UNIT 18   YOUTH: IDENTITY AND ALIENATION

Structure

18.0   OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall discuss the contemporary dimensions of youth in India. After going through this unit you should be able to:

- describe demographic condition of youth population in India;

- explain the difference between student youth and non-student youth examine traditional and changing value system of youth;

- narrate the problems of alienated youth;

- describe the factors and problems causing student unrest; and

- discuss some programmes for the youth in India.

18.1   INTRODUCTION

The study of youth in India involves consideration of several dimensions. Youth can be understood both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Qualitative

description means a discussion involving socio-cultural variables. Quantitative term means a consideration of estimates of the proportion of youth in a population, that is, a discussion of socio-cultural variables like education, occupation, income, standard of living, rural- urban differences. A sociological discussion would require socio-demographic and cultural approach 'to youth in India. We begin this unit defining the term 'Youth'. We shall, then shift our focus to the demographic variables of youth, namely, age, sex, urban-rural distribution, marital status, educational attainment and unemployment rate.

Confrontation of youth with the traditional value system, alienation, identity crisis are briefly touched upon. Causes of student unrest are dealt with next. Finally, we mention the observations of sociologists on future programme for youths.

18.2 DEFINITION OF 'YOUTH' AND 'YOUTH CULTURE'

At the very outset let us be aware of the notion of youth. Though apparently it is considered to be a biophysical stage, it has enormous sociological significance in the study of social problem.

18.2.1 Youth

The term Youth is not used technically but rather it nearly describes a series of characteristics in respect to persons belonging to age group 15-24 years of a given population. The term is illusive. Some consider youth as a stage characterised by factors of biological nature i.e. biophysical changes which occur in the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, roughly between 15 and 24 years age group. Thus in many studies on youth persons of age group 15-24 years are considered.

Despite realising the inherent drawback in such a classification (for it cannot serve as a common denominator to cover many complex problems all over the country) social scientists including sociologists largely depend on this age group classification. In this unit the age group 15-24 years would be retained for discussion-on youth. Along with this classification sociologically the nation of "youth culture" is closely associated. However, the notion of youth culture has contextual relevance. Let us examine it's relevance in Indian context.

18.2.2 Youth Culture

Euro-American sociologists such Bennett Berger (1963) and many others often talk about 'Youth culture'. In Western societies youth culture is identifiable and hence it is considered to be a sub-social system like *Black culture, America-Mexican culture* etc., But in a country like India, the youth are intimately linked with certain other features of social system. Therefore, Indian sociologists reluctantly accept the very notion of youth culture as employed by foreign scholars. In our discussion on youth we shall treat youth as "socio-demographic or statistical categories" of Indian society, which has enormous sociological importance and relevance.

Sociological studies on youth in India involve a discussion on several dimensions, namely demographic, social, cultural, economic and political. It would be useful here to examine demographic characteristics of Indian youth in terms of residence, education and working force.

18.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INDIAN YOUTH

It would be useful to examine the population of youth in terms. of sex-composition, rural-urban distribution, marital status and educational attainment.

It is significant to note that the population of youth in the country at the turn of this century was 40 million. The proportion of youth in the total population since 1901 remained unchanged, it was around 17 per cent till 1971.

In 1981 the youth population was 122 million, i.e., a little less than 18.5 per cent of country's total population. During 1951-1981 the population almost doubled (from 62 to 122 million). According to 1991 census youth constituted 18.3% of the total population

18.3.1 Sex-Ratio of the Youth Population

According to 1981 Census, of the total population 52% was of male youth. In terms of sex ratio it comes to 929 female per one thousand male. It is significant to note that male youth per 1000 female youth in India has been increasing during the last 20 years showing a deficit of 7 per cent of female youth.

18.3.2 Rural-Urban Distribution

In 1991 of the total rural and the urban population 17.7 and 20.1% respectively were the youth.

