluctant to look for jobs in the formal private sector. Instead, they seek public sector jobs for social legitimacy and validation. She further states that even public sector jobs are hard to get without access to patronage and political party networks.

As has been identified above, issues of the education sector, education and youth unemployment and underemployment, and the connection between youth unrest and education have been focused on by a considerable number of scholars. However, it is yet to be studied how students (who belong to the youth category) create educational targets in different competency levels of their education and how far they achieve those targets or deviate. This study attempts to fulfill this research gap by assess the impact and relevance of education when making life choices, in light of the opportunities available to students and the structural conditions that influence them. For this purpose, it will focus on four competency levels namely GCE O/L,

GCE A/L, First Degree and Post-graduate level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overarching objective of this study is to assess the impact and relevance of education when making life choices, in light of the opportunities available to students and the structural conditions that influence them. Towards this end, it aims to realize the following specific objectives:

1. To investigate how students determine educational targets in major competency levels
2. To identify what sort of factors affect them when they determine targets
3. To identify the structural factors that impact on target achievement
4. To examine the level of target achievement

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

This study was carried out in the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka in 2011. The formal systematical random sampling method was used to select the sample of this study, which consisted of 150 university students of third year from each faculty of the university. About 30% out of total population of third year of each faculty was elected as the sample composition. The final sample composition (as against the faculty composition) is as follows:

Table 01: Sample Composition

Faculty	Total population	30 %- Out of the Total Population	Sample Size
Agriculture	73	21.9	22
Applied Sciences	52	15.6	16
Management Studies	132	39.6	39
Social Sciences & Languages	199	59.7	60
Surveying Sciences	44	13.2	13
TOTAL	**500**		**150**

A questionnaire with open ended and close ended questions was used for data collection. The researchers distributed the questionnaire among the sample population and collected it after completion, during the data collection process. The SPSS statistical package was utilized to analyze the data gathered. Coding and entering the data was the first step, and the researchers identified relationships between variables during this time. Afterwards, single and multi variable tables were drafted to analyze the data. Using descriptive analysis, the findings of the research were explained to realize the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational Target Creation at GCE O/L

In this section we discuss how students create future targets of their education and what type of factors influence them in this process. Educational performance of students and their socio-economic environment are considered here as the major determining factors of educational target creation. There is no doubt that characteristics of the family are associated with the educational outcomes of students. Parental Socioeconomic status and education, cultural assets, social networks, and parental motivation influence the

educational decision making at each level of one's schooling (González et al 2008). Some researchers have suggested that parental influence on a child's education extends beyond the early years into adolescence. Muller and Karle (1998) found that parental support contributed positively to adolescents' academic outcomes, such as better grades.

Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the quality of academic support provided by parents may influence their children's achievement outcomes. The question is: What kind of support do parents provide? Researchers have documented many ways in which parents support their children's education, including providing valuable intellectual resources and cognitive stimulation (e.g. computers, books), monitoring and structuring their children's time around academic activities, supervising their homework completion, assisting them with schoolwork, and spending time discussing academic- related matters (Jun-Li Chen 2005).

In the education system of Sri Lanka, the GCE O/L examination can be seen as a turning point of one's life because it decides the future direction of students. In the study, we investigated how parents influence their children at GCE O/L. According to the existing system, parents do not directly involve in decision making at the GCE O/L since students have to study compulsory subjects for GCE O/L except a few subjects where choice is involved such as aesthetic and extra subjects. Study findings reveal that it is common for parents to send their children for tuition classes targeting higher results for the GCE O/L examination. The interesting point here is that parents influence their children to attend tuition classes especially for Mathematics, Science, first language (either Sinhala or Tamil), and English. According to our analysis, there are two reasons for this. First, results of these subjects will be the basis when choosing GCE A/L subjects. Secondly, both parents and children believe that these are 'difficult subjects' and school education is not enough to get good results for these subjects. According to the results, there was a rural-urban disparity of parents' influence at the GCE O/L. Parents in rural areas send their children to tuition classes mostly for the above three subjects only targeting their children to be qualified for the GCE A/L, whereas parents in urban or semi-urban areas send their children for all GCE O/L subjects targeting 'A' or minimally 'B' passes for all subjects. As a result of these motivations, Mathematics, Science, English, and first language have been mentioned as the favorite subject at the GCE O/L.

