

A Study on the Maldivian Educational Level and Its Developing Prospect

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Abstract

Normally, when it comes to the Maldives, its tourism is the most frequently mentioned aspect; however, it should be recognized that the overall development of a country is fundamentally based on its increasing educational level. This research is aimed at investigating the current situation of the education in the Maldivian Islands and coming up with some possible solutions to those problems. The research was successfully conducted in Maalhos, an island located in the east of Maldives. Based on the results and findings, we are to discuss the educational developing prospect of Maldives. It is believed that the Maldivian education has been making progress, but there are still difficulties waiting ahead.

Keywords

Maldives, Maalhos, Education system, Educational level, Employment.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Maldives and the Island, Maalhos

The Republic of Maldives is a South Asian country located in the Indian Ocean, and it is blessed with beautiful landscapes and abundant natural resources. With an average ground level elevation of 1.5 meters above the sea level, it is the lowest country of the world, with even its highest natural point being the lowest in the world, at 2.4 meters. [1] Therefore, in Maldives, the tourism is the most attractive and highly developed industry with no doubt. The World Bank classifies the Maldives as having an upper middle income economy. And the tourism has already become the pillar of the Maldivian national economic development; for most of the Chinese people, the Maldives is solely known as a paradise-like tourist resort. However, the natural landscape is supposed to be further projected and explored by human being with professional knowledge. That is to say, the education of the Maldivian people is playing an even more significant role. The development of the tourism and the national economy as a whole could be benefited from the improved educational level of the Maldivian people. Among those islands, Malé is the capital and most populated city, traditionally called the "King's Island" for its central location. Therefore, Malé and its surrounding areas are definitely the most representative places for the investigation of social phenomena. That is exactly the reason why we chose Maalhos to conduct our research.

Maalhos is located in the east of the Maldives, 200 km away from the capital city Malé. The number of local residents in Maalhos is 700, and a large part of them have gone overseas for working to earn more money and strive for their own living. All the local inhabitants are devout Muslim, and they each prays for five times every day. As we get the investigation deeper, it is found that women there are generally teachers or educators, while most of the men are

occupied in fishing and architects. According to the local report to the proportion of men and women in Maalhos, there is not a striking difference in number to be found. But based on our observation and research, there are more women than men on the island. For the overall population, it has increased by 17.3% from the year 2006 to 2014. [2] That could indicate that the educational burden for the country would be even heavier in the future.

1.2. The Education System of the Maldives

In Maldives, two education systems co-exist in parallel across the islands. The older schools are traditional Islamic ones where Dhivehi is taught as the medium language. Dhivehi, also known as Maldivian, is the official language of Maldives and a semi-official language in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, India. Over the past decades, the Maldivian government has been introducing modern English language to the local Maldivian people, and thereafter the literacy level has been greatly elevated. The Primary education begins at the age of five and takes five years to complete. And for the middle school education, although it has been extensively implemented, there is inevitably a large gap between the comparatively high level education in some main islands like Malé and those remote smaller ones. The middle school compulsory education takes a further five years to complete. Then, the secondary school in Maldives directly refers to the high school education. Grade eleven and twelve in the secondary education are the most difficult years for students to go through. Those who successfully finish the high school may go on attending the local tertiary education, and some of them could have an opportunity to go abroad for higher education.

The Vocational Training Centre was established in 1974, providing training for mechanical and electrical trades. In 1984, the Institute for Teacher Education was created and the School of Hotel and Catering Services was established in 1987 to provide trained personnel for the tourist industry. [3] The Maldivian government also provides a so-called "second chance" for adults. The vocational program is designated to provide a skill-oriented training for those who failed in finishing their formal schooling. By developing the vocational education, the unemployment rate could be dramatically decreased, which would effectively promote the development of the country as a whole.

2. Literature Review

Most of researches concerning the Maldives are concentrated on its tourism and the economic benefits brought by it. For foreigners like the Chinese people, it is understandable that the only thing we know about the islands is that it is an attractive tourist resort. But for the local Maldivian people and researchers, the education is an extremely important aspect to be seriously considered since it is a basic element and determinant of one country. If the tourism could secure the present prosperity of the Maldives, the improved educational level promises the future of the islands. If citizens of a country do not have a chance to get the primary education at least, the country would never be able to embrace a substantial improvement in all walks of life. Even though, in recent years, the situation has become much better than the educational status decades ago in Maldives, the tourist resort still has a long way to go in the elevation of educational level. Therefore, this research is committed to investigating the educational condition in Maldives with the sample taken in Maalhos. The research was conducted with our conversation with local residents and the feedback from the questionnaire. We are to determine the reasons why people there cannot get high education and find possible solutions to those problems.

