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Review

An article critique on "Economics of quality education and paths leading into and out of quality education: Evidence from Debre Markos University, Ethiopia"

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It is evident that providing quality education can lead to economic improvement as a result of cultivating productive human power. This article critique focus on a study conducted on economics of quality education and paths leading in to and out of quality education. In so doing, the issue raised is found important and timely to develop insights in the academic terrain desipte some critical technical problems are observed in the article. The economy of quality education which seems the big issue in the title gets less emphasis rather the study highly relies on the identification of factors into and out of quality education. However, the author raised the issue of employability (economic factor) as one factor he didn't magnify where, how, why and in what way, by whom this critical issue can be resolved from the perspective of economics of education. To this end, it is suggested that educators, researchers, and any interested body could conduct a large scale study to bring fruitful insights for such crucial issues and to address problmes identified in this critique.

Key words: Article critique, Economics of Education, Quality education

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INTRODUCTION

The well-known writer in the economics of education Psacharopoulos (1987: xv) explained that "human capital is formed by education and training and renders its productive activities mainly through the labor market". He also noted that educated manpower is one of the most crucial inputs in the economy of any country either developed or developing, where there is frequently a shortage of physical capital, the availability of skilled manpower may be particularly important. Much has been done to explore the connection between education and economic growth (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2010; Rolleston, 2014) as well as the need for skills and knowledge for employment or mismatch between education and wage (Bauer, 2000; Robst, 2007; Nordan, Persson & Rooth, 2010) and on the return effects of education (Monks, 2000; Long, 2010). Most findings ensured that quality education is important over other factors to create individual and institutional development.

This article critique intends to comment on the contributions and insights forwarded to the scientific knowledge of the world concerning the economics of quality education and factors leading to success or failure through education in the labor market. The critique is made based on some scientific guidelines/standards of article writing (abstracting, introduction, sampling, and method selection, analysis techniques, reporting results,

making conclusions, forwarding relevant and feasible recommendations). Moreover, problem clarification, conceptual justifications, as well as structural and important mechanics issues, are considered in writing this critique.

An article titled “Economics of quality education and paths leading into and out of quality education: Evidence from Debre Markos University, Ethiopia” is written by Tsegaye Molla. The author wanted to identify viable paths into and out of quality education and as a result, he aimed to indicate the return of quality education from the perspective of the economics of education. A cross-sectional survey design was employed and data were collected from 150 students selected using multistage sampling. Factor analysis and path analysis were employed to identify considered factors for the variation in academic performance and to identify statistically significant paths leading into and out of quality education, respectively.

Accordingly, the author reported that labor market demand, student’s learning-attitude, communication skill, curriculum, teaching method, and learning facility are statistically significant factors, together explaining 74% of the variation in the academic performance of students. Besides, the path analysis result indicated that the availability of learning facilities and macroeconomic situations is statistically significant. Based on the results obtained the author forwarded some policy implications for future improvement. However, the author produced some useful insights on the role of quality education for future employment there are problems of inconsistencies, clarifications, relationships between findings and recommended ideas, responses to the aim of the study, sampling and generalizations or suggested implications.

Critique

Molla Tsegaye, the author of the article is from the Department of Agricultural Economics, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Debre Markos University, Debre Markos, Ethiopia. There is no clearly stated bibliography and research interest regarding the author, but by default, the author seems interested to search for solutions related to the recent serious problems of quality education. The author argued that the substantial investments to human capital development determine the economic development of nations and the economic differences among nations emanate from variations of the investment for their human capital development. To that effect, the author underscored that paths into and out of quality education are determinant factors to address the very aim of education.

However, the author stated his argument in such a way that he failed to support his idea with sufficient evidence except mentioning few (e.g. Single reports cited from World Bank & UNDP). As far as there are debates against the assumption of whether education is a leading instrument for economic growth per se or not, the author should search for some contradictory or supporting views. For example in an article titled “Addressing the education puzzle: The distribution of education and economic reform” by Lopez, Thomas and Wang (1998: 2), stated that:

No country has achieved sustained economic development without substantial investment in human capital. Previous studies have shown the handsome returns to various forms of human capital accumulation: basic education, research, training, learning-by-doing, and capacity-building. Yet history also tells us that education by itself does not guarantee successful development. Examples include the former Soviet Bloc, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal. The real question, then, is when and how education can bring high payoffs. While theories suggested a strong causal link from education to growth, the empirical evidence has not been unanimous and conclusive.