Table 02: Favorite subjects at GCE O/L

Subjects	First selection as %
Mathematics	69
Science	65
First Language	56
Religion	38
English	33

Source: Survey data 2011

As the survey data reveal, this subject preference at GCE O/L has shaped the attitude of students towards subject stream selection at GCE A/L. However, English is given less priority compared to other ordinary level subjects. It was not deeply investigated in this study as to why students relatively do not favor English at the O/L. Nevertheless, according to some answers that respondents have given to open ended questions and other remarks, we assume that lack of trained teachers and poor teaching methods in schools would be the main reason for low preference for English at GCE O/L. Another possible reason is that English is considered as the second language and it is not compulsory to get a pass grade for English to study any subject stream at GCE A/L. However, since English competency is obviously linked with the job market and future social mobility of youth, future researches and policy makers should focus on this matter further.

Since the idea towards selection of a subject stream at the GCE A/L is developed in the first competency level, we investigated students' future preference about the selection of the GCE A/L subject stream. More than 50% of the respondents have answered their selection was the Mathematics/Commerce track and Science/Computer track. Further, a considerable percentage had selected the track of Arts/Aesthetic (16.7) and Languages/Literature (17.3). As the research discovered, the preference for streams such as Mathematics, Commerce, Computer and Science is shaped by job accessibility after GCE A/L.

Table 03: Pre-selection for GCE A/L Subjects stream

Section	Percentage %
Arts/Aesthetic	16.7
Languages/ Literature	17.3
Mathematics/Commerce	34.0
Science/Computer	28.7
No Response	03.3
Total	100.0

Source: Survey data 2011

Educational Target Creation at GCE A/L

According to the education system in Sri Lanka, the GCE A/L is the most competitive examination which is directly related to deciding the future social position of a student. Getting qualified through this examination to enter a state university is a dream of not only students but also their parents, teachers and other social networks. In Sri Lanka, admission to universities is still within the policy of 'free education', and therefore it has become extremely competitive. At present, Sri Lanka has 15 state universities and only 9% of the students who sit for the GCE A/L examination are able to obtain admission to them (Liyanage 2014). For instance, in 2011, 239,775 candidates sat for the GCE A/L examination. Out of these, 141,411 were qualified to enter the university. However, only 22, 016 were admitted to state universities. This number represented a mere 15.56% of the total qualified students and 9.2% of the total number of students who sat for the GCE A/L examination. In 2014, 247,376 students sat for the examination and 149,489 were

qualified to enter university. But the actual university intake of the respective year was 25,000 (16.72%). The following table further shows the performance of candidates at GCE O/L and GCE A/L examinations, and the limited access they have to state universities.

Table 04: Performance of Candidates at GCE O/L, GCE A/L and the Number Qualified to Enter University

Performance of Candidates	2011	2012	2013	2014
All Candidates sat for the GCE (O/L)	443,298	451,039	308,054	298,549
Percentage Qualifying for GCE (A/L)	**56.54**	**60.87**	**62.42**	**64.51**
All Candidates sat for the GCE (A/L)	239,775	233,634	241,629	247,376
All Candidates Qualifying to Enter University	141,411	144,745	140,993	149,489
Percentage Qualifying to Enter University	**58.99**	**61.95**	**58.35**	**60.43**
Admitted students	22,016	28,908	24,198	25,000
Admitted students % out of qualified candidates	15.56	19.97	17.16	16.72

Source: Department of Census and Statistics n.d.

Due to limited opportunities in state universities and limited access to private sector universities, competition for the A/L examination is further intensified. Therefore, students are influenced by many parties including their parents, teachers and friends in the selection of a subject stream at GCE A/L. In the study, we asked respondents to prioritize the reasons that motivated them to select their subject stream at the A/L. Results are shown in the following table.

