



POVERTY ALLEVIATION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FORMAL EDUCATION AND SKILL ACQUISITION

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Abstract

Poverty alleviation is the economic and humanitarian effort to eradicate poverty in a country. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), over 133 million Nigerians live in poverty. Given this alarming statistic, addressing poverty in Nigeria is of utmost importance due to the country's persistent challenges with severe poverty and income inequality. A significant contributor to this issue is the disparity between formal education and skill acquisition. Formal education provides knowledge and theoretical understanding, but often fails to equip individuals with the practical skills necessary for employment and income generation. This deficiency has led many to perceive formal education as less beneficial compared to skill acquisition, which can provide immediate financial rewards even during schooling. Consequently, this perception has undermined the importance of education among Nigerian youths. This paper investigates the crucial role of bridging the gap between formal education and skill acquisition in Nigeria as a strategy for poverty alleviation. This paper concludes that alleviating poverty in Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive approach, acknowledging the significance of both formal education and skill acquisition. By tackling the challenges each method presents and fostering collaboration between them, individuals can be endowed with the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies to escape the cycle of poverty.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation, Skill Acquisition, Formal Education, Income Inequality

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Introduction

The issue of poverty remains a persistent and complex problem affecting millions of people, including those in Nigeria. Recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and The World Poverty Clock reveal that over 133 million Nigerians live in poverty, with 71 million living in extreme poverty. Despite being the largest economy in Africa, Nigeria still faces significant income disparity and poverty rates. One of the main causes of this predicament is the disparity between formal education and skill acquisition. To address this issue, it is crucial to close the knowledge gap and provide individuals with the skills and information necessary to establish sustainable livelihoods.

Formal education takes place in a structured setting such as schools or universities, generally facilitated by trained teachers or instructors. This mandatory form of education seeks to convey specific knowledge and skills to students (Okebukola 2015). Although formal education has traditionally been perceived as an escape route from poverty, the educational system in numerous developing countries, including Nigeria, frequently falls short in adequately preparing individuals for the job market. Consequently, this has fostered a negative perception of education, with many Nigerians considering it a scam. Consequently, the number of children not attending school continues to increase, and even those who do attend often do so with reluctance.

On the other hand, skill acquisition serves as a vital pillar for individuals to realize their aspirations and support those who lack the opportunity to work in public or private organizations with academic credentials, as well as provide a means of livelihood. Skill acquisition involves acquiring practical skills that are directly relevant to specific professions or trades. This encompasses programs for entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, and vocational training. For individuals who do not have access to formal education or wish to acquire specialized skills more efficiently, skill acquisition programs offer an alternative pathway. These programs, which focus on acquiring practical skills that are in demand in the job market, have the potential to empower individuals and help them break free from poverty.

From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that the significance of formal education is being questioned in light of the escalating global poverty rate. The primary objective of education, which is to guide individuals through established channels and enable them to achieve their desired goals or become better individuals, appears to be undermined. Furthermore, it can be concluded that skill acquisition plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals into successful members of society. Undoubtedly, skill education has gained considerable importance in the current socio-economic landscape of the country, as it promptly provides sustenance for those in need.

Moreover, skill acquisition is not limited to a specific stage in life. This understanding explains why Nigerian parents often enroll their children in apprenticeship programs from the early years of primary school. Undoubtedly, skill acquisition is a valuable asset to humanity. However, it has inadvertently led to an increase in the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Many parents now prioritize skill acquisition over formal education, driven by their desire to break the cycle of poverty within their households.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of cybercrime is escalating daily, with individuals falling victim to fraud and losing their hard-earned money. Reports indicate that scammers employ various methods, including deceiving victims into divulging their bank card details. Another common scam targets individuals with lower levels of education who may unknowingly



share sensitive information with strangers nearby while using Automated Teller Machines for withdrawals.

