

Ad-hoc Question: ‘Educational Poverty – Background and Assessment’

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The aim of this review is to provide background information on the use of the term ‘educational poverty’ in the existing literature. The analysis proceeds as follows. First, an overview of the use of the term in an historical perspective is presented. Second, the use of the term in economics, in the economics of education literature as well as in policy-oriented research is examined. Last, an overall appraisal and concluding remarks are provided.

‘Educational Poverty’ in an Historical Perspective

The earliest mention of the use of the term ‘educational poverty’ that we were able to track goes back to the 1800s. Figure 1 presents the timeline of the use of ‘educational poverty’ as cited in publications recorded by Google Scholar over 1800 – 2016.¹ It is possible to observe that the use of the term has increased over time. Only five publications used this term in the 19th century, 191 in the 20th century, and 665 so far in the 21st century. Over 1900-1999, the largest increase in the use of the term was recorded in the last quarter when the use of the term was twice as large as in the previous years of the century. The increase in the use of the term has been even larger in the 2000s. By comparing the use of

¹ It is important to notice that the search was limited to the use of the term in the English language. Given the timeframe and the resources available to the Authors it was not possible to carry out archival research beyond the consultation of specific historical sources.

the term over 2000-2016 to the use of the term over 1975-1999 we observe a 5.78-fold increase. The 2010-2016 saw the largest use of the term, as cited in 380 publications.

It is possible to observe an evolution of the use of the phrase ‘educational poverty’, from an arbitrary term in the 1800s to a relatively more refined term by the end of the 1900s, to a more clearly defined term complemented by attempts to systematically measure it in the 2000s. The term ‘educational poverty’ was used for the first time in an academic paper in 1870. The paper titled ‘Inquiry into the Existing State of Education in Richmond, Twickenham, Mortlake, and Neighbourhood’ by T. Paynter Allen was published in the *Journal of the Society of Arts*. It is important to notice however, that in this early study the term was cited only once while referring to the fact that the English town of Richmond used to be a favourite resort of ‘royalty and fashion’ who were often ‘ignorant of the *educational poverty* that surrounds them’ (p. i). There was no attempt in this earlier study to describe the term and provide more details on the threshold of educational poverty referred to. This was similar to the early studies of the 20th century. There was neither a definition of the term ‘educational poverty’, nor a discussion related to its measurement, or some figures to illustrate it.

This seemed to change in the early 1980s when the term ‘educational poverty’ started being more clearly defined. Allen and Anzalone (1981) provide one of the first attempts in this direction by introducing the concept of an *educational poverty line* which they defined as the minimum amount of education each individual has the right to be endowed with. Efforts to complement the definition of ‘educational poverty’ with an explicit threshold to define poverty started in the 1990s. For example, Balkwell (1990) describes educational poverty as the percentage of 18 to 24 years old-individuals who are not high school graduates. On the other hand, Khusro (1999) in his book ‘The Poverty of Nations’, covers different dimensions of poverty and considers education as one of them. He raises some issues related to the definition itself, “...one can define educational poverty in absolute or proportionate terms and set up a minimum qualification such as a high school certificate or

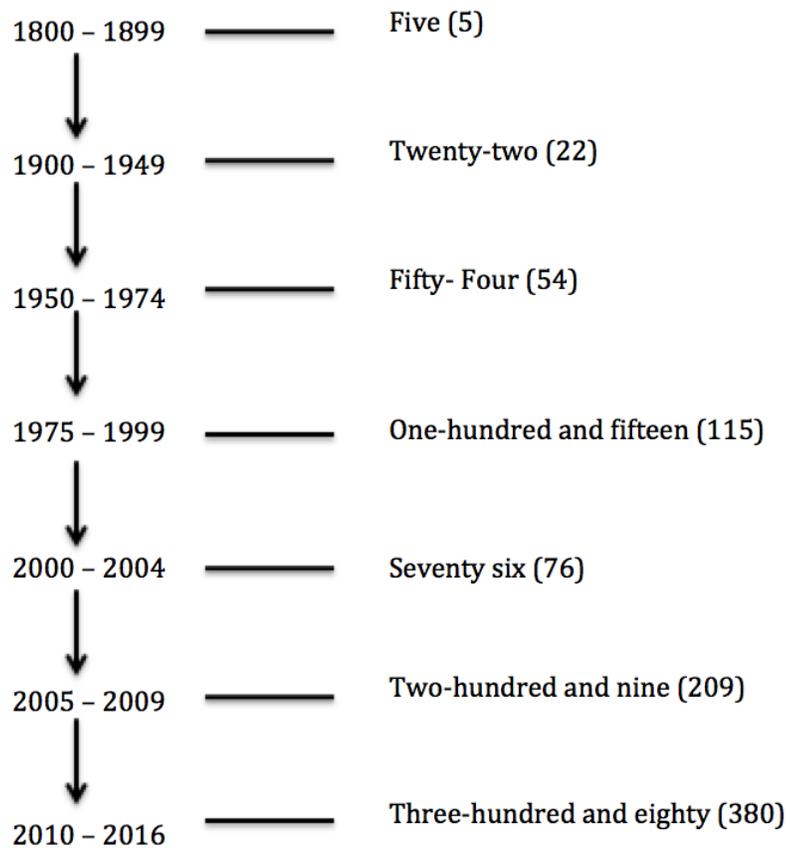
a degree certificate (p. 51)”, and presents a discussion over educational indicators underlying the definition.

