

Research on Education, skills, Employment, and Employability among Youth in the Auroville Bioregion

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With Feedback from
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

As per statistics in 2015 youth literacy rate in India is 90.2%. In Tamil Nadu, this rate is higher than the national average at 96.08%. The Auroville bioregion is no exception to this growth. In the last 10 years more youth in the Auroville bioregion are pursuing college education and receiving degrees. This is a significant change compared to the previous generations because the parents of most of these youth are educated only up to primary level. It is an interesting scenario with parents being very eager to see their children obtain college education that they themselves could not accomplish but unable to guide them in choosing courses and careers. This research aims at studying the education levels of youth in the Auroville bioregion and the employment rate after completing college education. Equally important, the research is aimed at studying the level of support and guidance they receive from parents and siblings when wanting to pursue college education. As first-generation college aspirants the challenges faced by the students are unique. The research aims at understanding these challenges and finding ways to improve the situation through the YEN KALVI program.

The motivation for the research came through meeting with students during YEN KALVI program activities. YEN KALVI aims at helping students pursuing college education by providing information about college and career choices and offering advice about appropriate course of study that would align with their interests.

1.2 Objectives

Conduct a research survey to:

1. Study the education levels of youth in the Auroville bioregion
2. Research their interests and motivations to pursue college education
3. Assess the employment level if they have already completed college
4. Understand the abilities that the students perceive as lacking or deficient in them for obtaining successful employment
5. The level of education of parents and older siblings and their ability to guide youth to college education and career

Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Are students motivated to pursue college education?
2. Are parents educated enough to provide guidance regarding higher education?
3. Are students informed about different possibilities of fields of study? Is there a variety in the chosen fields of study?
4. Are students willing and feel the confidence to go outside the Pondicherry area (or the state) to pursue college education? Will their parents allow them to do so?
5. How many are able to support themselves through part-time work while in school/college?
6. How many are able to successfully find employment after graduation?
7. How many are unemployed?
8. What are the perceived difficulties in finding employment?
9. What abilities do students wish to possess in order to find employment? (understood through experience or perceived)

2.2 Research Design and Instrument

The research was conducted through student surveys and interviews. Survey questionnaires were distributed and participants were requested to answer questions. The questionnaire in Tamil is attached.

2.3 Sample

Individuals participated after they received information about the survey. Announcement about the survey was printed and distributed through contacts. Two volunteers (Arun and Nimila) helped in distributing the announcements. Youth in the age range of 16 to 23 were invited to participate and all those who were interested were allowed to take part in the survey without any other selection criteria.

2.4 Data Collection

Data was collected in seven villages in the Auroville bioregion. Between September 2017 and April 2018 the survey was conducted in Edayanchavadi, Morattandi, Alankuppam, Sanjeevi Nagar, Kuilapalayam and Kottakarai. Other small villages like Nosal, Rayapettai, Annai Nagar were included as part of these main villages. On the day of the survey, participants were gathered in a school (an outreach school of Auroville in each village). Devi Namasivayam explained the context and background of the research to the participants after which she guided them through each question to be answered. Refreshments and discussions followed after the completion of the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in each village on a Sunday to allow for maximum number of participants.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data was entered using Microsoft Access and analyzed. Out of a total of 103 participants, 98 questionnaires were taken for analysis. They were 44 female participants and 54 male participants. The remaining 5 questionnaires were not valid due to participant's age (too low) or not enough relevant details (mostly incomplete).

2.6 Results

2.6.1 Interest among Participants in Pursuing College Education (Figure 1)

100% of the students who participated in the survey were interested in higher education. They were either in school and expressed interest in pursuing college education or were pursuing college education at the time of the survey or had completed college education.

