
Development as Improved Life Chances: Education for Improved Life Chances

Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and
Humanities

2 (2) 1–12

©2019 Kardan University

Kardan Publications

Kabul, Afghanistan

[DOI:10.31841/KJSSH.2021.26](https://doi.org/10.31841/KJSSH.2021.26)

<https://kardan.edu.af/Research/CurrentIssue.aspx?j=KJSSH>

Parveen Roy

Abstract

Commonly held assumptions about the relationship between education and development are changing due to the shift in our understanding about the notion of development and also due to the economic, political, cultural and social transformation of our societies. The notion of development, merely to economic growth now encompasses the concept of enlarging human choices, freedoms and improved life chances. As the concept of development expands, the relationship between education and development also changes. This paper looks at the major changes in the notion of development, the changing relationships between education and development and discusses the contemporary theories of development and the role of education in enlarging people's choices and improving their life chances.

Keywords: Education, Development, Life Chances

Introduction

Commonly held assumptions about the relationship between education and development are changing due to the shift in our understanding about the notion of development and also due to the economic, political, cultural and social transformation of our societies. The notion of development that in the postwar period was confined merely to economic growth now encompasses the concept of enlarging human choices, human freedoms, and improved life chances. Development of the global economy has removed some of the instrument used to control the economic destiny of nations. Political system of bureaucratic structure is now considered outmoded and is replaced by democratic system. The notion of common culture being the basis for maintaining social order is being challenged by multicultural education.

These changes in society have been variously described as a shift from industrial to postindustrial, modern to post-modern and resource-centered development to people-centered development. Literature that documents these various shifts provides rich insights about the fundamental nature of current social changes but is very thin on exploring the relationship between education and development (Lo, 1994). Except the literature from critical school that challenges the postulation of development and the contribution of education to it, the rest ask the common question of how education could facilitate the developmental processes particularly promoting the economic growth of societies. However, as the concept of development expands beyond the economic checklist to include issues such as enlarging people's choices and improving people's life chances the relationship between education and development also changes. There is now a growing recognition that education not only is an important indicator of the well-being of a society (Giroux, 2002), but also plays a fundamental role in expanding people's choice, freedoms and life chances (Sen, 1992; Wilmore, 2004).

To understand the shifts in the notion of development and to see the changing relationships between education and development, this paper looks at the major changes in the notion of development and the history of relationships between education and development in the postwar period. It also discusses the contemporary theories of development and the role of education in enlarging people's choices and improving their life chances.

2 The Notion of Development

Several important frameworks of thought about the notion of development have emerged in the past several decades. After the World

War II, with the recognition of the unequal level of development of national economies by the western community, two radically opposed theoretical schools, the modernizers and the dependencia, have been interpreting 'development', offering different development strategies. Although, these frameworks were interpreted as the convergence of different disciplines (such as history, sociology, technology), the role of one discipline (economics) was dominant (Halsey, 2002). Modernizers saw development as a matter of 'creative imitation' (Trputec, 2006): how to create an economic and technological system in underdeveloped countries, similar and 'efficient' as the ones in developed countries and how to transfer norms and values of the modern societies to the traditional societies for their economic transformation and growth. They did not recognize the complex relations in economic sphere and the power inequality between (and within) societies and nations. They considered the interdependence between the nations as a positive and even indispensable characteristic if development is to be achieved and proposed for the elimination of state established barriers to the flows of physical and financial capital, as well as of technology and knowledge.

The dependency theorists also saw the world composed of interdependent economies and nations, but asymmetrically related as center and periphery, center dominating periphery whose economic (and even social) processes depend upon the center (or centers). They considered development and underdevelopment as a product of the center-periphery relations. Opposite to the modernizers' strategic recipes, the dependency theorists proposed imports substitution industrialization strategy and de-linking from the capitalist world system. In spite of these differences between the two theoretical currents the analysis of their explicit and implicit assumptions leads to the conclusion that their paradigmatic base contains many similarities. First, they emphasize economic growth as fundamental condition of development; second, they concentrate their attention on macro aggregates (national income, investments, economic surplus etc.); and third, individual human being is not their central unit of concern. Mentioning individual human beings and the care about their wellbeing is only a derivation of successful economic growth and prosperity.