Indeed, it is crucial not to overlook the distinction between an individual with formal education and acquired skills, and one who views education as a scam, believing they can escape poverty without literacy. Formal education expands a person's exposure to the global world and enhances their understanding of societal events. Conversely, those without formal education may face challenges such as lower income. They are also more likely to end up in prison, even in developed countries. They also tend to experience increased rates of crime, disease, poverty, lawlessness, social unrest, intolerance, and upheaval.

Ultimately, it is evident that only through formal education can individuals truly comprehend the evolving and expansive nature of the world. Opting out of formal education in favour of skill acquisition may yield higher financial rewards and provide a means of sustenance. However, this choice also carries the risk of falling victim to fraudulent schemes, resulting in the loss of hard-earned money and potentially leading to a life of destitution or even suicide. Consequently, bridging the gap between formal education and skill development is crucial in addressing poverty alleviation. This necessitates a comprehensive approach that fosters collaboration among governmental entities, academic institutions, businesses, and civil society organizations.

A Worldwide Outlook on Poverty

According to the World Bank, the estimated poverty rate in the world in 2022 was around 7.7%, with approximately 630 million people living in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day). This represents a decline from 2015, when the estimated poverty rate was around 9.2% and approximately 736 million people lived in extreme poverty.

According to the World Bank (2018), the poverty rate in Sub-Saharan Africa was around 41%. This means that approximately 413 million people were living in extreme poverty in this region. Extreme poverty is defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day.

The poverty rate in Nigeria was around 40.1% in 2022, with an estimated 87 million individuals living in extreme poverty. This marks a slight improvement from 2019, when the poverty rate was estimated to be around 42.5% and approximately 90 million people lived in extreme poverty.

Poverty

The World Bank (2015) defines poverty as "the state of being unable to afford the basic necessities of life, such as food, clean water, shelter, clothing, and healthcare." This definition is based on the concept of "purchasing power parity" (PPP), which considers the varying prices of goods and services across different countries. The World Bank stipulates that a person living on less than \$1.90 per day in 2011 PPP dollars is deemed to be living in extreme poverty.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2014) describes poverty as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes not only income poverty but also social exclusion, vulnerability, and powerlessness. This definition underscores the intertwined nature of economic, social, and political factors contributing to poverty. The UNDP further acknowledges that poverty extends beyond income, incorporating issues such as access to healthcare, education, and social services.



According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2023), poverty is defined as a state of being very poor and having little or no money, possessions, or resources. This definition encompasses not only a lack of financial resources, but also a lack of access to basic necessities like food, shelter, and clothing.

Causes of Poverty

There are several common underlying causes that contribute to the prevalence of poverty worldwide. These causes can be broadly categorized as follows:

1. **Lack of Education:** Not having access to a high-quality education is one of the main causes of poverty. Without education, people could find it difficult to get the skills and information needed to land well-paying, steady work. This keeps people in poverty since it means that there will probably be less educational chances for coming generations.
2. **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Poverty can be exacerbated by a lack of job possibilities or by an inability to obtain acceptable employment. Low income levels brought on by high unemployment or underemployment make it difficult for people and families to meet their fundamental necessities.
3. **Inadequate Healthcare:** Higher rates of poverty might result from ill health and restricted access to healthcare services. People with health problems might not be able to work or might have high medical costs, which would put more burden on their finances.
4. **Discrimination and Social Exclusion:** Poverty rates can be influenced by discrimination against people on the basis of their race, gender, ethnicity, or handicap. Marginalised populations frequently encounter obstacles when trying to obtain housing, work, education, and other necessities.
5. **Political Instability and Conflict:** Poverty rates are typically greater in societies that are undergoing political instability or armed conflict. These circumstances impede development initiatives, ruin infrastructure, uproot populations, and interfere with economic activity.
6. **Inadequate Social Safety Nets:** People and families may be more susceptible to poverty if there are insufficient social safety nets in place, such as healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, and welfare programmes. Unexpected circumstances like illness or job loss might force people into poverty if there is no safety net in place.
7. **Income disparities and inequality:** High rates of income disparity are a factor in the poor situation. There are fewer prospects for others to improve their financial circumstances when a tiny percentage of the population holds a sizable majority of the wealth and resources.
8. **Geographical Factors:** Depending on where you live, poverty rates can differ greatly. Compared to urban regions, rural areas frequently have worse infrastructure, fewer employment prospects, and insufficient access to services like healthcare and education.
9. **Corruption and Mismanagement:** Corruption diverts funds meant for development projects, infrastructure, healthcare, and education into the pockets of a few individuals, leaving the majority of the population without essential services.
10. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure limits economic opportunities, hampers productivity, and increases the cost of doing business. Rural areas are particularly affected by inadequate infrastructure, leading to limited access to markets and basic services.