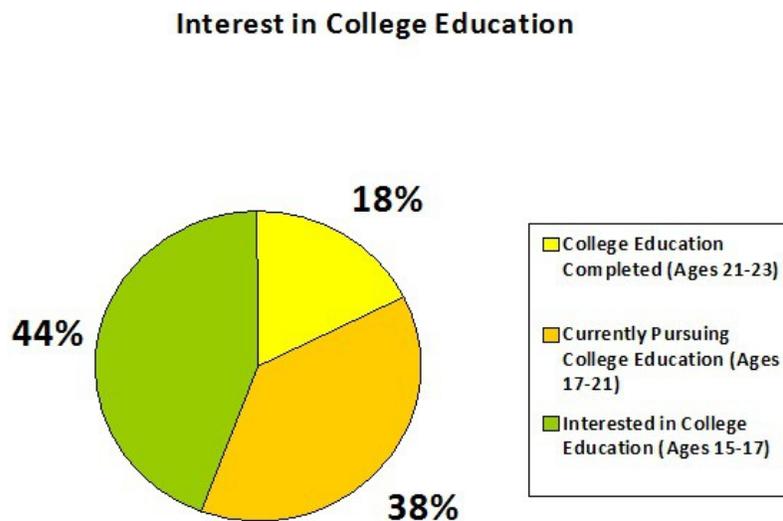


Figure 1

2.6.2 Educational Background of Parents (Figure 2)

72% of parents had education levels below 10th grade. Many had education below 5th grade. For the purpose of this survey 10th grade was taken as the minimum to be considered as an educational background necessary for a parent to provide guidance to their children regarding college courses and career choices. Only 3% of the parents possessed college degrees. 33% of participants had siblings who had some college education.

