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EDUCATION EQUITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS: A TWO-TIER SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Abstract:

Expenditure on education represents the third largest government spending, accounting to around 3.8% of GDP of which around 51% is allotted to secondary education in the Republic of Mauritius. The benefits of education cannot be contained to the individual who pays for it and these benefits spill over the broader community for example, in terms of lower crime, trained labour, healthy workforce and entrepreneurial innovations. Education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the Republic of Mauritius is financed with public money. Education may be considered as a public good. Here government funding, provision and regulation may help optimise the collective interests of citizens. Historically the provision of secondary education had emerged mostly from private-aided schools. State secondary schools behaved like public monopolies where the State maintained its monopoly over those children with higher educational achievements at the end of the primary schooling cycle.

The objective of this study is to examine equity in the provision of secondary education in the Republic of Mauritius, in terms of well-defined concepts such as horizontal equity, vertical equity, equality of opportunity and educational adequacy across the two-tier education system, that is, state secondary schools and non-confessional private-aided schools. Seven randomly chosen managers of non-confessional private-aided schools were interviewed to understand the rationale behind their provisions of secondary education, the numerous problems they have been constantly experiencing from education policies and the extent to which these have affected their students. Prior to this study, these had not been adequately documented in the literature. Secondary data such as repetition rates, enrolment in pre-vocational stream, teacher-pupil ratio, gross enrolment ratio and number of private-aided schools from the Statistics Mauritius website were also used.

Over the last two decades, the government had reinforced the negative loop where marginalised children received fewer resources and they ended up with poor educational outcomes and opportunities in life. The most recent education reform, the nine year compulsory schooling may be viewed as an equity-improving initiative as it postponed streaming and ended the stigma attached with the pre-vocational stream. However the government must ensure that quality education is provided at all levels of primary schooling and children with learning difficulties should be identified much before the end of the primary cycle. Greater financial incentives should be given to private-aided non-confessional secondary schools which deal with marginalised students. All administrative hurdles should be removed to facilitate the smooth expansion of these schools.

Keywords:

Equity, pre-vocational education, secondary education, education reforms, private-aided schools, education policies

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