

The role of education in poverty alleviation and Economic development: a theoretical perspective and counselling implications.

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Abstract

Poverty is a major threat to the existence of humanity in modern times especially in the developing world. The millennium development agenda set to reduce poverty by a half by the year 2015 expresses the global commitment to ensuring the living standards of mankind. Education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of achieving sustainable economic development through investment in human capital. Education fosters self understanding, improves quality of lives and raises people's productivity and creativity thus promoting entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition it plays very crucial roles in securing economic and social progress thus improving income distribution which may consequently salvage the people from poverty. This paper is aimed at contextualizing the role of education in advancing economic development and thereby alleviating poverty. The implication for counselling was also highlighted to overhaul the input, process and output processes of the nation education system to reflect the provision of quality education that may assist in building the humans capita and thereby eradicate the poverty of the deserving citizens.

Key words: Poverty, Education, Economic development, counselling implications.

Introduction

Poverty is the world's current greatest threat to peace and stability more than terrorism and other highly publicized struggles. According to Sachs (2009), more than eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. In the year 2010, the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) estimated roughly 1.4 billion people were living in extreme poverty of these, about 93% live in three regions; East Asia, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, despite the government's poverty eradication campaigns, national development plans and sessional papers, poverty is still a major challenge. It is also recognised by all and sundry as a major threat to the very existence of Nigeria as a country. It may not be easy to have a universal definition to poverty as it is viewed from different angles by researchers. However, according to Sachs (2009), poverty can be defined in terms of three distinguishable degrees. These are: Extreme poverty, moderate poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty means the household cannot meet basic needs for survival. Such people are perpetually hungry, unable to access health care; they lack amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation. They cannot afford education for their children and cannot shelter their families. Moderate poverty on the other hand generally refers to conditions of life in which basic needs are met, but just barely. Relative poverty is construed as a household income level below a given proportion of average national income. In high income countries they lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, recreation, quality health care, education and other prerequisites for upward social mobility. The World Bank has been defining poverty in statistical terms of income of one US dollar per person per day, measured at purchasing power parity to determine the number of extreme poor around the world. cursory observations show that many Nigerians are living below the poverty level of one US dollar per day. The base line is that, many Nigerians live in poverty in its extreme nature manifesting itself in terms of lack of basic standard of health, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation, and other minimum need for survival, well-being and participation in the society.

Dynamics of poverty

The poor are not a single group with only a single problem of lack of money but poverty has many dimensions – shortened lives, illiteracy, social exclusion and lack of material means to improve family circumstances. Further, these dimensions can overlap in different combinations where for example men view poverty differently from women.

Human and income poverty seem to go hand in hand. For example, some small farm households can maintain reasonable incomes until their lack of effective access to health services, because of long distances, bad roads or through local services deficiencies leaves them ill and vulnerable. For others, coping with the loss of expected farm income as a result of drought or flood and trying to find alternative crops to plant or additional sources of livelihood is their highest priority.

In Nigeria, poverty sometimes, presents itself in a periodical manner. Poverty may be seasonal in rural areas; lean periods and low income availability coincide with period of endemic disease. Seasonal rains destroy rural roads and physically isolate the rural poor from markets and essential services. Among the urban poor, times of economic hardship fall at the middle of the month when salaried employees run out of funds.

Poverty can sometimes be structural. It systematically excludes a portion of the population from full national and social participation through hunger, inadequate income, powerlessness, poor education and disease. For example, if a parent is poor, the chances of the children becoming non-poor are limited. The parent who is poor has no landed property, lacks money to educate the children and usually has a large family that is inadequately

provided for. Other poverty is more transient and reflects asset of vulnerabilities for income, assets and entitlements. In this context, poverty means the absence of security and so affect a very wide spectrum of Nigerian families. They may have adequate income for sometime but may highly be vulnerable to changes, hazards and misfortune.

Failure to maintain social integration and build hope for poverty reduction leads to violence against property and persons. This in turn impact negatively on the economy and welfare of both poor and non poor.

Education and Economic development

Education provides a foundation for eradicating poverty and fostering economic development. It is the groundwork on which much of economic and social well-being of the citizens is built. Education is the key to increasing economic efficiency and social consistency, by increasing the value and efficiency of the labour force and consequently raises the poor from poverty. Education increases the overall productivity and intellectual flexibility of the labour force and ensures that a country is competitive in world market now characterized by changing technologies and production methods.

According to Roberts (2011), the primary determinants of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing and utilizing the skills and knowledge, and furthering the health and educating the majority of its population.

