CHAPTER VI
CHAPTER VI
RESERVATION POLICY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This chapter considers the perspectives of students, teachers, policymakers and higher education experts on the merit of granting the Policy of Reservations in India and the feasibility of introducing Affirmative Action in Trinidad and Tobago. The chapter attempts to explore and provide an assessment of ethnic group variations (caste/tribe, race) and social class dimensions in the perspectives presented.

Students’ Perspectives on the Policy of Reservations (India) and the introduction of Affirmative Action (Trinidad and Tobago)

As mentioned earlier, the Policy of Reservations in higher education has been implemented for more than five decades in India and within recent times there has been a very controversial debate on introducing Affirmative Action in higher education in Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, the researcher requested the sample of students to present their perspectives on the retention of reservations in higher education in India and the introduction of affirmative action in UWI admissions for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>JNU</th>
<th>UWI</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79 (79.0)</td>
<td>29 (29.0)</td>
<td>108 (54.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21 (21.0)</td>
<td>70 (70.0)</td>
<td>91 (45.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>1 (0.5)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>100 (100.0)</td>
<td>200 (100.0)</td>
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</table>

From Table 6.1, it may be seen that out of the total sample of 200 students, 108 (54 per cent) supported Reservations/Affirmative Action whereas 91 (45.5 per cent) indicated a negative response, and 1 student (0.5 per cent) preferred to remain neutral. It is significant to point out that, 79 per cent of the JNU students endorsed reservations and only 29 per cent of UWI students were in favour of affirmative action. Hence, 21 per cent of the JNU students thought reservations in higher
education in India should be discontinued and 70 per cent of UWI students were against the introduction of affirmative action in UWI admissions for Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 6.2
Do you support the Policy of Reservations in University Admissions?

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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>SC</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

The opinions of JNU students according to their caste/tribe categories is interesting (Table 6.2). It is noteworthy that all SC students (100%) advocated a need for the continuation of the policy. Among ST students, 96 per cent agreed and only 4 per cent gave a negative response. Almost two thirds of the OBC students (64 per cent) supported reservations, whereas 36 per cent felt it was no longer needed. Interestingly, more than one half of the General students (56 per cent) recognized the importance of maintaining reserved seats in higher education to assist the weaker sections; on the other hand, 44 per cent of the General students disagreed.

Table 6.3
Do you support the Introduction of Affirmative Action in Admissions to UWI?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>UWI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>9 (30.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>39 (100.0)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Since there is no affirmative action policy in favour of any particular ethnic group in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, UWI students comprising of the three major ethnic groups were asked to respond to this precise question: "Do you support the introduction of Affirmative Action in UWI admissions for deprived groups in Trinidad and Tobago?" (Table 6.3). It is apparent that only 29 per cent of the total number of students supported the policy and 70 per cent were against it. Among African students almost one-third (30.0 per cent) responded positively and over two-thirds (70.0 per cent) differed in their opinion. Approximately, one-fourth (26.7 per cent) of the East Indian students agreed that affirmative action is needed and nearly three-fourths (73.3 per cent) disagreed. Similar to their African counterparts, almost one-third (30.0 per cent) of the Mixed students stated their agreement and over two thirds (67.5 per cent) voiced their disagreement. It may be noted that one Mixed student (2.5 per cent) adopted a neutral stance on the issue.

From the data, a distinct contrast emerges between the two contexts under study: overall, JNU students regard the policy of reservations as instrumental to the goal of equality in Indian society; however, the majority of UWI students reject the implementation of affirmative action for the upliftment of deprived groups in their society.

Table 6.4 shows the distribution of all students in accordance with their ethnic group variations and their response on the Policy of Reservations (applicable to India) or Affirmative Action (applicable to Trinidad and Tobago) in university admissions.

It is recorded that 11.5 per cent of the students reflected upon historical deprivations suffered by certain groups and another 11 per cent felt that the alleviation of poverty were reasons to grant reservations or implement affirmative action as the case may be. One-fourth (24.5 per cent) of the students expressed the need to provide for social equality. A few (3.5 per cent) presented arguments in support of assurance for quality education. Only 3.5 per cent of the students stated that the policies should be effected for the furtherance of national development.

On the other hand, almost one-fourth (24 per cent) of the students claimed that universities should admit all social groups on the basis of merit to maintain quality in higher education. Five per cent of the students argued that reservations/affirmative action would lower academic standards in higher education, and another 7 per cent expressed concern that social tensions may develop. Conversely, 9 per cent of the students declared that alternative means should be explored to cater for equality in admissions. One student opted not to share his views.
Table 6.4
Perspectives on the Policy of Reservations/Affirmative Action for Socio-Economically Deprived Groups in India/Trinidad and Tobago

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<tbody>
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<td>General</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>East Indian</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<td>(44.0)</td>
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<td>(73.0)</td>
<td>(70.0)</td>
<td>(71.0)</td>
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It is interesting to consider the institutionwise distribution of pro-reservation/affirmative action perspectives. Over one-fifth of the students in JNU (22 per cent) as compared to only one student from UWI\(^1\), supported Reservation/Affirmative Action on account of historical deprivations. According to JNU students, a certain section of the Indian population still needs to be protected even after 57 years of independence. This is because for thousands of years the weaker ethnic groups, namely Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been denied of their socio-economic rights. They experienced severe oppression and adverse treatment in every aspect of life under the socially powerful groups. They have been denied so many privileges for so many years that “they got left far behind in the race for success.” The majority of them belong tobackward areas where lifestyle and education is considerably not as good as that in the major cities of the country. Consequently, reservations are deemed essential for these deprived groups to enter higher education, develop their hidden potentials to the fullest, and emerge as participants in the social mainstream.

More students in JNU (17 per cent) than in UWI (3 per cent) endorsed reservations/affirmative action with emphasis on the alleviation of poverty. JNU students considered that SCs, STs and OBCs generally earn their livelihood through agriculture and many are economically backward. However, some advocated a change in criterion for allotting reserved seats in higher education since it creates division within the economically weaker sections; those who are better off are reaping the benefit of higher education. Also, reservations should be limited to one generation of students and not to the second if poverty is to be reduced. Thus, one alternative is that reservations in higher education should be given to needy families who have insufficient resources, irrespective of their caste: it should be granted on the basis of poverty and not just in accordance with the name of the community. Similarly, the UWI students agreed that background checks should therefore be carried out to determine whether a student is needy and deserves the benefit of “affirmative action” to further his studies and improve his economic status.

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\(^1\) Generally, the UWI sample of students adopted the view that all ethnic groups in Trinidad and Tobago have been subjected to more or less similar forms of historical deprivations under slavery or indentureship as the case may be.
It is significant that nearly one-third of the students in JNU (29 per cent) and one-fifth of those in UWI (20 per cent) were in favour of reservations/affirmative action as a means to promote social equality. JNU students reflected upon the fact that India, despite being democratic and secular by law, is a country where discrimination in the name of caste prevails. The lower castes are exploited by the upper castes in terms of social and economic progress. Furthermore, apart from negations of caste, India has marked regional disparities which create a wide gap between the privileged and underprivileged in society. There are social, cultural, educational, ethical, political and most strikingly, economic divisions – thus reservations in higher education are essential to bridge the gap between levels of educational attainment and to improve the socio-economic status of the underprivileged. In the case of UWI, students asserted that everyone must have equal opportunity to obtain higher education regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic background. Since the ratio among different ethnic groups enrolled at UWI does not reflect the ratio of their numbers among the population, there is need for fair representation among all on the campus. Attention was directed to the fact that many more East Indians than Africans are receiving higher education. However, the majority of students charged that the introduction of affirmative action in UWI admissions can only be successful if it helps some without doing damage to others – this is the controversial issue.

