Author's Note

This paper was produced from a thesis completed at Kenyatta University, and appreciation is expressed to the many contributors. The study was also conducted within the framework of the Cambridge University-Kenyatta University collaborative study, RECOUP.

Abstract

A widely-held belief is that education affects people's economic status by facilitating access to the labour market and raising their earnings. This paper explores the linkage between education and its labour market outcomes for young persons with physical disabilities in the context of poverty. Specifically, the paper analyses the strength of education as an enabler of access to job markets, and how this varies at different exit points in the education system. Data were collected from Nyeri District in Kenya, from a total of 30 participants in 2 different sites (urban and rural). The study utilized the qualitative interview, while the data were analysed using Atlas.ti. The analysis establishes that education levels notwithstanding, young persons with physical disabilities are evidently closed out of the skilled and formal labour markets. It concludes that disability and poverty interact to create a string of inhibitions to job markets, and that any high level of schooling needs to be coupled with strategies that break this cycle.

Keywords: Labour Market Outcomes; Education; Employment; Poverty; Persons with Physical Disabilities; Kenya.
Understanding Disability in Poverty Context

There is accumulated evidence to suggest that being born in poverty increases the likelihood of being born with an impairment, and the probability of becoming impaired and then disabled (Singal, 2007). Poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being a consequence of the other, with disability limiting access to education and employment, and mostly leading to economic and social exclusion (DFID, 2000). While poverty is not simply the consequence of a lack of resources, some people are unable to access existing resources because of who they are, what they believe in or where they live (DFID, 2000 in Yeo, 2001). Yeo (2001), states that persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience discrimination from birth or from the onset of disability. In communities living in poverty, PWDs may be discriminated further. Additional argument is that PWDs who survive are at a huge disadvantage as they grow up, when they have been excluded from formal and informal education. This has an impact on qualifications, experience, levels of confidence and self-esteem, thus leading to restricted employment opportunities due to discrimination, lack of education, experience and confidence. As Yeo argues, these exclusions from mainstream social economic and political opportunities throughout their lives make them fall further into chronic poverty and have little opportunities to come out of this cycle (Yeo, 2001).

Persons with physical disabilities have physical limitations that interfere with school attendance or learning to such an extent that special services, training, equipment, materials or facilities are required (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997). They may have congenital anomalies or may acquire disabilities through accidents or diseases after birth. The American Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) refers to physical disabilities as orthopaedic impairments. Special educators and special education agencies also refer to students with severe and multiple disabilities, other health impairments and traumatic brain injury as having physical disabilities (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, Smith, & Leal, 2002). Physical disabilities include conditions such as traumatic brain injury, neurological impairments, musculoskeletal conditions, and conditions affecting health or physical ability (Hallahan & Kauffman 1997).

Physical disabilities vary widely in reported prevalence figures depending on the specific condition. For example, the United Cerebral Palsy Association (2004) reports that 764,000 children and adults in the United States have cerebral palsy with approximately 8,000 and 1,300 preschool-age children being diagnosed with it each year. The Spina Bifida Association of America (2004) estimates that one out of every 1000 new-borns in the United States are reported to have Spina Bifida (Gargiulo, 2006). In Kenya, the overall disability rate is estimated to be 4.6%, which translates to 1.6 million people living with disability. Of this, the largest proportion is those with physical disabilities with a prevalent rate of 1.6% or 554,440 people (GoK, 2008).

Education, Physical Disability and Access to Economic Opportunities in Context

Historically, education for students with physically disabilities evolved from a medical model, which was health-based. Because of this, little attention was given to long-term needs, of the
children with physical disabilities, including the right to education (Meyer & Skrtic, 1995, cited in Nyamoki, 2008). A report by the Commission of Inquiry into Education System in Kenya (GoK, 1999) noted that special primary and secondary schools were required for the physically disabled enrolled learners with a view of registering them for Kenya National Examinations. These national examinations are designed to lead to subsequent entry into colleges and universities. Turnbull et al (2002) argue that curricular goals for persons with physical disabilities depend on each student's individual needs and they should aim at enhancing functional ability, increasing communication, and enhancing capability in attending to daily living skills, maintaining the best physical health possible and achieving self-determination (Geyer et al., 1998, cited in Turnbull et al., 2002). These goals are expected to ultimately lead to outcomes related to equal opportunities, independence, inclusion and productivity. Students with physical disabilities have need for curriculum and instruction which entails different components, some of which may be absent from the regular school (Bigge, 1991). However, disability is known to limit access to education and employment, often consequently leading to economic and social exclusion (DFID, 2000). Singal (2007;2008) argues that persons with disabilities (PWD) generally, are more likely to be prevented from becoming economically active, not because of the inherent quality of their condition, but more because of the discrimination and societal perceptions that they are likely to encounter related to their impairment. Unlike other graduates, young persons with physical disabilities in particular, encounter additional challenge in obtaining and retaining positions in the workplace (Bigge, 1991).