The early 2000s started seeing a more explicit focus on measurement issues and an increase in the use of the term ‘educational poverty’ in non-academic publications, such as policy reports, blog articles and other publications of international organizations. In spite of some attempts to provide a measurement tool, it is noteworthy that presently, unlike for other broadly defined development or socio-economic outcomes (e.g., human development index, corruption index etc.), there is no specific index developed by any international organization to measure ‘educational poverty’. Antonio Villar (2016) in his paper “Educational Poverty as a Welfare Loss: Low Performance in the OECD According to PISA 2012” attempts to measure ‘educational poverty’ by constructing a poverty index derived from an explicit welfare evaluation function, and by applying this method to measure educational poverty in the OECD countries that participated to the most recent wave available of the PISA survey. There have been also recent attempts to draw a distinction between poverty related to the ‘quantity’ vs. the ‘quality’ of education. This followed the increased availability of individual-level data related to skill proficiency. For example, Allmendinger and von den Driesch (2014), Allmendinger and Leibfried (2003) in their extensive discussion over the measurement of ‘educational poverty’ compare two possible definitions of ‘educational poverty’, one based on years of schooling or degree attained, the other one based on competences regarded as actual learning outcomes.

The geographical use of the term seems to have been historically limited to developed countries both in terms of source of the publication and focus of the study. This assessment should be taken with caution however given the possible bias associated with the method used. That is, the background search was carried out by relying on the English language, and on published material. Overall, in more recent years, the usage of the term has been heterogeneous in a geographical context. It has been used while referring to low educational achievement in developing countries, and recently it has become more common in the European framework, also with several news articles mentioning

educational poverty posing a threat in countries like Italy² and Germany³. There seems to be no convergence towards the use of a specific definition and measurement tool. In the articles examined there is virtually no cross-reference to other studies focusing on ‘educational poverty’, and there is no reference to the definition of the term as used in other publications.

Figure 1 – Timeline for the number of papers that cite the term “Educational Poverty” as recorded in Google Scholar, 1800 - 2016



² http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/15/c_134623847.htm

³ <http://www.dw.com/en/industry-study-gives-german-education-failing-grade/a-2068682>

‘Educational Poverty’ in Economics, in the Economics of Education Literature and in Policy-oriented Research

The term ‘educational poverty’ has not been used extensively in economics. Table 1 shows that it has not been used in any of the top 10 international peer-reviewed journals since these journals were established (or as far back as the search engine allowed us to go in some cases⁴). This appears to be also true if we focus on the leading journals in different fields of economics. These include journals such as the *Journal of International Economics* in international economics, the *Journal of Public Economics* in public economics, the *Journal of Health Economics* in health economics, and the *Journal of Development Economics* in development economics. The table with the complete list of the top-field journals and citations of ‘educational poverty’ is available from the Authors upon request.

Table 1 - Summary Statistics⁵ for the usage of the term “Educational Poverty” in top 10 economics journals⁶.

Journal Ranking	Journal Name	Time Frame⁷	Number of Citations	Article
1	The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Oxford University Press	1886 –2016	0	-
2	Journal of Political Economy, University of Chicago Press	1867-2016	0	-
3	Econometrica, Econometric Society	All Dates ⁸	0	-
4	Journal of Economic Literature, American Economic Association	All Dates ⁹	0	-

⁴ This is clarified in Table 1 and in the related notes.