Students who mentioned that assurance for quality education should be the basis for reservations/affirmative action are few in JNU (6 per cent) and UWI (3 per cent). JNU students emphasized that quality education should extend to the masses and not remain within the exclusive domain of any particular social category or social class. Similarly, according to UWI students, generally socio-economically deprived groups have low levels of educational attainment. Hence, affirmative action if implemented at UWI can increase the chance for these children to obtain quality higher education and improve their social status.

It may be noted that a few students (5 per cent in JNU and 2 per cent in UWI) supported reservations/affirmative action for the furtherance of national development. JNU students illustrated that India is a highly diverse nation comprising of numerous social classes, castes, tribes, and creeds etc. many of whom subsist below the poverty
level. Reservations in higher education can cater for the educational upliftment of the economically and socially deprived to bring them on par with the General category of people. Only then, India as a third world country can have equal participation from all segments of the population for rapid economic and social development in the process of nation building. On the other hand, UWI students indicated that depending on the nature of the group or strata identified, affirmative action may mean the difference between intelligent but underprivileged persons being able to receive higher education, or possibly having to accept a station in life that is way below their capabilities. This may have the ripple effect of hindering social and economic productivity as well as future national development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Institutionwise distribution of anti-reservation/affirmative action perspectives revealed several marked differences. Most importantly, a much larger proportion of UWI students (38 per cent) than JNU students (10 per cent) contended that reservation/affirmative action would negate meritocracy. UWI students took a firm stance that there is no need for affirmative action in admission regulations at the university. Only those with the requisite qualifications regardless of race, class or gender should be admitted to the various programmes offered. Any other criteria to determine admissions would be subjective in nature and place meritorious students at a severe disadvantage: once the criterion of a particular group is filled, others desirous of entering would be overlooked. Certainly, qualified people might be denied access due to space limitations. In sum, a university should be recognized solely as an educational institution in support of meritocracy and no special treatment should be given to any person or social group who cannot qualify for higher education. Similarly, JNU students strongly believed that admissions to higher education should be based on merit, rather than characteristics of social class, caste or tribe etc. Both JNU and UWI students felt that their respective countries should govern citizens in accordance with meritocratic principles.

Further, more students in UWI (9 per cent) than in JNU (1 per cent) stressed that preferential admissions can lower academic standards at the higher educational
level.² UWI students denounced the introduction of affirmative action in view of the fact that benefactors cannot cultivate a positive attitude towards work just before or upon entrance to UWI. If certain individuals choose to waste the opportunities given to them at the primary and secondary school levels and perform poorly, they should not be given a chance to pursue higher education because of a policy which holds "places for them." This defeats the whole culture of learning which Trinidad and Tobago is attempting to develop. Most likely, if students are accepted into UWI without the required qualifications they will perform poorly and lower the academic standards of the university. Everyone who reads for a degree must be competent or else affirmative action will definitely negate quality.

Twelve per cent of UWI students saw the possibility of social tension arising with the introduction of affirmative action at UWI. In contrast, only two per cent of JNU students were of the opinion that reservation policy in the Indian higher education system has a similar effect. UWI students declared that in a multiracial society each race should be judged based on its competence and not its past. Therefore the introduction of affirmative action at the campus to facilitate one ethnic group will engender racial tensions or promote already existent ones by attacking the issue of race. It will bring forth accusations of prejudice from both camps. For these students, affirmative action will result in "obvious confusion" among citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and "further cripple" the society. JNU students who opposed reservation policy felt that it creates conflict and hatred between the General and Reserved Categories of people. From the students' perceptive, reservations further highlight the differences in social status between one human being and another.

It may be observed that a smaller proportion of students desired that admissions should be based an alternative means to promote equality (8 per cent in JNU and 11 per cent in UWI). Both JNU and UWI students agreed that the adjudication of affirmative action or reservations for deprived groups to gain admission to higher education should be discouraged. For them, caste and race should not be utilized as determining factors to promote equality. UWI students underscored

² In this specific instance, the disparity in the data gathered can be viewed in light of the experience of India in implementing the Policy of Reservations in higher education for almost 50 years and the lack of such experience in Trinidad and Tobago.
that if students of a particular race are not equally represented in the university, reasons quite apart from race may be the problem: one should not readily resort to "cries of race." Likewise, JNU students stressed that the Indian reservation policies intended to elevate certain castes and tribes do not guarantee the desired outcome.

It is necessary to consider perspectives in accordance with social and ethnic group-wise distribution of data. From the JNU sample, all the SC students were in favour of reservations in higher education. Similarly, all ST students, with the exception of one, argued that reserved seats serve a meaningful purpose for the deprived groups. It is noteworthy that only 64 per cent of the OBC students supported the idea of reservations. Even more interestingly, 56 per cent of the General category students agreed that the policy of reservations are justified due to various socio-historical reasons. However, those who opposed the policy of reservations were mainly General and OBC category students.

It may be observed that more ST (40 per cent) and SC students (24 per cent) in comparison with OBC (8 per cent) students supported reservations based on historical deprivations. Among General students sixteen per cent adopted this perspective.

According to one ST student:

"Years of social conditioning and lack of educational facilities in certain parts of the country make our people vulnerable. In order to bridge that gap, government must provide equal access to higher education for regional development and social equality. I support the policy of reservations."

Another ST student further stated:

"As of now we need reservations, because a kind of landmark is required from where we can all start running the race, bearing in mind that we all come from different backgrounds and different environment."

SC supporters of reservations also spoke against the humiliation to which their people were subjected in the past and appealed for social equality.
One SC student asserted:

"We are equally capable but have been suppressed by the society for ages. We should be given an opportunity to learn and prove our skills and talents. It's time we are treated as equal humans."

In the words of another SC student:

"Yes, historically we were very backward and we did not have equal access to studies. Today, until we attain equal social and economic status in the society, reservation in the field of higher education should continue."

OBC students also underlined that without reservations in education it would not be possible for them to "grapple" with the past and "achieve the same footing" as the General students.

Furthermore, one General student explicitly stated:

"Certain groups have been denied access to education in our historical past, hence I support this policy."

Another General student stressed:

"I feel that these deprived groups need our support and encouragement, and these reservation policies are very useful to those who desire higher education."

According to 24 per cent of ST students, reservations in higher education would serve to alleviate poverty. Further, 20 per cent of OBC students and 16 per cent of General students were of this view. However, only a small proportion (8 per cent) of SC students saw redressal in terms of poverty. Notably, all social categories commented that the socio-economically deprived should be granted reservations because they lack adequate financial resources to opt for higher education. Consequently, the first generation of students who receive high qualifications and high status jobs would contribute towards eliminating the grind of poverty that their families endure. These poor families will obtain some financial support to live more comfortably and avail of education for future generations.
One SC student remarked:

"The socio-economically deprived are really facing problems to enter higher education because they are born into families of low economic status."

