


Chapter 12

Education and Poverty in Ibero–Americana Countries

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ABSTRACT

The conditions of poverty, indigence, hunger, and unemployment have increased since the 1980s. At the end of the 20th century, in March of 1995, during the World Social Summit in Copenhagen, major social commitments were signed in order to agree on the best way to deal with the generalized problems of poverty and unemployment, with special sensitivity in Latin America and granting education a priority area of action in the fight against poverty. In this chapter, three objectives are specified from the consulted literature: first, to provide a general overview of the topic of poverty and their determinants; second, to describe, from aggregate data obtained on the CEPAL website, the situation of education and poverty in some countries of the Ibero-American territory; and finally, evidencing whether there is a significant relationship between levels of education and poverty in those countries.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is one of the oldest problems of humanity (Ardila, 1979) and in the XXI century, is considered by experts and by international public entities as one of the three main global problems, together with terrorism and climate change (Muñoz, 2012).

The reality of poverty and the concerns and sensitivities that this subject provokes are perceived, among others, in the social and academic areas. In the international social field, the figure of world poverty is around 1,370 million people, which represents 20.5% of the world population (Gentilini & Sumner, 2012) and the number of poor people in the world does not stop to grow (Tarabini, 2008); being probable (Chen & Ravallion, 2013) that the number of relatively poor people will stabilize in the next

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7888-8.ch012

few years, in 2,700 million. Surprisingly and as evidenced by Gentilini & Sumner (2012), this poverty figure is not only located in low and middle income countries, as one in ten poor people in the world live in high income countries.

The Academy is not insensitive to this matter. According to Araya & Vásquez (2015), poverty has been a topic of interest for researchers of different disciplines, like economics and sociology (Valenzuela, 2004). Despite of this interest, Muñoz (2012) sustains that a shared and valid diagnosis about the causes of poverty has not being achieved, nor about the most efficient and effective solutions; thus emerging the need to deepen the meaning of poverty and their causes (General Sub-directorate for Studies of the Foreign Sector of Spain, 2007).

In this sense, among the causes that motivate and even define, in the case of multidimensional poverty and states of poverty, scientific literature gives a relevant role to education. Thus, Ordaz (2009) affirms that education is a transcendental mechanism to help individuals come out of poverty, both extreme and moderate; meaning in the words of Tarabini (2008), that education occupies, since the nineties, a fundamental place in the global agenda of the fight against the poverty.

Therefore, the relevance of education is so big that G. Manrique (2011), quoting Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, states that an increase in the score of the 15-year-olds in the PISA report from 500 to 525 points, for 20 years, would translate into an aggregate GDP of their countries of 115 trillion dollars in the life span of the generation born in 2010.

Despite the above data, Ribotta (2010) sustains that there are currently more than 400 million adults from poor and developing countries who have never attended school; being an important part of this population resident in Latin American territory. This deficit of populations with high levels of education will prevent, according to G. Manrique (2011), that Latin America can compete in the new era of the economy knowledge, where high-tech products from software programs to patents from the pharmaceutical industry are products that are more traded in the world markets than raw materials or manufactures with little added value.

The previous reasons for initiating this research is to provide value, offering useful knowledge, to the members of ASIBEAM and to those corresponding interest groups in the two main topics that define: education and poverty. From the literature consulted, this purpose is specified in two general objectives: first, to offer a synthesis of the state of research on the topic “poverty”; and, secondly, to describe the situation of education and poverty in some countries of the Iberoamerican territory and to show whether there is a significant relationship between levels of education and poverty in those countries.

The research has a cognitive (descriptive and explanatory) character, one-dimensional in terms of poverty measurement, exploratory, correlational and transversal; and the structure is based on the following premises: the review of the literature on the topic “Poverty” is presented, with a special interest in education as a determining factor; the methods of data collection and analysis are then described; subsequently, the results are discussed and finally, the theoretical and empirical implications, the limitations and the future orientations of the investigation are presented.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ON THE TOPIC “POVERTY”

The consulted literature shows that there is not a single definition of poverty. In a first approximation to the term, Kaen (2012) affirms that poverty is identified with notions of deprivation, absence or lack. From a historical perspective, Acosta (2009) affirms that most economic studies on poverty have focused

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