18.3.3 Marital Status

By and large the youth remain unmarried till they reach 20 years. But in India the situation is different, for a sizeable number of youth population is married. In 1981 most half of the girls in the age group 15-29 years were unmarried in urban areas. As compared to the previous Census years, the current mean age at marriage has gone up. However, a sizeable number of girls in rural areas still marry at young age. During 1961-81 the proportion of the youth remaining single has increased both in urban and rural areas. Category wise age at marriage in India for youth has been indicated in the following table:

18.3.4 Educational Attainment of the Youth Population

The overall youth literacy rate in 2002 was 72.6% in India. In other words, in terms of sex and residence illiterates are predominant in the population.

Overall the literacy rate has gone up from 24 per cent to 36 per cent during the past 20 years. Youth educated up to matriculate were 3.6 million in 1961 and 20.2 million in 1981. In other words, a six-fold increase is apparent. The increase was obvious among the young women. In spite of the increase half of the male youth and three-fourth of the female youth in the country cannot read and write even today.

18.3.5 Working Population of the Youths

Usually the proportion of working population is expressed In terms of employment- unemployment rate. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), in its periodical survey provides data in this respect.

i)   **Incidence of Unemployment**

Analysis of unemployment figures in the country clearly shows that the youth form a relatively significant group among the total unemployed persons. According to Visaria, the share of youth among the employed population in 1977-78 ranged from 48.5 per cent for the rural female youth to 79.8 per cent for the urban male youth.

When we analyse the unemployment rate among the educated youth, we get that among all educated youth the proportion of unemployed Secondary educated youth, both in urban and rural areas, is higher than others (see Table 3).

Table 3: Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment
1977-78

	Rural		Urban	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**
All	3.6	4.1	7.1	4.4
Illiterate	2.5	3.6	3.6	4.4
Secondary	10.6	28.6	10.0	33.6
Graduates	16.2	32.3	8.8	31.0

Source: NSSO, India (1981)

It is obvious from the above table that overall employment rate among the urban youths is less than the rural. youth. It has reached a critical stage among the educated youth population.

Analysis of data on youth unemployed in the country indicates some useful trends, namely:

a)   Unemployment rates among the rural female youth in states of Karnataka, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala were higher than the national average which, for the year under consideration (1977-78), was 5.6 per cent.

b)   Among rural male youth, this rate was higher than the national average of 6 per cent in Orissa, Bihar, Haryana, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. :

c)   Among male youth in urban areas, the rate of unemployment was higher than the national average in Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala.

d)   The incidence of unemployment was the highest among the urban female youth. In states like Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and Maharashtra this rate was higher than the national average, and

e)   The rural unemployment rates in many states were significantly lower than those of urban unemployment.

18.3.6 Implication of the Increase in Youth Population

The rate of increase in youth population has serious implication both for educational and work opportunity. Despite the differences existing between these characteristics of the youth in different regions, certain common problems can easily be identified.

The bulk of the rural youth in India is out of school. Some are drop-outs. However, among the different social strata education is spreading. The out-of-school youth exhibit a different character. These children are forced in one way or the other to enter the work in production cycle prematurely.

Despite the numerical preponderance of rural youths this sector has been exposed very little. It is obvious that rural youth have less opportunity for receiving education, self-expression and enjoyment compared with other young people.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   How is youth defined? Answer in four lines.

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ii)   State some important dimensions of study of youth in India. Answer in about three lines.

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iii) Briefly describe some demographic features of Indian youth. Answer in eight lines.

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iv) Briefly state usages of demographic data on youth population in India. Answer in three lines

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18.4 CHANGING VALUE SYSTEM AND ALIENATION OF THE YOUTH

18.4.1 Changing Value System

In this section, we shall be dealing with the phenomena of changing value system and the facts of alienation among the youth.

In the last two centuries, there have been enormous changes in our traditional value system. Let us explain this phenomenon and find out whether it has any impact on the youth of our country with special reference to the alienation of the youth.

In the traditional Hindu system life is viewed in terms of four well-marked states with social obligations. The youth enjoyed no authority, but were given some tasks in the second stage (i.e. Grihastha).

