

Dealing with another kind of poverty

The real question is not whether the education is a way out of poverty. The real question is whether alleviating poverty is the best way for improving the education. How does changing the point of view change the story?

We were supposed to stand on the brink of a new era regarding the constant technology development, economy growth, globalization and sustainability. However, standing on that brink may last longer as the recent tests in education showed disappointing results. The reading proficiency among students does not reach satisfactory levels and as long as the reading skills are considered crucial for understanding and specializing in any subject in future, this could be the new challenge we are facing with.

Recently World Bank introduced the concept of Learning Poverty which means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age of 10. According to the brief from [World Bank](#) 260 million children are not participating in education processes and 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries, or even 80 percent of children in poor countries cannot read by the end of primary school.

Moreover, the International Student Assessment (PISA) published the [results](#) from tests that examine the level of knowledge in three subjects including reading proficiency. According to the [PISA-D](#), on average only 43% of all 15-year-olds were enrolled in at least grade 7 by age 15 compared to the OECD average of 89%.

If we analyze the reading ability and proficiency, or the enrollment in a specific grade, as indicators for the education system, we can conclude that we really have a problem. This problem is much bigger in the least developed countries. Indeed, according to economic theory, higher standard of living and constant level of development have great impact on the education system and the results of the tests. For instance, if GDP is analyzed, as an indicator for economic growth, in 2018 Finland, Norway, Denmark and Ireland have higher GDP per capita than the EU28 average. Additionally, these countries had better results of the tests too.

Some new research indicates additional reasons for better results in the reading proficiency in some countries. One interesting conclusion in the survey is that China and Singapore scored staggering results in reading in comparison to the other countries. According to the results nearly 90% of the examined students reached a minimum level of proficiency in reading. What's more important China has also a [significant increase](#) of the time spent reading in 2018. The main reason for the significant increase is the availability of e-books. As the needs for education are growing, the technology offers cost effective ways of buying and reading books using E-platforms. Obviously, China had no second thought on taking an advantage of e-commerce in order to improve the reading proficiency, bypassing the formal education.

However, being able to use the E-Platforms require availability of smart phones or computers. Unfortunately, advanced economies still have higher rates of [technology use](#). In the least developed countries or low-income countries, the use of technology is still not frequently or regularly. The use of technology is certainly linked to living standards and socioeconomic status.

Once again, this shows that countries with better socioeconomic status have greater opportunities and resources for education and training. On the other side, in the developing countries the problem may be multidimensional because it does not only include the education system, but the standard of living, the ability of parents to send their children to schools, access to electricity and good social and health system too. Resolving these problems may cause even bigger damage if the countries try to make [rapid changes](#) on their own. As a result of this, the changes and reforms that should be made, have to be made only in cooperation and collaboration with the developed countries.

However, investing only in education and expecting higher results in the developing countries is not enough anymore. What is more important, we have to take care of improving people's living standards and alleviating poverty by improved water and electricity access, quality of health care, higher income and employment opportunities. The governments and non-governmental organizations should invest in many humanitarian or social areas beside the education. The concept of Learning Poverty cannot be fixed if don't fix the real poverty first.

Everyone says that the education is a way out of poverty. I think we should change the strategy. It is not enough to provide the poor countries only with better education when they face a daily struggle just to survive or meet basic needs. If we help poor countries to reduce the poverty, they will be able to improve the education system too.