⁵ The search for citations of the term was conducted by inserting the phrase “educational poverty” under the search parameter ‘Specify Authors, Key Words - Text | Abstract | Title’

⁶ The top 10 Economics journals are based on IDEAS/RePEc Aggregate Rankings for Journals.

⁷ The Search parameters for the time frame was left open ended (no limitations) to cover the oldest to the newest publications – this varied from journal to journal

⁸ The online version does not specify the oldest issue available, however since the journal was established in 1933, it is safe to assume ‘All Dates’ parameter covers all the periods up until the present.

⁹ The online version does not specify the oldest issue available, however since the journal was established in 1963, it is safe to assume ‘All Dates’ parameter covers all the periods up until the present.

5	Journal of Economic Growth, Springer	1996-2016	0	-
6	Journal of Financial Economics, Elsevier	1974-2016	0	-
7	Journal of Finance, American Finance Association	All Dates ¹⁰	0	-
8	Review of Economic Studies, Oxford University Press	1933-2016	0	-
9	Review of Financial Studies, Society for Financial Studies	1988-2016	0	-
10	Journal of Monetary Economics, Elsevier	1975-2016	0	-

We then broadened our scope and extended our search beyond the top-ranked journals in economics. We observed some recent citations in journals related to the following two fields: ‘development economics’ and ‘inequality’. Table 2 presents the list of articles using the phrase ‘educational poverty’ in leading journals related to these two fields. Among these studies, two are country-specific empirical analyses in developing countries. Baulch and Masset (2003) include ‘educational poverty’ in the category of non-monetary poverty and define it in terms of enrollment status as “out of school status of two cohorts of primary and lower secondary school age children”. You and Annim (2014) introduce the concept of ‘educational poverty trap’ in the context of rural China without explicitly defining it. On the other hand, Bourguignon and Chakravarty (2003) provide a tool to take into account the multi-dimensionality nature of poverty and define the threshold as the end of primary school and ‘educational poverty’ “as the number of years of schooling short of that level” (p. 43).

¹⁰ The online version does not specify the oldest issue available, however since the journal was established in 1946, it is safe to assume ‘All Dates’ parameter covers all the periods up until the present.

Table 2 - Summary Statistics for the usage of the term “ Educational Poverty” in leading¹¹ economics journals for the fields of Development and Inequality

Journal Name	Time Frame	Number of Citations	Article
Journal of Development Economics, Elsevier	1974-2016	0	-
World Development, Elsevier	1973-2016	1	1. Baulch, Bob, and Edoardo Masset. "Do monetary and nonmonetary indicators tell the same story about chronic poverty? A study of Vietnam in the 1990s." <i>World development</i> 31.3 (2003): 441-453.
The Journal of Economic Inequality	2003-2016	1	1. Bourguignon, Francois, and Satya R. Chakravarty. "The measurement of multidimensional poverty." <i>The Journal of Economic Inequality</i> 1.1 (2003): 25-49.
Journal of Development Studies, Taylor & Francis Journals	1964-2016	1	1. You, Jing, and Samuel Annim. "The impact of microcredit on child education: quasi-experimental evidence from rural China." <i>Journal of Development Studies</i> 50.7 (2014): 926-948.
Economic Development and Cultural Change, University of Chicago Press	1952-2015	0	-

We then examined the use of the term ‘educational poverty’ in broadly defined journals in the field of the ‘economics of education’. It is important to notice that also in the leading journals in this field the term ‘educational poverty’ has not been used as shown in Table 3. Among the articles citing it, Miron et al. (1991) present an historical overview of the U.S. court cases related to urban school finance and some background information to the court decisions that led to the adoption of the concept of the ‘minimally adequate’ education.

¹¹ The field journals have been selected from within the subset of journals in the field and corroborated with the IDEAS/RePEc Aggregate Rankings for Journals.

Table 3 - Summary Statistics¹² for the usage of the term “ Educational Poverty” in top 15 economics of education journals¹³.

