

Learning Poverty and Gaps: Toward A Basic Education Solution for Sustainable Development and Economic Evolution in Nigeria

¹Philip-Kpae Friday Oodee. and ²Philip-Kpae Joyce Soorbari

¹Department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo P. M. B. 5080, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

²Center for Peace and Security Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Email: philipkpae1@gmail.com and joyscee4u@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

There is a growing and proposed increase in spending on education, which tends to encourage inquiry into what the impact of such investment will be in light of students with regards to the problem of learning poverty. This study revealed that acquiring highly standardized education has the potential to produce significant learning gains at larger scales. Social learning theory was adopted to serve as an undergirded theory in this study. Thus, finding suggests that policymakers may wish to investigate the possibility of incorporating standardization into the educational systems in Nigeria, including standardized lesson plans as well as teacher feedback, monitoring, and coaching. The findings indicates favorable benefits on reading abilities including sound functional memory and self-reliance, as well as the participation of both teachers and parents in their students' educational experiences.

Keywords: Learning Poverty, Learning Gaps, Poverty Eradication, and Education

DOI: 10.56201/ijssmr.v9.no7.2023.pg15.23

Introduction

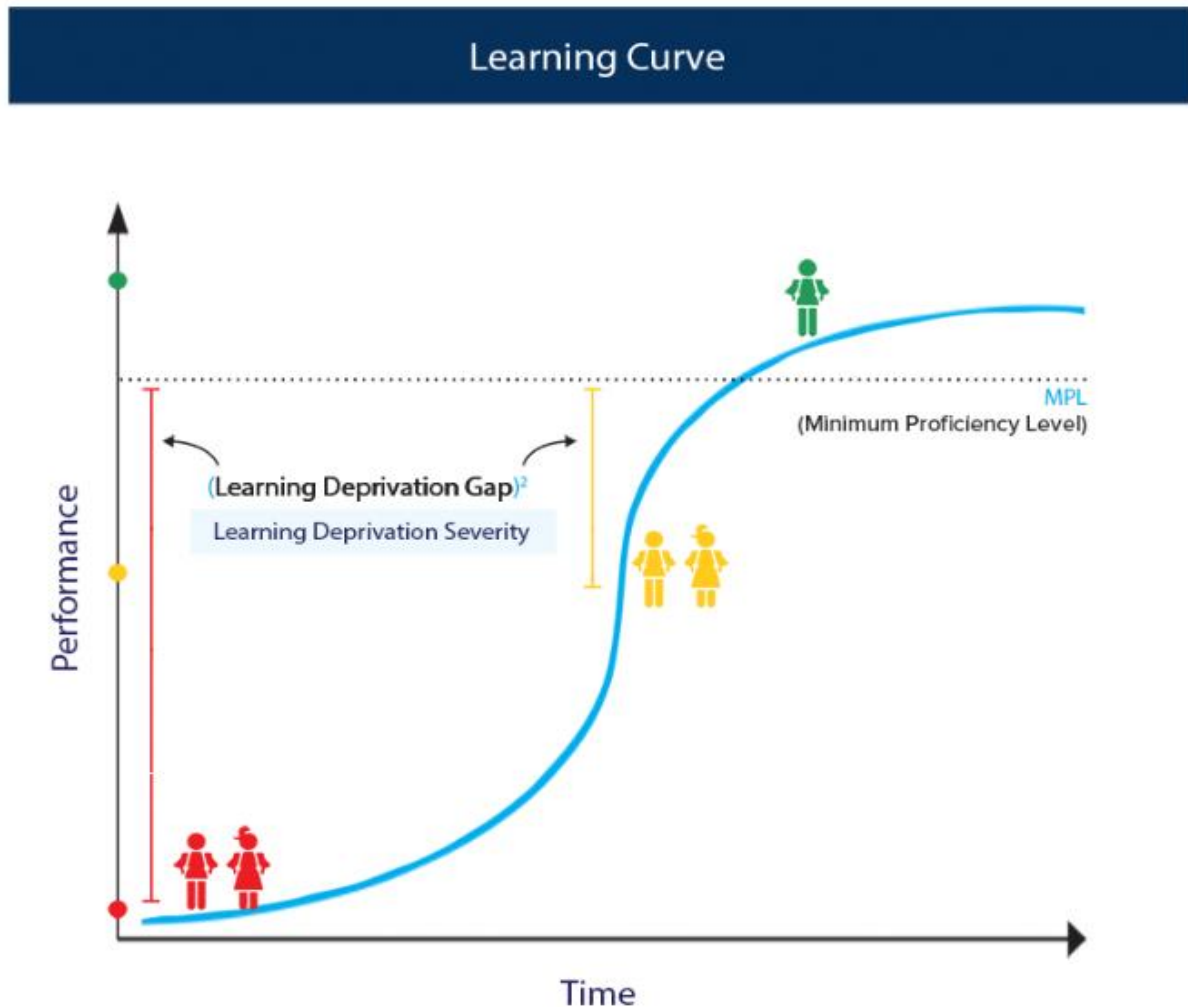
Education plays a pivotal role in us reaching our highest potential. This is because, it is the vehicle that enables us to acquire the abilities, strategies, information, and wisdom necessary to recognize, comprehend, and respect the responsibilities that we have toward our community, family, and nation. Undeniably, education is the fuel that keeps the wheels of any contemporary, developed, and industrialized society revolving. It is like a flashlight that shows the path of survival through this difficult and cutthroat world. The many parties and/or entities that have a stake in education-namely, governments, students, and organizations themselves-have reached a consensus about the multifaceted significance of education. Therefore, education is a significant ingredient in the progression of families across the spectrum of income (Team Leverage Edu, 2022). Sadly, our reality is not in conformity with all the benefits of education as stated above. This may not be unconnected with the several issues bedevilling education in Nigeria. Some of these factors includes; poor and inadequate funding, poor governance and mismanagement, lack of responsibility and control, the politicization of education, lack of infrastructure, indiscipline, poor parenting and guidance, lack of state-of-the-art teaching aids, unstable curriculum and subjects, lack of good teachers' welfare, unaffordable education, and insecurity (Kolawole, 2022).