A General student observed:

"SC, ST and OBC students are usually from low economic background in society. The disparity between the "rich and the poor" and the "educated and uneducated" is yet apparent today, there is need for policy of reservations."

SC students (40 per cent) placed greater emphasis on reservations for social equality than ST students (24 per cent). Interestingly, the same proportion of ST (24 per cent) and General students (24 per cent); and a slightly higher proportion of OBC (28 per cent) students also focused on the issue of social equality. Generally, SCs expressed appreciation for the opportunity to benefit from higher education and improve their social status.

An SC student outlined:

"I belong to reserve category and my educational skills have been enhanced considerably through this reservation policy. Initially, I believed that I am a below average student and I cannot compete in my field with others. But after making use of this reservation, I will say with firm conviction that I am qualified and my status is such that I can compete in my field."

Similarly, OBC and ST students indicated that through reservations in higher education they can acquire improved social status.

One OBC student stated:

"Reservations help the children of weaker sections of the society to join the mainstream of society."

From the perspective of an ST student:

"Reservation is a good policy to elevate the low and backward groups of India. People from these groups have problems to complete their
studies. It is necessary to increase their social status through reservations."

Of great significance, General students also felt equal opportunity in higher education should be given to SCs, STs and OBCs in order to help them acquire the social status of the General category.

A General student stated:

"I support the policy of reservations for socio-economically deprived groups in order for them to achieve the social standing of the more affluent group."

Yet another General student specified:

"Because the representation of the socio-economically deprived groups is very low in higher education as well as in prestigious jobs, reservations are more necessary to bring them at a par with the General group."

A few students belonging to the weaker sections stated that the policy of reservations in higher education would ensure quality education. They are as follows: 3 SCs (12 per cent), 1 ST (4 per cent) and 2 OBCs (8 per cent). They indicated that those of low socio-economic background and minority groups like themselves are able to reap the benefit of quality education through reservations.

The ST student claimed:

"I am also a beneficiary of reserved seats at JNU. Fortunately, the socially and economically deprived students from backward states can obtain quality education. In the backward states of North Eastern India, the higher education system is not good enough."

In contrast, no students belonging to the General category felt that reservations is a means through which "the weaker sections" can attain quality higher education.

A few SC students (16 per cent) and one ST student (4 per cent) commented that reservations in higher education for socio-economically deprived groups would lead to the furtherance of national development.
One SC student documented:

"Reservations encourages deprived groups to pursue their studies as long as they wish, in fact until the attainment of Ph.D. degrees."

Another SC student pointed out:

"Reservation policy in universities has ensured progress and advancement in society as far as the deprived sections are concerned."

One ST student concluded:

"If government continues to grant reserved seats in higher education for deprived groups everyone can contribute towards social and economic growth which is essential for national development in India."

On the other hand, it is deemed imperative to explore arguments presented by students who hold anti-reservation views. An equal proportion (20 per cent) of OBC and the General category students argued that reservations in higher education dilute merit in admission procedures. According to a majority of them, those who have worked hard and acquired necessary qualifications are rejected in favour those who have not.

One OBC student protested:

"Some industrious and intelligent students have not been able to study at JNU. Yet others of less academic ability who are carefree come here on account of reservations."

One General student reinforced the following point:

"Reservations give undue advantage to students who are not qualified enough to undertake higher studies, whereas those who have secured good marks are unable to gain admission because seats are limited."

In fact, General students were opposed to reservations for SC, ST and OBC categories simply on the basis of caste: only meritorious individuals should be able to compete with others who belong to the General category.

One General student (4 per cent) remarked that reservations lead to a decline in academic standards thus:
“Students occupying reserved seats can become demotivated because they are unable to cope and end up receiving poor grades in course work and examinations. The Government of India can provide people with incentives to study such as books and additional facilities, but not a percentage of reserved seats for some, especially in universities where there can be no compromise on quality higher education.”

Only two students (8 per cent) of the OBC category spoke against reservation policy emphasizing that it creates controversy and disharmony among students. The existence of reserved seats for weaker sections makes them aware of their low social status, while students of the General category display a feeling of “superiority.”

One fifth of the General students (20 per cent), 2 OBC students and 1 ST student recommended that alternative means should be explored to assist socio-economically deprived groups who desire higher education. According to the General students, the policy of reservations for deprived groups is only classified on the basis of social status. There are many people who belong to the SC, ST and OBC categories who are financially sound and do not require reservations. On the other hand, a lot of people from the upper social strata cannot afford to access higher education.

One General student concluded:

“The criteria of birth and ascription to grant reservations are not quite justified since it encourages parochialism and the caste mindset becomes entrenched. Reservations kill the incentive to rise above ascription. In my opinion, reservations should be given only to the economically and educationally backward groups in India.”

The OBC students also questioned whether reservations are really benefiting needy people.

One OBC student underscored:

“Some SC and ST students are wealthy, their parents are working in government offices, yet they come through these reservations and they deny those who are really destitute. The students of poor parents deserve a chance.”
The ST student stated:

"I support the policy of reservations but only in one generation of each family. I have seen several people with reservations, but at the same time they are affluent and lead luxurious lives. The needy requires assistance."

From the UWI sample, only less than one-third (30 per cent) of both African and Mixed students were in support of affirmative action to determine admissions. Even fewer East Indians comprising of 26.6 per cent put forward arguments to endorse this perspective. Of great significance, a similar proportion of approximately two-thirds of the students belonging to each ethnic group were adamant that affirmative action should not be considered as a criterion for entering UWI.

It is apparent that, no students of East Indian or Mixed descent indicated that affirmative action should be introduced on account of historical deprivations. Only one African student outlined:

"In the past, the Africans have been plagued by living conditions which are not conducive to teaching and learning practices. Now African youths seem to be reluctant "to move forward" due to a prevailing culture of underachievement in education among the African race. Hence, the academic requirements of young African males to enter UWI should be lowered to provide incentive and raise their standard of education. The University must adopt policies to allow them access to higher education."

A small percentage of East Indian (6.6 per cent) and Mixed (7.5 per cent) students stated that affirmative action would assist in the alleviation of poverty. Students in both categories commented that deprived groups who are given the opportunity to attend UWI would become motivated to excel in academics and to compete at a higher standard for the attainment of prestigious jobs. Through careful investigation those who are identified as needy should be allowed the benefit of affirmative action to gain high salaried jobs and improved living conditions. No African student addressed the issue of poverty.

Twenty per cent of the Mixed students supported the introduction of affirmative action on the basis of provision for social equality. It may be noted that
slightly more Africans (23.3 per cent) than East Indians (16.6 per cent) endorsed this perspective. All students believed that each ethnic group in the society deserves a fair chance to attain higher education. A Mixed category student stated:

"In allowing a group of less academically inclined candidates entry, the University must also assist them in striving towards their goals. The long term objective is to promote equality among Trinidad and Tobago's diverse society."

A few African students expressed concern that affirmative action should not have the adverse effect of creating a "look down attitude" upon a deprived group; rather everyone should be given justice regardless of class, race, gender or economic background. East Indians also agreed that policies adopted should elevate the self-esteem of the deprived bearing in mind the notions of equality.

