

Factors Affecting Decision Making and Achievements in Educational Pursuits of Students in Selecting Careers

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The success of educational endeavours of students is determined by many factors. Proper decision-making and social factors are very important for students to successfully complete education and achieve career goals. In Sri Lanka, education is very competitive and only students with higher intellectual capacity and ability to make right decisions are successful. The parents and family, teachers, peers and other important social groups such as clergy, celebrities and social organizations are also contributors to their success. Selection of suitable subjects in G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L) is very important for acquiring better careers in the future. Upon successful completion of the A/L examination, only a handful of students obtain the chance to enter National Universities, where they could specialize for a certain profession or obtain a special or a general degree. After graduation, they go into professional careers depending on the available opportunities, overall qualifications and career interests.

Limited studies have been carried out to ascertain factors affecting educational pursuits of Sri Lankan students at critical points such as selection of A/L stream, selection of specialization stream in the University and achievement of professional careers. Therefore, the present study was conducted to assess the factors affecting the decision-making and achievements in educational pursuits of students in their advanced level and post-school careers by collecting information from A/L students, current university students and professionals. The survey was conducted in the Central Province, Sri Lanka from April to June 2011 by conducting a questionnaire guided interviews.

Seventy five percent of the professionals and current university students had at least one parent in a government job, which shows that there is a higher chance of success for the children of government servants. This implies that children of government servants had better guidance in education than children whose parents were not government servants. Sixty percent of the respondents had made their own decisions in selecting their A/L stream and the others had followed decisions made by their parents/family. The ability to make decisions is increased in university and postgraduate students indicating a lesser influence by parents/ family. Eighty percent of school students preferred to be a socially high ranked professional. Primary people behind the career path and success of respondents were parents and teachers. Significant associations between preferred career and grades obtained for O/L Mathematics and between subject selection in A/L and grades for Mathematics and Science were observed ($P=0.05$). Thus, Mathematics and Science education is crucial in deciding the future careers of students, and must be strengthened at school-level. Thirty three percent of the respondents in all three categories had been motivated by successful role models in planning their life. Respondents were of the opinion that improving English language proficiency and career guidance programmes at A/L stage would be useful.

Decision-making and achievements of the students are decided primarily by self interests and social factors such as parents/ family and teachers. Students mainly receive motivation through social groups such as peers. Therefore, parents/ family, teachers and other important social groups must play a crucial role in supporting students to pursue education successfully.