No country has achieved constant economic development without considerable investment in education and human capital (Ozturk, 2011) many researchers have shown handsome returns to various forms of human capital accumulation basic education, research, training and aptitude building (Denison, 2008, Bowman 2010). Unequal education tends to have a negative impact on per capita income and thereby increase poverty in many countries. Educating girls and women is probably the single most effective investment a developing country like Nigeria can make, whether or not women work outside the home. It creates a multitude of positive remunerations for families including better family health and nutrition, improved birth spacing lower infant and child mortality, and enhanced educational attainment of children. In order for a country to be adequately integrated in worlds market for manufactured goods, and compete in these markets and in globalizing service markets will depend on the excellence of human capital they bring to the competition. Ensuring that all citizens are educated and numerate, that many possess a wide range of problem solving skills beyond the basic level, and that some have world class professional skill will be an advantage.

Education and Productivity

Clearly the educational provisions within any given country represent one of the main determinants of the composition and growth of that country's output and exports and constitute an important ingredient in a system's capacity to borrow foreign technology effectively. For example: health and nutrition, and primary and secondary education all raise the productivity of workers, rural and urban; secondary education, including vocational, facilitates the acquisition of skills and managerial capacity; tertiary education supports the development of basic science, the appropriate selection of technology imports and the domestic adaptation and development of technologies; secondary and tertiary education also represent critical elements in the development of key institutions, of government, the law, and the financial system, among others, all essential for economic growth. Empirical evidence at both micro and macro levels further illuminates these relationships. At a micro level, numerous studies indicate that increases ion earnings are associated with additional years of education, with the rate of return varying with high level of education (Behrman

1999 Psacharopoulos 1998). The returns to primary schooling tend to be greater than returns to secondary and tertiary education (Psacharopoulos, 2004).

In agriculture, evidence suggests positive effects of education on productivity among farmers using modern technologies, but less impact, as might be expected, among those using traditional methods. In Thailand, farmers with four or more years of schooling were three times more likely to adopt fertilizer and other modern inputs than less educated farmers (Birdsall, 2003). Similarly, in Nepal, the completion of at least seven years of schooling increased productivity in wheat by over a quarter, and in rice by 13% (Jamison and Moock, 2004).

Education is also an important contributor to technological capability and technical change in industry. Statistical analysis of the clothing and engineering industries in Sri Lanka, showed that the skill and education levels of workers and entrepreneurs were positively related to the rate of technical change of the firm (Deraniyagal, 2005).

Education alone, of course cannot transform an economy. The quality and quantity of investment, domestic and foreign, together with the overall policy environment, form the other important determinants of economic performance. Yet the level of human development has a bearing on these factors too. The quality of policy making and of investment decisions is bound to be influenced by the education of both policy makers and managers.

According to Lucas 2008, for example, the higher the level of education of the workforce the higher the overall productivity of capital because the more educated are more likely to innovate, and thus affect everyone's productivity. This implies that increased education of individuals raises not only their own productivity but also that of others with whom they interact, so that total productivity increases as the average level of education rises (Perotti, 2008). The impact of education on the nature and growth of exports, which, in turn, affect the aggregate growth rate, is another way in which human development influences a country's performance. The education and skills of a developing country's labor force influence the nature of its factor endowment and consequently the composition of its trade. It has been argued that even 'unskilled' workers in a modern factory normally need the literacy, numeracy, and discipline, which are acquired in primary and lower secondary school (Wood, 2009).

Education and Income

There is also a positive feedback from improved education to greater income equality, which, in turn, is likely to favour higher rates of growth. As education becomes more broadly based, low-income people are better able to seek out economic opportunities. For example, a study of the relation between schooling, income inequality and poverty in 18 countries of Latin America in the 1990s found that one quarter of the variation in workers' incomes was accounted for by variations in schooling attainment; it concludes that 'clearly education is the variable with the strongest impact on income equality' (Psacharopoulos, 1998). Another study suggested that a one percent increase in the labor force with at least secondary education would increase the share of income of the bottom 40 and 60% by between 6 and 15% respectively (Bourguignon and Morrison, 2000). An investigation of the determinants of income distribution in 36 countries found secondary enrolment rates to be significant (Bourguignon, 2005).

Education may affect per capita income growth via its impact on the denominator, i.e. population growth. For example, a study of fourteen African countries for the mid-nineties showed a negative correlation between female schooling and fertility in almost all countries, with primary education having a negative impact in about half the countries and no significant effects in the other half, while secondary education invariably reduced fertility (Wolfe 1995).