Only 1 Mixed student (7.5 per cent) opined that affirmative action would facilitate the attainment of quality education among those who are deprived. The student argued that higher education should cater for all deprived groups to acquire the necessary holistic development in addition to certification, if social equality must prevail within the workforce.

One African student (3.3 per cent) and one East Indian student (3.3 per cent) argued that if individuals from all groups attain a high level of education, thereafter they can utilize their knowledge and skills to improve social relations and develop the economic sector. Hence, affirmative action will contribute towards national development.

In contrast, it is essential to consider arguments put forward by students who articulated anti-affirmative action views. Forty per cent of mixed students stressed that affirmative action would dilute merit, and a slightly lesser but equal percentage of African (36.6 per cent) and East Indian (36.6 per cent) students were of the same view. Mixed students claimed that entry into the university should be based entirely upon academic merit; it should not be dependent upon the ratio of enrolment among different social and ethnic groups in the university.³

³ A group of Mixed students charged that Selwyn Cudjoe was making an "absurd demand." In their perception, Cudjoe claimed that, "At UWI, East Indians feature most in terms of numbers and Afro-male Trinidadians between the ages of 17-24 should be granted lower entry requirements for adequate representation."
One Mixed student stated:

“I don’t believe that on account of race, one should be given special privileges to enter UWI.”

Another Mixed student mentioned:

“If those who do not possess the intellectual capacity are given an advantage to pursue higher education, they can simply occupy space and fail examinations; thus more worthy people are denied a chance.”

Similarly, an African student wrote:

“Everyone who desires to access university education should work hard and earn marks to do so. Negligent people will only waste time while others who are serious cannot be admitted due to lack of space.”

From the perspective of an East Indian student:

“Affirmative action is another form of discrimination, especially to those students who work very hard to attain the grades for admission.”

One East Indian student also questioned:

“Why should we be bypassed just because others do not work as hard? I have worked very hard to be here, and I deserve to be here, not those who have not worked hard.”

Finally, another East Indian student concluded:

“Why don’t they emphasize the “handouts” and dependency syndrome that African Trinidadians at certain levels have taken and made their culture, and then deal with why they don’t want to become educated, rather than complain that they aren’t educated? Why do they only highlight how much education the Indo-Trinidadian has? If there are too few students of any particular group in UWI, their members need to work harder.”

Among the three ethnic groups in the UWI sample, 13.3 per cent of East Indian students pointed out that affirmative action would lead to inefficiency in terms of study habits and work performance. A smaller proportion of Mixed (7.5 per cent) and African (6.6 per cent) students were of this opinion. One concern expressed was
students' inability to manage time and to cope with examination stress. Therefore, affirmative action may adversely affect the maintenance of academic standards in higher education.

One East Indian student remarked:

"If affirmative action is introduced we will have two classes of degrees, one higher than the other."

An equal percentage of East Indian students (10 per cent) and those of the Mixed category (10 per cent) highlighted that the implementation of affirmative action in university admissions can create social tensions in Trinidad and Tobago’s multi-ethnic society. A larger proportion of African students (16.6 per cent) shared this view.

A Mixed student outlined:

"I think that most Trinidadians of African descent believe that society “owes” then something due to years of slavery, the slave trade and the plantation system. Hence, they tend to be carefree, but expect a life full of material rewards. If they are “rewarded” through affirmative action, other groups on the campus would protest."

One East Indian student added:

"I believe that affirmative action would only bring about racial tension and division on the St. Augustine campus."

According to some African students, race should not determine one’s admission to UWI, careful investigation may reveal that more groups also need access to higher education due to other factors, and affirmative action to accommodate Africans alone can lead to severe prejudice among the campus population.

An equal proportion (10 per cent) of African and Mixed students (10 per cent), but a slightly higher percentage of East Indian students (13.3 per cent) suggested that alternative means should be explored to assist deprived groups instead of introducing affirmative action in UWI. Generally, students across the three ethnic groups felt that certain policies can be formulated to help individuals who have the ability but not the financial resources to access higher education. Some candidates may have the necessary qualifications but cannot afford to pay tuition fees or purchase books. These
persons may have the desire to attain the same level of education like others who are not plagued by these shortcomings. A pre-requisite is that background checks should be undertaken to determine who really deserves an opportunity to pursue higher studies. A Mixed student raised a significant question:

“If the criterion for affirmative action is based on race, then maybe Africans and East Indians can benefit, but what happens to the Mixed individual?”

Interestingly, it may be observed from the table that one Mixed student gave a neutral response as to whether affirmative action should be introduced at UWI. He stated:

“I rather remain neutral due to the reason that I a non-conformist to any societal uproars regarding race, culture etc.”

From the foregoing discussion, it may be seen that from among students who were in support of reservation/affirmative action in both universities, the majority across all ethnic groups presented arguments for the advancement of equality. It may be noted that among those who were non-supporters in each context, the majority expressed concern for the dilution of merit. However, a marked difference may be documented. Whereas students belonging to all ethnic groups in UWI- Africans, East Indians and Mixed - addressed the issue of meritocracy in Trinidad and Tobago, only several OBC and General students in JNU voiced this opinion with reference to India. In addition, students from all ethnic groups in UWI spoke against affirmative action in relation to decline in academic standards and the rise of social tensions. Only a minority of General and OBC students raised issues pertaining to quality education and acceptable relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. This points to the fact that the Indian society is more accommodating where reservations/affirmative action policies are concerned. Furthermore, it is apparent that SC and ST students believe they still require reservations to enter the field of higher education in the quest for social equality.
AN ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CLASS DIMENSIONS IN RELATION TO STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON RESERVATIONS/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Table 6.5 shows the caste/tribe perspectives of JNU students in terms of their socio-economic status on the Policy of Reservations in India.

It is apparent that the greatest proportion of students who are proreservationists across all social groups come from medium SES families as follows: SCs (60 per cent), STs (68.0 per cent), OBCs (44 per cent) and General category (36.0 per cent). A sizeable proportion of almost one-third of SCs (32.0 per cent) and one fourth of STs (24 per cent) in approximation; but fewer OBCs (16.0 per cent) and General students (12 per cent) from low SES families also reinforced the merit of reservations. A minority of 2 SC students and 1 ST student from the higher strata of society also favoured reservations. In addition, 1 OBC student and 2 General students with high SES expressed agreement.

Among those students of medium SES, nearly one-third of STs (32.0 per cent), one fifth of SCs (20 per cent) as well as 3 General students (12 per cent) reflected upon historical deprivations in support of reservations. It may be seen that, 1 SC student, 1 OBC student and 1 General student each from high SES families addressed this issue. Two ST students and 1 OBC student who belong to families with low socio-economic background highlighted adverse conditions to which deprived groups were subjected in the past.

Several students from medium and low SES families across the four social groups believed that reservations would serve to alleviate poverty. The former comprises of 4 OBCs (16 per cent), 3 STs (12 per cent), 2 General students (8 per cent) and 1 SC student (4 per cent). The latter consists of 2 ST students and 1 student from each of the other three groups. It may be noted that 1 General student with high SES also felt that through reservations the socio-economic status of needy families can be elevated.
Table 6.5
Caste/Tribe Perspectives in relation to Socio-Economic Status on the Policy of Reservations in Indian Higher Education

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>OBC</th>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>General</th>
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With reference to the above table the following abbreviated terms may be noted: H – High SES, M – Medium SES and L – Low SES.