Table 05: Decision making on field selection at A/L

Basis of the decision	Percentage %
Rank 1: Based on O/L results	69
Rank 2: Influence of parents and family members	65
Rank 3: Influence of teachers and friends	56

Source: Survey data 2011

As the study reveals, parents, family members, friends and teachers guide children to select white collar job oriented subject streams at the GCE A/L. However, there seems to be a difference of the influence on the selection of the subject stream between parents with higher and lesser education. In the study, the GCE A/L and above was considered as the line of demarcation between these two groups. According to this benchmark, parents with higher education seem to have guided their children to select Science and Mathematics fields than the Social Science field. However, it should be noted that in this category, some

respondents (12%) have mentioned that they were not influenced by their parents. With regard to the second category, which is parents with low-education, children have apparently not been guided by their parents and were allowed to decide their subject field. However, for students of this category, teachers' and friends' guidance in the subject stream selection was evident.

Inequality of Opportunity

Although Sri Lanka is following the free education policy, it is important to note that one's economic status is also instrumental in deciding his/her education mobility due to unequal opportunities in education. As Gamage (2008) points out, the free education system is challenged due to the inequality of opportunity in educational mobility. Applying the Chi-square test statistics, the researchers tested whether there is a relationship between family expenditure and students' subject selection at GCE A/L. The hypotheses were as follows,

H0: There is no relationship between family expenditure and the selection of the GCE A/L subject stream

H1: There is a relationship between family expenditure and the selection of the GCE A/L subject stream

After applying the Chi-square test statistics, it was concluded that there is a relationship between these two variables at 5% level of significance (P value=0.043). Then the probability is about 95%.

Table 06: Relationship between family expenditure and subject selection at A/L

Subject Stream	Monthly expenditure level of family				
	10000	10001-15000	15001-20000	>20000	All
Management	33.33	30.61	15.63	27.08	26.67
Science/Mathematics	28.57	18.37	53.13	39.58	34.00
Social Sciences	38.10	51.02	31.25	33.33	39.33
All	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

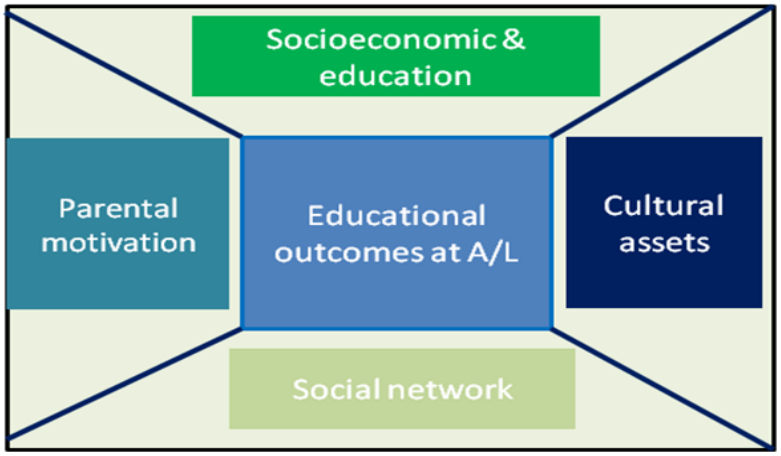
Source: Survey data 2011

According to the above statistics, it is clear that students who belong to families with higher levels of expenditure show greater propensity to follow Science and Mathematics streams than Arts, whereas students who belong to families with lower levels of expenditure seem to have followed Arts and Management subjects in more instances than Science and Mathematics ones. According to the survey data, both parents and students of low-expenditure families believe that they have to spend more money if they select Science or Mathematics subjects because the children have to attend tuition classes for all three subjects and the tuition fees are relatively higher than Arts subjects. The general perception towards subject selection at GCE A/L is that students who obtain higher grades for the GCE O/L prefer to study Science and Mathematics while students who obtain relatively low grades prefer to study Arts subjects. However, according to the survey data, some students have obtained higher grades for all the subjects at the GCE O/L. Nevertheless they decided to study Arts for the GCE A/L. We were motivated by this factor to investigate why they decided to study Arts for GCE A/L. Only a very few (02) students have answered saying that they had a strong interest to study Arts subjects. Others have

mentioned two interesting points. First, they do not have enough money to study science related subjects and/or that the Science stream is not available in their schools for GCE A/L. The second and more interesting factor is that they believe that doing Arts for A/L is the easiest way to enter the university and obtain a degree that provides them with an opportunity to get a government sector job which facilitates their future social mobility. Further, it should be noted that the parents of those students also have motivated their children to study Arts for GCE A/L due to future job security.