At the family level, poverty seems to aggravate the situation for persons with physical or other disabilities, particularly with regard to schooling and employment. A person who has physical disabilities and who comes from a poor family is likely to be left out in favour of other able-bodied siblings. Further, parents who live in poverty may lack the means to support the education of a child with physical disability due to the cost of items such as mobility and other assistive devices. Consequently, poor people with disabilities may get caught up in a vicious circle of poverty and disability; and often suffer economic and social exclusion (DFID, 2000).

With education being constructed as a means of eradicating poverty and a tool for enabling individuals to develop necessary skills for various jobs in the labour market, this study explored the extents to which education influenced access to labour market for young persons with physical disabilities in one poor rural site and one poor urban site in Nyeri Central District.

**Conceptual framework**

Human capital theory suggests that education or training raises the productivity of workers by imparting useful knowledge and skills, hence raising workers’ future income by increasing their lifetime earnings (Becker, 1964 in Xiao1999). The concept of “human capital” recognizes that quality of employees can be improved by investing in educating them and that the education, experience and abilities of an employee have an economic value for employers and the economy as a whole. Schultz invented the term in 1960s to reflect the value of human capacities and believed that human capital, as with any other type of investment, could be nurtured through education and training and result in enhanced benefits that would lead to an improvement in the quality and level of education. It is assumed therefore, that meaningful accumulation of
human capital, achieved through education, ought to accord individuals a competitive edge in accessing labour markets. This applies to persons with disabilities as well. A direct relationship is assumed, where persons with lower levels of education may experience certain barriers, especially in accessing the formal job markets, while persons with higher levels of education, access increased opportunities for economic engagement.

**Study Methodology**

This study utilized the narrative research design, in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on multiple meanings of individual experiences that are socially or historically constructed (Creswell, 2003). Purposive sampling was applied to identify one rural site (in Kiganjo location) and one urban site (in Mukaro location), on the basis of comparative material poverty. Snowball sampling was used to identify 18 young persons with physical disabilities (aged 14 to 30 years) and their significant others (9 in total). Only four (4) of the young persons with disabilities were female. Head teachers of three public primary schools with integrated disability units also participated in the study. An interview guide was used to collect data, complemented by observation and field notes. Data were transcribed and analysed following the thematic analysis approach, aided by Atlas.ti.

**Education and Access to Labour Market: Critical Skills**

This study sought to establish the role education played in facilitating access to the labour market. Arguments have been raised, that such a relationship does exist. Fasih (2008) argues that education and relevant skills are a necessary condition for good labour market outcomes for individuals, while Hanushek (2005) contends that formal schooling is one of the several important contributions to skills of an individual and to human capital. Hanushek further argues that basic literacy and numeracy skills matter greatly to people’s economic outcomes, whether through indirect effect of occupational sorting or a direct effect on earnings.

In our study, young persons with disabilities agreed with Fasih’s and Hanushek’s position, observing that education should help one to acquire skills relevant to the employment of their choice. The young persons underlined literacy and vocational skills as most useful in facilitating this link. All the young persons expressed that among other things, schooling should help one acquire basic literacy skills. While moral education should be acquired at home through informal education, the school must adequately transmit literacy skills as a facilitator of accessing job markets, as one participant expressed:

...schooling will help one know how to read, and get employment...have learnt most things on my own though my parents used to tell me what is wrong and what is right [Female participant with no formal education, urban site, 2010].

Emphasizing the functions of literacy skills in real life, one parent opined that
it is important to take persons with disabilities to school because there are so many things that they learn. For example, a disabled person will be able to calculate his money when he get employed. He will also be able to read the signposts and know where to alight when using public vehicles... [Mother, rural site, 2010].

Besides the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, vocational skills were rated as a critical component of education. The young persons with disabilities saw the worth of self-employment, in the context of high unemployment. Stressing this, one (male) young person stated that education helps PWDs in self-employment, and that vocational courses such as carpentry, mechanic and tailoring should be offered to them.

**Perceptions of the outcomes of education and relation to labour**

The young persons with physical disabilities and their parents had various expectations of what education should do for them. One key highlighted outcome was that education should help persons with disabilities to enjoy a better life, in terms of higher standards of well-being.

Analysing this, one head teacher put it:

"...one, it's a better life, they cannot make it there without education, then may be knowledgeable therefore using the knowledge you can be able to derive skills - super skills that are not to the side of the handicapped... [Head teacher, Nyaribo, 2010].

Better living standards are achievable through access to employment, with the expectation that the more education persons with disabilities have, the better salaries they can earn. One parent stated:

...education is important because it helps people in daily activities. Someone who has education, if in employment, will earn a better salary than one who has none. The two can never be the same... [Mother to a young male, Nyaribo].