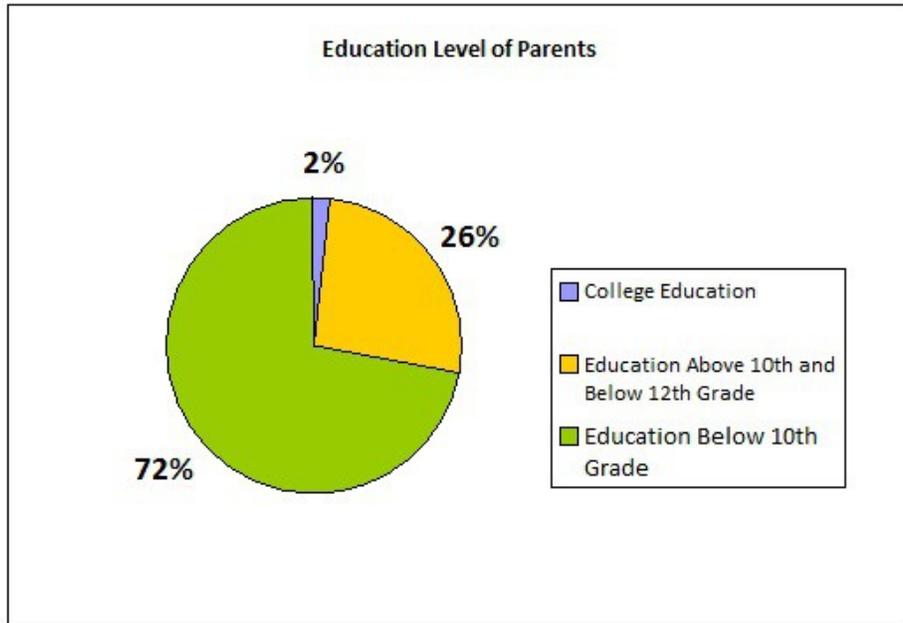


Figure 2

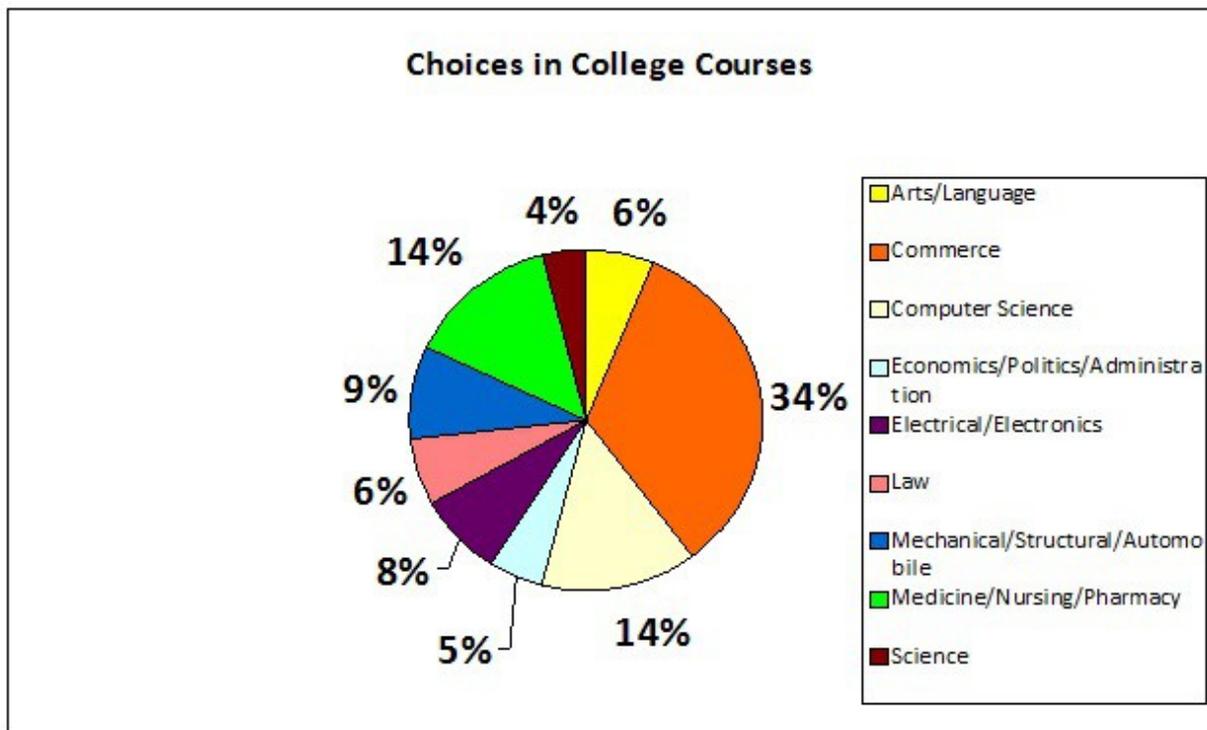


Figure 3

2.6.3 Selection of Subjects of Study (Figure 3)

Commerce was the most popular choice of study among participants. The reason for this was the perception that studying commerce offers the highest number of job opportunities. 34% of the participants were interested in commerce as their field of study. This was followed by 14% of the participants choosing either computer science or Medicine/Nursing/Pharmacy subjects. Each of the other fields was chosen by less than 10% of the participants. Participants had knowledge only about very limited fields and were interested to pursue/were already studying only from nine subjects.

2.6.4 Employment after College Education (Figure 4)

73% of the participants who completed college education were unemployed.

Individuals employed after Completing College Education

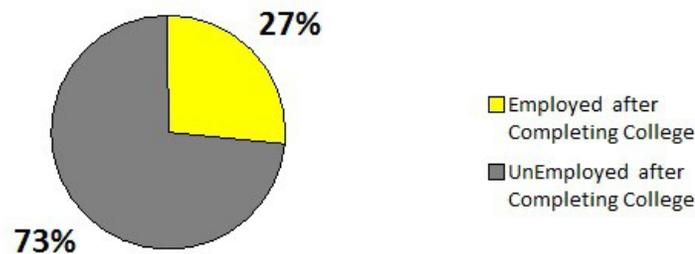


Figure 4

2.6.5 Reasons for Unemployment/Perceived Abilities that Could Improve Job Opportunities (Figure 5)

25% of Participants noted lack of work experience as the foremost reason for not being able to find employment. Communication skills, ability to speak English well, and self confidence were other skills that were perceived as lacking and were desired by the participants to increase their chances of finding employment.

2.6.6 Part-Time Employment (Figure 6)

9% of the participants were working part-time to support themselves through school or college. Interestingly more than 50% of the youth who were employed part-time were working as pizza delivery persons in the evenings.

