

## **Positive Change through Educational Solutions**

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### **Abstract**

*The approach used in this paper is an examination and review of the literature pertaining to the topic of global education. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of education from a global dimension and to elucidate how education can be used as a positive solution in assisting to alleviate world issues such as poverty and poor health status. This paper will discuss the importance of education of the individual, the family, and the community. The paper provides insight into the need of working towards improving education globally. Conclusions made from this paper purposely focus on the overall importance of education in developing and developed countries.*

**Key Words:** Global education, education for all, education internationally, universal education

### **Introduction**

Nelson Mandela (as cited in Earle, p. 256, 2007) “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. It has the potential to evoke change and to be a building block in improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities. However, the opportunity for education is not granted to a significant number of people worldwide. It is estimated that 72 million children worldwide are without primary education, 71 million adolescents are missing out on secondary school, and 759 million adults are illiterate (Bokova, 2010). These numbers illustrate a harsh but true universal reality that education is not an available opportunity to all persons globally. The need for education is critical, as for some, education may be more than just an opportunity: it may be a chance for survival. The statement “everyone has the right to education” was written in 1948 by the United Nations in Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights. Although education is a human right, for many countries worldwide this proclamation has yet to become a reality. There is still much more effort needed to obtain the goal of education for all persons globally. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of education from a global perspective and provide insight into the importance of working towards improving education globally. There is specific study into how education can be used as a goal in assisting to resolve world issues such as poverty, economic status, health, and life cycle. Future considerations for global education are also examined.

### **1. Education as Change**

Education has the potential to improve lives globally. It is a vital aspect in minimizing effects of, or potentially eliminating, many global hardships. Further examination of how education can improve poverty and economic status, health, and life cycle will be explored to support the positive outcomes of education.

#### **1.1 Poverty and Economic Status**

A tool that can be used to increase economic status globally is education. The Global Campaign for Education (2010) notes that when individuals have the opportunity to seek educational advantages such as learning about basic life skills or learning to read, poverty declines and economies grow. Education, specifically of girls and women, has one of the greatest impacts on reducing poverty (Cotton, 2007). Educating girls and women is the best way to break the cycle of ill health, hunger, and poverty (Kailash Satyarthi, qtd in. Earle, 2007). Earle (2007) agrees and states that investing in a girl’s education can be the “single most effective way to reduce poverty” (p. 250). In reducing poverty through education, there is a potential for economic growth. Every additional year of schooling has a direct impact on economic growth (Earle, 2007). Even a single year of schooling makes a significant difference in an individual’s income. The Global Campaign for Education (2010) estimates that a single year of primary school increases a boy’s income later in life by 5-15%.

A single year of education for a girl can increase a woman's wages by 10-20 % (Earle, 2007). To achieve continuous and rapid economic growth, 40 % of a country's adult population must have the ability to read and write (The Global Campaign for Education, 2010). The statement that "quality education is key to overcoming poverty in a single generation" represents the strong connection between education and poverty (Earle, 2007, p.268).

### **1.2 Health**

The health status of individuals and communities varies globally. Yet, regardless of geographic location, one key feature regarding health is common internationally; education is capable of improving the health of nations. Education can begin the pathway of change for simple health practises such as hand hygiene or boiling water as a way for sanitation. In addition, education can assist in improving illness and disease patterns. Illness and disease have potential to cause devastating effects on individuals, families, and whole communities. In third world countries, diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria unnecessarily diminish the quality of life and cause death. Avoidable illnesses such as influenza or diarrhea also cause needless harm to individuals. Diarrhea alone kills 1.6 million children every year (Earle, 2007). Education can reduce disease and illness rates. Evidence of education working to combat disease and illness can be seen through examination of one of the world's biggest epidemics; HIV/AIDS. The 2009 Global Report on the AIDS epidemic released by World Health Organization (WHO) stated that there are a total of 33.3 million people living with HIV and in 2009 the numbers of deaths related to AIDS was 1.8 million. These numbers can dramatically change through education. The Global Campaign for Education (2010) estimates that if every child were to receive an education, seven million cases of HIV/AIDS could be avoided in the next decade. Education on the transmission, effects, and proper prevention of HIV/AIDS would help to stop the epidemic.

Education as a way to improve your health is important for all persons internationally, but education of girls and women is especially important. Luthra (2007) wrote that the healthy outlook of society depends on the health of children and mothers. *Start with a Girl*, the new agenda for global health (2010), reiterates that the lack of education poses health risks and enrolling girls in school is one of the most effective ways to benefit their health. Literate women are more likely to use family planning (Luthra, 2007). Family planning reduces the number of pregnancies and births a woman will have which lowers the chance of maternal deaths related to complication. Literacy is also beneficial to children, as children born to literate mothers are 50% more likely to live past the age of 5 (The Global Campaign for Education, 2010). Luthra (2007) wrote that educated women are likely to seek medical care when necessary. Veneman (2007) also notes that health and social services are used more by those with educational backgrounds. Education to improve health is needed in the topics of early and exclusive breastfeeding, immunization, vitamin A supplementation, and mosquito nets to help improve the health of infants and children (Veneman, 2007). Education of girls and women will improve the health status of themselves, their families, and potentially their communities.