3. Methodology

The purpose of our research is to investigate on the Maldivian educational level and come up with solutions accordingly. Meanwhile, we want to know the concerns and viewpoints of the

local residents on the educational issues. Based on those researching purposes, after an extensive group discussion, we decided to adopt two ways of investigation in general. In the first place, our research group personally visit Maalhos to observe the local environment and communicate with the local people. Through those conversations with the Maldivian, we gained a basic understanding of the Maldivian social situations and their attitudes towards the national education system. Such interactions with them enabled us to get a much deeper thinking about the Maldivian education. Then, we distributed our original questionnaires to the local people on the islands. From those findings, some results could be summarized with a solid data basis. According to the findings and results of our questionnaire, we made a comprehensive analysis of the local educational condition and also endeavored to find more ways to make the Maldivian education better.

However, at the same time, we also recognized that our research had certain limitations. First of all, the number of respondents of our questionnaire was limited, and our samples were not that enough to make our research perfectly convincing. Secondly, our respondents were generally under 18 years old and none of them was over 40 years old. Thus, to control the result, we kept the number of man and woman respondents the same. We tried to know the actual educational condition deeply and make our researching results much reliable so as to make the investigation complete.

4. Research Findings and Results

4.1. The Overall Educational Level of Maldives

According to those data collected (shown in Figure 1), we believe that the educational level on Maalhos Island has recently developed since most educated residents (58%) are under 18 years old. It is found that the local Maldivian citizens gradually pay much more attention on the education of their children nowadays. More than a half of the educated people are teenagers, and it could indicate that the Maldivian people have already recognized the importance of education for the following generation. We can also find that certain achievements have already been made, as the proportion of educated people between the age of 18 to 25 has already reached one fourth of the total investigated number. So there is a healthy education structure of age in Maldives, and we have plenty of reasons to believe that the educational environment would be much better in the future.

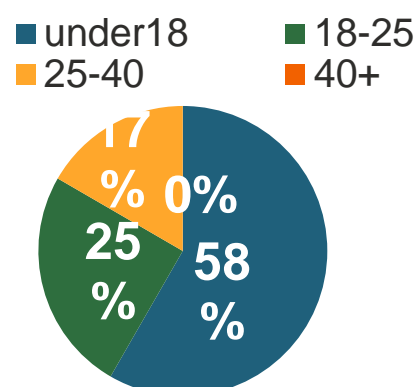


Figure 1. The Age Distribution of Educated People

■ 1st-6th grade ■ 6th-9th grade

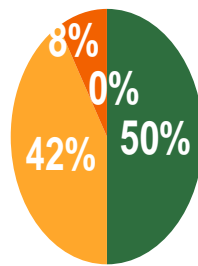


Figure 2. The Proportion of Grades among Respondents

In the investigation of educational level, 12 people voluntarily helped us finish the questionnaire, and most of them were in the sixth to ninth grade, accounting for a half of the total respondents. As shown in Figure 2, there was also a large proportion of people presently in the ninth to twelfth grade, taking up 42% of the samples. Only one person got a college degree among the 12 investigated people with a percentage of 8%. What's more we were delighted to find that none of them was under the sixth grade, which could indicate that about one decade ago, people had realized the significance of education and sent their children to schools.

Due to the fact that half of our investigated residents were under the age of 18, the result of our research had a flaw that the respondents of our questionnaire had not yet got a chance to go to colleges or universities for a higher education. But we do believe that these teenagers definitely would attend the tertiary education and have a promising future. At the present stage, the tourism is undoubtedly the pillar of the Maldivian national economy, so the further development of those young generation in Maldives would more or less have some connections with tourism. In just three and a half decades, the tourist industry became the main source of income in Maldives. Tourism was also the country's biggest foreign currency earner and the single largest contributor to the GDP. As of 2008, 89 resorts in the Maldives offered over 17,000 beds and hosted over 600,000 tourists annually. [4] The young generation have benefited a lot from the highly developed tourism, and in the future, they could make an even more remarkable contribution to its thriving with a solid basis of knowledge.

To make a brief summary, the overall educational level of Maldives is still in a comparatively low situation, but it has made noticeable progress in the past decades. A reasonable educational age structure has already been successfully established, and the energetic young generation are accumulating knowledge of various sectors, which would be applied to further develop the islands in the future.

4.2. The Occupation of the Maldivian People

On the island of Maalhos, according to our investigation, it has been found that the majority of occupation in the island was student, which took the part of 58% of the total number. No fisherman was involved in our survey, and about 33% of the island population were managing individual businesses. In our survey, there was only one freelancer among them, accounting for 8% for all amount.