An abstract is a significant part of an article where summarized, short and relevant information (purpose/objective, method and design, population, samples and sampling techniques, major findings, and selected implications/recommendations) (Neuman, 2014) can be stated succinctly. In this regard, the author explained the purpose, research design, data analysis technique, selected findings, and policy implications. It is possible to say the author did almost expected. However, the stated results seem self-interests and expressions emanated from the needs of the author rather than based on critical findings.

In the introduction of the article relevant literature (but only a few, WB & UNDP) are cited concerning the need for quality education in the production of human capital particularly focusing on the Ethiopian context. The author noted that the country’s (Ethiopia) Human Development Index is currently a challenge that calls for substantial investment in human capital development. The author also mentioned that to achieve the aimed Millennium Development Goals and to ensure sustainable development of the country providing quality education is not only necessary but obligatory. To that effect, higher education institutions are the main sites to produce the required human power with compatible skills in line with the labor market demand. The introduction is concluded by stating the aim of the study that “This study aimed to identify feasible paths for higher education institutions to attain quality education”.

According to (Kothari, 2004; Cargill and O’Connor, 2009), a compelling introduction should contain statements about the area of the research to provide the reader with a setting or context for the problem to be

investigated and to claim its centrality or importance. It should also specifically explain the problem of precisely supporting evidence. Statements that indicate the need for more investigation, creating a gap, or research niche for the present study to fill are necessary. In this regard, there is a lack of clearly showing the specific problem the author wanted to study in the selected study site. The background is general, the gap to be addressed in the study is not well identified, and even the title of the article (the problem statement) is not well articulated and magnified. Succinctly presenting the conflicting data, knowledge gaps, or uncertainties (Kadhiravan & Thabah, 2017) is a critical problem of the introduction section.

According to Cargill and O'Connor (2009), the method provides the information needed for another competent scientist to repeat the work. So that it needs clarity for better understanding. Moreover, the goal of the methods section is that it establishes credibility for the results and should, therefore, provide enough information about how the work was done for readers to evaluate the results. Referees are likely to look in this section for evidence to answer the question: Do the methods and the treatment of results conform to acceptable scientific standards?

In the method section, the author described sample size, sampling technique, research design, and method of data analysis. It was reported that the study guided by a cross-sectional survey design taking 150 students from the college of agriculture selected using purposive sampling (the college) and multi-stage sampling technique (departments and students) in the study site. The questionnaire was the main instrument to collect data and the data collected were analyzed using factor analysis (which is not clearly stated) and regression analysis (regressing perceived student's academic performance). The author also expressed the general regression equation used for the factors considered in the analysis procedure. And he also reported that the pilot test was conducted by taking students from other departments.

The author tried to include most of the necessary components of a method section in an article (Bhat, Kumar & Rao, 2017) but still, there is a problem of clarification (eg. The reason why he took the only college of agriculture students as a sample, why he used the only questionnaire, and how many factors were included in the first collection of data and why factor loading/ exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis (Guar & Guar, 2009) is chosen over others are some to mention. Besides the inclusion of mathematical formulae unnecessarily and later ignoring without applying in the study are some comments in the method section. The pilot test conducted is also vague and skeptical.

The author reported his findings in two ways. The first one is related to the pathways leading into and out of quality education using factor analysis. And the second one is the path analysis regression that identifies the statistically significant components (factors) predicting academic performance. On the identification of the major factors, the author reported that seven factors explain 74% of variations of the students' academic performances. Of these seven factors, labor market problem and employability are the external components explaining the variation in academic performance in which the former explains the largest (more than 19%). The other six factors identified were Entrepreneurial motive, Learning facilities, School environment, Student personality, Curriculum, and Family background.