It should also be noted that in Hindu society education was restricted to certain caste levels; therefore, socio-economic and occupational mobility was almost restricted. Viewed against this value today specially after Independence this phenomenon regardless of religion and region has changed. One of the important contributing factor to change in value system is of course development in mass education. New ideas and values are inculcated through education. This makes youth student receptive to change. Several sociological studies support the view that youth student are/keen on social change in the areas of family, caste, notions of hierarchical status (including untouchability), rationality, secularism, equality, social justice, position of women and so on (Damle, 1977:203). It should be emphasised that although there is difference between rural and urban youth, their traditional value system is almost the similar.

18.4.2 Alienation

The term 'alienation' denotes a feeling of estrangement from other people and of confusion about existing norms. Many writers include in the concept of alienation, to explain notions such as lack of power, meaninglessness, sense of isolation and self- estrangement. The causes of alienation are many. In the present context a few factors seem to be important.

i) **Generation Gap**

One of them is a cleavage between young and old generation. The youths especially of urban areas depend much on their parents. On the one hand, there has been considerable rise in their level of aspirations and expectations; on the other, they confront the forces of traditions. Majority of the modern Indian youth are not interested to be bound by the traditional norms and values. They are interested to adopt the secular life-style and a rational outlook. These causes conflict which at some later stage leads to alienation.
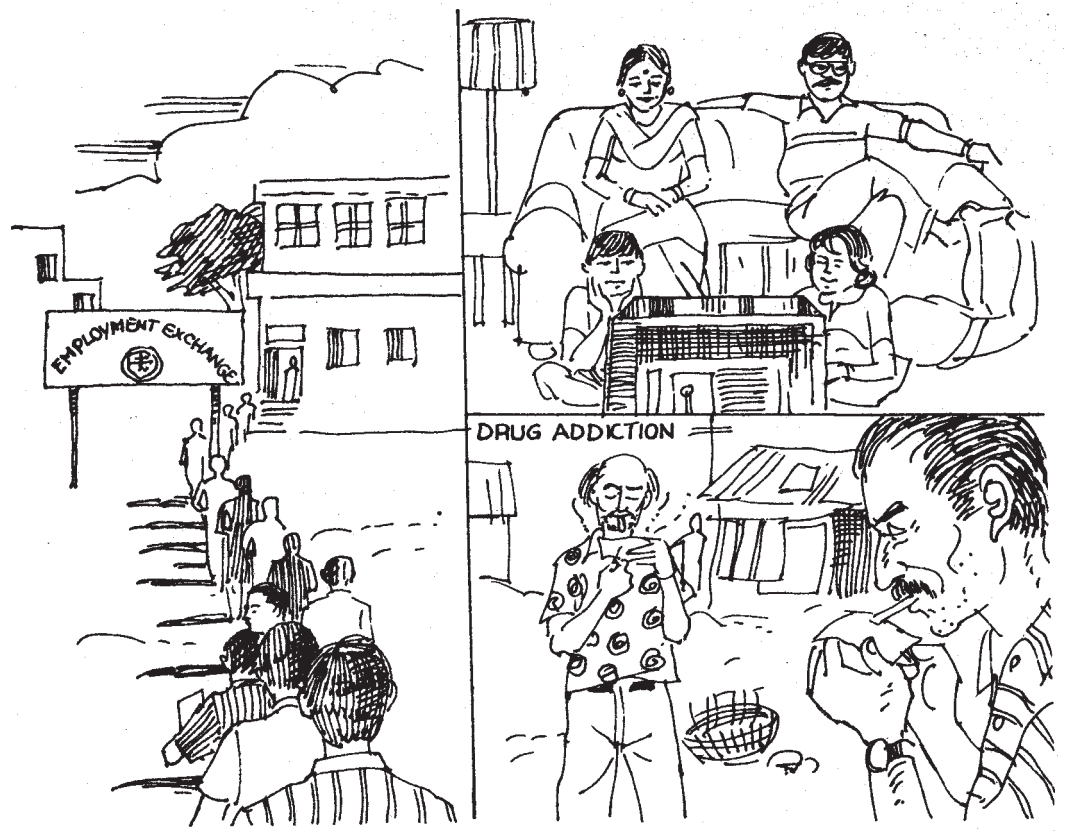
Youth and Alienation

ii) Unemployment

The second important contributing factor to alienation is widespread
phenomenon of unemployment. Soon after completing a particular stage they
require economic security. But as they fail to find a job they feel like living in
an isolation. This is very crucial stage. Here they may become victim of other
evils, such as mental illness, criminal activities, drug addiction. Here both
rural and urban youth are almost in similar situation. Sachchidananda (1988)
writes:

> "Those (rural) boys who cannot go to the town for continuing their studies
> and remain in the village spend their time in idle gossip and in some cases
> turn to anti-social activities. It has been found that many such educated
> young men take active part in dacoities, road hold-ups which are extremely
> common in many parts of India".

Some studies carried on in parts of northeastern and central India have pointed
out widespread phenomenon of, 'drug addiction" in university and college
campuses. It is not well established those whether alienated youth are victim
of drug addiction or drug addiction alone leads to alienation. Both these factors
influence each other and operate together.

iii) Identity Crisis

Identity signifies a sense of awareness that people consciously or unconsciously
assert for survival, recognition and reward in the existing social structures.
Youth in recent time try .to define their own identity in order to obtain the
resources for survival and try to get a place in the existing social order.

It is being felt that the youth have not satisfactorily been placed in the matter of education and occupation. Instead of being in search for identity youth are undergoing turmoil of identity crisis. This has led them to attract towards the forces of revivalism as remedy to inadequacies. In absence of adequate model to deal with rising identity crisis, the youth especially the educated unemployed youth indulge in non-institutionalised channels of socio-economic betterment.

Check Your Progress 2

Tick mark the correct answers:

i)   In the traditional Hindu system life is viewed in terms of four well marked stages with social obligations. In this system of life youth enjoyed

   a)   good deal of authority without any social obligation

   b)   good deal of authority with social obligation

   c)   no authority but were given some tasks in the second stage of life Griha

   d)   All are incorrect.

ii)   There is difference between the rural and urban youth; and their traditional value system

   a)   is also different

   b)   is almost similar

   c)   cannot be judged in these two opposite scales.

iii) Which one of the following is not a cause of alienation among the youth?

   a)   Cleavage between young and old generation

   b)   Spread of unemployment

   c)   Drug addiction

   d)   Enormous scope of employment.

18.5   STUDENT UNREST

In recent decades, there have been considerable number of incidences of unrest in the educational campuses. Studies reveal that youth unrest and educational institutions are highly correlated.

According to a sociological study of unrest on the campuses in the country, it was noticed that during the period 1968 to 1971 almost all the states in the country were heavily affected by instances of student violence (Vinayak, 1972). Of 744 cases of student unrest, 80 per cent were violent and about 20 per cent were peaceful. All India average ratio of violent to peaceful agitations was 4:5 to 1:0 and it ranged between 2:3 to 1:0 in Bihar and Madras, to 31:0 to 0:0 in M. P. The universities in the southern states were comparatively more peaceful or less violent. The maximum number of cases of student violence were in Delhi, followed by U.P. and West Bengal. The least disturbed states were Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan.

18.5.1 Causes of Student Unrest

Two broad categories can be listed as the causes of unrest and violence, namely, 'On-campus' issues and 'Off-campus' issues. The 'On-campus issues' are both academic and non-academic in nature. On-campus issues are related to examinations, fees, residential facilities. The Off-campus issues are sympathetic strikes (Bandh) and confrontation between student youth and non-student youth.

Vinayak has observed that during the period 1968-71 more than 65 per cent cases of unrest were due to Off-campus issues, about 24 per cent due to On-campus academic issues, and about 11 per cent due to other factors. The state-wise analysis revealed that :here were 66 cases in Andhra Pradesh, 25 in Assam, 44 in Bihar, 128 in Delhi, 7 in Gujarat, 6 in Haryana, 7 in Himachal Pradesh, 15 in Jammu and Kashmir, 51 in Tamil Nadu, 14 in Maharashtra, 22 in Orissa, 50 in Punjab, 18 in Rajasthan, 109 in U.P., and 101 in West Bengal. This study revealed that almost all states were affected by student violence during 1968-71. There is no denying the fact that there have been several reported cases of agitations on campuses during the past decade.