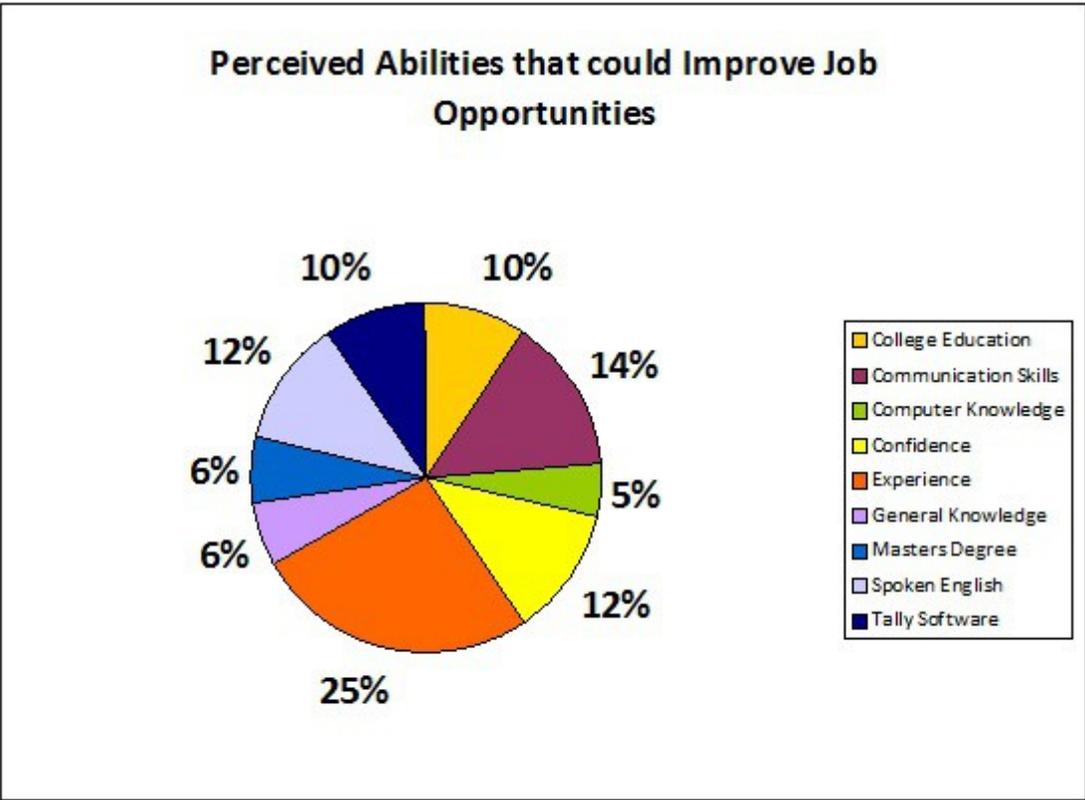


Figure 5

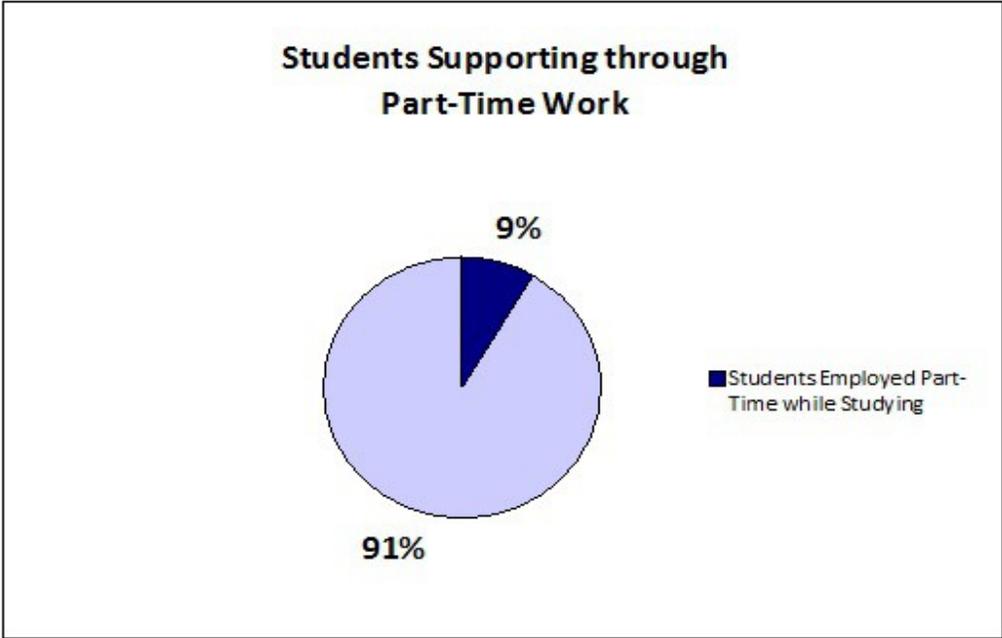


Figure 6

2.6.7 Willingness to Pursue Higher Education Outside of Pondicherry Area (Figure 7)

40% of the participants expressed confidence in going outside Pondicherry area to pursue college education. Interestingly, the same percentage of participants was in college in Pondicherry area. Only 5% of the participants were studying outside of their home state. 15% of the participants noted that their parents may not/will not allow them to study outside Pondicherry area although they had the confidence to do it.