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Again, a majority of students who have medium SES across all four social groups indicated that reservations provide for equality. They comprise of an equal proportion (20 per cent) of SC, ST and OBC students and a slightly smaller proportion (16 per cent) of the General students. Several students with low SES also documented the exact opinion: 4 SCs, 1 ST, 2 OBCs and 2 belonging to the General category. Of great significance, 1 SC student with high SES sufficed that reservations promote social equality.

The data reveal that 3 SC students from low SES families believe that reservations cater for the attainment of quality education. One ST student and 2 OBC students from the middle strata of society also presented this view.

According to a few SC students (16 per cent) and 2 ST students from middle SES and low SES background respectively; the deprived socio-economic groups who are given opportunities to achieve higher education through reservations can make a substantial contribution towards national development.

From the table, it is clearly seen that between the SC and ST groups, only 1 ST student who has medium SES advocated for the termination of reservations and alternative means to be explored.

In particular, the General and OBC students who belong to medium SES families were against reservations. Two General students and 1 OBC student with a record of high SES also dissented. It may be observed that 1 General student from the lower strata of society was also opposed to reservations.

Four OBC and 2 General students with medium SES; in addition to 1 OBC and 2 General students who come from high SES background, declared that reservations would have an adverse effect on meritocracy. The General student from lower socio-economic background also endorsed this view.

A small and equal fraction of 2 OBC students with medium SES each raised separate arguments pertaining to: the rise of social tensions and alternative means to be explored. It may be emphasized that one fifth (20 per cent) of the General students who also have medium SES argued for alternative measures to be instituted in place of reservations.

The salient finding from the data on students’ pro-reservation perspectives in relation to their socio-economic background reveals that: students from all the social
groups, but especially SCs and STs who are predominantly of medium and lower SES background, addressed the issues of historical deprivation, alleviation of poverty and the need for social equality through reservations. Some of these SC and ST students specified that they belong to large families with low educational background. Parents frequently face financial and other constraints in meeting the demands of education. Hence, primarily the policy of reservations along with financial aid obtained through various sources has afforded them an opportunity to enter the arena of higher education. With regard to anti-reservation views, the data reflects that even upper and middle-class OBCs may dissent; and General students belonging to all strata of society may refute the policy of reservations.

Table 6.6 illustrates the ethnic groups perspectives of UWI students in terms of their socio-economic status on the question of Affirmative Action in UWI admissions.

The largest proportion of students across all ethnic groups who are in favour of affirmative action come from medium SES families: an equal proportion (13.3 per cent) of Africans and East Indians, and more students from the Mixed category (22.5 per cent). It is noteworthy that 4 Africans (13.3 per cent), 3 Mixed (7.5 per cent) and 2 East Indian students (6.6 per cent) from the higher strata of society also adopted a positive stance. Further, one African and 2 East Indian students with low SES also presented favourable arguments. Of major significance, no Mixed student who has low SES supported affirmative action.

In total, a majority of students with medium SES across the three ethnic groups indicated that affirmative action would promote social equality – they comprise of 6 Mixed students (15 per cent); in addition to 3 East Indians (10 per cent) and 2 Africans (6.6 per cent). Interestingly, 4 African students (13.3 per cent) with high SES argued that affirmative action would serve to provide equal opportunities in higher education. Furthermore, 2 Mixed students and 1 East Indian student also with a record of high SES endorsed this perspective. Among the few students with low SES, 1 African and 1 East Indian also presented this view.
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<td>Total</td>
<td>6 (20.0)</td>
<td>13 (43.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6 (20.0)</td>
<td>13 (43.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10 (33.3)</td>
<td>17 (56.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With reference to the above table the following abbreviated terms may be noted: H – High SES, M – Medium SES and L – Low SES.
It may be seen that 2 Mixed students and 1 East Indian student from high SES background claimed that affirmative action would assist in reducing poverty. Two Mixed students with medium SES and 1 East Indian from the lower strata of society expressed agreement. A minority of 2 students - 1 African and 1 East Indian student, both of medium SES, stated that the introduction of affirmative action in UWI admissions would propel national development. One African student who commented on the adverse effect of historical deprivations also belong to the middle strata of society. Additionally, 1 Mixed student who come from a medium SES family commented that affirmative action would cater for deprived groups to obtain quality education.

It is predominantly students with medium SES across the three ethnic groups who demonstrated anti-affirmative action views as follows: more than one-half (55.5 per cent) of the Mixed students as well as an equal but smaller proportion (43.3 per cent) of African and East Indian students. One-fifth (20 per cent) of the African students, 13.3 per cent of the East Indian students and 2 students of the Mixed category (5 per cent), all of whom come from high SES background, were against affirmative action. Interestingly, even students with low SES adhered to a negative stance: this group consisted of 5 East Indians (16.6 per cent), 3 Mixed and 2 African students.

It is evident that students from the middle strata of society across the three ethnic groups opined that the practice of affirmative action for entry to UWI would dilute the principles of meritocracy. These students comprise of the following: approximately one-third (32.5 per cent) of the Mixed category, over one-fourth (26.6 per cent) of East Indians and one fifth (20 per cent) of Africans. It is recorded that, 1 Mixed student, 2 East Indian students, as well as 5 African students (16.6 per cent), all of whom belong to high SES families, endorsed the procedure of “admissions based on merit.” One East Indian student and 2 Mixed students also raised arguments in favour of meritocracy.4

Among the students with a record of medium SES, 2 Mixed students and 1 East Indian student felt that the implementation of affirmative action would create

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4 One must consider that the composition of UWI bears an elitist tradition, hence the sample contains few students from low SES background. It is speculated that an additional number of citizens from the lower strata of society may support the Policy of Affirmative Action in higher educational institutions.
social tensions. This view was also expressed by 1 African student and 1 Mixed student with high SES; as well as 1 African student and 2 East Indian students from families with low SES background. Although these numbers are minimal, the views put forward suggest the possibility of resentment and disharmony.

From the perspective of 3 East Indian students, 2 Mixed students and 1 African student of medium SES; the concessionary practices through affirmative action would lead to a decline in academic standards on the part of benefactors. One East Indian student with high SES agreed; also 1 African student and 1 Mixed student with low SES.

An equal proportion (10 per cent) of African and Mixed students, as well as 1 East Indian student with medium SES, recommended alternative means to be explored. Furthermore, 1 East Indian student with high SES and even 2 of them from low SES background indicated the same view.

The data point to anti-affirmative action views as expressed by the middle strata of society across the three ethnic groups. The majority of students - and notably Mixed students - contend that the criterion of affirmative action for entry to UWI would act against the principles of a meritocratic society. Mainly African and Mixed students expressed views for alternative means to be explored and the possibility of social tensions arising. Slightly more East Indian students asserted that affirmative action may lead to a decline in academic standards.

With reference to pro-affirmative action views the data emphasize that: Mixed students and to a lesser extent East Indian students - both of medium SES, and even African students with high SES, maintain the view that affirmative action can contribute towards the goal of social equality.