Since our research was mainly conducted in schools, so its result was inevitably greatly limited. If we see the school at present as a community, then it is absolutely different from those traditional ones. The education actually could bring more possibilities and a much more diversified occupation layout. Previously, throughout the developing history of Maldives, people mostly have been working in fishing and manufacturing, but for the further development in this new era, the service industry ought to be prioritized. As the Maldivian islands

is blessed with attractive natural landscape, there is no doubt that the tourism is still going to play a leading role in the national development. However, in such a competitive global environment, the future of the tourism would also confront many challenges. For a stable and sustainable development, a professional management is urgently needed, which is also the reason why we believe that the level of education is the most important determinant of Maldives. The educated generation is also expected to come up with new brilliant ideas with their innovative mind to explore a new path for development. Therefore, the occupation in the future would definitely be diversified and become close to those developed countries.

4.3. The Public Attitude Towards the Education

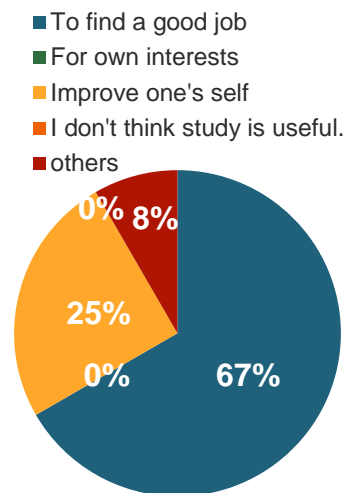


Figure 3. The Proportion of Respondents' Purposes of Study

Based on the result of our questionnaire (shown in Figure 3), we can find that more than half of them (67%) hope to have a good job after getting educated. And 25% of them want to improve themselves in order to earn a better living. Meanwhile, there is still a group of people choosing 'others' in our questionnaire. In fact, those who choose 'others' are too young to make a choice of the purpose of study. In this analysis, that 8% is of little value, but it is understandable. For the first and the third option, improving oneself could be equal to finding a job in a sense that the latter choice could become the ultimate consequence of devoting oneself in improving the abilities and skills. In order to find a desirable job, people have to attend vocational schools, for example, and practice in great diligence to equip themselves perfectly with required knowledge and capabilities to be competent of a demanding but promising position. The process of improving oneself is valuable, but the very fact is that most of the Maldivian people are employment-oriented and care little about the cultivation of mindsets. They are eager to find a job and support their own livings; therefore, the vocational education in Maldives is more popular than those academic institutes.

Besides, from the chart, we can also find that nobody at all chooses the second and fourth choice, which indicates that almost everyone has been got involved in this social trend of education as well as employment pressure. People have already realized the importance of study and take it as the best way to earn a better living. Thus, generally speaking, the attitude that the Maldivian people hold towards education is positive. They do not stick to the conventions but endeavor to explore a even more prosperous society with profound knowledge and innovative ideas. In the 21st century, the world is changing all the time, and only through education can everyone, including the Maldivian people of course, welcome a comfortable life and make the world better.

4.4. The Satisfaction of the Level of Education

In order to know people's satisfaction of the current national education, we set up a question with only three options: 'Yes.', 'No.', and 'No opinion'. According to the research result (shown in Figure 4), the answer 'Yes.' occupying 75% overwhelmingly exceeds the other two answers, while there are 17% of the respondents feel dissatisfied about the national education. Also, 8% of them have no opinions on that. From the pie chart below, we can clearly find that most of the Maldivian people are satisfied with the national educational level, and there is a large proportion of those respondents is still only in the sixth to twelfth grade. Such finding could indicate that the Maldivian government is trusted by the local citizens to make further progress in education.

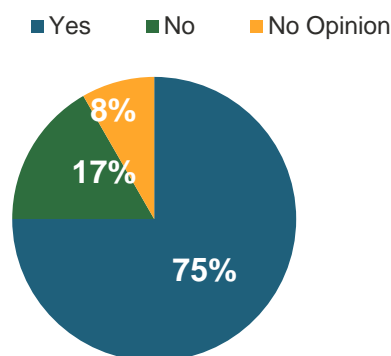


Figure 4. The Educational Satisfaction in Maalhos, Maldives

Besides, there are still 17% of the local residents are not satisfied with the current situation. We tried to dig out the real reason for it, and it came us that the dissatisfaction results from the high cost of study. An equal access to advanced education is a universal obstacle in the development of education. The compulsory education may bring burdens to the government at first, but the nation would definitely benefit from it in a long run.

5. Problems and Possible Solutions

5.1. The Problems in the Maldivian Education

By the several days of research and investigation on Maalhos Island, we have collected many useful data and information about the education in Maldives. The educational level there is roughly the same as our previous anticipations. But we also find that there are some problems within the Maldivian education system and the general national education environment.

In the first place, the sexual discrimination could be found in the Maldivian education system; to be specific, a local woman has little chance as equal as a man to get a higher education. Through the research, we find that currently most of children can receive a primary education, but it becomes more and more difficult for students to continue their study. The education chances for girls are even fewer. This might be a historical problem with a religious tradition, but for the modern development of Maldives, such situation must be altered.