In the eighties both approaches changed their unit of analysis. The dependency theorists experienced some evident failures of import substitution industrialization, and success in the economic growth, of some 'dependent' Asian countries. This put an end to the belief that dependence and development are incompatible, and that the only guarantee of

development is the highest possible autonomy from the world economic system. Modernizers also lost faith in a universal application and imposition of 'develop-control' strategy due to the various political, social and military events in the seventies, such as the loss of the Vietnam War by the USA, and the resistance of the Muslim world to the western civilizing project, (Slater 1998, p.3).

2.1 Alternative Development Thinking: Human Development

In the nineties the Human Development Reports (HRDs) provided a channel for alternative development thinking. They redefined development and viewed economic growth as a means towards human development rather than human development as means for economic growth (ul Haq, 1998). They view development as a process of widening the range of human choices (HDR, 1996) and approach every issue from the lens to establish the preeminence of people in the process of development. They consistently take this view that economic growth is essential for human development, but to fully exploit the opportunities for improved wellbeing one needs to emphasis on investment in education, health and skills of the people, equitable distribution of income and assets, and empowerment of every individuals regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and class (Gasper, 2002).

This alternative notion of development goes far beyond the modernization and dependency theory in having both a wider scope and a sharper focus. On one hand, its scope is comprehensive, integrating major changes in socioeconomic structure, political culture, and regime institutions; on the other, it is sharply focused on the enlargement of human choice. Welzel, Inglehart and Klingemann, (2003) discuss three major components: socio-economic development, cultural change and democratization of human development. They argue that all these components have a common focus of i.e. broadening human choice. Socioeconomic development broadens people's choice by increasing their individual resources; cultural change gives rise to self-expression values that led people seek broader choices and democratization institutionalizes effective rights by giving human choice a legal basis.

However, there are growing debates on identifying the aspects of life that could qualify as a part of human development. Among the various efforts, the most popular are the two polar approaches: the subjective and the objective approach, which define human development on two extreme positions. As two distinctive conceptualizations and measures of human development, the former focuses exclusively on resources and objective

living conditions, while the later emphasizes the subjective well-being of individuals.

2.2 Measures of Human Development: Capability Approach

Capability Approach arose from the dissatisfaction with the subjective states and the objective measures of human development (Robeyens, 2005). It differs from the psychological approaches that concentrate on people's happiness or desire-fulfillment, as well as from development theories that concentrate on economic growth (Fukuda-Parr and Kumar 2003). Amartya Sen the exponent of CA argues that normative priority could not attach to a) satisfaction, because these subjective outcomes are too dependent on personality, acculturation, prior expectations and other framing factors; nor more general, to b) any other sort of outcome, because outcomes depend on how well people have used their opportunities; to c) any sort of input or means because their sufficiency and relevance varies according to the nature of the person concerned. Instead priority should be given to d) the effective freedoms which people have to achieve prioritized outcomes (Swift 2001; Gasper, 2002). This does not mean that mental states, such as happiness, and economic growth are unimportant, rather, it is the *exclusive* reliance on mental states and income which Sen criticizes (Gasper, 2002).

In capability approach, development is discussed in terms of people's capabilities to function (Swift 2001; Kymlicka, 2002). "Functioning's are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they *are different* aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead" (Sen 1987: 36). A person's functioning's and her/his capability are closely related but distinct. The capability approach does not consider the functioning's that a person has achieved as the ultimate normative measure rather it is concerned with people's real freedoms. Capability is thus closely related to the idea of opportunity (Roche, 2006) but this should not be understood in the limited traditional sense, but more as a notion of improved life chances, which includes the economic, political cultural and social opportunities.

By now, it is clear that the capability approach attaches great importance to people's choices and freedoms. This makes it likely to be 'opportunity-based' theory instead of 'outcome-based' theory. It concerns the question of how to measure opportunities instead of outcomes. However, it is much more difficult to measure the capability of a person rather than her/his realized functioning's. The reasons include: a), achieved

functioning's are observable, whereas the person's capabilities are unobservable; b), the capability set contains *potential* beings and doings, where it is not obvious how this set should be measured and evaluated. Thirdly, the transition from achieved functioning's to capabilities involves the process of choice, and the choice process itself should be evaluated if we want to use the capability approach to judge individual advantage or social arrangements (Gasper, 2002).