Thus, it may be noted that in JNU, middle-class students of the weaker sections of historically deprived SCs and STs in particular, are in favour of reservations to improve their socio-economic status and to acquire social mobility. Reservations are an important means through which they can assume their rightful place and become at a par with other groups in the Indian society. On the other hand, in UWI, the middle class students across all three ethnic groups are strongly against affirmative action. They believe that the policy would negate meritocratic principles and serve to benefit the socio-economic advancement of one group at the expense of
another. Hence, this would not further the cause of social equality in Trinidad and Tobago.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLICY OF RESERVATIONS

JNU teachers were asked to share their perspectives on the following issue: “Socio-politically, to what extent has the Policy of Reservations been beneficial to deprived groups in India/JNU?” (Appendix C.I).

A majority of JNU teachers (70 per cent) supported the Policy of Reservations for socio-economically deprived groups. A few teachers reflected upon reservation policies “in light of public space in India.” Throughout the ages and well after independence, “public space” was overwhelmingly and exclusively the domain of the upper castes.

According to one teacher:

“It is essentially because of reservations that some individuals have benefited from higher education and the “caste/class” nature of this “public/formal” space has been altered. While the proportion of those who gained is not substantial, reservations nevertheless have created an atmosphere in which Brahmanical and feudal capitalist interest do not have hegemonic control over all policies and discourses.”

Another teacher expressed agreement:

“Politically, the Policy of Reservations has been extremely useful in creating a space for deprived sections. It has enabled them to bargain with dominant and privileged groups for acceptance in the social process, it has created some amount of difference to their status.”

Several teachers mentioned that approximately over the last 55 years, reservation policy has created a new upsurge in education among the weaker sections. It has opened up new opportunities in “higher learning”, significant jobs and political leadership. One teacher asserted:

“This can be seen by comparing the government sector with the private sector. Today we can see Dalit and OBC intellectuals, government servants and politicians, but who has heard of Dalit or OBC entrepreneurs!”
The teachers identified that reservation policy has been the single most important avenue for advancement of higher education among SCs, STs and OBCs wherever it has been implemented. Additionally, those who have managed to avail of opportunities and sustain all pressures, have become a source of inspiration and encouragement to their families, and especially their siblings.

A few teachers were cognizant of certain deficiencies but maintained their stance in favour of reservation policies. According to them, while it is true that opportunities are utilized more by the better off among the weaker sections, reservations have created a certain kind of ideological and structural revolution in Indian society. Nevertheless, much more has to be done. There is need to further link policy with the larger goals of education, total literacy and participatory democracy. By all means, complementary steps must be taken to produce first-generation graduates among the poor and weaker sections. In some states and regions, the reserved quota for higher education very often goes unfilled. But one teacher documented that the situation will be worse in the absence of reservations. She emphasized:

"The very act of making reservations creates the potential of a space for social change, it is therefore not to be opposed."

In addition, teachers endorsed the Policy of Reservations based on its success in JNU. The reserved quotas for SC/ST and OBC students are respected at the entry level. However, there is a difference between reservation policy stipulated at the all India level and that of JNU. While the former is oriented exclusively towards caste; the latter has put into effect its own innovations to encompass regional backwardness, income, gender discrimination and other handicaps. One teacher stated:

"JNU’s reservation policy in the 80s and 90s was very successful as it took into account regional disparity, economic deprivation and gender in addition to caste. A large number of students from deprived backgrounds were able to join JNU."

Furthermore, the kind of work achieved by such a varied group of students and teachers distinguished academia that had a genuine social relevance. The teacher added:
"The policies instituted have really helped all spectrum of Indian society to obtain quality education."

Another teacher presented similar views as follows:

"Reservation policy has enriched JNU. The university attracts talents of the rich and poor from all over the country. As a result, we have been able to resist any elitist appropriation. Certainly, there are students who come from the affluent metropolitan social milieu. Yet, there are students, including females, coming from rural areas and deprived communities. This university because of its fairly egalitarian culture, has given the reserved categories the confidence to excel and achieve higher education of quality."

One teacher concluded:

"I believe that the JNU experiment with reservations should be seen as a model for the rest of the country. It shows to a considerable extent, the ability to reconcile equality and quality."

A range of arguments were put forward by teachers (30 per cent) who were against Policy of Reservations.

Firstly, it is feasible that reserved quotas in higher education be discontinued if attention is directed towards providing other forms of assistance for the upliftment of the poor. One teacher questioned:

"What is the plight of the poor upper caste and the rich lower caste SC and ST, as well as OBC people?"

An Economics teacher was totally against reservations for students whose parents have received higher education on account of reservation policy. According to him, this signifies most likely that the father has a stable occupation, and thus a reliable source of income. He argued that one must distinguish between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Gradually reservations ought to be withdrawn and replaced by effective social policies which can help the economically deprived.

According to one teacher, reservations have catapulted the deprived groups to various positions of power – but at the expense of merit. After 57 years of
independence and initiatives to improve their lot, SC, ST and OBC groups should now be able to complete with the General population. From the teacher’s perspective:

“Reservations in higher education at this stage means that this segment is not capable to come out of their vicious cycle of backwardness.”

Another teacher also felt that students should be admitted to higher education on the basis of intellectual capability. She illustrated:

“At times, I meet some SC or ST students who are of the required level, good students in the reserved quotas, because they have been in a position to come up to that level. On the other hand, I actually feel sorry for others. Ph.D is not everybody’s cup of tea. I have had postgraduate students of lesser ability, their research skills and written work were not quite encouraging. There are other meritorious students who have been denied entrance to JNU.”

Teachers raised the issue of reservations and quality in higher education. They spoke against consecutively certifying numerous “Ph.Ds” if students do not present theses of quality.

A teacher outlined:

“In this era of globalization and internationalization of higher education, Indian students have to interact with Ph.D students of Harvard, Stanford, Oxford and Cambridge at the intellectual level. We ought to cultivate very high academic standards.”

In addition, another teacher stated:

“If we have to rise up as a nation, it is incumbent that we meet the West an equal terms. If our Ph.Ds go out with low standards we cannot.”

One teacher outlined the following perspective:

“In the case of JNU, the policy of reservations has created an officialdom that wants the privileges without the pressures, perks without the efforts and a student community that believes in getting free world class facilities – it appears that this is their birthright. The policy of reserved seats should be abolished in favour of a policy based
upon merit. Then we can have more equal opportunities in higher education and equality in the society at large.”

Generally, teachers who were opposed to the Policy of Reservations conveyed that it fails to enhance social equality and cohesiveness in the society. Instead it creates controversy over the issues of meritocracy and the maintenance of high academic standards; also resentment continues to exist between the Reserved and General groups.

UWI teachers were requested to present their views on the following question: “Socio-politically, how feasible it is to sanction Affirmative Action for the deprived groups in Trinidad and Tobago?” (Appendix C.I) Eighty per cent of the teachers were against affirmative action while twenty per cent indicated a favourable response.

Among teachers who voiced objection, several believed that from a socio-political standpoint, affirmative action is wrong since it is unfair to have preferential treatment of one group over another.

A teacher stated:

“I do not support affirmative action in Trinidad and Tobago since every group in society has an equal chance to excel.”

Another teacher questioned:

“Who are the deprived groups?”

In his view, there are no deprived groups that are denied access to higher education. Rather, the deprived groups emerge from situations beyond schooling and higher education when graduates seek employment.