Other factors recently added to this list by UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Funds) are learning poverty and learning gaps. According to Ibrahim (2022), an astounding 70 percent of pupils in most Nigerian schools are poor at learning, which prevents them from receiving adequate information that would enhance their education. According to the findings of several studies by UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Funds), going to school does not always lead to increased knowledge or learning. Even if they are attending school, a great number of students are not acquiring the core skills necessary for competency. As a direct consequence of this, many children are living in ignorance, and with the exact percentage fluctuating from place to place. By the time they are 10, all children should be able to read (Azevedo, 2020). Reading is a doorway for learning as the child continues through school, and conversely, an inability to read slams that gate shut. Reading is a gateway for learning as the child progresses through school. In addition to this, the fact that children are unable to read is often an unmistakable sign that the educational systems in place are not effectively structured to assist children in learning in other subject areas such as mathematics, science, and the humanities. Children who have not mastered reading by the time they are 10 years old - or at the very latest, by the time they have graduated from primary school - are not likely to become proficient readers later on in their academic careers, despite the fact that it is possible to learn new things later in life if enough effort is put in (UNESCO, 2021).

Learning deprivation can be improved in one of two ways: either by reducing schooling deprivation as countries expand coverage and bring in out-of-school populations or by reducing learning deprivation as countries raise proficiency levels for children below the minimum proficiency threshold (World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF, 2021). Both of these techniques have the potential to assist cut down on the number of individuals who are both living in poverty and without access to an education of sufficient caliber. On the other hand, learning deprivation is not something that can be seen right away; rather, it is something that can be measured with the use of standardized examinations. Learning deprivation, on the other hand, cannot be immediately witnessed in the same way that education deprivation can since it depends on whether or not the child is enrolled in school. It does not take into consideration the common academic gap that occurs among pupils whose proficiency levels are below the acceptable minimum. Those children are at a disadvantage academically (World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF, 2021). As a consequence of this, we take into consideration the learning poverty gap, which calculates the average distance that separates a child who is learning-deprived from the minimal level of competence and reflects the average amount of additional learning that is required to eradicate learning poverty.

On the other hand, the gap measure is unable to differentiate between an increase in the learning gap that is caused by students who are close to the threshold and one that is caused by students who are at the very bottom of the learning distribution. This is because the gap measure does not take into account students who are close to the threshold. The magnitude of the learning gap may be expressed as the square of the gap in comparison to the square of the least competence. This assesses how differently individuals within a group of persons with weak learning abilities learn concerning one another (Azevedo, 2020). It is vital to be acquainted with the concepts of the learning poverty gap as well as the learning poverty severity to have a thorough awareness of the educational opportunities that are available to students. It is conceivable that nations with the same degree of learning poverty have distinct learning poverty gaps, or that countries with the same learning poverty gaps have various levels of learning poverty severity. Both of these scenarios are plausible. Both of these options have repercussions for the measures that are implemented to alleviate the effects of educational deprivation (World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF, 2021).

A Learning Curve demonstrating learning deprivation gap and minimum proficiency.



Source: World Bank, UNESCO & UNICEF. (2022).

Fig 1.1 Learning Curve.

Two nations have the same overall degree of educational deprivation for instance, but one of them has a larger difference between the levels of educational deprivation, then the latter country will need more work to get its students up to the minimal level of competence. In the same way, if two countries have the same learning poverty gap but one of them has a higher learning poverty severity, then the country with the higher learning poverty severity will need to adopt strategies that address the unequal distribution of learning among those who are below the minimum proficiency threshold. In addition, since we predict learning deprivation as a result of the pandemic or the increased proportion of children who have learning difficulties, we are in a position to investigate expanding disparities by calculating the gap and the severity of the problem.

Literature Review

Social learning theory was adopted to serve as an undergirded theory in this study.

Social Learning Theory

A theory of the learning process and social conduct, known as social learning, holds that new behaviours may be learned by emulating those of others and seeing how others behave in similar situations (Bandura, 1971). It is said there that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social environment and that it is possible for learning to take place just by observation or direct teaching, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1963). Learning may take place not just via the observation of behaviour but also through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement. Observing rewards and punishments is an important component of learning. It is more probable that a certain behaviour will continue if it is rewarded on a regular basis; on the other hand, if the conduct is consistently penalized, it is more likely that the habit will stop (Bandura, 1963; Grusec, 1992).

Traditional behavioural theories, in which behaviour is primarily regulated by reinforcements, are expanded upon by this theory, which places attention on the vital roles that many internal processes play in the learning person (Bandura, 1971; Renzetti et al., 2012). In order to produce a model that could account for the diverse array of learning events that take place in the real world, Social Learning Theory incorporated both behavioural and cognitive theories of learning. This was done in order to offer a complete model. The theory was wholly behavioural in character when it was first presented by Bandura and Walters in 1963 (Bandura, 1963); the important component that made it unique and more prominent was its stress upon the importance of imitation. Bandura, on the other hand, changed to a more cognitive approach during the course of his career, which resulted in a significant modification of the theory in 1977 (Bandura, 1977; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002).

Basic Assumptions of Social Learning Theory:

- i. Learning is not just a matter of behaviour; rather, it is a cognitive process that occurs within the framework of social interactions.
- ii. Learning may take place both via the observation of a behaviour and the observation of the outcomes of that conduct.
- iii. Learning is accomplished via the processes of observation, the derivation of information from those observations, and the formulation of judgments on the performance of behaviours
- iv. Therefore, learning may take place even in the absence of a discernible shift in behaviour.
- v. Learning is facilitated by reinforcement, although it is not wholly dependent on reinforcement for its success.