As we understood from the survey, educational target creation of students at both GCE O/L and GCE A/L is highly influenced not only by the students' performance but also by their socio-economic and cultural status. Accordingly, the educational outcome is also largely determined by these factors. In both competency levels, white collar job mentality directly or indirectly influences the target creation of education. Theoretically this influence can be closely explained from the following diagram (see the figure 01). Since the parental and other influences are high and visible at GCE A/L, we have drawn the diagram only for GCE A/L.

Figure 01: Target creation at A/L[1]



Source: González et al 2008

Level of Educational target achievement

The researchers measured the level of target achievement of education based on the following five criteria.

1. Obtain expected results for Future Oriented Subject (FOS)[1] at the GCE O/L examination
2. Obtain expected results for Future Oriented Subject (FOS) at the GCE A/L examination
3. Qualifying to enter university at the first attempt
4. Qualifying to do a special degree in FOS

According to the above criteria, target achievement at GCE O/L is significantly high. About 86.0% of students obtained expected results for their FOS. Only about 14.0% were unsuccessful in achieving the expected results for FOS. This group reset its target and managed to enter university because of such action. For instance, if somebody expects to become a doctor by studying Science subjects for GCE A/L, and s/he does not qualify for that, s/he enters university to read for an Agriculture degree. It is significant to note that this group still worries about the deviation from the original target. Compared

1. The concept was adopted from González et al 2008

to the level of target achievement at the GCE O/L, target achievement at the GCE A/L is low. Only 42% obtained expected results for FOS at the GCE A/L and 58% deviated.

Getting qualified to enter the university was the next competency level. In this level, target achievers (46.7%) and non-achievers (52.7%) were almost similar in number.

Table 07: Eligibility to enter the university at the first attempt

Eligibility	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	70	46.7
No	79	52.7
N/A	01	00.6
Total	150	100.0

Source: Survey data 2011

The majority of those who were ineligible (52.7%) to enter university at the first attempt studied subjects in the Science, Commerce and Mathematics streams. Due to the strong aspiration for getting the expected job, 51.3% out of 52.7% had taken the same subjects for their second attempt, while about 1.4% had changed their subjects. There were students who obtained two 'A' passes and one 'B' pass after sitting for the examination in the Management stream who were not eligible to enter the Management Faculty due to the cut off mark being high, but received a chance to enter the faculty of Social Science and Languages for the Economics track.[2] Only about 68.7% received an opportunity to enter the section of FOS.

The eligibility to do a special degree in FOS is the next target achievement level. Before explaining the achievement level of FOS, it should be noted that out of the sampled population 71.3% were able to study FOS beyond the first year at the university, while 28.7% were unable to do so. Among those who did not receive the opportunity, 25% had not acquired the necessary Grade Point Average (GPA) for the particular subject, while 2%, due to engaging in a job, decided to do a general degree. Very few students (1.7%) did not get the opportunity since the respective department does not offer that subject. However, though they (those who were unable to do a special degree in FOS) could not get an opportunity to do a special degree in FOS, they had received a chance to do a special degree in other available subjects. 92.7% of sample population had received an opportunity to do a special degree in some subject (see table 07). According to the views of students, though they missed the opportunity to do a special degree in FOS, they had accepted the opportunity to a special degree in any other field due to the competition in the job market. They strongly believe that having a special degree in any field will help them find a job more easily than graduates with general degrees (See table 08).

Eligibility for a specialized degree in FOS among the respondents was about 84% (See table 09).

The reasons for not receiving an opportunity to do a special degree from FOS included not meeting the required qualifications, offering of limited opportunities by the departments and the unavailability of some subjects for specialization at certain departments (for instance languages such as Japanese, Chinese, Hindi and German). Therefore, it

Table 08: Eligibility for a special degree in some subject

Eligibility	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	139	92.7
No	10	06.7
N/A	01	00.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Survey data 2011

Table 09: Eligibility for specialized degree in FOS

Eligibility	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	126	84.0
No	19	12.7
N/A	05	03.3
Total	150	100.0

Source: Survey data 2011

can be seen that some students do not have an opportunity do a special degree from FOS due to some structural issues in the system as well, and that it does not solely depend on one's performance.

