

# The Role of Education in Reducing Poverty and Social Inequality

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**Abstract:** *Background of the study: Education is the essential human capital to adapt to the world's development. However, there are still 250 million children out of school and 773 million illiterate adults, most of whom are women. South Africa is one of the countries that has high poverty and unemployment rates and low education levels, which trigger high social inequality. The aims and objectives: To discuss the importance of Education in increasing one's potential to reduce poverty and social inequality and to discuss the factors of educational inequality in the world to know the strategies to overcome it. Methods: The research methodology employed in this study involves a comprehensive review of the literature to gather empirical evidence and qualitative and quantitative secondary data. These data sets were subsequently examined to discern recurring issues of Education, poverty, and social inequality. Results: Poverty and social inequality can be overcome by providing everyone with access to quality education without exception and empowering them through Education and training to acquire skills. Conclusion: Government policies and public awareness of the importance of Education have an impact on reducing poverty and social inequality.*

**Keywords:** Education; Poverty; Social inequality; Equality

## 1. Introduction

Poverty is a condition where individuals or households experience a lack of materials or resources that function as necessities of life, such as adequate food, clean drinking water, clothing, shelter, sanitation, and transportation to health and education facilities, resulting in the inability to be a complete and active member of society.[1] Social inequality occurs when there are inequalities in social status, such as wealth, income, and unequal opportunities. This inequality can be seen in the level of Education, health, and treatment the criminal justice system provides. One of the correlations between poverty and social inequality is that people experiencing poverty are hit by violence to provide unsafe conditions. At the same time, middle and upper-class people get good treatment from the community to provide safe and peaceful conditions.[2] A person with access to quality education has great potential to get a decent job and become an active and productive citizen who can contribute to society.[3]

This study aims to discuss the importance of Education for anyone, anywhere, and anytime, which supports obtaining the basic needs of life and also affects social and economic development. This study also discusses the potential obstacles in increasing and equalizing access to quality education worldwide so we can find the strategies that must be carried out to eradicate the challenges that occur today.

## 2. Literature Survey

Even though the world is very advanced and modern today, certain areas in a country still do not have access to quality education. By 2023, UNESCO reports that the number of out-of-school children and adolescents will increase by 250 million, which has increased by 6 million since 2021.[4] The leading cause of children dropping out of school is financial constraints; children who live in excluded areas are far from the education center, so they need money for transportation to

the education center. Another cause is that there is often discrimination against marginalized communities in the school environment due to social "differences," so marginalized communities prefer not to go to school. The indifference of parents with little or no Education about their children's Education is also a cause of the high number of children who do not go to school, so children do not get educated that Education can change their lives or social status.[5] Gender inequality is also a factor in unequal education services. Where by 2022, in Afghanistan, as many as 1.1 million children and adolescent girls are prohibited from attending school, and as many as 100,000 young women are denied access to Education.[6]

There are countries in the world that have high poverty rates, one of which is South Africa. According to the World Bank, South Africa's poverty rate has continued to increase since 2014, with 55.5% or 30.3 million people living in poverty and social inequality reaching 63%, where poor people with low education account for 60% of the total poor population.[7] The latest data on South Africa's poverty rate 2022 reached 62.6%.[8]

Based on these data, Education is vital in encouraging self-development because it has knowledge, skills, and critical thinking to open up individual opportunities to participate fully in society toward social, economic, and cultural.[9] This idea is reinforced by the Human Capital theory proposed by Becker (1962), where Education, formal Education or training, is very influential in obtaining sufficient income, reducing poverty and social inequality, and encouraging social cohesion because it is equipped with knowledge and skills so that it is ready to contribute actively and productively in the community environment.[10] According to a study by the World Bank, there is a 9% increase in income globally every additional year of schooling. This can encourage long-term economic growth and promote social cohesion.[11]

### 3. Problem Definition

This study presents the factors inhibiting equal access to quality education in marginalized areas and the impact on a region or country, even the world if this education problem is not addressed as soon as possible. These presentations can help various parties, such as governments, organizations, and communities, in making strategies or policies in the field of Education to overcome current barriers by creating a knowledgeable, skilled society that can contribute to reducing poverty and social inequality in the world and build a fair and prosperous future that all people can feel.