Secondly, the tertiary education is still unaffordable for most of the families in the Maldives. Nowadays, students and their parents are pretty sure that it is almost the only way for them to improve their living standard, so they have been working hard with no efforts spared to get into colleges for higher education. However, the harsh reality in Maldives is that they cannot afford the tuition and some related costs are also too high. In order to make a deeper research to find out the main factors causing the present situation, we prepared some teaching materials to

interact with the local students and observe their performance. Through the whole process, although some students were very shy at the beginning, gradually, they became active when they fully entered into the study atmosphere. That is to say, they do have a strong desire to learn, but they do not have enough money to support their study, which is absolutely a disappointed status. However, as the government and the Maldivian people have realized the significance of education to the whole country, we do believe that the situation would get better and better over time.

5.2. The Possible Solutions to the Problems

Based on the research result, we come up with some methods to solve these problems. The high cost of the Maldivian tertiary education makes few students have the possibility to receive advanced education. For the government, they should pay more attention on reducing the educational fees and granting financial aids on education. For instance, government can grant non-interest loan for those students living in poverty or provide some educational subsidies by using the revenue from tourism. The government plays a decisive role in the development and reform of education, and there are still many tasks to be accomplished. For a developing country, the Maldives has to experience the educational reform so as to be naturalized to the new tide of the world. And certainly, there would be many difficulties to be solved in its developing process. But the Maldives is not a pioneer in the education reform; actually, the Maldivian can refer to those precedents in other countries. Here, we can take the Chinese education as a typical example.

The education in China is a state-run system of public education under the control of the Ministry of Education. All citizens must attend school for at least nine years, known as the nine-year compulsory education, which is funded by the government. The compulsory education is indeed the path that must be chosen in its developing process, but it all depends on the determination and financial input of the government. The development of education is a long term project from which we could not enjoy the fruits immediately. So the Maldivian government as well as its citizens ought to be patient in that tough journey just like what the Chinese people have experienced in the past decades. What's more, looking back to the developing history of the education in China, we can find that in the early 1980s the government allowed the establishment of private institutions of higher learning, increasing the number of undergraduates and people who hold doctoral degrees fivefold from 1995 to 2005. [5] Therefore, besides the government, the private sector can also play an active role in making more people receive education. By 1999, the primary school education had become generalized in 90% of China, and the mandatory nine-year compulsory education now effectively covered 85% of the population. [6] It is a joint effort made by the government and the private institutions. Even though the important position of education has been established, the actual disposable capital of government in education is still limited in all countries throughout the world since it has many other sectors to be cared about. But with the contribution of a number of private institutions and corporations, the burden of government is going to be released and the outcome would be more inspiring. In addition, the development of education can take a great advantage of globalization. According to the Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad (2016), Chinese overseas students reached 1.26 million, accounting for 25% of the world's total international students in 2015. In the same year, foreign students studying in China got to 397,600, accounting for about 8% of the world's total international students. The globalization bring more chances to ordinary families to send their children abroad for advanced education. Many countries all over the world are also willing to take in more foreign students of unlike nationalities for cultural exchanges. Sending the young generation overseas and providing them a better platform to learn the cutting-edge knowledge is a perfect choice for the students as well as the country. But it requires the government to actively negotiate with other countries so as to set up some educational cooperation programs.

The globalization has made a great contribution to the development of education industry and the cultivation of talents, and we believe that all the countries on this planet can benefit from that trend. Known for its tourism, the Maldives has already earned its international reputation, so other countries would be willing to give a hand and make the education industry of Maldives develop smoothly. With the help of international community and the efforts made by the whole nation, we do believe that the Maldivian educational industry would have a bright future.

6. Conclusion

Since the remarkable landscape of Maldives becomes increasingly famous in recent decades, many researches are concentrated on its tourism and the development of its national economy. However, the current prosperous of tourism is only about the present Maldivian islands, but the education is the hope and future of the whole nation. The Maldivian people have relied too much on the natural gifts, but those blessed fortune would be used up or destroyed with the continuous exploration. Some new paths should be discovered to support the national economy. In order to make the country develop effectively in the future, the young generation is supposed to shoulder their responsibilities to learn knowledge and make contribution to the prosperity of their homeland. There are a lot of tasks and difficulties waiting for the Maldivian people to tackle. Primarily, the government should at least enable the children to receive a nine or ten years of compulsory education. Those students have great desires to study, but they do not have enough chances. What's more, the developing educational level of Maldives could promise a diversified occupations and industries in the future. Those college graduates would add more possibilities of the country. To meet that end, the private sectors should be encouraged to increase their input on the education. With a combined effort, the education in Maldives would have an excellent prospect.

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