

Education and Economic Inequality: There is More to Know

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Abstract

The most important influence on economic inequality in the United States is education. The majority of high paying jobs in the United States require at least a high-school diploma. This clearly puts those lacking a higher education at an immediate disadvantage. How is this fixed?

Development in technology has eradicated the need for many low skilled jobs. **Where it is the problem it can also be the solution.** Instead of lengthening the time it takes in school to get a good job, the opposite must be done. Technical schools have the right idea, but instead of offering a full two years after high school, the programs should be absorbed into the high school system.

Key words: Economic inequality, lack of education, ways to reduce economic inequality developments in technology, high school courses, education and family.

Role of Education

Humans are constantly evolving. Although the science behind that statement may be questionable, it is true in regards to knowledge. Over the course of history, as discoveries are made and humans learn about them, each generation knows more than the last, or so it is hoped. The most important influence on economic inequality in the United States is education.

Lock and Key of Numerous Opportunities

Education is both the lock and the key to numerous opportunities in multiple different fields. In this day and age, one's level of education practically dictates their income. Although

this is not always true, there is a clear pattern. The majority of high paying jobs in the United States require at least a high-school diploma. For example, in 2012, 65% of all jobs required a post-secondary education, completely reversed from the only 34% that did in 1975 (Keane).

Lack of Higher Education and Economic Inequality

This clearly puts those lacking a higher education at an immediate disadvantage. How is this fixed? There are many options: Most importantly, creating a more affordable higher education system, and confronting technology and generational poverty in order to move people to better economic standings.

Not only are those with less education making less, but the college-educated are now making more. In 1975, employees with some post-secondary education earned about \$1.55 for every \$1 earned by those with only a high school education or less. By 2012, that figure had climbed to \$1.80 (Keane). So, why is this happening?

Development in Technology

Over the past quarter century, the entire employment landscape has changed. A major reason for this is technology. Development in technology has eradicated the need for many low skilled jobs. Incomes are raised as more and more improvements are made in technology. The problem is that this happens disproportionately as rewards go to highly educated workers (Yglesias).

Those who are already educated have the time and money to keep up on the latest technological knowledge, while the uneducated are working multiple jobs just to pay their bills. The gap is continuously widening for many in America.

Some Possible Solutions

So, how can this problem be fixed? Technology cannot and will not be stopped. As a species we disdain the slowing or stoppage of progress. The answer is education. Once again, **where it is the problem it can also be the solution.** Instead of lengthening the time it takes in school to get a good job, the opposite must be done. Technical schools have the right idea, but

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instead of offering a full two years after high school, the programs should be absorbed into the high school system. The skills taught will need to be technologically advanced and ready to be put to work. It will be powerful when a student can graduate high school with a skill he/she can take straight to the job market. This will be perfect for students who are not able to or do not want to attend college. Classes could be absorbed into the students' schedule, or treated like an extracurricular activity (this way a small fee would be required for those that are able to pay).

Of course, not everyone would make use of this program, leaving them in the lower paying jobs that do still need to be filled. However, those that will take advantage will have the potential to become the next great American middle class, therefore exponentially shrinking the economic gap.

Education Runs in the Family

A large factor that makes education such a considerable part of economic inequality in America is that education runs in the family. Just because a mother reads *To Kill A Mockingbird* while she is pregnant does not mean the child will be born with an indescribable knowledge of the book's major themes. Nonetheless, being born into a family with a strong history in education, or even having two parents with high school diplomas gives children a considerable advantage.

Children Born in Poverty and Poverty Cycle

According to The Urban Institute, one in six U.S. newborns are born into poverty. About 50% of them will go on to spend at least half of their childhood in poverty (Lee and Burkam). Children who spend half of their childhood in poverty are 90% more likely to enter their twenties without a high school diploma than children who have never been poor (Baker).

The poverty cycle is undoubtedly intertwined with education, and as illustrated by these statistics, it is not easy to break. What makes the poverty cycle the sturdy thing that it is, is the mentality that comes along with it. The imprinting that begins when a child is born continues throughout their life as they observe their surroundings and learn what is expected of them (Lee

and Burkam). Schools in low income areas will need to focus on breaking that mentality by exposing the students to a world outside of what they see every day.

In order to shrink the economic inequality in America, the next generation must know that it is possible for them to have more than their parents. This may take a long time to accomplish as there are multiple ways to change a child's mindset but it is integral to the nations' economic development as a whole. For, as Malala Yousafzai said, "we cannot succeed when half of us are held back".

Fixing Economic Inequality

Economic inequality is caused, in large, by education. But, it can also be fixed by education. Economic inequality will never be fully eradicated, but it can be scaled down, and education can make that happen. Through more technology classes in high school to prepare students for the job market and by starting at the base of the poverty cycle, I believe we can once again make America the land of opportunity it was meant to be.

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