

Asians discover education no guarantee for employment

Asia's expanded educational programme that went into high gear in the 1960s has created a burgeoning pool of "educated unemployed", deflating old projections about education as the key to giving the poor a bigger share of society's wealth.

Thus, the Third World governments' hopes that education offers the promise of equal opportunity for everyone and the chance of social mobility even for the poorest remain unfulfilled.

For many countries throughout Asia during the 1960s, education constituted the largest single and most expensive programmes.

These governmental thrusts seemed urgently relevant. Their populations were young and education offered the promise of a fairer distribution of income in an area of vastly maldistributed wealth.

But something seems to have gone wrong. As a study published recently by the International Labour Office (ILO) pointed out, "the best paid jobs still go mostly to the already well-off, and much of Asia has now a pool of educated unemployed."

What went wrong with Asia's ambitious education programmes?

The study said that the educational expansion in Asia has spread resources so thinly that

background advantages continue to carry overwhelming weight in deciding who obtains the best and biggest slice of the national cake.

It said this was the result of "the interplay of low levels of physical resources and of knowledge, information, communications and influence."

As a result, the study said, the rapid expansion of education in countries with limited job markets was "educational inflation".

"Educated unemployment leads not to spurning education but to thirst for higher levels of education. The demand also leads to greater competition within the school system", the study said.

Asia's problem concerning its educated unemployed is that the public sector provides much of the job supply and governments are wont to use educational achievement as a yardstick in determining who obtains a job.

"However, where education is the main criterion used for job selection, the result is education inflation, and the requirement of ever higher levels of formal education for an unchanged job," the study said.

Asian countries had looked up to vocational training as the solution to the education enigma. But even vocational training appears to have faltered as the hope for solution

to the disquieting disequilibrium in the distribution opportunities for Asia's youth.

Quoting an ILO mission to the Philippines in 1974, the study noted that it "is generally conceded that vocational education is unpopular with students and that most of them regard it as a second-best chance to go to college."

The study said that as a result, 82 per cent of those who completed vocational courses in general high schools in the Philippines went on to college and up to 50 per cent in Thailand.

Said the study: "Vocational secondary education does not guarantee employment." On the basis of these findings, it said vocational secondary education has failed in one of its major aims, despite its generally higher costs and longer course time.

Schools offering vocational courses usually have active placement bureaus, and some employ highly experienced instructors. But even with these assets "they may be fighting a losing battle if the best jobs are reserved for college graduates", the study said.

Invariably, societies give preference to employees with highly developed cognitive abilities in jobs that require mental skills. It is an established fact that these kinds of jobs "are universally rewarded, in pay and status, that jobs re-

quiring largely manual psychomotor skills," the study stated.

It noted that in the case of the children of the poor, it is not experience with a particular set of manipulative skills which is most useful to them, but the ability to absorb new skills and to adjust to the old ones.

"This ability is in itself more cognitive than manipulative," the study said.

But tests conducted in Iran, India and Thailand indicated that "on average, children of labourers and similar unskilled workers have a less developed thinking faculty than children of members of the profession or of management."

This seemingly inherent class deficiency cannot be redressed even by schooling.

The study said: "Evidence from the Philippines certainly suggests that although the early display of talent and assiduity may partly compensate for low household incomes, the limiting effects of low incomes on children's educational achievement are formidable."

The study noted that there are strong links between academic success and high levels of education and achievement. The development of mental ability and access to better-paid jobs.

"Developing other types of ability, especially for the poor leaves the field of competition in mental abilities free for the non-poor. Given the present pattern of reward structures in the labour market and given the need for educational systems to respond to this pattern, educational expansion cannot be expected to improve income distribution in any significant fashion," the study stated.

The study warned that the various aspects of what they called "multiple deprivation for the poor are closely interlinked" through inadequate employment opportunities, inadequate nutrition, insecurity... child labour, expense of books, absence of reading materials at home and poor employment prospects."

It suggested that changes in the school system be "accompanied by changes in other respects".

It added: "So long as the hierarchical ranking of jobs and earnings remains there will be competition for them in which school variables and tested abilities will play a major part."

"Stress on adopting different attitudes will be almost certainly self-defeating and is not likely to be accepted by

children whose home background in any event closest to existing holders of coveted jobs."