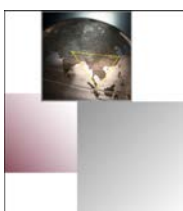


#2: July 2013

The J Y Pillay Comparative Asia Research Centre Conference



We had a very hectic May with the J Y Pillay Comparative Asia Research Centre Conference. The conference was entitled: *40 per cent of the World: Population Change, Human Capital and Development in China, India and Indonesia*. Over 50 academics from

various countries around the world attended this conference to discuss their new findings.



The participants of the J Y Pillay CARC Conference. This picture was provided very kindly by Dr Evi Arifin.

The 3-day conference saw 24 presentations and 7 general topics being deliberated upon. Each topic covered research projects from China, India and Indonesia. Research topics included education, mortality, migration, data issues, fertility, ageing and methodology.

If you require more information about the J Y Pillay CARC or the conference, please send an email to jypcarc@nus.edu.sg or visit [the J Y Pillay event page](#).

Education and Human Capital Development in the Giants of Asia

By Therese Chan

With a fast growing middle class and 41% of the world's population within their borders, China, India and Indonesia possess the potential to be among the world's richest economies in 2050. However, can this potential be achieved with their current education policies?

Education is a crucial tool in many countries to narrow social inequalities, and advance workforce related and non-workforce related issues. Jones and Ramchand's paper¹ gives an overview of the role of education in the development of China, India and Indonesia, as well as several issues they face developing their human capital for the future.

The enactment and gradual implementation of compulsory education laws has led to an increase in enrolment rates in all three countries. Gross enrolment numbers in secondary schools have increased significantly in China and Indonesia. India lags behind the other two countries in terms of secondary school enrolment numbers, but significant improvements have been made over the last decade.

Despite these policies in place, the opportunity a child has to progress to study in a tertiary institution is strongly related to factors such as rural-urban background, social class, cultural reasons and gender. A low household income may also deter a student from attending school past a certain point. Subsidies or scholarships from the government are usually insufficient to pay for post-basic school fees and other school related expenses; the forgone income from time spent in school and the low returns to education continue to be impediments to post-basic education.

The quality of education offered by schools in rural and urban areas may vary in terms of facilities, the quality of teachers and the curricula offered by the schools. This may reinforce existing social inequalities and increase the barriers to further education faced by rural students. The teachers' rate of absenteeism, quality and competency in public schools also affect the students' enthusiasm for school. These barriers

¹ Jones, G. and Ramchand, D. (2013), Education and human capital development in the giants of Asia. *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*, 27: 40–61. doi: 10.1111/apel.12002

manifest in vast and varied forms at different education levels.

Reports from schools in rural areas are often misleading as enrolment numbers are reported instead of the students' attendance rates throughout the year. Many students may be unable to reach secondary school because of the following issues: an increase in opportunity cost, lack of role models for the student, poorly trained teachers at the school, a lack of child-friendly teaching practices and an increase in miscellaneous costs like uniforms or stationery. The student may face difficulties in getting to the new school as it may be located in another village. Even if students graduate successfully from primary school, some are functionally illiterate with below standard skills in reading and mathematics.

Some rural households have environments which may not be conducive for learning. Linguistic differences between home and school might affect a student's ability to learn.

The long lead times between the implementation of new policies and producing a workforce relevant to the economy further emphasizes the importance of early action to reform education policies.

In the case of India, while the Right to Education Act (RTE) gives students aged between 6 and 14 years the right to a place in school and stipulates various infrastructural and organisational requirements, problems still exist.

Depending on their status with the school, teachers in India have varying levels of competency. Contract teachers are found to be more effective than regular teachers. They are also more likely to have college degrees and are more dedicated to their jobs, when compared to teachers in regular employment. Contract teachers are found to be more effective educators than regular teachers, who rarely had disciplinary action meted out to them.

The absence rates of public school teachers in India's rural areas negatively affect the way students learn. Nationally, private enrolment in the 6-14 age group reached 25% in 2011 and these classes are used as an alternative to public school. Teachers engaged by these private schools originate from the same village, work on annual contracts and are willing to work for a lower salary than their public school counterparts. Thus, schools can hire more teachers to keep the teacher-student ratio low. Each teacher is less likely to engage in multi-grade teaching. However, only 28% of the rural population have access to a private school in the same village, and they are only available to the richer families due to the extra expenses involved.

In the case of Indonesia, teacher absenteeism rates are lower when compared to India but remain rather high. Male teachers with higher education, teachers on contracts, and those teaching in remote areas are more likely to be absent from class compared to their counterparts. Indonesian public schools have a low pupil-teacher ratio (when compared to other middle income countries) and high student enrolment rate. However, test scores of Indonesian students are still lower than test scores achieved by their peers from other countries.

In China, floating migrants move from their home district to another for jobs, often taking their families along with them. Children of these migrants and some families from rural villages may find it difficult to relate to their teacher, fellow classmates, and any new curricula. Children of 'floating migrants' are also officially barred from attending school in their host district as they lack appropriate documentation. Some children manage to attend school in their host district by paying unofficial and exorbitant school fees. To help these floating migrants, there are migrant sponsored schools in host districts but these usually have low quality infrastructure and a lack of qualified teachers. This adds to the opportunity cost involved in sending children to school.

These three countries make up 40 per cent of the world's population and have a growing middle class. With their educational issues in mind, what are the chances that one of these countries, if not all, can become among the richest economies in the world by 2050?