The three success countries in terms of reduced fertility, Kenya, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, had the highest levels of female schooling as well as the lowest child mortality rates (Ainsworth, 1995).

Human capital and the family: Education and the family

The family is the foundation of a good society and of economic success. Families have differed over time, but they are still very important in the modern economy. To understand human capital, one has to go back to the family, because it is families that are concerned about their children and try, with whatever resources they have, to promote their children's education and values. Families are the major promoters of values in any free society and even in not-so-free societies.

Families make a variety of decisions. One is whether to have many children or to have fewer children. Also some try to do more for each child. The trend shifts very strongly toward the latter as countries develop. Every nation that has developed has done that, some in remarkably short periods of time. Taiwan, for example, has a birth rate lower than the United States. Declining birth rates also characterize Hong Kong, Mexico, and Poland (Becker, 2008).

In the developed part of Turkey the average number of children that families have is lower than the less developed part of Turkey. This is related with the level of education level of families. On average, educational families, particularly educated women, have 1.4 children and uneducated families have 5.1 children in the eastern region of Turkey (Baloglu, 1998). Thus, in order to reduce the birth rate and inequalities between these regions of Turkey, more importance may have to be given to education. Greater education of parents, perhaps of mothers, tends to improve the treatment of children, especially the daughters. The gap between the education of sons and daughters seems to be smaller when parents are ore educated. More educated men and women also tend to invest more in their own health and the health of their children. Indeed, education may be the single most important personal determinant of a person's health and life expectancy.

According to Becker, (2008) the educated persons in the United States and other rich nations are the least likely to smoke. He observed that smoking in the United States is now found in significant numbers only among those with no college education, and is especially common among high school dropouts. The educated persons in Turkey are mostly working most of the time. The uneducated people not in work usually sit in cafes and waste their times. Many of them smoke (Baloglu, 1998).

Education of the poor helps improve their food intake not only by raising their incomes and spending on food but also by inducing them to make better, healthier, choices. Studies from different nations indicate that educated persons tend to consume a healthier diet even when the total amount spent on food is held constant (Behrman, 1999). Of course, the relation between education and better health and life expectancy involves causation in both directions, for greater health and lower mortality also induce larger investments in education and other human capital since rates of return on these investments are greater when the expected amount of working time is greater.

Education and Trade

Some countries have successfully combined openness and investment in learning and education, forming a virtuous circle; openness creates demand for education, and learning and education make a country's export sector more competitive. Knowledge accumulation influences a country's trade performance and competitiveness (Grossman and Helpman 1999), trade in turn, enhances knowledge accumulation, especially through imports (Ben, 2005).

Birdsall (2003) observed that a World Bank study found that economic growth rates in a sample of 60 developing countries during 1985-95 were especially high where there was a combination of a high level of education and macroeconomic stability and openness. The impact of trade openness on long-term growth thus depends on how well people are able to absorb and use the information and technology made available through trade and foreign investment.

It seems to be widely accepted that in order to adapt to an environment of stronger competition and to a world emphasizing the role of information, knowledge and skills, and advanced economies, there is the need to continuously upgrade the overall quality of their labour force through education. This may assist to consequently their poverty or totally eradicate it.

Counselling Implications

Since independence, in 1960, education has been recognised by every government that comes on board in Nigeria as a basic human right and powerful tool for human resource and national development. Policy documents have constantly reiterated the importance of Education in eliminating poverty, diseases and ignorance.

Education is the backbone of growth and development of individuals and the nation. However, its achievement continues to elude many Nigerians who are poverty stricken. This has perpetuated the vicious circle of poverty so much that the gap between the rich and the poor has kept on widening as the extreme poor are denied access to education. Equally access to quality education among some of the poor has constantly been affected by poverty. Some access education that is marred by lack of the right instructional facilities and equipment, poor processes of delivery, and unattractive learning environments etc. These may render them too uncompetitive in the job market.

To date the Nigerian government seems not to be fully committed to the provision of quality education to guarantee the right to every learner an education that offers a competitive edge in a global market. It is counselled that the governments at all levels should rise up to making quality efforts in financing education, reviewing the education sector, seeking community cooperation and other stakeholders to in the provision of good education for the citizens. The Governments may need to look critically at the input, process and output of the Nigeria education sector.

Inputs

In a school set up the inputs refer to the quality of the learners; their health, nourishment, their readiness to participate and learn and the support given to them to learn by their families in terms of financial and psychological support. The financial inputs usually facilitate provision of instructional materials, textbooks, physical facilities and equipment like laboratories, classrooms, latrines/toilets, boarding facilities, stationery, co-curricular facilities, seats, desks and other instructional facilities.

