

Education in informal settlements



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Poverty is a constant sensitive subject in almost all developing countries within the world. Thus, education plays a vital role in alleviating poverty. The importance to investigate whether the different levels of education or literacy may alleviate poverty is necessary. When it comes to informal settlements and adult education provision the classes and structured programmes on offer is of high priority, although informal settlements do not often benefit from this.

As Samuel Barnett once wrote of Toynbee Hall (Barnett 1898: p. 20) "(It) seems to be a centre of education, a mission, a polytechnic, another example of philanthropic machinery; it is really a club and the various activities have their root and their life in the individuality of its members."

Despite the changes made to South African education since 1994, there are many challenges still being experienced within the educational system. Of which are the challenges experienced by learners whose backgrounds are that of poverty, of that in particular those who dwell in informal settlements. Founded on the principle of human rights, inclusive education aims to provide quality education to all South Africans, equally. In order to do this a process of addressing the diversity of the learners is of great importance, in order to reduce exclusion from education. With the ever changing education climate, there is limited research within the education and informal settlement sector. The activities of informal settlements and social action centres are often unnoticed when it comes to organised adult education. Informal settlements are constrained by the unmotivated conformity and narrow concerns of policy analysts and policymakers.

This research project will look at the life of informal settlements and social action centres in terms of education. The 'life' of informal settlements is based on a diversity of relationships within the informal settlements, the NGOs and governments. Material has been gained from informal settlement reports as well as publications, and a general review of the literature.

Education in Informal Settlements; A Closer Look

Introduction

Poverty is a multidimensional occurrence, which encompasses the incapability to satisfy one's basic needs, this is due to the lack of control over education and skills, resources, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, little or no access to clean water and sanitation, violence and crime, vulnerability to shocks (Chaudhry et al. 2010, p. 136).

Not only is poverty multidimensional, but the causes of poverty are also; as there is not a single one cause that can explain poverty fully. There are a number of factors that relate to poverty; including the economic, psychological, physical and socio-cultural. Some of these factors can be linked to an inability to participate in democratic processes and behavioural inadequacies aggravated by low levels of literacy and education (Chaudhry et al. 2010, p. 136). Education is seen as the most prominent and important factor which draws the line between the poor and the non-poor. Education has been placed on a high pedestal in the theories of economic growth, as it constitutes a part of human freedom and human capability (Chaudhry et al. 2010, p. 136).

Most of today's densely populated informal settlements are placed in an area which has a fragile ecosystem. This poses risk due to the poor design of building structures, inappropriate land use which leads to degraded environments (Na. 2006). Research on policies highlights a number of weaknesses that portray the failure of adequately address the spatial and socio-economic space, and sustain the growth of these informal settlements (Charlton 2001).

A stronger economic growth over the last decades what can be attributed to the success South Africa has achieved. In turn thus gives power to the minority groups through higher levels of employment and the tax revenues (Turok 2011).

Studies have shown that at least 10 percent of South Africa's 44 million people live in urban informal settlements, of which the population of informal settlements are over 4. 4 million (Misselhorn 2010). These living conditions are generally poor, as the residents face challenges such as solid waste accumulation, poor access to basic sanitation and water supply, recurrent shack fires, a range of health hazards, safety and security risks.

Looking at Adult Education

A basic education does not only incorporate people younger than 20, but also those who did not have the courtesy of an education when they were in their youth. Merriam and Brockett describe adult education as the “ activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults”

(1997: p. 8). There are many debates about how to define ‘ adult education’.

There have been 5 perspectives suggested:

Adult education has been shaped by key activities of organisations, for example the Workers Educational Association (WEA).

Adult education involves a relationship of which involves the conscious effort on behalf of the person to learn a skill.

An emphasis on training for a skill, this view encompasses “ the way in which adults are encouraged to learn and aided in that learning is the single most significant ingredient of adult education as a profession” (Courtney 1989: p. 20).

Adult education is seen as a quality that emerges through activities such as that of unionism, political parties and social movements (e. g. the women’s movement and anti-colonial movements) (Lovett 1988).

It is argue that adult education is does not prepare people for life, but rather helping them to live successively and sustainably (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982: p. 9).