Based on the explanation above, there are several problem formulations in this study, namely:

- What is the role of Education in reducing poverty and social inequality?
- What factors hinder the improvement and equitable distribution of quality education in society?
- What is the impact on a region if inequitable access to quality education in the community is not addressed?
- What strategies should be adopted by various parties, such as the government, organizations, and communities, that can eradicate the barriers to equality of quality education in the community?

### 4. Methodology / Approach

This research design uses a literature study approach where reading and recording of previous studies are carried out so that qualitative and quantitative secondary data are obtained. Qualitative secondary data is received by collecting empirical evidence from earlier researchers through interviews and observing the perceptions and behavior of individuals in a particular area. Quantitative secondary data is obtained by collecting statistical data from earlier researchers or official institutions, one of which is World Bank Data. The data that has been collected will be analyzed to find the root of the problem so that a correlation pattern between Education, poverty, and social inequality is obtained. The pattern of the issues obtained is used to find strategies and support policy-making to overcome the problems that occur with the support of relevant information on Education, poverty, and social inequality.

### 5. Results & Discussion

#### 5.1 The role of Education in reducing poverty and social inequality

Education dramatically affects a person's income level, where knowledge and skills can be obtained through Education and training. This knowledge and skills open up opportunities to get a job, make innovations in various sectors, and make it easier to develop and adapt to an ever-changing world. For example, Japan is famous for having the best education system by applying the principle of full personality development and upholding individual dignity so that every child gets knowledge and high morality.[12] By 2023, Japan had an unemployment rate of only 2.4%.[13]

The capital theory was proposed by Becker in 1962. Becker said that Education and training affect future real income

because, with Education, a person can acquire the physical and mental skills needed to manage economic variables. According to the theory, rich people have better physical and cognitive skills and thus earn higher incomes than people with low incomes. The difference in physical and mental skills people possess causes social inequality, where social inequality is often seen based on a person's income level. According to Becker, the young population changes jobs more often than the old population to get more job training, which also affects a person's productivity. Learning new skills can broaden the worker's horizons. Unfortunately, in the world of work in underdeveloped countries, most still use a paternalistic system; even though young workers have more skills, they cannot get a chance to make decisions on the job.[14]

Based on a study conducted by Spaul (2015) discusses how the low quality of Education in South Africa exacerbates poverty that continues to the next generation. Many students in South Africa cannot count and read. This educational disadvantage causes the knowledge and skills acquired by children in South Africa to be doubted, thus preventing young people in South Africa from fully contributing to society. Not being able to contribute to society significantly affects opportunities to find work. Difficulty accessing employment leads to increased unemployment in South Africa.[15] This is reinforced by the Quarterly Labor Force Survey (QLFS) data, which states that the unemployment rate in South Africa in 2023 was 41.2%.[16]

#### 5.2 Factors hinder the improvement and equitable distribution of quality education in society

Based on research by Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) reported that the highest number of violent acts occurring in South African schools were bullying (83.8%), physical punishment by educators of learners (60%), harassment (21.3%), gangsterism (37.5), and vandalism (52.5). School violence is fueled by poverty and crime in the community due to high unemployment in South Africa, which leads to stress and depression. Violence in the school environment is also fueled by rampant drug use among students, smoking, and the use of vulgar language, which has excellent potential for harassment, with a reported 21% of South African students experiencing or witnessing harassment in their school environment. It is reported that 72.2% of students experience depression, and 63.3% of students lose concentration while studying due to feelings of fear and threat. These feelings of insecurity lead to high rates of young people dropping out of school. There is also a high rate of theft and vandalism in the school environment, resulting in many school facilities being damaged and lost and even a shortage of textbooks due to deliberate destruction by students. This has led to more than two-thirds of the African continent experiencing a shortage of educators.[17]

Based on Loganathan's research (2023), in Malaysia, there are also cases of marginalized communities having difficult access to Education; many people choose not to go to school because of the relatively high cost of Education and transportation to education centers. It is reported that children who attend school in Malaysia are discriminated against by the local community, both students and teachers, due to

cultural and language differences. The marginalized areas in Malaysia need more information on available Education due to the long distance between where these communities live and the education centers. The inequality in education places in Malaysia is due to limited funding to build school infrastructure, recruitment of trained teachers, and inadequate infrastructure.[18]