These facilities should be gender sensitive and comfortable to all assuring health and safety. Water and sanitation, class size, psychological elements such as peaceful safe environment are key inputs.

The quality of the content also matters. A student centered and non-discriminatory curricular that has unique content covering all areas of numeracy, literacy, life skills and peace educations are indicators of quality inputs.

Human resources in form of teachers, support staff, principals and head teachers, their experience, professional development, adequacy especially of teachers in terms of pupil

teacher ratio are crucial key inputs. The extent of care for the teachers especially those with special needs are also paramount.

Time resources refer to the concern for time by the members: utilization of instructional contact hours, management of meetings and quality of time spent on co-curricular activities.

Other inputs are in terms of quality assurance procedures. Quality assurance refers to the process of ensuring that learning and teaching resources are put into proper and maximum use to achieve desired outcomes. In schools it refers to use of inspection, monitoring implementation of the school curriculum through external and internal inspection, external in-servicing of teachers and other support staff, recording reworking, promoting and grading staff according to well-defined quality system standards.

Process

Process refers to co-ordination of the school wide activities to bring about achievement of intended goals. Curriculum implementation process of teaching and learning is paramount in the school processes. The broadness or narrowness of the school curriculum, the subject options, effectiveness in time tabling, quality of teacher planning of daily programmes are crucial along with the school examination policy and modes of student evaluation. Key in the effective management of the processes is the management support including professional and supportive evaluation. Ability of students to understand the medium of communication is yet an indicator of quality processes.

To be considered in the process are the teaching processes, and appropriateness of the teaching approaches. The use of homework, quality of teacher dialogue, quality of pupil learning process, their motivation and their progress in learning are crucial along with their personal responsibility for learning, for instance, independent thinking and participation in learning and student to student interaction in and out of class. The contribution of the non-teaching staff in learning is also part of the processes which need not be forgotten.

Communication with parents in relation to support of learning and teaching process is of importance along with the quality of the information given about pupil's progress. Student support processes of pastoral care, guidance and counselling, attention given to students with special needs are also very important. The placement of students' educational needs, type of school and the environment in which the school is situated. For instance schools in the arid and type of school and the environment in which the school is situated, need to be taken care of. For instance schools in the arid and semi arid areas are more vulnerable compared to schools in high and medium economic potential areas. Equally, schools attracting students from among the urban poor are more susceptible to poverty compared to school children of the well to do in society. Worst affected are girls in some communities where they may be denied education in favour of boys. In other situations the girls may be married off to counter the perennial poverty in their home as the parents hope to be paid some dowry. Day schools are most affected especially schools in the low income areas. Other school, attract very few students such that they can not enjoy economies of scale in financing educational activities and programmes.

Where the average poor struggle to educate their children putting almost all the family income in financing of the education of their children, the poorest of the poor do not access this service. Contrary, the non poor appear to be benefiting from the education hence the escalation of the gap between the rich and the poor in society.

Since the school is the most important functional point for achieving the educational goals, it is counselled that school leaders should embrace school based management and develop the knowledge base associated with efficiency and effectiveness in school

management for the purposes of achieving the educational goals for the learners. Owing to the effects of poverty in provision of education, school governing structures should strategize on the school aspects which need more emphasis compared to others to meet the expectations and interests of the most important constituent-the student/learner.

Output

Output refers to attainment. Attainment is the success in reaching or achieving something. The interventions put in place to achieve school's mission and vision are considered, the class size, the retention rate as school, the valuation policy and process in the school, attainment in public examinations, performance in co-curricular activities and acquisition of useful social and practical skills. Community related outcomes including knowledge of human rights and the ability to analyze social situations, demonstrate autonomy in learning and exercise responsibility towards others are important indicators of quality education.

Critically analyzed, the above indicators of quality education cannot be achieved without proper inputs in terms of finances, time and human energy. Owing to challenges posed by poverty in provision of quality education where inputs are not adequate, leading to interference with the processes and outputs, innovation and creativity on the part of the players (government and all stakeholders) in provision of education is paramount.

Lags in reforming the education sector may hinder growth: conversely, timely reforms can pay off in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction, evidenced in developed nations that have generally invested heavily in Education and basic human capital. This may consequently assist in achieving the Nigeria vision 20:20:20.

Conclusion

Education is indispensable to economic development and poverty eradication. No economic development is possible without education. A balanced education system promotes not only economic development, but productivity, and generates individual income per capita. Its influence is noticeable at the micro level of an individual family whose combination makes up the nation.

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