The Nature of an Adult Education in Informal Settlements

With in adult education, education is viewed as a means for life, rather than a means for a living (Pimlott 1935, pp. 142 and 143). The question is could Trevelyan’s description (in Yeaxlee 1925, p. 157) of the process at the Working Men’s College in London as ‘ friends educating each other’ be applied to the education processes within informal settlements.

Experience

Experience is central to the way informal settlements operate and thus will affect their educational approach. Thus it is important to change their experience by opening up and widening experience, deepening the understanding of and encouraging the residents to not be constrained by history, especially that of apartheid.

The Range of Settings

As education is not fixed by location, the work of educators can take place anywhere and not necessarily only in the informal settlements. NGOs may offer buildings in order to give a chance for residents within informal settlements to have both more formal teaching and the sorts of social setting that creates an environment for conversation; this could lead to an increase in committed community members to teach development and social action. This will create an everyday atmosphere of ‘grabbing the given opportunity’, so that they may engage with each other.

Liberal programmes

John Wallis (1996, p. ix) has summarised liberal education involving:

A set curriculum, which incorporates studies that concern the well being of men and/or women.

Social studies and those aspects of other areas, such as family planning and farming, that looks to people as social beings.

Change the mind set of informal settlement residents.

Democratic notions, concerning equality of educational and opportunity.

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Analysing Case Studies

Describing Informal Settlements

Informal settlements may cause problems for local authorities and policy makers, but it could also be said that they play an important effective role in providing the urban poor with a cost effective living environment. The underlying socio-economic causes of informal settlements have to be recognised and more effectively addressed, creating more emphasis on education, economic growth, and the appropriate skills development (Misselhorn 2010).

Education within South Africa

The most urgent development priorities within South Africa are the creation of solutions to the dual crises between education and employment. The New Growth Path strategy document launched in the latter half of 2010 identifies this as central challenges. With the difficulty in global growth and the economic contraction within the developed North, job creation has become even more challenging and complex for countries that are situated in the South (Nyoka 2011).

By the end of October 2011 South Africa's official unemployment rate stood at 25. 0 per cent, while the more expanded rate (including discouraged job-seekers) was calculated to be 36. 0 per cent (Statistics South Africa 2011).

These figures can be observed through the recorded levels of economic inactivity, of which includes South African home-makers and students of whom are unable to work due to age, disability, or due to giving up on searching for a job because of the economic situation within South Africa.

With this in mind, 45. 4 per cent of South Africans have been economically

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inactive during the third quarter of 2011. Of which the lowest rate is aged between 25-54 (27.5 per cent), followed by 55-64 year olds (59.5 per cent), and is the highest among 15-24 year olds (74.7 per cent), keeping in mind that the economic inactivity rates among the youth/students are higher due to enrolment at secondary schools or tertiary institutions (Stats SA 2011).

Thus a workforce that is both educated and skilled is necessary for the long-term development goal of South Africa.

Case Study 1 Analysis: Does Education Alleviate Poverty? Empirical Evidence from Pakistan by Chaudhry, Malik, ul Hassan, Faridi (2010)

Poverty is most commonly based on incomes or consumption levels, each country's line is appropriate to the level of development, societal norms and values of that specific country. Thus one can consider a person to be poor if their consumption or income level falls below the minimum level (poverty line) necessary to meet basic needs within their country or at a global level. Basic needs of people and/or communities vary across time and the various societies, thus creating a variety and a definition in time and place (Chaudhry et al. 2010).

This case study was based on Pakistan's population, which was estimated as living below the poverty line in 2004. After which the government at that time adopted a different strategy which then produced more favourable figures of the population subsisting below the poverty line, allowing the government to claim that poverty had declined due to sound economic policies that had been pursued by the government. Although, there was no

substantial data obtained through household surveys or other internationally recognized methods (Chaudhry et al. 2010).