Journal Ranking	Journal Name	Time Frame¹⁴	Number of Citations	Article
1	Economics of Education Review, Elsevier	1981-2016	0	-
2	Education Economics, Taylor & Francis Journals	1969-2016	0	-
3	The Journal of Economic Education, Taylor & Francis Journals	1969-2016	0	-
4	International Review of Economic Education, Economics Network, University of Bristol	2003-2016	0	-
5	Educational Studies, Higher School of Economics	2004-2016	0	-
6	Higher Education Management and Policy, OECD Publishing	1998-2016	0	-
7	International Journal of Education Economics and Development, Inderscience	2009-2016	0	-

¹² The search for citations of the term was conducted by inserting the phrase “educational poverty” under the search parameter ‘Specify Authors, Key Words - Text | Abstract | Title’

¹³ The top journals has been selected from within the subset of journals in the field and corroborated with the IDEAS/RePEc Aggregate Rankings for Journals

¹⁴ The Search parameters for the time frame was left open ended (no limitations) to cover the oldest to the newest publications – this varied from journal to journal

8	Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics,	1976-2016	0	-	
9	International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education	2009-2016	0	-	
10	International Journal of Educational Development, Elsevier	1981-2016	2		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mackenzie, Pam. "Literacy, culture, and development: Becoming literate in Morocco: Daniel A. Wagner, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, ISBN 0 521 39813 4 (paper),, 367 pp." (1997): 356 [book review] 2. Tilak, Jandhyala BG. "Post-elementary education, poverty and development in India." <i>International Journal of Educational Development</i> 27.4 (2007): 435-445.
11	Journal of Education for Sustainable Development,	2007-2016	0	-	
12	The Journal of Educational Research, Taylor & Francis Journals	1920-2016	0	-	
13	Educational Researcher	1972-2016	1		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ornstein, Allan C. "Educational poverty in the midst of educational abundance: Status and policy implications of teacher supply/demand." <i>Educational Researcher</i> 5.4 (1976): 13-16.
14	Journal of Education Policy, Taylor & Francis Journals	1986-2016	2		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grace, Gerald. "Education and poverty in affluent countries." <i>Journal of Education Policy</i> 26.6 (2011): 855-857. [book review] 2. Miron, Louis F., Patricia F. First, and Robert K. Wimpelberg. "12 Equity, adequacy and educational need: the courts and urban school finance." <i>Journal of Education Policy</i> 6.5 (1991): 181-191.
15	Handbook of the Economics of Education	2006-2016	0	-	

Several international organizations and NGOs have begun to tackle the concept of ‘educational poverty’ in their policy briefs and publications. To the best of our knowledge, one of the earliest reports to mention the term was a development communication report in 1980 - “The Elusive Goal of World Literacy”¹⁵ by the Agency of International Development. The focus of the report was on comparing literacy indicators across countries and discussing international education campaigns. The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) acknowledged public awareness over the fundamental role of education in poverty reduction, and in fostering development and growth. The more recently introduced Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also set targets related to the access to free, equitable, quality primary and secondary education, as well as to quality early childhood development. It is not possible to state whether this had a ‘causal impact’ on the increased supply of international reports but clearly the term of ‘educational poverty’ has recently been used in the case of several developing countries such as Brazil, India, Nepal, China, Vietnam, Nigeria – with the aim of studying the multidimensional aspects of poverty in a development context. In this regard, among other agencies, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) published an Africa Brief¹⁶ in 2011 about reducing exclusion and educational poverty through innovation. In the European context, two 2015 reports of the European Commission focus on the concept of ‘educational poverty’ tackling it as one of the Europe 2020 headline targets.

Appraisal and Concluding Remarks

Three facts were established in the framework of this review. First, there is no systematic use of the term ‘educational poverty’ in economics and in the field of the economics of the education. Only a limited number of publications in non-top-ranked journals used it. Second, the relatively recent increase in the number of publications using the term ‘educational poverty’ is partly explained by the growing use in policy-oriented and

¹⁵ <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED190058.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/deza/en/documents/publikationen/briefing-papers/africa-brief-1-2011_EN.pdf

development research. The rise seems to have been faster after the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals, and again after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. Third, in the publications that use the term ‘educational poverty’ there is great variation in terms of definition adopted and there seems to be no convergence over time towards a unique definition. It is important to acknowledge that the lack of a systematic use of the term ‘educational poverty’ in the economics of education does not imply a lack of focus on issues related to inequality in education and skills, or low educational achievement (e.g., the EENEE Analytical Report No. 21 provides a recent and comprehensive review of the literature on inequality in educational outcomes). This may be partly related to the multidimensionality of educational achievement, the challenge of defining and measuring it with a single indicator, and setting a consistent threshold of ‘poverty’ in different countries and heterogeneous contexts. Overall, there seems to be some scope for using the term ‘educational poverty’ in a more systematic way in the scientific and policy fields. However, it seems that the issues raised above will have to be addressed for it to become a conventional term and widely used development indicator in the future.

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