But even more, education was expected to play a role in equalizing opportunity for persons with disabilities, in attaining a meaningful level of independence, in and outside the labour markets, thus:

...when they go through school life, and may be succeed in examination and the like, they have equal opportunities, employment opportunities like any other normal person and such, they can earn a living and can support themselves. ... Another issue is that having gone through school, even if they don't go to an extent of...being employed and the like, they can be able to...to live on their own...[Head teacher in a primary school in Kiganjo, 2010].

From the responses on the expectations of education, or what education should do for persons with physical disabilities, three levels of outcomes emerge. At the basic level is that fundamentally, schooling and education should equip persons with disabilities with three sets
of skills: basic literacy and numeracy skills, vocational skills and skills for independent living. These skills should then directly lead to social independence, economic independence and ultimately, equalized opportunity for them. In the end, the person with disability should enjoy better living, like every other person without disability. The figure below summarizes these levels of outcomes.

This conceptual framework of the outcomes of education for persons with disabilities concurs with the views of Jonsson and Wiman (2001) that education not only makes a difference in everyone's life, but it makes much greater difference in the lives of children with disabilities. The finding further agrees with Fasih (2008), who argued that education and relevant skills are a necessary condition for good labour market outcomes for individuals.

**Education and Labour Market Outcomes for Persons with Physical Disabilities**

It is widely believed that education affects people’s economic status by raising their earnings in the labour market. This may be by improving access to employment, conditions on employment or by promoting entry into higher-paying occupations or industries. Fasih (2008) argues that both quality and quantity of education determine the economic impact of a particular level of education in labour market. It has also been argued that quality education and training contribute significantly to economic growth, better employment opportunities and expansion of income-generating opportunities (GoK, 2004). However, disability limits access to education and employment, and leads to economic and social exclusion. Singal (2007; 2008), observes that persons with disabilities are more likely to be prevented from becoming economically active, not because of the inherent quality of their condition, but more because of the discrimination and societal perceptions that they are likely to encounter related to their impairment. Further, Yeo (2001), states that PWDs experience discrimination from birth or from the onset of disability and that in communities living in poverty, PWDs may be discriminated further. An additional argument is that PWDs who survive are at a huge disadvantage as they grow up if they have been excluded from formal and informal education. This has an impact on qualifications, experiences, levels of confidence and self-esteem. This leads to restricted employment opportunities due to discrimination, lack of education, experience and confidence. As Yeo states, these exclusions
from mainstream social economic and political opportunities throughout their lives make them fall further into chronic poverty and have little chance of breaking out of this cycle (Yeo, 2001).

Most considerations of the economic aspects of education have concentrated on school attainment or the quantity of education (Hanushek, 2005). According to Hanushek, it is commonly presumed that formal schooling is one of several important contributions to skills of an individual and to human capital. Other contributors include parents, individual abilities and friends. In addition, the human capital of the population, which is enhanced by a strong education system, enters directly and indirectly into economic growth. Education has the possibility of making both the individual receiving it and others better off (Hanushek, 2005). Further argument is that basic literacy and numeracy skills matter greatly to people's economic outcomes, whether through indirect effect of occupational sorting or a direct effect on earnings. For example, in studies conducted in Ghana and Pakistan, wage employment and self-employment are much better remunerated occupations than agriculture. Individuals who can read and write are therefore, much less likely to work in agriculture in both countries (Fasih, 2008). Additional evidence exists, that cognitive skills have large economic effects on individual earnings and on national growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007, in Fasih, 2008) and that workers' productivity depends both on years of education and what is learned at school (Heckman, Layne, Farran and Todd, 1995; and Murnane, Willet & Levy, 1995, cited in Fasih, 2008).

Nyamoki (2008), in her study *Relevance of Vocational Training for Persons with Orthopaedic Disabilities in Kenya*, notes that there is a positive relationship between the courses done and employment as 86.4 per cent of employed graduates in the study had jobs or ran businesses related to their training.

There is clear evidence that individuals with more skills have higher productivity and earn more than those without (Hanushek, 2005). According to Fasih (2008), education is an important catalyst for improving the livelihood of individuals, with evidence showing positive returns to education in various sectors of the economy. Kingdom and Soderbom (2008), contend that there is a strong belief that education affects people's economic status by raising their earnings in the labour market. Education may also raise earnings through a number of different channels, such as by improving access to employment or conditions in employment, or by promoting entry into higher paying occupations or industries. Nyamoki (2008) argues further that since the labour market requires individuals with skills which are acquired through training, then, training and labour market are closely related and as such, should have a formal link.

This study showed a positive return to education at all levels, but that the returns were higher for higher levels of education. Fasih (2008) points out that education affects people's economic status by raising their earnings in the labour market.