The concept of 'life chances' (Dahrendorf, 1979; Weber, 1978) is useful here, so long as it is recognized that they are not static but emanate from social processes. It is useful not only because it supplements the capability approach by operationalizing the capability set in economic, social, political and cultural terms, but it also emphasizes the co-constitution of self and society, through which action creates social structure just as social structure constrains, or opens up, possibilities for choice and, thereby, shapes action. Moreover, it adds a positive new agenda for development- to improve people's life chances.

3 The Concept Life Chances (LC)

Life chances can be understood as, in Giddens's terms, 'the chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural "goods" that typically exist in any given society' (1973, pp. 130-1) or, more simply, as the chances that individuals have of gaining access to scarce and valued outcomes (Gerth & Mills, 2005). The concept of life chances is associated with the study of the sociological issue of social stratification. The three traditions that have used the life chances approach are Marxists, Weberians and Bourdieu. Marxists associate the concept of life chances with the economic resources; Weberians also view it as the economic chances of people; however, they add the dimensions of status and party, which is then, interpreted as political and social chances of people. Bourdieu associates the concept of life chances to a variety of dimensions of capital, where capital is understood as multidimensional space of power conferring resources that shape both the opportunities and the dispositions of actions (Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu's approach in this way is comprehensive because he takes the Marxist focus on economic resources, but also incorporates the Weberian concept of social and cultural capital (Roche, 2006). Thus, life chances are considered not just economic but also cultural, political and social opportunities. This more comprehensive view of life chances relates well with both, the capability approach, and the components of Human Development forwarded by Welzel et al, (2003).

The life chances approach and capability approach are related because both look at opportunities and chances available to people to live the kind of life they value (Sen, 1999; Roche, 2006). The LCA supplements the CA by breaking down the fuzzy entity of capabilities into social, cultural, political and economic opportunities. Since CA is largely criticized for its individualistic approach, LCA can supplement it by adding the dimension of social groups to assess the level of inequality and poverty (Uphoff, 2003). Though originally used to assess a relatively specific issue of inequality (Wright, 2004) and poverty (Uphoff, 2003), this approach could also serve the purpose of measuring human development. However, it should not be understood merely as an analytical approach but also a new positive agenda for development.

The concept of life chances also corresponds with the components of Human Development proposed by Welzel and colleagues as it also focuses on social, economic, cultural and political aspects of human development, but it goes far beyond that. It looks at the deprived segments of the society such as social class, gender groups, ethnic groups to expose the inequalities and deprivations of these groups (Wright, 2004). It closely looks at the complex relation of agency and structure and emphasizes the role of agency to emancipate themselves from the deprivations (Giddens, 1973; Dahrendorf, 1979), which is ignored by most of the development and social theories.

Understanding development as improved life chances would require us to look back at some of the work of its exponents specially Bourdieu, Weber and Marx. Bourdieu highlighted the issue of unequal life chances in relations to material goods and symbolic relations by giving particular focus on education and its role in reproducing these unequal life chances. Weber also brought into light the power struggle and the brutalities of labor market. The concept of *conflict* and *alienation* forwarded by Marx were still the other way to expose the sufferings that human beings were (are still) experiencing. However, the two theorists (Bourdieu & Weber) were not concerned with transformation as such rather with allocation of people in different categories. It was Marx, and later, the Marxists who not only call into question the so called power hierarchies but also emphasized the notion of emancipation. The real development for them was (is) raising the consciousness of the deprived so that they could transform their world and move towards a more progressive and just society. All the three theorists in one way or the other advocate for a more equal society that offers equal life chances regardless of their social status and social class.