11. **Rapid Population Growth:** The rapid increase in population puts immense pressure on available resources, including food, housing, education, and healthcare. Insufficient resources to meet the needs of a growing population contribute to poverty.

Consequences of Poverty

The consequences of poverty are multidimensional and interconnected, forming a cycle that is challenging to break without sufficient support and intervention. These consequences include:

1. **Limited Access to Basic Necessities:** Poverty often results in inadequate access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, sanitation facilities, and shelter. This can lead to malnutrition, poor health outcomes, and increased vulnerability to diseases.
2. **Educational Disadvantages:** Poverty significantly affects educational opportunities. Children from impoverished backgrounds may lack access to quality schools, resources, and support systems necessary for academic success. This can perpetuate the cycle of poverty as limited education reduces future employment prospects.
3. **Health Disparities:** Poverty is closely linked to poor health outcomes. Limited access to healthcare services, preventive measures, and nutritious food can result in higher rates of chronic illnesses, infant mortality, and reduced life expectancy among impoverished populations.
4. **Social Exclusion and Stigma:** Poverty often leads to social exclusion and stigmatization. Individuals living in poverty may face discrimination, prejudice, and limited social interactions due to their economic status.
5. **Increased Crime Rates:** Poverty can contribute to higher crime rates within communities. Desperation for basic needs may drive individuals towards illegal activities as a means of survival or economic gain.
6. **Inter-generational Transmission of Poverty:** Poverty tends to be passed down from one generation to the next. Limited opportunities for education and employment make it difficult for individuals to break free from the cycle of poverty, perpetuating its effects on future generations.
7. **Social and Political Instability:** Poverty can contribute to social unrest and political instability. When a significant portion of the population is marginalized and lacks access to basic resources, it can lead to social tensions, protests, and conflicts.

Global Education System

The global education system comprises stages from early childhood to primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Each level aims to provide quality education to all individuals, regardless of their background or socio-economic status. Early childhood education fosters cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, while primary education provides basic literacy and numeracy skills. Secondary education, from 12 to 18, builds upon foundational knowledge and offers specialized subjects. Tertiary education, from universities



to vocational schools, focuses on specialized knowledge in various fields, preparing students for higher education or vocational training.

Overview of the Nigerian Education System

The education system in Nigeria is overseen by the Federal Ministry of Education and implemented at the federal, state, and local government levels. Nigeria offers a comprehensive education system, including early childhood education for children aged 3 to 5, which focuses on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Primary education, compulsory for 6 years, covers basic subjects such as English language, mathematics, science, technology, social studies, religious studies, physical and health education, creative arts, and vocational studies. Students complete the First School Leaving Certificate Examination at the end of primary education. Secondary education consists of junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school (SSS), lasting 3 years each. The curriculum includes core subjects and elective subjects based on students' interests and career aspirations. Tertiary education is provided by universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs leading to academic degrees. Admission to tertiary institutions in Nigeria is based on the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

Challenges and Limitations of Formal Education in Addressing Poverty

Formal education plays a crucial role in addressing poverty by providing individuals with knowledge, skills, and opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. However, it is important to recognize that formal education also faces several challenges and limitations in effectively addressing poverty. These challenges include:

1. Unequal access to quality education is a significant challenge in addressing poverty, particularly in developing countries where marginalized communities face barriers like infrastructure, resources, and inadequate facilities.
2. Formal educational systems often prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical skills, hindering individuals from breaking free from poverty cycles and promoting employability and income generation.
3. The shortage of qualified teachers in developing countries, exacerbated by inadequate training and low salaries, significantly impacts the quality of education for students from impoverished backgrounds.
4. Poverty-stricken individuals often face significant barriers to formal education due to high costs such as tuition, textbooks, uniforms, and transportation.
5. Poverty often hinders education for individuals, as children often work to support families, and adults may prioritize immediate income over long-term educational investments.
6. Despite formal education, impoverished individuals often face limited job opportunities due to lack of marketable skills, discrimination, and limited access to resources.
7. Societal norms and cultural practices, particularly gender disparities and early marriages, can hinder education access for individuals living in poverty, perpetuating cycles of poverty within communities.
8. Impoverished individuals often lack adequate support systems, such as parental involvement, mentorship programs, and counseling services, which can hinder their academic progress and overall development.



9. Educational stigma and discrimination can negatively affect impoverished individuals, limiting their academic achievements and upward mobility, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Skill Acquisition Programmes

Skill acquisition programs are structured training initiatives designed to enhance the abilities of employees within a specific timeframe. These programs aim to improve performance, increase productivity, and enhance employee retention. One of the most widely recognized skill acquisition programs is provided by the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WEF's Skill Acquisition Initiative focuses on addressing the global skills gap and preparing individuals for the future of work. The initiative emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and upskilling to adapt to rapidly changing technological advancements. Some skill acquisition programmes in Nigeria are:

1. National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
2. Industrial Training Fund (ITF)
3. Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)
4. The NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED)
5. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD): The FMARD

Challenges and Limitations of Skill Acquisition Programmes

Skill acquisition programs are designed to help individuals develop and enhance their skills in various areas. These programs can be beneficial in improving performance, increasing knowledge, and fostering personal growth. However, like any other endeavor, skill acquisition programs also face challenges and limitations that need to be addressed for effective implementation and success.

1. **Individual Differences among Participants:** One of the main challenges of skill acquisition programs is the individual differences among participants. Therefore, it is crucial for skill acquisition programs to incorporate diverse teaching methods and strategies to cater to the various learning styles and needs of participants.
2. **Limited Resources:** Another challenge is the limited resources available for skill acquisition programs. However, not all organizations or institutions have the necessary resources to support comprehensive skill acquisition programs.
3. **Time Commitment:** The time commitment required for skill acquisition programs can be a limitation for some individuals. It is important for skill acquisition programs to offer flexible scheduling options and consider alternative methods such as online courses or self-paced learning modules to accommodate diverse lifestyles and time constraints.
4. **Short-Term Goals and Immediate Outcomes:** Skill acquisition programs often focus on short-term goals and immediate outcomes. It is essential for these programs to provide ongoing support and opportunities for participants to apply their acquired skills in real-life situations.
5. **Evaluation and Assessment:** The evaluation and assessment of skill acquisition programs can be challenging. It is important for skill acquisition programs to incorporate diverse assessment methods, including performance-based evaluations, portfolio assessments, or real-world projects, to provide a comprehensive and accurate measure of participants' skills.



6. **Scalability and Accessibility:** The scalability and accessibility of skill acquisition programs can be a limitation. Limited resources, logistical constraints, and the need for qualified instructors or trainers can hinder the scalability of these programs.
7. **Stigma Surrounding Vocational Training:** Misconceptions about technical and vocational education deter individuals from pursuing skill-based careers.

The Gap between Formal Education and Skill Acquisition

The mismatch between formal education and market demands is a significant issue that affects individuals and the economy. Formal education provides foundational knowledge and skills, but it often fails to keep up with the rapidly changing job market demands, leading to unemployment or underemployment. This mismatch can be attributed to the time lag between curriculum development and implementation, which can result in graduates having outdated skills that are no longer in demand.