Aspirations towards Post-Graduate Degree

The basic degree is considered as the primary qualification for graduate level positions in the job market, and post graduate degrees are considered as a qualification for promotions, or as a means of adding extra scholarly value to the employee. However, at present, post-graduate degrees are recognized more as a basic qualification in the competitive job market than for its scholarly value or promotion capacity. According to the research findings, aspirations for postgraduate studies are shaped at the undergraduate level. In fact, the understanding is that a basic degree is not a sufficient qualification to find a job due to the prevailing high unemployment or underemployment rates among graduates. On the other hand, graduates have to spend considerable time to find a job after the basic degree. Hence, they decide to effectively use this time for a post-graduate degree. Out of the sample population about 67.3% had decided to read for a postgraduate degree after completing the basic degree (frequency is 101) while 30% had not (frequency is 45) {No response rate was 2.7% (4)}. Answers given to the question "Why did you decide to do a post-graduate degree?" are as given in Table 10.

The researchers studied as to why 30% of undergraduates do not have an aspiration for following a post-graduate degree. The reasons for not making such a decision are in Table 11.

The summarized educational target achievement rate in each competency level appears in Table 12.

Table 10: Purposes of deciding to do a post-graduate degree

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage %
To enhance subject knowledge	19	19.8
To find a job	80	79.2
N/A	02	01.9
Total	**101**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data 2011

Table 11: Reasons for not making a decision to follow a post-graduate degree

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage %
Inadequate income	14	46.7
Basic degree subject is not the FOS	13	43.3
Need to follow a vocational course	03	10.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data 2011

Table 12: Summary of educational target achievement in all competency levels

Competency Level	Achievement level/rate (%)	
	Yes	No
Expected results for FOS at GCE O/L	86.0	14.0
Expected results for FOS at GCE A/L	42.0	58.0
Qualifying enter to university in 1st attempt	47.0	53.0
Qualifying to do a special degree for FOS	71.0	29.0
Aspiration on postgraduate degree	67.0	33.0

Source: Survey data 2011

CONCLUSION

Young undergraduates of Sri Lanka have high expectations regarding employment conditions and professional work after graduation. However, at present, the education system in Sri Lanka is challenged by growing youth aspirations of education in the competitive and limited job market. As this study reveals, undergraduates decide their future target of education in the period of GCE O/L and it is highly developed in the period of GCE A/L. However, as the data show, decision making on educational target

creation is not fully based on performance and aspirations of the students. It is highly influenced by their parents, teachers, friends and other groups, as well as the prospects open to them depending on their social status and financial capacity. During the periods of GCE O/L and GCE A/L, educational target creation is mainly influenced by aspirations for 'education for white collar job' or 'education for government job'.

When considering the educational target achievement in each competency level, a considerable amount of students did not achieve their targets (GCE O/L- 14%, GCE A/L and 1st attempt to enter university-53%, First Degree- 29%, Postgraduate-33%) due to issues of individual performance and structural issues such as poor income and lack of educational facilities. Particularly GCE A/L is the most critical competency level of creating educational targets for students. However, family economy and available educational facilities directly affect target creation at GCE A/L. The data revealed that students who belong to higher expenditure families have a higher opportunity to follow Science stream subjects than Arts, whereas students of low-expenditure families tend to follow Arts and Management subjects than Science subjects, sometimes despite even wishing to follow the Science stream for A/L. This difference is mainly due to structural factors that condition their choices, because Science subjects are either not available in schools that do not have a lot of facilities (which students of low expenditure families are usually compelled to attend), or tuition for such subjects tends to be more expensive than for Arts subjects.

Even at the university level, due to limited facilities in the respective departments, students seem to have brought their targets down. Therefore, any policy aiming at providing equal opportunities in education should be sensitive to these structural inequalities in order to make social justice an achievable ideal.

NOTES

1. The researchers define the FOS as the education track/field or subject of students that, as they think, guide to reach their future target. E.g. If one thinks he/she wants to become an engineer by studying mathematics, mathematics is the FOS for him/her.

2. This is a special selection taking place at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Under faculty recommendation, out of the total intake into the faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, 50% is enrolled from students who sat for GCE A/L from the Management field with relatively low Z-core.

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