



THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent to which community education can be used as a tool for socio-economic development. A qualitative interpretive approach was employed to investigate the effectiveness of community education in influencing socio-economic issues in the Gravelotte community. The researchers used three methods to collect data which were in-depth individual interviews, document analysis and participant observation. Ten participants were interviewed individually using open-ended interview guides. The study was conducted in the small semi-urban area of the Gravelotte community in Ba-Phalaborwa municipality with a populace of about 500 residents of mixed races. The collected data were thematically analysed. The findings of the study were that there is an improvement in the social status of those who go through educational services in the community. The local mine benefit through skills development which minimises accidents in the mines and improves productivity in the business. The study recommends a link between the local community education services and the local TVET College in Phalaborwa town that can generate a greater impact through partnerships and increased publicity of the further education and training services seeing that there is no secondary school in the community. Companies and individuals with interest in education should be encouraged to support community education and that the TVET College establish a forum locally to provide marketing and interactive collaboration with localsto recruit learners who may drop out of mainstream education to expand the influence of education on the local community.

Keywords: Education, Impact, Provision, influence, Socio-economic Issues.

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BACKGROUND

Education as a tool for socio-economic development cannot be overemphasised. (Bourn, 2014; Fricke, Gathercole & Skinner, 2015), posit that South Africa has gone through a variety of attempts in applying education for societal reforms and development. Implementation of community education services happens for a variety of reasons hence the capital

investments of the government in education services. Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the tool through which one can change his circumstances". Education in any society holds the epitome of channelling the strength in guiding development. It is for that reason that this research study was done in the area of Gravelotte. In anticipation of development, the community should be



provided with quality education. The provision of quality education is seen as the reason most learners stay in the school system for much longer.

The focus on educating girls and women is one of the most efficient ways to combat poverty and improve economic growth in developing countries (Ostby, Urdal & Rudolfson, 2016). Gender equality is also an important dimension and goal in the 2030 Agenda. Seeing that a larger percentage of residents are female providing educational opportunities for women is therefore both a prerequisite and a driver for successful development (UIL, 2016). According to recent figures, the gap between girls and boys globally is down to 1% in primary and secondary education. However, the majority (57%) of illiterate youth globally are still female. Discrimination against girls and women in education is more due to the unwillingness of public authorities to act and less a consequence of capacity, for example, bureaucratic quality and financial resources (Ostby, Urdal & Rudolfson, 2016).

The fundamental governing principle for the education system must be to enable access to educational and training opportunities and further to the level of basic education achieved by any school-leaver irrespective of race, gender, or social and economic circumstances (HESA, 2011). Education should be accessible to all. The National Policy on Community Colleges (DHET, 2015; 2014) states that Community Colleges community education programmes must be flexible in the programmes they offer, which should

cater for the wide range of needs of adult learners and be driven by priorities of the communities they serve. Education is therefore of utmost significance hence this study took the direction to determine how the Gravelotte is impacted by education as it relates to socio-economic issues.

Babalola (2003) asserts that the contribution of education to economic growth and development occurs through its ability to increase the productivity of an existing labour force in numerous ways. The Ministry of Education and Science in the Republic of Kazakhstan realised that in every society there were certain problems in getting an education which was either financial or social inequality (Kazakhstan, 2018). In their case, Kazakhstan had a grant system of training, where the state allocated annually more than 15 thousand places for students in various specialities in the direction of bachelor, master and doctoral studies. In Kazakhstan, the necessary initial conditions for self-realisation and self-development of youth were created. The youth was a carrier of new and innovative knowledge which was brought on production and to other spheres of public life. And the volume and quality of knowledge, the new ideas grew in society first at the expense of young people (Kazakhstan, 2018). According to Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1997), direct economic returns to investment in terms of the balance between the opportunity costs of resources, and the expected future benefits can be realised through Human Capital Theory. Furthermore, the indirect economic



returns, in terms of external benefits affecting other members of society, the private demand for education and other factors determining individual demand for education, the geographical and social distribution of educational opportunities are beneficial to a larger extent in addressing socio-economic issues. Since education plays a significant role in the economy of every nation there is a need to view educational expenditures as a form of investment

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the impact of education as a tool for socio-economic development?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even after the democratic dispensation in South Africa communities are still languishing in poverty. The greater efforts are for seeking employment rather than creating self-sufficient efforts for survival. Even though endowed with natural resources and wild animals in the area the Gravelotte community is still not fully economically active. The concern is mostly because education services are conducted in the area however there are fewer observed improvements in terms of community development. The structures of the economy are still led by the minority who benefitted from the exclusive development policies of the apartheid system. Considering that the majority of the people in the community are previously disadvantaged, notably, education services are supposed to bring the required socio-economic impact as required.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Human Capital Theory is defined historically as an economic terminology.

