

Does higher education usually lead to higher income essay

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



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Purpose of Research

Given the findings in my literature review, I have concluded that whilst the question of whether higher education leads to a higher income has been asked and studied on a number of occasions, a conclusive result is yet to be published. The indicative findings are that generally, higher education does procure a higher income however; it is still undefined as to the extent of its impact and whether it improves the quality of living for the individuals concerned. For instance, a study carried out by O'Neil (1995) indicates that there is a strong relationship between higher education and higher income which compounds the view held by De Gregorio and Lee (2002) who state that higher education went some way to reducing income inequalities. Many of the studies I researched were interested in looking at different countries as an independent variable including Blaug (2001) who in a study of thirty countries found that the correlation between higher education and higher income was three-fold: economic, sociological and psychological – all of which led to a strong relationship between the two. However, it is clear that

the despite numerous studies, the main gap in findings is the extent to which higher education improves an individual's earning prospects and this would be my central focus. My study would preoccupy itself with filling this gap by focusing on the extent to which higher education would improve the potential to attain higher earnings.

In doing this, my study would cover various avenues of discussion including why certain countries indicate a higher chance of achieving a higher level of education and whether a higher chance of earning is a product of this (for example - asking why the USA is considered to be wealthier than India and is this dependent upon their ability to produce strong graduates?). My study would also address different subject areas and whether they would produce a greater chance of entering into a career path that generally allows for a higher earning potential. My research would aim to envelop the entire relationship between higher education and higher earning potential by addressing the various variables that are concurrent with such discussion. This methodology would be carried out via a survey which would enable me to ask all the pertinent questions as well as allowing for privacy and confidentiality in the study.

Mode of Observation

The mode of observation which I feel would best suit my research is an online survey which would enable me to attain strong, quantifiable data. This method has been used in prior studies and so I feel that it is a strong choice for my study too. I will do this by using Survey Monkey as it will save money in the long run (Babbie, 2010, p313). I feel that this methodology is

ultimately a lot less intrusive than other methods as the individual members of my sample could complete the survey under their own steam, in private and could take time to consider their answers more carefully. The method would involve a comprehensive survey asking a range of questions that consider a number of variables. At the heart of the questions would be a focus that would allow me to draw a strong, quantifiable conclusion concerning the extent to which higher education enhances the individual's income.

The survey's questions will need to be worded very specifically in order to procure the highest quality of data. For example:

1. What is your highest level of education

- a. High School
- b. College
- c. Undergraduate degree
- d. Master's degree
- e. PhD/other post-doctorate course.

2. How much were you earning on your 30th birthday?

- a. \$0-5, 000
- b. \$5, 000 - 15, 000
- c. \$15, 000 - 25, 000
- d. \$25, 000 - 35, 000
- e. \$35, 000 - 45, 000
- f. \$45, 000 - 55, 000
- g. \$55, 000 +

These two example questions demonstrate the importance of requiring specifically phrased questions which allow for a strong set of quantifiable data as a result. These, along with other questions such as:

3. If you attended college or university, which subject area did you major in?
4. Did you major lead you to working in a certain professional field?
5. How often have you received a pay rise?
6. Would you be able to do your job without your qualifications?

These types of targeted questions will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of how education impacts upon income. Through asking these questions, I will endeavour to fill the gap in current research which explores the extent to which higher education improves the individual's earning capacity. Whilst many have discussed its impact, my aim is to ask more probing questions which will allow me to elaborate on previous studies and enhance the understanding of just how much education impacts upon income.

The method of a survey is one which would best meet the requirements of my research because ultimately, my central concern would be a quantifiable variable and the study's aim would be to draw a conclusion which clearly demonstrates the individual's income verses their level of education (Babbie, 2010, p351). A survey is best for this because I would receive a strong set of findings which are focused entirely on fixed responses rather than allowing for qualitative responses which do not hold any bearing over my eventual aims. A survey would produce strong, quantifiable results which would allow me to designate clear cut correlations.