Some specific studies have been directed to root out the causes of unrest.

i) According to one source, the underlying cause of unrest is rooted in a general feeling of frustration among the youth. The educated students have come to believe that in the present set lp the government policies have ignored merits and abilities.

ii) The other important cause of student unrest has been interference of political parties with student union or organisations. Several studies have supported the views that the association of various political parties through the student wings in many ways are responsible for the outbreak of violence. The national political parties and their local bodies tend to use the students as their testing field for their strength for incoming elections.

iii) The third contributing factor to unrest is unemployment. It is a well-known fact that the present.day education system in the country does not guarantee suitable employment. The reasons are many: lack of proper guidance, training, career-oriented programmes and non-availability of jobs. .

According to a recent study by Parveen Visaria (1985) it is quite clear that in spite of the. efforts on the various fronts, the quantum of unemployment has continued to increase with the growth in population. Visaria has concluded that the unemployed' males in urban areas have outnumbered the unemployed females. This study indicated a marginal rise in unemployment rate for rural males but a sharp decline in the unemployment rate for rural females. The trend for the youth population (age 15-29) was similar. The unemployment rates showed a rise among urban youths of both sexes and also among the rural male youth.

18.5.2 Implications for Student Unrest

Youth form a relatively significant group among the total unemployed persons in India. The reasons for unemployment are many and they are closely linked with population growth, economic growth and expansion of education. The

consequences of rising unemployment among the youth are for themselves and their families. It has been indicated that the increase in the number of educated youth and the indifferent quality of education makes matter worse. This has implications for student unrest in particular.

Activity 1

Read Section 18.7 again and list the issues that have led to unrest and violence in university campuses in recent years. You may present your own observations about student unrest in your area and compare your observations with your friends at your Study Centre.

18.6 SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO YOUTH QUESTION

According to Sachchidananda (1988), two Possible and complementary approaches could be thought of to discuss the youth question. It could be based either on an individual or socio-economic context in which one lives.

Despite the differences existing between characteristics of the youth in different regions, certain common problems can be identified. First, there is a high percentage of rural youth within the population. This sector must be given opportunity to play their role. A major obstacle in this connection is of lack of education. While education alone is not capable of bringing about socio-economic change on its own, it is nevertheless the condition, that is, educational opportunities which must be fulfilled if change is to occur. Therefore, the future programme, that is, educational policies, must be flexible and more sensitive than at present to regional and local traditions. Further, the youth are most affected by the erroneous process of development. As such future educational planning should take particular account of the situation and prospects of the employment including linking work with study.

Box 1

Youth Services

There are various youth programmes launched by the State and the Central Governments as well with a view to enabling the youth (a) "to improve their skills and personality for effective participation in the process of development and (b.) to provide them opportunities to participate in the process of national development". You may like to know about a few of these programmes

1) **National Services Scheme (NSS) :** This scheme aims at the involvement of College Students on a voluntary and selective basis in the programme of social service and national development.

2) **Nehru Yuvak Kendra (NYK) :** 'This scheme aims to serve the non-students and rural youth with a view to improving their personality and employment capability. These *kendras* organise youth leadership, training programmes, national integration camps, operation of bio-gas plants, bee keeping, para-military training etc. At many places the scheme of Training Rural Youth for Self Employment is implemented through the Kendras

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> 3) **Scouting and Guiding:** This is a part of an international movement which aims to building character of boys and girls.
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> There are other numerous schemes viz. International Exchange of Youth Deligations, Promotions of National Integration, National Service Volunteer Scheme, Exhibition for Youth, Youth Hostels; National Youth Award Scheme etc. meant for the youth in India. (India 2000).