The other line of thought that supports this theme of development as improved life chances is the difference between what is and what would be. In my opinion the first notion, 'development as enlarging human choices' somehow relates to what is present, and the certain availability of choices (*certainty*), while the second notion 'development as improved life chances' relates to what may be available (probability) and would be available (future). Since development is about present as well as about future, considering the present only might not be helpful. It may further intensify the ecological issues that we are facing today. It may limit our approaches to address social issues such as inequalities, poverty, and security, merely to some quick fixes. It may also put blinkers on our thoughts to prepare ourselves for issues that might arise in the future. To avoid all these risks, we should work on both agendas of enlarging people's choices as well as improving people's life chances. Thus, improving lives of people by enlarging their choices, their present living standards and conditions, are important, but I think development is most significant in terms of what it does to people's life chances - their opportunities to live an acceptable decent life, to upward mobility, to raise their capabilities, to recognize their potentials. Hence, the ultimate goal of development is to enlarge people's choice and to improve people's life chances.

4 History of the Relationship between Education and Development

The Frarian perspective that *no process* (in general), *and no education* (in particular) *is neutral* is essentially true, because education process is conditioned by what education may have to mean as well as by development as it is seen to be (Lo, 1994). In the post war period, the hall mark of development as mentioned earlier was economic growth. Education, then, was seen as a key instrument in the promotion of economic growth. This was premised on two widely held assumptions: a) economic efficiency depends on getting the most talented people into the most important and technically demanding jobs; and b) education opportunities needed to be extended, given that the vast majority jobs were predicted to become increasingly skilled, requiring extensive periods of formal schooling (Halsey, 2002). Consequently, efforts were made to extend the education system to perform their role of providing human for the expanding skilled occupations.

However, despite the expansion in the skilled occupation and maximum supply of the educated workforce, the underlying idea of modernization that selection for the most important and technically demanding jobs would purely depend on talent and merit were myths (Lo, 1994). Neither the unskilled labor works disappeared, nor did the privileges of the already privileged. The most important jobs were still dominated by

the people from affluent background (Wright, 2004); and even when intelligence was taken into account, social background still remained a significant factor in determining individual's life chances (Apple, 2002). In effect, the emergent occupational structure further widened and legitimated the gap between rich and poor by creating more room for the affluent (McLaren, 2002).

None of these comments are critical of the idea of education as an instrument for economic growth. As Bowls and Gintis (1976) mentioned, 'no sophisticated theory of education can ignore its contribution to economic development'. They simply reflect a mistrust of the formal models of education implanted into our societies. The establishment of modern school equated education with schooling as was development equated with economic growth (Rao and Reddy, 2004). The rapid expansion of these schools became the hub of fixing education, sorting out students and locating them to various roles in society and position of control in the economic and social structures shaped by the modernization process (Halsey, 1997).

4.1 Alternative Education for Alternative Development

In 1990s when the concern for human well-being became the agenda of development, thoughts about education and its role has also started changing. Though it has not yet reached its maturity, but there is a growing realization that education does not mean preparing the young generation only for their economic roles. As the agenda of enlarging people's choices and improving people's life chances have become the thought of the day, the intrinsic importance, the instrumental social role, the instrumental process role, the empowering and distribution role of education have started emerging on the globe of the academia (Sen, 1999). The identification of education with schooling, selection and certification, at the expense of the wider domains of society and of life has started making its way to consider education as a life-long process.

Education as a life-long process has some distinguishing characteristics. First, it covers a much wider domain in human condition than schooling. Second, it is expressed in a variety of societal organisms and institutions. The school is only one of these institutions: home, neighborhood, and community, societal associations, all serve the learning needs of the participants of all ages. Third, it is acquired not only by written word but also through the oral, the visual and the contemplative means of learning.

Education as schooling is not necessarily antithetical to this view of the education process as long as it is remembered that schooling is a segment

in its own right, and this role will continue in the foreseen future. The antithesis arises when what is a segment abrogates the whole of which it is a part. When that happens, learning becomes rote, the regimen of taxonomic objectives, and the dispensation of the teacher. The learning process gets displaced by the hidden agenda of slugging, selection and rejection.

5 Implications and Conclusion

The development process with a human focus is seen as permeated by, and inextricably bound up with the education process (Sen, 1999). This permits me to repeat my main argument, that development with a human focus means nothing less than enlarging people's choices and improving people's life chances - development which is directly aimed at addressing inequality, massive mitigation of poverty, deprivation and lack of work. Education in such a scenario does not end with preparing individuals for their economic roles but moves forward by defining the lineaments of a learning society. This thesis has certain implications for our education system as well as for our development policies.

