

## **F-21: Academic performance of University students admitted under different categories**

**Raja Gunawardane**

*(Faculty of Education, Univ of Colombo, Colombo 3)*

Equality of access at the University Entrance level, is a main criterion for measuring the degree of democratisation of higher education. Due to the demand for more places at the university, the authorities had at various points of time, introduced change into a system which had previously been based only on the meritocratic principle. Thus, district quotas and quotas for under-privileged districts have been used mainly with the aim of ensuring fair opportunity for 'disadvantaged' students.

The main objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the university selection procedure by examining the differences in academic performance of university students. Specifically, the study attempted (1) to measure the differences of performance levels of different student groups at the entrance level and at the final degree level; (2) to identify the constraints which tend to maintain a low mark range in the disadvantaged students' performance.

A sample of 2 batches of students from 3 major university courses, was used to examine the differences in academic performance of students from different categories at entry level and final degree level. This was supplemented by a questionnaire survey of a sub sample of students and interviews of a group of university teachers.

The analysis revealed that students from disadvantaged districts still represent a small proportion of the university population. Although they had progressed academically during the period of university education, the entry level pattern was replicated in the final examination. This indicated that GCE (AL) examination is effective in predicting later examination performance. Insufficient knowledge of English and financial difficulties continue to hinder them at university level. These findings indicate that the admission policy which envisaged a reduction of disparities is effective only at entry level.