One teacher documented:

“Groups that resent affirmative action would only perceive that they are being shortchanged and more social division would ensue.”

A teacher of West Indian History concluded:

“Affirmative action is not very feasible. Due to colonial history, all groups feel deprived and discriminated against. The situation is quite different from the US and India where structural exclusion was the norm for hundreds of years under the same powerful group.”
According to a few teachers, affirmative action is unacceptable, since access to higher education should be based on merit. Indeed, highly motivated achievers will become disenfranchized and suffer reverse discrimination. On the other hand, affirmative action can send adverse signals to “recipients” who will endure a stigma of having progressed as “a minority group” without having earned the right. Thus, teachers felt that “recipients” may suffer from low “self-esteem and perform poorly in examinations. One teacher stated:

“Affirmative action can lower standards at a time when the level of higher education is already threatened by student complacency and passivity.”

Recognition was given to the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is still a developing country, and in the interest of national development, higher educational institutions require students with intellectual capability.

Although the majority of teachers were opposed to affirmative action per se, they expressed concern for equality of opportunity in higher education among socio-economically deprived groups via alternative means. For example, government can provide additional financial assistance in the form of bursaries, scholarships and maintenance grants for the poor who meet UWI entrance requirements but cannot afford. In the view of one teacher, affirmative action by itself cannot adequately and effectively address disparity between the rich and poor. Instead, action that directly addresses the cause of the disparity must take high priority. Remedial work and special preparatory programmes can be initiated at the primary and secondary levels to prepare the deprived groups to meet the challenges of a UWI degree. Such programmes will include literacy and numeracy skills, guidance and counselling, and the encouragement of healthy lifestyles. It is a whole question of culture that incorporates the pre-requisites of discipline and a positive attitude towards school work. In sum, the teachers were adamant that “socio-politically targeted and well planned action is required, not affirmative action.”

From the perspective of several teachers, due to the socio-political climate in Trinidad and Tobago, affirmative action at the higher educational level will create serious social and political problems in a society already stricken by racial and ethnic
conflict. It can lead to further ethnic polarization and resentment with undesirable political consequences. A teacher of Political Studies stated:

“Given the ethnic reactions in Trinidad and Tobago, unscrupulous politicians would use the idea of affirmative action to incite other groups. It has to be thought out very carefully, or it could lead to unrest.”

Teachers in support of affirmative action advocated a well-planned developmental strategy that takes into account deprived groups and gender related issues. One teacher commented:

“Affirmative action will always be subject to political criticism, but I think if we intend to build a society that is socially cohesive and eradicate the high incidence of crime and poverty etc., we must address our underprivileged also.”

One teacher suggested that affirmative action in UWI admissions be accorded to young men of various ethnic groups; not only Afro-males between the ages of 17-24. He specified:

“I am not referring to Afro-Trinidadians alone, because something is happening to several groups of our young men and they are just not making it in academia.”

A teacher in the field of Social Policy recommended sound research that unearths and identifies these groups using diverse criteria to capture “deprivation” in as many forms as possible – poverty, underachievement, a history of deviant behaviour, gender stereotyping etc. A history teacher explained:

“So long as affirmative action is not ethnic based but focuses on income and other class variables, there can be no legitimate objection to such action. Deprived young people are not confined to any one ethnic group, though residential rural-urban patterns might make such people of one ethnic group more visible than another. Such visibility can disguise the essentially trans-ethnic character of youth deprivation and serve as an apparent justification for ethnically focused affirmative action.”
Moreover, a teacher advised that affirmative action should be evoked for special circumstances, and once those special circumstances are no longer existent, then "the policy becomes dormant – it is not abandoned but it becomes dormant." In other words, this signifies that affirmative action policy should not be for a life time or bequeathed from one generation to another.

In the case of arguments for reservations/affirmative action, the respective group of teachers recognized the need for equality and upliftment of the socio-economically deprived sections of their society. Similarly, commonly voiced arguments about equality and reservations/affirmative action are raised by policymakers in both India and Trinidad and Tobago. However, the relative frequency with which the different arguments are raised, is different between the two countries.

PERSPECTIVES OF POLICYMAKERS AND EDUCATORS ON THE POLICY OF RESERVATIONS/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Policymakers and renowned educators of both India and Trinidad and Tobago presented their perspectives on the Policies of Reservations and Affirmative Action in higher education.

In the case of India, several individuals agreed that whatever achievement have been made during the last 57 years with respect to higher education enrolment of the weaker sections is largely and directly related to government reservation policies. Professor J.B.G. Tilak stated:

"It is clearly the reservation policies of the Government of India at work. If it were not for these policies, I think the system would have been in a very bad situation."

However, Professor Tilak made the point that although these policies have worked sufficiently well throughout the years, progress is still inadequate as far as the education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is concerned. Certainly, there are many among them who should be in the colleges and universities but who are not, on account of social and economic factors.

Professor G.D. Sharma supported the policy of reservations but felt that India needs to address a pertinent question which should not be left to chance. Basically,
“How can mechanisms be put in place to improve the quality of higher education for SCs, STs and OBCs?” He explained:

“We have provided reservations, that’s very good, it has given opportunity to the less fortunate but at the same time, we should ensure that we provide the persons with quality higher education. Efforts have to be undertaken in this direction.”

Professor Sharma reinforced the point that providing access is not the ultimate objective, but rather providing access with quality education and all the support that is required to bring weaker groups to the required level. The majority of educators recognized that a crucial problem exists in maintaining quality work among weaker groups that are granted reservations in higher education.

In addition, Professor Sharma raised the issue that these reservations can be distributed in accordance with an individual’s economic situation and the criterion need not be based on caste. This concern had arisen in earlier times but it was found that those who were economically deprived were also of low social status. One solution is that government can consider both factors and conduct investigations to determine those who are really deserving reservations. Thus, the distribution of reservations will not be restricted to social status but will extend to economic considerations. Professor Sharma outlined:

“You see reservations can be up to a certain point and it must be testified, because there might be various kinds of constraints and the real issue is that people from certain social strata or groups would not be able to elevate their status.”

In contrast, Professor Sudesh Nangia put forward the argument that for over 50 years following independence, India has granted reservations to weaker sections and the time has now come to consider alternative measures in order to resolve their problems. For instance, government can supply a grant for books and meals to motivate the less fortunate to attend school and participate in the learning process. In this way, they can receive the preparation and training necessary for higher studies. Instead, over the years reservations have been increasing – today it is one group, tomorrow it is another group, then another comes for regional reservation, then another advocates for “sons of the soil”; hence there will be no end to reservations. In
addition, the groups that are receiving the benefit of reservations desire to continue to have it; they do not wish to "graduate from reservations", they do not want to compete with the mainstream. Professor Nangia concluded:

"Generally, I do not support reservations. This is a vital issue of national importance and so many factors have to be taken into account concerning the extent to which the granting of reservations is sensible and rational."

From discussions among policymakers and higher education experts in India, there is a large measure of support for the continuation of reservations in favour of SCs and STs based on historical deprivations, eradication of social stigma and the need for increased social mobility.