Economists and historians commonly recognize British Economists Sir William Petty (1623-1687) and Adam Smith (1723-1790) as the primary cultivators of Human Capital Theory. Petty contributed by writing the book "Treatise of Taxes and Contributions" in 1662. In the book, he examined the role of the state in the economy and touched on the value of labour.

Human Capital Theory is the most influential economic theory of Western education, it set the framework of government policies since the early 1960s. It is seen increasingly as a key determinant of economic performance. A key strategy in determining economic performance has been to employ a conception of individuals as human capital and various economic metaphors such as "technological change," "research," "innovation," "productivity," "education," and "competitiveness" (Fitzsimons, 2015: 1).

The Human Capital Theory is important currently, as the world is changing rapidly. The advancement of technology demands more skills and human capital is a significant contributor to economic growth (Mutia, Doris, & Roziana, 2018). Thus, many new skills are required to be a well-developed industry in this competitive world, which can be enhanced with the aid of various organisations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Flyvbjerg (2011:302), case study research as a strategy for methodological exploration, "has been around as long as recorded history". The



contemporary case study research is said to have its origins in qualitative approaches to research in the disciplines of anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology (Stewart, 2014). This study followed a set of methodological guidelines as stipulated in empirical studies. It is widely accepted that qualitative research should be ethical, important, intelligibly described, and use appropriate and rigorous methods (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Furthermore, qualitative methods intend to give a holistic, full representation of complex, dynamic social circumstances reality.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

One of the findings in this study is that local communities should be made to reflect on the socio-economic benefits of education across all levels. Education should produce capable citizens who take responsibility for their socio-economic issues without expecting handouts. Simply put, top-down and external expert-led development has proven unsuccessful in many contexts (Beck & Purcell, 2010). Unless the Gravelotte community structures put a focus on education for socio-economic benefits there will be fewer successes around the area in the next years to come because much of the economic benefits are still in the hands of the Europeans.

Responding to the question “What is the impact of community education as a tool for socio-economic development? The participants had the following to say;

Participant KP1:

“Wherever you go... skills are in demand for a developing community and our

society is suffering because of lack of skills. Most ... lacking behind in the area of socio-economic development due to poor educational facilities and a lack of a secondary school in the area”

Participant KP2:

“In my view, learnerships is some way of preparing the learners for full-time employment in the companies around Ba-Phalaborwa municipality. Yes, one can say that the... allow some students to be self-employed.”

Participant KP8:

“.... Yes, one can say that the skills acquired through training in the college allow some students to be self-employed.”

There are differing opinions from the participants in the study concerning the impact of community education as a tool for socio-economic development. However, comments on the impact can be made from the data collected through interviews, document analysis and observations. The first participant above speaks from a point of need since there is a consensus amongst scholars that education is a prerequisite for development.

The second finding is that ever since the ABET centre was in operation in 2010 there has been a lot of improvement in adult learners' lives. More of the adult learners were promoted at their workplaces after completing the ABET level four certificates. There is confirmation to this as said by one participant:



“Some of the mineworkers complete the ABET level 4 in Gravelotte Primary School, and we see an improvement in safety in the mine and most of them are promoted to higher positions after completing their certificates” (Participant KP5, male).

The certificates are recognised for learnerships at the municipality and others have gone on to further their studies and their socio-economic status have improved. However, the local councillor has a different opinion on the success basing her argument on the shortage of educational services due to the absence of a secondary school. It could be because the participant as a local ward councillor views the services provided as inadequate in addressing socio-economic issues. However, there is a positive impact on society through educational programmes.

Thirdly the impact of education programmes on socio-economic development in Gravelotte is vast due to the structure of the community. Businesses are dominated by European farmers and the local Stibium mine employs a fraction of local people due to the lack of skills required in the industry. Furthermore, one of the participants opines that the success or impact is not evident. Participant KP1 said:

“It is not traceable since the learners that participate in higher education relocate from the community after graduating and there is no feedback to the community which makes us worried as the citizens of the area.”