The strengths of a survey are, as discussed, its ability to produce clear definable and quantifiable results as opposed to producing reams of information which may or may not be relevant to my research. Also, a survey is an excellent way of gathering information from a large number of people with relatively little effort - surveys can be carried out through the post or electronically meaning that I would be able to focus my efforts on analysing data. However, a weakness of surveys is that the responses given by people may not always entirely reflect their true feelings on any given matter. This causes surveys to have a slightly air of artificiality as the questions are very prescribed and so, individuals may answer the questions based on a 'best fit' response rather than with any great degree of accuracy. However, for the purpose of this research, I do not feel like this is a major problem as I would be looking to gain a broad overview of the matter and the specifics that would ultimately define my research's findings can be worded in a way as to provide the subject with a wide range of potential answers - allowing for a greater level of accuracy and consequently reducing its inaccuracy greatly. Also, a survey may not be able to be undertaken by someone who is unable to read and write for themselves (Babbie, 2010, p304) but as it would be an online survey and the focus is aimed at educated people, I don't think this will be a problem. Ultimately, a survey is the best option as I could make it as comprehensive or vague as I choose.

Sample

The central focus of my research is the extent to which higher education impacts upon higher income earnings, therefore, I am less interested in

aspects such as gender and nationality. However, to give my research further depth of conclusiveness, I would still assess nationality, gender and degree major too as I feel that this would help to provide further correlation possibilities (someone who completed a master's degree in Business earns more than someone with a master's degree in English Literature, for example). Therefore, in order to do this, I would require a broad sample of people from a variety of backgrounds in order to gain a strongly representative sample (Babbie, 2010, p480) and I would endeavour to do this in conjunction with various schools, colleges and universities who would be willing to engage alumni and current students in the study.

I would contact a total of 2000 people on the basis that around 1500 (or rather, a strong majority) would respond positively. This number would allow me to gain a strong basis for my findings and would offer me plenty of rich data to analyse. In order to gain the best possible spectrum of people (with regard to their educational background and income), I would use a stratified sampling technique which would allow me to break my sample into categories and select individuals for each category (Babbie, 2010, p231). To my mind, this sample type would allow me to achieve better, more varied results. As previously discussed, I would take my sampling frame from schools, colleges and universities willing to allow me to do so - by doing this I would be able to create a strong sample with definite variables who have experienced different levels of education. The sample's population would consist of adults over the age of 30 meaning that regardless of their level of education, they would have had a chance to find work and establish a

regular income. To eliminate a bias towards age, the individuals would be asked to state what their income is/was at age 30; this is because a 30 year old and a 55 year old are likely to have significantly different incomes simply due to years of professional experience which means that their educational background becomes somewhat irrelevant.

Variables

This research would consist of a number of variables – some dependent but most would be independent. The dependent variables would be what I am measuring: the level of education the individual has achieved, the amount of income they were earning as of their 30th birthday, and I would also look for correlations between subjects and countries too in order to produce the optimum result of how to attain the greatest amount of income. My reasons for choosing the age of 30 are that by that age, the vast majority of people have attended university and have begun to engage with their professional lives. By choosing the 30th birthday, it will allow me to get a fair sweep of incomes, regardless of age. However, should this prove ineffective, I could also carry out a survey asking for people to establish what their income was by the 40th and/or their 50th birthdays as well – in the hope that this would help to further elaborate results. Sometimes, the effects of education can take time to manifest and in truth, if I am required to carry out the survey with some older participants, this could enhance my research by adding a further dimension which addresses how long it takes education to impact upon income also.

My study's independent variables are still concerned with education and income and as such, I will inquire about their major as well as their career path (see example survey questions) and as I am keen to keep my results as fair and as accurate as possible, I will be independently measuring their age too as I want all participants to be over the age of 30 (and potentially over the age of 40 and/or 50 should the occasion arise).

These variables were conceptualised through an understanding of what the research would require knowing and I did this particularly through assessing the various studies discussed in my literature review. Most notably, Card (1999) who drew comparisons between the earnings of twins - from this, I established that it would be important to review socioeconomic background as a factor and this was also established by the study carried out by Baum & Ma (2007) who found that individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds had less chance of attending higher education; also, Van de Worfforst (2011) who assessed whether different countries had more in place to motivate young people to attend university or not which led me to understand that assessing location in line with income and education was also important. They have been operationalized through taking the main variables which are of the greatest importance and applying them to a survey which would help me to quantify my results and thus removing the ambiguity which surrounds them.

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