In their study, Odeh and Lach (2023) reported that the main factors inhibiting access to Education for children with disabilities are school architecture, information, and ineffective communication between schools and parents. Many schools worldwide do not provide facilities for children with disabilities, for example, narrow classroom doors, no ramps for children who use wheelchairs, and no wheelchairs available at school. Children with disabilities were also reported to be discriminated against or ostracized by their peers, who were afraid to interact with children with disabilities and tended to stay away from them. Parents of children with disabilities complain that communication between the school and parents is hampered, so parents are late in getting all the information about their child's Education.[19]

Currently, in Afghanistan, there is an inequality of Education for women; the government does not support young women to go to school. Inequality in Education for women is caused by socio-culture, where the community will look down on educated women. Many women are desperate and choose to stay at home because conditions outside the house are not safe for women.[20]

### 5.3 The impact on a region if inequitable access to quality education in the community is not addressed

The gap in access to quality education worldwide continues to be a serious issue because it affects the quality of the younger generation's contributions to society. The education gap has the potential to increase poverty, increase unemployment, and decrease the welfare and economy of a country, which causes an increase in social inequality and inequality. Increased social inequality can lead to conflict between communities, creating an unsafe region.[21] The young generation needs sufficient and quality education to find it challenging to face the obstacles that occur in this era of globalization. This inability will affect themselves, society, and the country, which causes lagging in various sectors.[22]

### 5.4 Strategies should be adopted by various parties, such as the government, organizations, and communities, that can eradicate the barriers to equality of quality education in the community

According to UNESCO, one of the strategies for overcoming the education gap in the world is to make policies efficient, relevant, effective, and coherent because the education system in the world is very complex and interconnected between sub-systems to achieve goals in overcoming the education gap.[23]

Determining an effective strategy must have empirical evidence obtained from direct research in the region to increase the potential success of the policy to be made. The

empirical evidence is collected, and previous theories relevant to poverty and Education are reviewed. Policy making must consider all areas in the region so that it is recommended through a holistic approach. Poverty in a country is not only seen from the quality of Education, but other factors are also considered, such as local political and environmental factors that have as much influence as the education sector. Each country has a different culture, so this policy-making must be based on the country's culture. The first step of the strategy in overcoming the education gap and poverty in a country is to empower the community, especially the poor, with programs needed to reduce poverty, such as science, technology, and communication through formal and non-formal Education and training, so that they can carry out productivity. Community empowerment will increase awareness of the right to Education so that people can critically defend their rights. Providing essential social services such as health care, Education, economic development, and social welfare is also necessary. Policies that have been made must be monitored regularly to improve these policies through evaluations.[24]

One of UNESO's programs to address education disparities worldwide is SDG4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which ensures that all boys and girls receive and complete free, quality, and equal Education. In addition, the Youth and Adult Literacy (2020-2025) strategy involves 20 countries with literacy rates below 50%.[25]

## 6. Conclusion

Quality education can reduce poverty and social inequality by empowering the community through formal and non-formal Education and training. Quality education determines a person's quality in how they view their life in society and can contribute fully to society. Policies to overcome poverty due to low Education can be made holistically so that young people in marginalized areas can gain knowledge and skills by providing accessible, effective, and equal access to Education. Based on the above discussion, the author suggests several things, including:

- The government should ensure that everyone receives quality education regardless of social status and location.
- The government creates programs that provide learning opportunities for all ages to adapt to economic and social changes in the world.
- The government or non-governmental organizations promote gender equality in Education to help young girls who do not have access to Education. Provide quality schools with adequate facilities that can be used by all children without exception, including children with disabilities. The government can work with schools to socialize the dangers of drug use and free sex to help create a safe school environment without violence and sexual harassment.
- The government must continue to monitor and evaluate various sectors to adjust to the latest constraints and conditions, especially the quality of Education, which significantly affects the quality of society.
- The government has always empowered its people through free Education and training, especially for people with low incomes and qualifications. This is a long-term investment for a country to prepare its people to face future obstacles and to keep up with developments in the globalization era.

## 7. Future Scope

This research only focuses on data that can strengthen the idea that Education can reduce poverty and social inequality and explain the factors that cause low Education throughout the world, which can provide strategies to overcome it. In the future, the scope of this research can be expanded by comparing government policies in countries with low levels of Education with developed countries to see the effectiveness of policies made by countries with low levels of Education so that these countries can improve their education policies.

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