Learning Crisis, Learning Poverty and Gaps and Poverty Eradication

It is important to bring attention to this situation which draws attention on newly compiled data of learning poverty that was generated in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. In a situation where a person reaches the age of 10, they are considered to be learning poor if they are unable to read and comprehend a basic paragraph. The following indicators of education and learning are brought together by this indicator: It starts with the proportion of children who have not reached a minimal level of reading competence (as assessed in schools) and is then modified by the percentage of children who are not currently enrolled in school (and are assumed not able to read proficiently). Using a measurement that was established jointly by World Bank and the Institute of Statistics of UNESCO, it was discovered that 53 percent of students in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read and comprehend a short tale by the time they had completed elementary school. The rate may go as high as 80

percent in less developed nations. Extremely high rates of illiteracy are an early warning indicator that all of the world's educational objectives, as well as other associated sustainable development goals, are in danger. At the present pace of development, around 43 percent of children would still be living in learning poverty in the year 2030 (World Bank, 2022). The rate of progress in eliminating learning poverty is simply too sluggish to realize poverty eradication. The eradication of educational deprivation is on par with the eradication of severe monetary poverty, undernourishment, and starvation. Around the course of the last several years, it has been abundantly evident that a significant number of youngsters all over the globe are not learning to read at an adequate level (World Bank, 2021). Even while the majority of youngsters are attending school, a significant minority are not developing even the most essential abilities. In addition to this, 260 million youngsters are not even enrolled in any kind of education. Students sometimes struggle to succeed later in their academic careers or after they enter the industry if they did not get enough fundamental education. They do not gain the skills that will help them become involved citizens and nurture healthy, affluent families after they leave school, nor do they develop the human capital that is necessary for them to power their jobs and economies once they have graduated. The learning crisis is a key contributor to human capital shortfalls, and as a result, it inhibits both sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

Combating the Underlying Structures of Poverty through Education

It is essential for all parties involved in poverty reduction to engage in continuous education throughout their lives in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the nature and scale of the problem and to be able to arrive at well-informed decisions regarding the most effective means of addressing it. Increasing the number of people who have access to educational opportunities may help fight against poverty. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are only few of the fundamental abilities that have been shown to have a favourable impact on the financial well-being of economically disadvantaged groups. The rate of return on the economy is increased as a result.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has just released a report demonstrating that education is essential for escaping from chronic poverty and preventing the transfer of poverty from one generation to the next. The rate of return is greater in nations with lower incomes than it is in those with higher incomes. The return on investment for primary education is larger than that of secondary education. Those who have formal paid work may also benefit from education by increasing their income potential: There is a correlation between having one more year of school and having a 10% rise in pay. The structures of food security may also be altered through education. The impacts of elementary education on agricultural productivity in 13 different nations were evaluated in research that was conducted in 1980 and is still considered seminal today. It was discovered that having four years of education led to an average yearly boost in productivity of 8.7%. (Jamison et al., 1980). Education transforms into a catalytic force, helping to the turning of the tide toward the elimination of severe poverty in a manner that is sustainable. Consequently, it is essential to make investments in education that equip children and young people with the applicable theoretical and practical abilities.

Basic Education Solution for Economic Evolution

Statistics from World Bank (2022) shows that if every child left school with fundamental reading abilities, it would be possible to pull more people out of severe poverty. That is the same as a twelve percent decrease in the global total. This demonstrates that a sound learning

enhancements have the potential to bring about a thirty percent reduction in absolute poverty. Thus, education leads to an approximately 10% rise in wages for every extra year of education that is completed. This shows that if people from wealthy homes and those from poor backgrounds obtained the same level of education, the gap between the two in terms of learning poverty might be reduced by 39%.

