



Education, Society and Development: Some Critical Issues

DR. PROF. HEMANGINI S. WAGHELA
Shri.P.K.Chaudhari Mahila Arts College

1. Introduction

The relationship between education and development cannot be debated without linking the structure of educational systems to the economic and social character of societies. That link between education and development is a two-way process. Educational systems, for the most part, reflect the socio-economic structures of the societies in which they function; whether egalitarian or inegalitarian. There is also the tendency for educational systems to perpetuate, reinforce and even reproduce those economic and social structures. Paradoxically, educational reforms can significantly induce corresponding social and economic reforms in the societies.

There are many components of the development question, but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the human resources, inequality and poverty, migration, and rural development, to examine the principal forces behind them, and ways they influence or are influenced by educational systems. This examination, though not comprehensive, will seek to demonstrate the relationship between education and each of these critical areas.

Keywords: *Education, Systems, Human resources*

1. Education, Inequalities and Poverty

"The destruction of the poor is their poverty". (Proverbs)

Children who grow up in conditions of poverty, family stress and violence are at high risk of ill health, developmental delay and maladaptive behaviour. Poverty can be defined in terms of the insufficiency of income giving rise to deterioration in life circumstances by the inability to secure the basic necessities essential for life (Oxford Dictionary, 1995). Townsend (1993) indicated that the correlation of ability and education can influence poverty⁴. In other words, intelligent families are less likely to have low income and be subject to the effects of socio-economic deprivation. Children in poverty live in circumstances dominated by a certain hopelessness in which the sense that things are inexorably running down, weighs constantly on every decision and inhibits many positive responses. They live in physically unsatisfactory conditions, overcrowded and unsanitary, lacking amenities or generally in a state of disrepair.

The debate can then begin on the premise that poor students have less chance of completing any given cycle of education than more affluent students. For many decades the primary objective of development has been to maximize the aggregate rates of output growth. Worldwide studies on the economics of education have predominantly focused on the relationship between education, labour productivity and output growth. As a consequence of that emphasis, the impact of education on the alleviation and or elimination of poverty and equal income distributions are often neglected.

Equality of opportunity is a fundamental aim of education. Conversely, the critical importance of formal education cannot be questioned. However, its structure, content, effects, impact, key strengths and weaknesses should really come under great scrutiny. It has become increasingly obvious that equalization of opportunity is impossible to achieve as, with the passage of time, societies have become more stratified, the status quo.

Children of poor families are easily identified in the classroom and usually begin school at an academic disadvantage. Studies on the impact of poverty on education indicate all too persuasively that poverty children often receive a disproportionate number of negative messages leveled at their ability to perform and at their personality and character. These messages begin from the early grades and often persist throughout the children's school career. Under these conditions, poor students view themselves as being helpless in academic settings thereby making educational success virtually impossible. What is needed in the classroom are positive experiences that can mitigate the stress associated with the children's home and familial environment. To accomplish this, teachers can set standards, give incentives, praise, provide effective feedback, be a role model of exemplary behaviour, assign positions of trust and responsibility to children, and provide these children with order in a world gone mad.

Teachers are aware that the single most powerful predictor of academic performance is a student's socioeconomic background, as growing up in poverty does not adequately prepare children for what they will encounter in the classroom environment. The indicators of poverty are easily perceived as potential failure; an assumption that inevitably contributes to the difficulties poverty children face in school. At this point, it is difficult to know what percentage of poor children endure negative experiences because there is a lack of sufficient information; however it is safe to conclude that it is widespread, but not universal.

At the start of first grade the verbal skills of poverty students may not be well developed and the reading-readiness skills not as good as their classmates. They will continue to be disproportionately represented in tertiary level institutions and universities. It follows that large income inequalities will always be reinforced because levels of earned income, in the main, are clearly dependent on years of completed schooling. One can therefore conclude that if the poor are denied access to higher-level educational opportunities because of financial constraints and other reasons, the education systems are inherently inegalitarian and actually perpetuate and increase inequality in developing countries.

So despite the existence of free schooling, (also in an endeavour to achieve the Education For All (EFA) Goals), poverty children, especially those who live in rural communities are seldom able to go beyond secondary education. Importantly, one needs to look beyond actual school attendance to the effects of:

- Opportunity costs
- Relevance of curriculum offered
- Teaching methodologies
- Teacher-student interaction patterns
- Teacher effectiveness
- Classroom environment and socialization processes
- Academic performance of students
- School characteristics, and
- Public confidence in education

Notably, the relatively poor performance of poverty children may have nothing to do with their cognitive abilities. On the contrary, it merely amplifies and reflects their disadvantaged economic circumstances. When this reality is truly understood, then the euphoria that accompanied the quantitative educational expansion will soon give way to scepticism and anxiety.

2. Education and Rural Development

For many decades, the focus of the majority of priority projects has been on development and modernization of the urban sector, with little emphasis on the expansion of economic and social opportunities in rural areas. However, serious commentators will argue that for national development to become a reality in this region there needs to be a balance between rural and urban development. Approximately 70% of rural populations engaged directly or indirectly in agricultural activities,

therefore agricultural development must always be included in any rural development programme. However, recent trends in migration, spotlight the need to critically view the issue of rural development more comprehensively.

Rural development should embrace the far-reaching transformations of health and educational institutions, social and economic structures and services. The goals for rural development should not be restricted to agricultural and economic growth, but emphasis must also be placed on the basic survival and priority learning needs, attainment of equitable distribution and the generation of benefits that will enhance the quality of life of rural people. Of critical importance are:

- The creation of productive employment opportunities both on and off plantations and farms;
- The equal distribution of rural income;
- Improvements in health and social services
- Nutrition
- Household improvements;
- Provision for recreational and sporting facilities;
- Provision for increased access to formal and informal education, with special attention paid to adult learns and the differently able;
- Development of curriculum and educational programmes with direct relevance to the needs and aspirations of rural people; and
- Ensuring that Education Systems reflect, for implementation, a broader perspective of rural development.

3. Conclusion

There is a rapid increase in human learning needs and educational demands among the various sub-groups in societies of developing nations; but there is no reason to suppose that this acceleration of learning needs will subside. On the contrary, all indications from the research point to its continued growth far into the future; and this will have serious implications for the supply side of education.

It is often said that educational systems for the most part reflect and reproduce social and economic structures of societies where they operate, rather than change them. Therefore any strategic approach or policies designed to address these problems should consider reforming the educational system to make it more relevant for development needs and to increase its internal effectiveness and equity.

References

1. Allen, D.A., and Green, V.P. (1988). Helping children cope with stress. *Journal of Early Child Development and Care*, Vol. 37.
2. Coates, K and Silburn, R. (1983). *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishman*. Nottingham: Russell Press Ltd.
3. Coombs, P.H., Prosser, R.C., and Ahmed, Manzoor (1973). *New Path to Learning: For Rural Children and Youth*. Essex, Conn.: International Council for Educational Development.
4. Dumont, J.C., and Lemaitre, Georges (2006). *Counting Immigrants and Expatriates in OECD Countries: A New Perspective*. OECD: Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers.
- Fields, G.S. (1975).
5. Resiliency and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. *Journal of American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 34, No. 4, New York: Sage Publications, Inc.
6. Rural-urban migration, urban unemployment and under-employment, and job-search activity in LDCs. *Journal of Development Economics*, vol. 2. Garmez, N. (1991).