

Interconnectedness of Poverty & Education

In this Youth Voices in Development Report, I will discuss two of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and how they are connected with one another. "No Poverty" is one of the goals of the UN, and the UN aims to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere".¹ The other goal I will discuss is Quality Education, which is to "ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning".² In my work experience in education, it is evident that money is a huge factor in determining a quality education. As an ESL Instructor in Korea, I observed that many parents pay high fees to place their students in after school academies to ensure increase their knowledge. Currently, I am a Teaching Assistant in South Africa, where the quality of the children's education is based on how much school fees their families can afford. Based on my experience and observations in the education field, I will discuss how the goals "No Poverty" and "Quality Education" interconnect with one another, and how this impacts how the goals should be addressed.

Experience in South Korea

Education is very highly regarded in South Korea. South Korean parents on average spend over 10% of their monthly income, \$3 946 USD, to get their children into the best afterschool academies to give them a competitive edge over their counterparts.³ School children go to school during the day, and afterwards they attend their academies, which can run as late as 10 pm. In the last year of middle school there is a big test that determines which high school the students get into; and the students have to do another big test a few years later in high school, which decides the university they go to. Of course, the higher the test scores, the better the school the students will get into. The students that most likely excel are the ones who have parents who can afford to send them to afterschool academies. They have the extra support as the academies prepare them for the tests and teach them how to answer the questions. In South Korea, the quality of education of the students is unequal due to money, as the richer parents are able to pay for a better education.

Experience in South Africa

The quality of education in South Africa varies much more than South Korea's because of the disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor. South Africa has one of the widest rich-poor gaps in the world, and this is exemplified in the school system. In this country, the better public schools have school fees, which allow these schools to pay for better facilities and programs. For example, Alexandra High School in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa has a library with an extensive collection, tennis courts, basketball courts, and a huge football

¹ "Poverty - United Nations Sustainable Development." UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 31 Aug. 2016.

² "Quality Education - United Nations Sustainable Development." UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 31 Aug. 2016.

³ Kwaak, Jeyup S. "South Korea's \$18 Billion Education Problem." The Wall Street Journal. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Aug. 2016.

field. There are school fee exempt schools, and the primary school that I work at, Slangspruit Primary, is one of them. Slangspruit Primary School has the bare minimum in terms of facilities and programs. The playground is run down, windows are broken, the doors do not lock, and the new library is still in the process of getting more books and developing more programs. The unfortunate reality is that the Slangspruit students receive an inferior education compared to those students at Alexandra. This systemic inequality is a huge hurdle for Slangspruit students to overcome, and most students will not be able to excel to their full potential. This is a snapshot of an issue that pervades throughout South Africa.

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In my experience working in the education field in South Korea and South Africa, it is quite evident that poverty and education are interconnected. Of course, most parents would give the best education to their children that they can afford. The issue is that when a quality education is so closely determined by finances, is that the children in poor households are disadvantaged. They are forced to limit their potential, and instead of becoming teachers or engineers, they are doing menial jobs with low wages. This continues the cycle of poverty, because a mediocre education won't inspire or prepare young children to reach their full potential.

Impact of Addressing Goals

Since poverty and education are so interconnected, it would be difficult to address one goal without addressing the other. Improving the quality of education would be an effective way to achieve "Zero Poverty" in the long term. By having states and NGOs invest in the education of children, it will give the young generations the opportunity and capacity to use their knowledge and skills to become skilled workers or entrepreneurs. This in turn will, theoretically, improve the GDP of the state as the citizens are more skilled and productive. Of course, this success will require the financial support and social planning of the state. However, having an educated workforce will be beneficial for society and this should be emphasized in working with states to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Poverty also negatively affects education. One thing that impedes learning is hunger. Some children cannot afford to eat breakfast at home so they go to school on an empty stomach and have a hard time focusing in school. When addressing the Sustainable Development Goal, Quality Education, one must address poverty also because hunger inhibits students from excelling to their full potential. There are students who are bright and capable at excelling in academics, but they need to stop attending school because they need to provide an income to support their family. Policymakers must take into account education when addressing poverty and vice versa to input effective policies and programs.