Again, between 1965 and 2010, the difference in growth rates between East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa may be roughly explained by the level of educational attainment of the population in each region. That is to say, if every child in a low-income country had an education, the GDP per capita in such nations would be about 70 percentage points higher in 2050 (World Bank, 2022).

The long-term GDP of sub-Saharan Africa would grow by 16% if the average number of years spent in higher education was increased by one year. The overall effects of climate change, such as an increase in the number of natural catastrophes and a decrease in agricultural production, might push as many as 122 million people below the poverty line by the year 2030 (World Bank, 2022). Hence, proper education can enhance the agricultural production abilities of members of the educated populace to bring about economic stability and improved standard of living.

On issues of green environment, workers with a high level of education and experience are going to be required for the construction of green industries. Interestingly, one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions are caused by the agricultural sector. Therefore, education at the elementary and secondary levels may equip the next generation of farmers with vital information about the obstacles to agricultural sustainability (Jamison et al., 1980; World Bank, 2022).

Societal Mobilization for Education

A broader mobilization of society for education is required in order to provide support for high-level commitment and to form national learning coalitions. A strong commitment from the government will not be adequate to maintain the commitment if it does not have the backing of a larger portion of society, both immediately and particularly over the longer term to preserve the commitment. This begins with an honest conversation about social policies and issues with all of the relevant parties. The efforts of educators, providers, suppliers of education inputs, families, and administrators located across the system are required in order to recover the lost academic ground that has been lost by children and young adults (World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF, 2021). If they are not aware of the scale of the losses and the consequences of those losses, and if they do not share the commitment to recovering those losses and accelerating progress, it is likely that education systems will simply return to business as usual, which will have negative lifelong consequences for the students of today. Recovery and acceleration will need to take place across several sectors, which means that the health industry and other sectors responsible for social policy, amongst others, will need to make commitments as well. In order to develop momentum behind lowering learning poverty and make it more sustainable, it is necessary for other major socioeconomic sectors, including as the business community and organizations representing civil society, to be a member of national coalitions (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2022). A national commitment to education necessitates that all relevant actors collaborate in the formulation and execution of educational reforms with the single goal of enhancing the educational opportunities and general well-being of children and young people.

There must be no contamination of the decision-making process in education by either political or commercial objectives. It should only be the interests of students that matter, not the views or interests of political parties or unions, nor the interests of suppliers, vendors, or providers, nor the interests of any other stakeholders in education. What should matter is the interests of students (World Bank, 2021).

Conclusion and Practical Implications

Some short-term interventions need to be executed at scale in order to maintain acceleration of learning, and this implementation has to be a component of a national plan of structural changes that will take place over the longer term. In addition to this, an ambitious measurement and research agenda is required up order to fill in the data gaps, continue research and innovation that is action-oriented, and determine how to best strengthen core abilities. The battle against learning poverty will need an integrated, multi-sectoral strategy that is backed by efforts in areas other than the education sector, that is, in all of the other sectors that are necessary to enhance learning. This is due to the fact that ensuring that all children have access to educational opportunities necessitates the provision of better water and sanitation, enhanced health and nutrition, enhanced social protection for populations that are at a disadvantage, reforms to the civil service, and improved management and financing of public services. All of this necessitates an approach to improving learning outcomes that involves the participation of the whole government, as well as families, educators, members of civil society, the business sector, and other ministries. In conclusion, the role that families and communities play in developing the desire for education, establishing the appropriate atmosphere for learning, and supporting the appropriate education reforms has to be given a greater amount of attention.