With reference to Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Ewart Taylor illustrated that the introduction of affirmative action policies are worthwhile if they conform to the principle of "equity" and aim to achieve justice. Dr. Taylor quoted King Martin Luther thus: "If there is no justice, there is no peace." Hence, a pre-condition of peace in a country is justice. All governments must therefore address the question of equity. Equity concerns the improvement of living conditions among the socio-economically deprived, so that they can attain the level of any ethnic group in the society, and thus enjoy the same rights, privileges and freedom etc. According to Dr. Taylor, one group that requires assistance is Afro males between the age group of 17-24 who are under-represented in enrolment at UWI. However, this is only one group. There are several groups that need to be identified, maybe the children of the rural Indian farmer and whoever else, in order to bring about some measure of equity in higher education and in the living standards of all groups. Dr. Taylor expressed the following view:

"I say a country is better off striving for affirmative action than not striving for it and allowing certain groups to deteriorate, their conditions will then deteriorate by default."

He further explained that the thought of introducing affirmative action in Trinidad and Tobago is explosive because people do not understand the concept. They perceive of it as favouritism. By all means, one cannot be in favour of "equity" and be against "affirmative action." In other words, citizens cannot declare, "We want equity, but we don't want affirmative action." There must be reconciliation between the two.
On the other hand, Dr. Carol Keller believed that from a socio-political point of view affirmative action in Trinidad and Tobago is a “non-start.” Undoubtedly, the tensions and mutual suspicions that now exist between the ruling “Afro-based party” and the predominantly “East Indian Opposition” would rule out any possibility of affirmative action. Even though government policies in previous times do reflect such an orientation, it is certain that whichever party is in opposition would vociferously object. Dr. Keller underlined:

“The policies imply that there is a need for affirmative action but socio-politically, it is such a charged question that it would always be seen as racial bias on the part of whichever political party introduces it. Besides, it is difficult to have affirmative action in a country where racial polarization and racial sensitivities have infiltrated the population. For these reasons, affirmative action is a “non-start.”

The President of Trinidad and Tobago and former Principal of the UWI, St. Augustine Campus, Professor George Maxwell Richards, underscored that affirmative action is not required in UWI admissions to facilitate any ethnic group. The country can provide an alternative solution. The aim should be to visit specific communities and identify groups that are “At Risk”, some children may have dropped out of school for certain reasons, others may have the qualifications but cannot pursue tertiary education due to economic or social pressures. Thereafter, educators must formulate strategies such as remedial education or continuing studies to ensure quality education among some, or to provide the necessary assistance to others who are capable. The President was convinced that this approach can cater for equity in higher education; he was totally opposed to the lowering of academic standards in admissions to UWI. Likewise, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Colm Imbert, drew a distinction between enrolment and recruitment thus:

“With regard to enrolment one lowers the standard; as far as recruitment is concerned, one goes and find the deprived groups, determine what is wrong with them and address their problems so that they can achieve the required standard. That’s the difference.”

Unlike the majority of their counterparts in the Indian context, policymakers and higher education experts of Trinidad and Tobago have not identified that any

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5 The researcher was not permitted to tape-record the President’s interview. Hence, His Excellency’s comments are not enclose with quotation marks in the above discussion.
particular "under-represented ethnic group" is more deserving of affirmative action preferences than another, whether on the basis of historical deprivations, greater negative discrimination, or greater socio-economic change.

SUMMARY

Over three-fourths of the JNU students supported the established practice of Reservations within the Indian higher education system; on the other hand near to three-fourths of the UWI students voiced objection to the use of Affirmative Action as a criterion to determine entry into UWI.

In the case of JNU, an overwhelming proportion of SC and ST students raised pro-reservation arguments with reference to social equality, alleviation of poverty, and compensation for historical deprivations to which the weaker sections have been subjected. One half of the OBC students and even slightly more of those in the General category presented positive arguments. Several OBC and General students who were opposed to reservations placed emphasis on the dilution of merit.

With respect to UWI, over two-thirds of the students in each ethnic group - African, East Indian and Mixed - adhered to anti-affirmative action perspectives. A sizeable and equal proportion of African and East Indian students; together with a slightly larger group of Mixed students directed attention to meritocratic principles. A minority of students in each group also presented arguments concerning alternative means to be explored, the emergence of social tensions, and a decline in academic standards. Interestingly, the data reflects that those students who expressed pro-affirmative action views comprised of roughly one-fourth of each ethnic group. Each of them focused on the goal of social equality.

Both JNU and UWI are universities which have opened the doors to a wider section of middle class students; it may be recognized that the latter reflects a more elitist tradition in terms of enrolment. Hence, in JNU as well as UWI, it is essentially the students of medium SES who demonstrate pro-reservation and anti-affirmative action views.

In JNU, even a minority of students with high SES in each of the SC, ST, OBC and General categories supported reservations. Additionally, slightly over one-fifth of the JNU sample with low SES voiced arguments for the continuation of
reservations. The data reveal that OBC and General students from both high and medium socio-economic background presented anti-reservation views based on meritocracy and alternative means to be explored.

In UWI, it is noteworthy that a few students with low SES presented arguments against affirmative action. The largest segment consisted of East Indians. The data also shows that even African, East Indian and Mixed students with high and medium SES, contend that affirmative action would act against the principles of a meritocratic society. On the other hand, it is striking that several students with high SES, mainly Africans, argued in favour of affirmative action. These students focused on the need to promote equality among all ethnic groups.

A common characteristic of JNU and UWI- in each of which more middle-class students are enrolled- is concern for the advancement of social equality. However, whereas the former recognizes the necessity to elevate the weaker sections due to centuries of historical deprivations; the latter believes that all ethnic groups have “started the race on equal footing” and each must achieve success and social mobility based on meritocratic principles.

The majority of JNU teachers supported reservations primarily on the basis of caste due to historical deprivations, the new upsurge in education, the acceptance of the lower castes as participants in the social process, and their progress in terms of social mobility. Nevertheless, a few teachers were aware of certain deficiencies in the implementation of reservation policies that are intended to meet the needs of the socio-economically deprived.

In contrast, a minority of UWI teachers endorsed the policy of affirmative action but specifically stated that it should not be granted using the criteria of ethnicity and historical deprivations. They argued that “socio-economically deprived groups” need upliftment in the interest of a more socially cohesive society. In addition, they expressed concern for equal opportunities in terms of gender to address male under-achievement.

A majority of UWI teachers opposed the introduction of affirmative action in Trinidad and Tobago in consideration of: ethnic groups’ similar experiences as far as historical deprivations are concerned - thus again the assertion was made that ethnicity should have no bearing on affirmative action. These teachers also considered the issue of meritocracy as well as maintenance of high standards;
provision for equality via alternative means; and the emergence of greater ethnic polarization in the society.

Similar to the UWI teachers who adopted anti-affirmative action views, a minority of JNU teachers refuted “caste-based reservations” claiming that only the criterion of socio-economic status should be utilized to provide assistance for the weaker sections. Others also presented arguments on meritocracy, the need for quality higher education, and resentment between the Reserved and General groups.

The perspectives of policymakers and educators in both India and, Trinidad and Tobago were utilized to supplement teachers’ arguments. One recognizes that: whereas credit is given to the continued success of reservations for historically deprived groups in India, from a socio-political point of view the introduction of affirmative action in Trinidad and Tobago is a non-start. However, both countries are in favour of equality, equity and social justice for all groups. In this regard, policymakers are open to feasible measures for the elevation of the socio-economically deprived within their given scenario.