The study further discovered that the local community does not have a trace of the children who graduate from either colleges or universities and are currently employed locally. Although there is a consensus that to a larger extent some learners progress in life even to higher heights. One former learner from Gravelotte Primary is a player for the national team that won the rugby world cup in 2019. There are positive impacts out of the work in educational programmes offered in the Gravelotte community.

One report, in 2015, from the online version of 'The Nation' (a Malawian newspaper), recounts an interview given by President Peter Mutharika to the American Magazine Foreign Affairs, where he set a five-year deadline for the country 'to start balancing its national budget without relying on contributions from donors' (Munthali, 2015). Successes of this nature can only happen under highly prioritised outcomes-based education. The researcher concurs fully with the report because education and empowerment projects should leave a positive impact on society creating self-reliance and sustainability.

Nthenda, (2016) reports that the Malawi Broadcasting Service shows that some stakeholders in Malawian resurgences, such as the Malawi Scotland Partnership, believe that Malawians should take responsibility for aid reduction and food security into their own hands. This is indicative of the need for interventions that bring tangible change. Education is



pivotal in bringing the much-anticipated intervention strategies for success.

However, Badat (2009) posits that we are bound to protect and promote a much richer and multifaceted conception of education that views itself as also having intrinsic as well as a social and political value. The Gravelotte community is void of such sustainable educational programmes due to the lack of community-based educational organisations. The study revealed that there is a gap in the community which could be played by the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to support and extend the impact of community education on socio-economic development.

The socio-economic needs of the population in the Gravelotte community require educational intervention. However, the current state is not enough to bring the necessary redress. Talking about development Badat (2009:5) says without a “thick” conception of development, it will be nigh-impossible to eliminate the historical and structural economic and social legacies of apartheid, transform... and redress inequalities in patterns of wealth and ownership. Agreeably the statement speaks of how much effort should be put into addressing socio-economic issues. It emerged in the study that the current state of education input is way behind to address the gap of the past and reposition society for equality and social cohesion. Badat (2009) further states that the goals of development should be amongst others

ensuring intellectual development, cultural, social and political rather than just economic.

SUMMARY

The study has brought the following conclusion on this topic as it relates to Gravelotte Community. Ever since the ABET centre was in operation in 2010 there has been a lot of improvement in adult learners' lives. More of the adult learners were promoted at their workplaces after completing the ABET level four certificates. The certificates are recognised for learnerships at the municipality and others have gone on to further their studies and their socio-economic status have improved. The learners that went through school relocate to their parents' local communities after completing their studies. The local economy is still in the hands of Europeans who own most of the food stores and businesses in the Gravelotte community. Few food stalls owned by residents operating in the local market sell pap and chicken to workers and passers-by in the small town of the Gravelotte community.

The success of community education on socio-economic issues in the Gravelotte community is not yet on a large scale. This study revealed that community education in the Gravelotte community has not yet fully played a pivotal role in the advancement of the social status of individuals however there is a positive impact. The participants in this study agree that educated people or households will behave differently as opposed to families of uneducated people. The



understanding of financial beneficiation is mostly related to the level of education.

Business opportunities are still in the hands of the minority who are Europeans. Furthermore, there is a continued subjection of black folks to inhumane treatment and low salaries. Education is perhaps the realisation of employability, income level, wealth accumulation, social mobility and modernity as viewed by most. If local people in Gravelotte can not achieve one or two of what is mentioned earlier they may perceive education as less significant. It is, however, pivotal to point out that education has more practical socio-economic benefits than merely accumulation of wealth, social mobility and employment. Social behaviour and improved health benefits are the results of a good education.

CONCLUSION

According to Alvaredo *et al* (2018), income inequality has increased in almost all

The regions since 1980, although at different speeds. The rising trend of income inequality can be attributed to low levels of education and low economic activities. Economic inequality has been on the rise around the world over the last four decades while the low-level equilibrium that South Africa finds itself in has its roots in the apartheid regime of institutionalised inequality. The provision of substandard education does not develop the capabilities to expand economic opportunities. Furthermore, it denies the local community dignified employment and undermines their sense of self-worth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The finding in this study is that local communities should be made to reflect on the socio-economic benefits of education across all levels. Simply put, top-down and external expert-led development has proven unsuccessful in many contexts (Beck & Purcell, 2010). Unless the Gravelotte community structures put a focus on education for socio-economic benefits there will be fewer successes around the area in the next years to come because much of the economic benefits are still in the hands of the Europeans.

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