Due to the increase in unemployment after the economic crisis had erupted, a draft policy was created. This policy did not recognise the link between poverty alleviation and education; rather it proposed to convey technical and vocational education at the high school level. To quote from the document “ courses at the secondary and higher secondary level shall be reviewed with a view to making them more relevant to the needs of the labour market in order to better prepare those students not going on to further studies.” (Chaudhry et al. 2010). Although, there is an entire chapter that is devoted to technical and vocational education, there remains an unrecognised gap between education and poverty (Chaudhry et al. 2010).

The policy did not deal with poverty head on. It failed to recognise that even though women contribute a greater amount to the economy, they are poorer than men. It is the woman that perform all domestic duties (e. g. carrying water long distances, growing all the food and caring for younger children and the aged), all whilst holding down a job which may incorporate hard labour (which affected their health) and often received less pay than men. Although these woman receive the heavier work load, many of them have not gone to school. Education for women has been constrained by culture and religious taboos (Chaudhry et al. 2010).

This policy did not recognise that education can be used as a powerful tool for building capacity, empowerment and capability to challenge inequalities. This policy should have incorporated a revamped education system which

will provide and produce knowledgeable, productive, skilful, and creative individuals (Chaudhry et al. 2010).

Case Study 2 Analysis: Settlements and Adult Education by Smith (1999)

This case study takes a look at the early stages of concerns of settlers which are found in many of the adult education practice within settlements and social action centres today. Some of the factors that were pointed out were that of the residents of the informal settlements struggle to either to find work or finance their work. This has been due to the lack of attention given to the development of theory and communities. There is no creation of a demand for informal or formal education within the settlements, thus there cannot be community development nor neighbourhood renewal (Smith 1999).

Smith (1999) stated that “ The educative power of association in itself, and the contribution to democracy it holds has not been worked through in most settlements and centres.” Reports show that residents within informal settlements rather learn from first hand experiences, but there are no dominant rolls (especially that of the educators within the communities) that are being identified. Rather informal settlements show conformity and narrow minded concerns, especially when it comes to the policymakers and policy analysts who hold the power (Smith 1999).

Case Study 3 Analysis: Experiences of learners from informal settlements by Pillay (2006)

This article describes the experience of which learners from informal settlements in Lenasia experience. The target group for this case study were <https://assignbuster.com/education-in-informal-settlements/>

the Grade 8 learners from the Thembelihle and Hospital Hill informal settlements in Lenasia. The case study covered the basis of a qualitative research method rather than that of a quantitative. The analysis of the data collected showed that learners experience a variety of negative feelings, as they had been misunderstood by the educators as well as their peers. Issues of racial discrimination, bullying and ganging-up were presented. Although these negative feelings were present, the learners felt privileged to be in schools with quality education. There was a difficulty in studying when learners were at the informal settlements. Furthermore unemployment and poverty played a role in furthering the disempowerment that the students felt. There had been several recommendations put forward in order to create an ecosystemic intervention for the learners, this included the roles of government, community, and schools which would help to create an empowerment within the learners (Pillay 2006).

Conclusion

Despite the changes made to South African education since 1994, there are many challenges still being experienced within the educational system. Of which are the challenges experienced by learners whose backgrounds are that of poverty, of that in particular those who dwell in informal settlements. Founded on the principle of human rights, inclusive education aims to provide quality education to all South Africans, equally. In order to do this a process of addressing the diversity of the learners is of great importance, in order to reduce exclusion from education.

There is need for a clearly focused national informal settlement development programme, of which will represent an alternative response to create

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tangible development benefits to many informal settlement residents. This could help bridge the gap that exists between the poor and the non-poor, creating a better life for those who are less fortunate.

“ A rapid upfront evaluation of all informal settlements should be undertaken at municipal and area levels in order to ensure that appropriate developmental responses are made that are informed by a basic understanding of the status quo, including the developmental constraints” (Misselhorn 2010).

The activities of informal settlements and social action centres are often unnoticed when it comes to organised adult education. Informal settlements are constrained by the unmotivated conformity and narrow concerns of policy analysts and policymakers. Thus, the following has been proposed in order to bridge the gap: a set curriculum, which incorporates studies that concern the well being of men and/or women. Social studies and those aspects of other areas, such as family planning and farming, that looks to people as social beings. Change the mind set of informal settlement residents. Finally, the democratic notions which concern the equality of education and opportunity.