A contributing factor to this discrepancy is the disconnection between academia and industry. Academic institutions emphasize theoretical knowledge and research, whereas employers prioritize practical skills and real-world experience. This divergence can result in a misalignment between the education students receive and the expectations of potential employers.

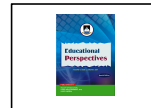
Also, the rapid pace of technological advancement exacerbates the mismatch between education and market demands, as new technologies emerge at an unprecedented rate, disrupting industries and creating new job roles. Educational institutions struggle to keep up with these changes, resulting in a shortage of graduates with the necessary skills to fill these emerging positions.

Finally, Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability, are highly valued by employers but often underdeveloped through formal education. To bridge this gap, academia and industry should collaborate through partnerships, internships, apprenticeships, and advisory boards. Educational institutions should integrate practical skills and lifelong learning, while policymakers should promote entrepreneurship and innovation. This will empower individuals to create opportunities, promote economic growth, and foster innovation.

Strategies for Bridging the Gap between Formal Education and Skill Acquisition

Vocational training programs within formal education can be enhanced to meet the needs of both students and employers more effectively by implementing certain strategies. This will cultivate a more skilled workforce that is better equipped to contribute to economic growth and development.

1. **Curriculum Development:** Enhancing vocational training programs involves developing relevant curricula that aligns with industry standards, ensuring students have the necessary skills, and regularly consulting with professionals and employers to identify trends and skills gaps.
2. **Partnerships with Industry:** Educational institutions can enhance vocational training programs by partnering with local businesses and industries, providing students with real-world experience through internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities.
3. **Qualified Instructors:** Vocational training programs' quality relies on experienced instructors, who provide firsthand knowledge, and ongoing



- professional development opportunities to stay updated on industry trends and teaching methodologies.
4. **State-of-the-Art Facilities and Equipment:** Investing in modern facilities and equipment in vocational training enhances students' technical skills and prepares them for the workplace after graduation through hands-on experience.
 5. **Career Guidance and Counseling:** Comprehensive career guidance and counseling services are essential for vocational training programs, assisting students in making informed decisions about their career paths, industry demand, and potential progression.
 6. **Industry Certification and Accreditation:** Accreditation from reputable organizations validates vocational training programs, adding credibility and ensuring they meet industry standards, thus enhancing graduates' employability.
 7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of vocational training programs are crucial for assessing effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement, involving feedback from students, employers, and industry partners.

Recommendations

1. The government should ensure that every child has access to basic education, enabling them to read and write. This is essential for overcoming the challenges of the rapidly changing world.
2. Emphasizing practical learning experiences like internships, apprenticeships, co-op programs, and project-based assignments can bridge the gap between formal education and skill acquisition, enhancing students' practical skills and practical knowledge.
3. Collaboration between educational institutions and industry is crucial for skill acquisition and bridging the gap between formal education and real-world challenges, ensuring curriculum alignment with industry trends.
4. Experiential learning methods like simulations and case studies enhance skill acquisition by allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, fostering critical thinking and decision-making.
5. Technological advancements necessitate skill updates, necessitating a lifelong learning culture. Educational institutions should offer professional development opportunities to bridge formal education and skill acquisition.
6. Technology bridges education-skill gap by providing online resources, virtual simulations, and interactive learning platforms, enabling students to develop technical skills and adapt to workplace digital tools.
7. Employers value soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, requiring educational institutions to develop this alongside academic knowledge through group projects, presentations, and communication exercises.
8. Career guidance and counseling services can help individuals navigate their career paths post-formal education, identifying strengths, interests, and goals, and providing necessary skills, thereby bridging the gap between education and employment.
9. Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in educational institutions can empower individuals, bridge skill gaps, and foster economic growth by providing resources, mentorship programs, and entrepreneurship courses.



Conclusion

Poverty alleviation necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates formal education and skill acquisition. Collaboration between governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders is crucial to bridge the gap between these two domains, enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and skills for sustainable livelihoods.



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