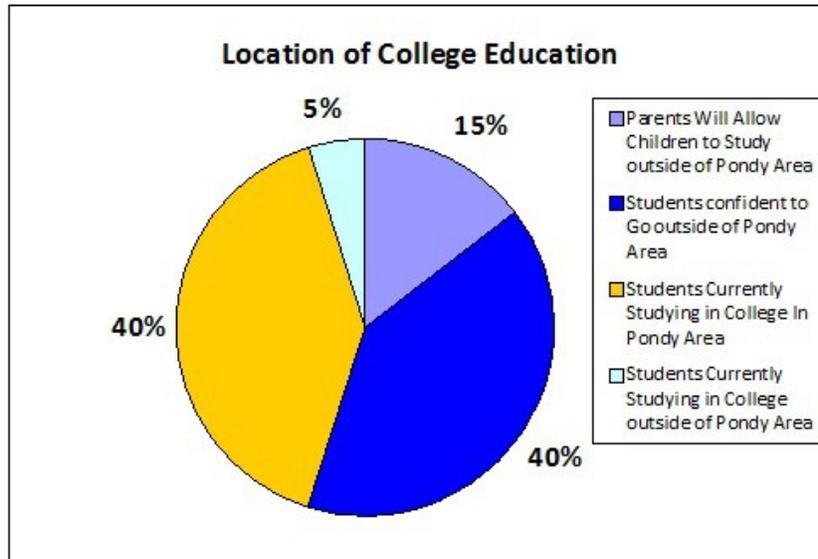


Figure 7

2.6.8 Vocational and other skills acquired through Formal training or from Parents

19% of the participants had vocational (painting, welding etc) and other skills with distribution as in the figure below

Vocational and Other Skills

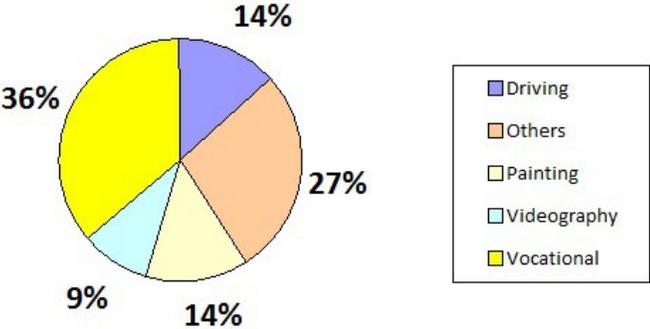


Figure 8

2.7 Observations, Conclusions, and Remarks

The research survey confirms that youth in the bioregion, with a few exceptions, are unprepared for higher education. They are unable to seriously plan their education and careers. Lack of proper guidance combined with inadequate support and planning makes them feel lost in the admission process to colleges following the completion of 12th grade. Some develop ideas of becoming professionals without adequate knowledge about the steps involved to accomplish their dreams and with little understanding of what the profession is about. In many cases, the parents who are themselves uneducated impose the choice of a neighbor or friend and push the youth to pursue degrees even when the chosen field of study does not interest them. Opting for colleges that have poor infrastructure in order to stay close to home, limited capacities for critical thinking and lack of confidence to compete with students from advantaged backgrounds, and inability to comprehend the relevance of the chosen field of study are some causes for inadequate subject knowledge and incompetence for work. The inadequacy of subject knowledge for real-world applications is a challenge faced by the youth. The findings show that unemployment rate is quite high (Figure 4) at 73% in the Auroville bioregion that can worsen without appropriate intervention. Students who completed college education cited lack of experience and confidence as two main reasons for unemployment. Lack of experience is a chicken and egg problem that requires innovative strategies to solve. Projects (in the final year of study) with real-world applications planned and implemented well, internships, and volunteering could be possible opportunities for the youth to obtain experience and understanding of work environments. During discussions that followed the surveys, it became clear that the concept of “internship” is new to all of them. They were also not able to comprehend the significance of project work that is part of their degree courses. The project work remains largely academic and theoretical that does not provide them the opportunity for real-world experience of the subject. Many were prepared to volunteer if they had the opportunities to do so.

YEN KALVI program will continue to provide information sessions as well as guidance and support to the youth in the Auroville bioregion. The program will also aim to expand to find strategies for providing the youth, who are first-generation college aspirants, with opportunities for developing skills, abilities, and experience to meet the challenges of finding meaningful work.