Implications of Social Learning Theory on Practical Learning

The theory of social learning is incorporated into a variety of instructional methods and classroom activities to facilitate better knowledge acquisition and retention among students. To demonstrate how guided participation works, for instance, a teacher can deliver a word and then ask the students in the class to repeat what they just heard. Therefore, pupils not only mimic but also duplicate the action of the instructor, which helps with recall. Social learning is similar to that of guided participation, except instead of the instructor taking the lead, the student takes turns guiding the conversation. In addition, instructors have the ability to mould the students' conduct in the classroom by setting a positive example for right behaviour and clearly praising pupils for doing well. The teacher may improve the students' learning outcomes by making the teacher's knowledge and practices more obvious to them by putting more of an emphasis on the role that the teacher plays as a model and by encouraging the students to assume the position of observer.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on technical considerations:

1. Get to every youngster and encourage them to continue their education: To keep children enrolled in school, it is necessary to implement initiatives such as "back-to-school" campaigns, family outreach and early warning systems, the abolition of school fees, cash transfer programs, and school food programs.
2. Measure the children's present learning levels once they have returned to school. This will assist instructors focus lessons in the classroom to each child's starting position, which will often be substantially lower owing to the school closures that have occurred.

3. In order for children to be successful in their education, it is essential that the foundations of reading, writing, and arithmetic be taught with the utmost importance. Efforts made to recover students' lost knowledge should concentrate on teaching the most important information that was missed. Assist instructors in teaching students these abilities.
4. Adopting efficient teaching practices that support teachers in their immediate classroom challenges in a cost-effective manner, such as formalized teaching programs and resources to target instruction to students' current learning levels, is one way to make classroom instruction more effective and increase its efficiency.
5. Ensure that schools are safe places, that children are healthy, that they are protected from violence, and that they have access to fundamental services such as nutrition, counseling, water, sanitation, and hygiene services. This will contribute to the development of psychosocial health and well-being.

References

- Azevedo, J. P. (2020). Learning Poverty: Measures and Simulations. Policy Research Working Paper No. 9446. World Bank.
- Bandura, Albert (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Oxford.
- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory: General learning corporation*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Bandura, Albert (1963). *Social learning and personality development*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Crawford, L., Susannah H., Ana M., & Sandefur, J. (2021). Understanding education policy preferences: Survey experiments with policymakers in 35 developing countries. Center for Global Development Working Paper 596.
- Grusec, J. (1992). Social learning theory and developmental psychology: The legacies of Robert Sears and Albert Bandura. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 776–786.
- Ibrahim, O. (2022). *Seventy percent of Nigerian children suffering from learning poverty – UNICEF*. Vanguard. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/70-of-nigerian-children-suffering-from-learning-poverty-unicef/>
- Jamison, D. T., Lockheed, M. E. & Lau, L. I. (1980). Farmer education and farm efficiency: A survey. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 29(1), 37-76.
- Kolawole, Y. (2022). *Fifteen problems in Nigeria and possible solutions*. InfoGuide Nigeria. <https://infoguidenigeria.com/problems-education-nigeria/>
- Kumpulainen, K., & Wray, D. (2002). *Classroom interaction and social learning: From theory to Practice*. Routledge Falmer.
- Montoya, S., & Antoninis. M. (2020). Benchmarks for the SDG 4 Indicators: A Political and Technical Basis for Discussion. *7th meeting for the TCG*. UNESCO.

Renzetti, C., Curran, D., & Maier, S. (2012). *Women, Men, and Society*. Pearson. 78–79.

Team Leverage Edu. (2022). *Importance of education*. Wings.
<https://leverageedu.com/blog/importance-of-education/>

UNESCO. (2021). Uneven global education stimulus risks widening learning disparities. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379350>

World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF. (2022). *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update*. Conference Edition.

World Bank. (2021). *What is learning poverty?* World Bank.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/what-is-learning-poverty>

World Bank. (2022). *What is learning poverty?* World Bank.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/ending-learning-poverty>

World Bank, UNESCO, & UNICEF. (2021). *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path To Recovery*. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documentsreports/documentedail/416991638768297704/The-State-of-the-Global-Education-Crisis-A-Path-to-Recovery>