### **1.3 Life Cycle**

The situation that an individual is born into is predetermined, but the lifestyle and the person's potential in life can be transformed through education and learning. Education allows the ability of an individual to change the outcome of their own life, the lives of their future children, and generations after them. Individuals who have a basic education and become parents are more competent to provide care to their children (Veneman, 2007). Education allows for knowledge of life skills such as hygiene and nutrition which can be practised and passed on. Girls and women who are educated marry later in life and have smaller families (Cotton, 2007). Marrying later in life enables women to have children at a later age when they have matured and are more prepared to take on the responsibility of a family. Women with education understand the need to manage the size of their family based on their capacities (Veneman, 2007). Having a family based on the abilities that parents can give provides more opportunities for the family and children. The biggest role education plays in life cycle is that educated parents are more likely to send their own children to school (Veneman, 2007). If a parent understands the importance of education and its benefits, they are more inclined to therefore make every attempt to send their own children to school. Children can pass on knowledge learnt in school around subjects such as hygiene, disease awareness, and nutrition. Education is critical in improving the life cycle of families and communities for the better regardless of who starts change in the cycle.

## **2. Future Considerations**

There is a substantial amount of theory and research to support the positive outcomes of education as explored above. Although the encouraging outcomes of education seem clear, there are still a significant number of children, youths and adults who are illiterate and/or without education of any level. With such an emphasis on education and its benefits, it seems incomprehensible that education is, in reality, not available to all. Continued discussions must ensue if action is to be taken for education to be available for all persons globally.

## **2.1 Millennium Development Goals**

In September 2000, world leaders came together to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration now commonly known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Each of the eight goals is unique to its objective and has a target to be met by 2015 (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010). The second goal is to achieve universal primary education with a target of ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010). The target of the third goal is to promote gender equality and empower women, is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education no later than 2015 (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010). The 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report issued by the United Nations notes a few positive steps thus far in meeting the goal such as the number of children out of school decreased from 106 million in 1999 to 69 million in 2008. Although positive steps have been made towards meeting MDG goals related to education, the same report declares that universal primary education will not be met by the 2015 target.

Matsuura (2007) believes that education is part of all MDGs and that learning is at the center of the global agenda to accomplish the MDGs. Evawoma-Enuku, Oyitso, & Enuku (2010) agrees that literacy can help to accomplish goals four, five, and six as literacy plays a role in educating about child mortality, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS and other health problems. Education as a means to assist in all the MDGs helps to support the importance behind education. If the MDGs are accomplished, regardless of target date, extreme poverty and hunger would be eradicated, gender equality and the empowerment of women would be common globally, child mortality rates would significantly lessen, maternal health would improve, the rate of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases would be reduced, environmental sustainability would be ensured, and global partnerships would be developed. If all of these MDGs goals were accomplished, it would have meant the universal primary education goal, would have been long achieved. The path to complete the MDGs is still a long one, but education is paving the way to make these ambitions not only goals but a universal reality.

## **2.2 Barriers to Education**

The millennium development goals are strategic objectives to improve humanity and as noted, education will assist in obtaining the goals. But if education is such a powerful weapon to combat world hardships why is it not already being provided to all persons globally? There are numerous barriers that must be overcome before all persons will receive education. Finance relating to providing education and attending school plays a role in allowing education. The Global Campaign for Education, 2010 estimates that 16 billion is needed to provide education for all, small cost for the positive outcomes education allows for and the large amounts governments would save through reduced health care spending. Education is a human right and therefore should be accessible to all regardless of their financial situation. Cost of tuition, books, and uniforms can be lowered to allow children to attend school and receive an education. Accessibility to education and the number of teachers to provide education can increase. It is estimated that an additional 18 million teachers are needed to provide quality education (Earle, 2007). Gender equality must be overcome to obtain the goal of universal education. Girls who are in poor households are more than three times as likely to be out of school as compared to boys (Bokova, 2010). It is also important for equality of pertaining to disability, minority status, and language (Bokova, 2010). Focusing on equality is important for allowing equal opportunity of education.

## **2.3 Progress**

The barriers to education can seem overwhelming, but it is important to bear in mind the progress thus far in obtaining the goal of education for all persons globally. Due to the drops of school fees in many countries, 40 more million children have been able to access school within the last eight years (The Global Campaign for Education, 2010). Enrolment in primary education in developed countries has continued to rise, reaching 89 % (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010). Even in regions that have the lowest school enrolment rate globally, such as sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment rates went up from 58 % to 76 % between 1999 and 2008 (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010). Save the Children, UNICEF, Absolute Leadership, and The Global Campaign for Education are all examples of organizations dedicated to providing and improving education globally. Future considerations to aid in the goal of universal education must focus around the social responsibility of societies and governments to provide education. Advocating for how education can positively improve poverty, economic status, health, and life cycle is vital in the progress towards the importance of education.

### **Conclusion**

One in five people cannot read this paper due to limited or no education (The Global Campaign for Education, 2010). Education has the potential to evoke positive change in lives of individuals, families and communities. Education has the ability to reduce the effects of, or possibly eradicate poverty. It has the power to create and improve economic status for individuals. The health status of whole communities can improve through education. Negative life cycle characteristics of individuals and families can be broken. The Millennium Development Goals are set in place for the obtainment of universal education, and progress has been made towards the target of education for all persons internationally. However, barriers are still in the way of global education. It will take advocacy and the understanding of social responsibility for education to break these barriers and work towards the opportunity of education for every person worldwide. Education is a human right.

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