First of all, our education system is increasingly becoming restrictive and structured. This tendency moves education away from reality and life. The focus on exams reinforces formalism instead of learning. Secondly, the link-up of education and human focus development involves a new approach to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Education has to address directly the learning needs and learning styles of the deprived ones. Not the pursuit of exam results but the realization of the potential of the learners in their specific situation, participatory learning in the community, re-invigorating the diversified learning webs, exposing the distortions and false clues that macro educational planning has imposed on the education process. These need to be the focal points of educational change in order to link the educational process to human development. Thirdly, learning about development should be an essential part of the education process. Development needs to be the subject of learning in the network of community and neighborhood learning groups. It should not be treated as a subject handed out to the "taught" but an experience of awakening awareness in the learners.

References

- Apple, M. (2002). Is the new technology part of the solution or part of the problem in Education? In A. Darder, M. Baltodano and R. D. Torres (eds.). *The critical pedagogy Reader* (pp. 119-125). London: Routledge Flamer.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *The forms of Capital*. In A. H. Halsey, H., Lauder, P. Brown, & A. S. Wells, (eds.). *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bowles, S., & Ginitis, H. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.
- D. L. Levinson, P. W. Cookson, and A. R. Sadovnik. (2002). *Education and sociology: An encyclopedia*. London: Routledge Flamer.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko, and A.K. Shiva Kumar (2003) *Readings in Human Development*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gasper, D. 2002 Is Sen's capability approach an adequate basis for considering human development? *Review of Political Economy* 14(4): 435-461.
- Gerth, H. and C. W. Mills. (2004) From Max Weber. In E. O. Wright, (ed.). *If Class is the question, what is the Answer? Six approaches to class analysis*. (edt.), New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1973). *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Giroux, H. A. (2002). *Education incorporated?* In A. Darder, M. Baltodano and R. D. Torres (eds.). *The critical pedagogy Reader* (pp. 119-125). London: Routledge Flamer.
- Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P. & Wells, A. S. (1997). *Education: culture, economy, and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2002) *Contemporary political philosophy, an introduction*. London: Oxford, University Press.
- Lanzi, D. (2004). Capabilities, human capital and education. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on the Capabilities Approach, Pavia.
- Lo, L. N, (1994). Development and Education: Reflection on a contentious field of inquiry. *CUHK Education Journal*, 21(2), pp. 205-216.
- McLaren, P. (2002). Critical pedagogy: A look and the major concepts. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano and R. D. Torres (eds.). *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (pp. 119-125). London: Routledge Flamer.
- Robeyns, I. (2005). The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1): 93-117.
- Roche, J. M. (2006). Capability and life chances: An assessment of two analytical traditions. *Paper presentated at the 2006 Annual conference of the Human Development and Capability Assoiication, Groningen, The Netherlands, 29th August – 1st September*.
- Sachs, W (1993). *The Development Dictionary*. London: Zed Books.
- Sen, A. (1992), *Inequality reexamined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Slater, D (1998). Post-colonial questions for global times. *Review of International Political Economy*, 5 (4), pp. 647-678.
- Swift, A. (2001) *Political Philosophy. A Beginner's Guide for Students and Politicians*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Trputec, Z. (2006). *The Concept of Human Sustainable Development and Economic Development: Some original contributions*. Retrieved on 12/06/2007, from <http://english.ecorys.nl/dm>
- Ul Haq, M. (1989). *The Human Development Paradigm*: London: Oxford University Press.
- Uphoff, N. (2003). *Poverty and inequality: A life chances perspective*. Retrieved on 05/05/2007, from www.pubpol.duke.edu/.
- Welzel, C., Inglehart, R. & Klingemann H. D. (2003). The theory of human development: A cross-cultural analysis. *European Journal of Political Research* 42, pp. 341-379.
- Willmore, L. (2004). *Basic education as a human right*. *IEA Economic Affairs*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp 17-21.
- Wright, E. O. (2005). *If Class is the Question, what is the Answer? Six approaches to class analysis*. (edt.), New York: Cambridge University Press.