Second important point is related to position of youth in general population structure of the country. Life expectancy in India has increased considerably over the past five decades. It is expected to increase much more in the next twenty years. Therefore, it would necessitate a clear-cut division between youth and old. In sociological terms it would mean two broad but distinct types of groups: old and young. Since role and responsibilities are associated with persons this would involve some transfer of authority from one generation to the next, i.e. from older to the younger. So there is a possibility of clash or conflict in ideas and actions between two generations. Such clash, likely to come up in years to comes. However, there are ways to tackle the problem of clash. One is possible changes In the family ideology. A democratic type of family atmosphere can resolve the conflict. Similar radical changes in other social institutions such as kinship and caste system are also required.

Check Your Progress 3

i) What are the main causes of student unrest? Answer in about seven lines.

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Tick marks the *incorrect* statement.

ii) According to a recent study:

    a) unemployed males in urban areas have out numbered the unemployed females.

    b) there has been a marginal rise in the unemployment rate for rural males but a sharp decline in the employment rate for rural female

    c) the unemployment rates showed a rise among the urban youth
        d) none is incorrect.

iii) Discuss briefly anyone of the possible approaches to youth question in India with special reference to rural youth. Use seven lines to answer.

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18.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit highlights certain important issues related to youth in India. We pointed out the difficulties in defining the term youth. Though the term was defined as 'age-group' category, the emphasis was also on socio-cultural variables. These were treated as identifiable criteria in the study of youth. We discussed at some length a few demographic variables of youth, namely, age-sex, urban-rural distribution, marital status, educational attainment and unemployment rate.

Confrontation of youth with the traditional value system, alienation and identity crisis were touched upon briefly. Discussions on the situation and problems of youth were held at some length. Lastly, observations of sociologists on future programme for youth, were indicated.

18.8 KEY WORDS

Alienation	:	A feeling of estrangement from other people and of confusion about the existing norms.
Demography	:	Study of phenomena connected with human populations; such as births, marriages and deaths, migrations and the factors which influence them. It involves statistics.
Identity	:	The condition of being the same with something described or asserted.
Sex-Ratio	:	Number of female per 1000 male as defined in the *Census of India.*
Value System	:	Shared cultural standard according to which the relevance – moral, aesthetic – of objects, of attitudes, desires and needs can be compared and judged.
Violence	:	An extreme form of conflict.
Youth	:	Persons of age-group 15-24 year of a given population. It is a socio-cultural and simultaneously a statistical category.
Youth culture	:	An identifiable sub-social system of a larger social system.

18.9   FURTHER READINGS

Damle.. Y, B. 1977. "Youth". In S.C. Dube (Ed.) *India Since Independence,* Vikas: New Delhi.

De Mellow, R.C., 1978. "Youth". In Romesh Thapar's (ed.) *Change and Conflict in India.* Macmillan India: Delhi.

Sachchidanand, 1988. *Social Change in Village India,* Concept: Delhi.

18.10   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   Youth is defined both as social and statistical category. Usually persons between 15 and 24 years age are considered youth.

ii)   Important dimensions of the study of youth in India are social demography and: cultural variables.

iii)   Demographic features of the youth can be expressed in age-sex-residence distribution in the general population.

Rural-urban ratio is 3.1 (urban male 33 million, rural male 92 million). Youth mean marriage age is 22. Half of the male youth and three-fourth female youth are still illiterate.

iv)   Main usages are related to the areas of educational expansion and creation of job opportunities.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   c

ii)   b

iii)   d

Check Your Progress 3

i)   The causes of the student unrest can broadly be categorised under two broad headings: on-campus and off-campus. The on-campus issues are related to examination fees, residential facilities etc. The off-campus issues are sympathetic strikes (Bandh), and confrontation between student youth and non-student youth. In general the feeling of frustration, unemployment and political interference have contributed substantially towards this unrest.

ii)   d

iii)   Rural youth must be given the opportunity to play their role, Hence they are to be educated adequately, to bring change in the society. The educational policies, must be flexible and sensitive to regional tradition. The further educational planning should take particular account of the situation and prospects of the employment including linking work with study.