Participants of this study had varied perspectives on how education influences labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities. While some were of the view, that the options that education gives in labour should be equal for persons without disabilities, opinion was also
expressed, that disability significantly limits labour options. Expressing this viewpoint, one parent argued that:

...the only course I think my son can enrol in is teaching because he can sit and lecture. Teaching will not require much movement like other courses... [Parent, Nyaribo, 2010].

This view situates physical ability as a critical intermediary in the labour outcomes of education. Related to this finding, young persons with disability viewed mobility as having significant influence on the range of courses they can enrol in, and eventually the career options available for them. One young male person with disability was running a shoe-making enterprise, after exiting schooling at grade 7, and narrated:

...I find it (shoe making) the one fit for me because it is the one I trained in. I say this is my course, such that if I leave for any other business, including the phone selling business, I would want to have some premise where I sit and make/repair shoes... [Young male, Majengo, 2010].

Besides the direct link between the education outcomes (course and skills) and labour outcome (shoe-making), the respondent links these two with a mobility dimension – sitting. In another dimension, young persons with disabilities feel disadvantaged in accessing labour markets, even with the relevant training. Subsequently, structural intervention is viewed as an intermediary option between training and the world of work, as one young person expressed:

...I would want to get any work related to computers. I have done almost ten computer packages. These days we need to be computer literate. I was surprised to see that in the Lands Office everything is manual and only now are they introducing computers in the office. Because many people have now become computer literate, they can now offer us jobs especially those with disabilities... [Young male, Majengo, 2010].

Also one finding of this study is that training needed not be only formal training. Informal training could also make one acquire skills which would enable him to be in employment, whether formal or self-employment. One respondent who was working as a shoe-maker and who exited school at class seven said:

...I have not gone for any training but I may find you doing some work like shoe making or constructing something. I sit next to you and observe to see what you are doing. I start repairing shoes also as you direct me on how to do it. I am intelligent so I grasp what I have been taught. I may also go to another person who cuts and repairs keys and locks. I stay there with him. He trains me and we agree that I’ll be getting some money anytime I make a key... [Young male, Majengo, 2010].

These feelings had earlier been expressed by Fasih (2008), that formal schooling systems may not be the only channel for acquiring employment skills. Many workers acquire skills through apprenticeships in informal or traditional training systems. The skills apprentices acquire may or may not enable them to access higher skill and better remunerated employment opportunities.
Another young male from Kiganjo who had not trained in shoe-making expressed his desire to work as a shoe-maker and emphasized that this desire could only be fulfilled by training in shoe-making. These feelings of the young people that through training, they would be in gainful labour had earlier been expressed by Hanushek (2005), when he stated that there is clear evidence that individuals with more skills have higher productivity and earn more.

Though these youth reported to have some training in the type of work they were doing, it was clear that income from their employment was not enough and this made them engage in other income generating activities. Taking the case of the young man who had learnt shoe-making skills and key cutting, one would expect that with more than one skill, the income could be higher. Similarly, the young male who also had learnt the shoe-making skills was also engaged in other incoming-generating activities to supplement his income. This leaves one wondering whether the skills learnt were really helping the youth engage in activities that would pull them out of poverty. Also to note is that though these youth had some training in shoe-making, none of them reported having gone to school to learn the course. Skills were acquired through apprenticeship, and eventually they were able to move into their own businesses.

This may lead one to conclude that limited opportunities to education and training (low quantity of education) enabled the young persons to access only low-end labour markets, which subsequently presented low earnings. This inability to access optimal job opportunities was also observed by Bigge (1991). Further, Bigge argues that this exposure to a variety of roles starts to build knowledge and appreciation about the roles of work and workers in the society. Palmer further argues that socialization for youth with disabilities is usually built around medical environments and experiences which centre on relating to adults who include parents, doctors and nurses rather than their peers (Palmer, 1980).

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study, which concur with many other authors, present a range of expectations on what opportunities education should provide for persons with disabilities. Essentially, these expectations are not different, from the general expectations for persons without disabilities. Ultimately, education should lead to better standards of life. Both the quantity and quality of education matters in determining outcomes in the labour market; However, despite a young person achieving the three sets of skills seen as necessary for access to job markets (literacy/numeracy, vocational and independent living skills), it seems that disability still emerges as a strong intermediary factor in inhibiting access to labour markets. Consequently, a young person with disabilities, even with secondary education, remain largely closed out of the labour market, and seek jobs that suit their mobility limitations.

While the promise of the *Kenyan Constitution 2010* (affirmative action for persons with disabilities) may augment access to labour markets, it will take more conscious intervention from employers to give young persons with disabilities opportunities, so that they can access jobs in high-end labour markets.
REFERENCES