Similarly, the author reported the result obtained using path regression analysis to identify predictors of academic performance. As it is explained the labor market is negatively and significantly determine students' motive towards better academic performance. A learning facility is also a statistically significant variable that has a positive influence on the academic performance of students signifying adequate provision of required facilities. Besides, curriculum reform will significantly improve students' academic results than either alone strategy signifying the need for policy synergy.

However, the author reported the results obtained there are some critiques on the ways he presented the result of the study. As mentioned earlier, the author did not mention how many factors were considered to run the factor analysis. Any reader cannot understand easily except those who know factor analysis (i.e. 21 factors were considered looking at the analysis results but not mentioned anywhere in the article). Besides in the method section, a regression equation is given which is not used to explain the results. It is better to express the regression equation using the obtained results (i.e $AP = a + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + b_4 X_4 + e$). This regression equation must be expressed in the form of the following which is neglected by the author of this article.

AP (Y) =0.547+ -1.353(LM) +1.511 (EM) + 0.864(LF) +0.293(SE) + 0.190(SP) +0.117(C) +-1.38 (FB) + e (for academic performance without interaction effect) and

AP (Y) =0.487+ -1.403(LM) +547 (EM) + 0.817(LF) +0.270(SE) + 0.168(SP) +0.140(C) +-1.106 (FB) + 1.153(LF) + e (for academic performance with interaction effect)

Note: AP= Academic Performance; LM= Labor Market; EM= Entrepreneurial Motive; LF= Learning Facilities; SE=School Environment; SP= Student Personality; C= Curriculum; and FB= Family Background

This is a better way to report the regression result. Simply putting complex formulae is not useful except creating misunderstanding for readers. The author concluded that labor market situations and employability are external factors that largely jeopardize student's motives for better academic performance followed by adequate learning facilities. Even internal forces have a conditional effect on quality education as they are driven by external forces altogether, to guarantee the better academic performance of students. But the conclusion made by the author seems his justification rather than based on the findings drown out of the study. Some are visionary that can be proved after a long time. For example future, unemployment or employment is considered as a motive for students' academic performance. In reality, most of the students might not think of their employment while they are in schools. Thus, the conclusions made need further investigation. The conclusion should be the final paragraph, which provides a well-thought-out, take-home message for the reader (Aghai & Carola, 2017).

Finally, the author forwarded policy recommendations. He recommended that for production of quality labor from huge education investment, identified paths leading into and out of quality education should be relieved with more focus on external and internal forces exacerbating the learning morale of students. Accordingly, suggestions are forwarded to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED), employers, Higher Education Institutions/Ministry of Education to take part in the improvement of employment policies and quality education.

Here serious problems are observed. Most of the recommended ideas are out of the scope of the study. Data were collected solely from students of a single college so that how the author able to forward such comprehensive recommendations. Without knowing ideas from employers, teachers, policy implementers, and students from different departments it might be fictitious to forward such fabricated recommendations. Concerning concluding a study Ramesh and Ananthakrishnan (2017), explained that authors should avoid presenting general statements that are not emerging from the research study as a conclusion. Sometimes depending upon the results, the authors may recommend future work to be done in the area and provide the way forward.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude the critique, it is possible to say that the author raised a relevant issue which is a serious agenda particularly in this alarming time about problems of quality education. Although few kinds of literature argue against the assumption "education is the only tool for economic development" most of the research findings and experiences from different countries assure the need for human capital development for everlasting and sustainable development together with physical resources. To that effect conducting studies (such as this article) to identify hindering factors in the provision of quality education is more than necessary. But, this study didn't address what was aimed at the outset.

The economy of quality education which seems the big issue in the title gets less emphasis rather the study highly relies on the identification of factors into and out of quality education. However, the author raised the issue of employability (economic factor) as one factor he didn't magnify where, how, why and in what way, by whom this critical issue can be resolved from the perspective of economics of education. To this end, I would like to suggest that educators, researchers, and any interested body could conduct a large scale study to bring fruitful insights for such crucial issues.

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