# Differential Educational Attainment among Learners: Implications for Achieving Sustainable Development Goal Four

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**Abstract**

Differential educational attainment is a serious issue in the world that requires immediate action to save or rescue the situation. It is caused as a result of societal imbalance, inequalities, and structural factors that perpetuate socioeconomic disparities. In this paper, we will discuss the factors that may influence differential educational attainments, such as family issues, socioeconomic issues, political issues, and culture. We will also discuss the implications for achieving sustainable development goal four.

*Keywords:* Differential Educational Attainment, Sustainable Development Goals

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the factors that may influence differential educational attainment, such as family issues, socioeconomic issues, political issues, and culture. Among these factors, family issues for instance has hampered some learners' realization, which is a problem that could lead to disparities in educational attainment between and among such learners and their peers. These disparities would hinder the realization of the sustainable development goal four. This shall be discussed under the following sub-headings:

i.  debating the concept of differential educational attainment;

ii.  family issues and differential educational attainment;

iii.   socioeconomic issues and differential educational attainment;

iv.   political issues and differential educational attainment;

v.   culture on the educational system and vice versa;

vi.   sustainable development goals;

vii.   social reproduction theory in education;

viii.   applicability of the theory;

ix.   implications for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG);

x.   summary;

xi.   recommendations

**Debating the Concept of Differential Educational Attainment**

All students want to reach a high level of education in their chosen field of learning, and the only way to do so is through learning, which is not static but dynamic. Learning is defined as a relative change in behavior as a result of experience (Obadimeji & Oredein, 2023). It is the act of passing on knowledge from one who is knowledgeable to one who is not. It is a change that occurs as a result of an experience, which could be direct or indirect. Education is the liberation any society can give. It is the key to the development of society and the world at large. Every individual aspires to attain the highest level of education in their chosen field of learning because knowledge is power and this knowledge is embedded in education. Educational attainment is the highest educational level that a learner is willing to complete (U.S Census Bureau, 2021). Although it is in the interest of every individual to attain the highest level of education (all things being equal), some hindrances or obstacles could hinder learners from not attaining the highest level of education. Among them are family issues, socio-economic issues, political issues, and the influence of culture on the educational system and vice versa. Others may be affected by health and gender (Cawley, Han, Kim & Norton, 2023).

The number of years of schooling that an individual has used to complete his or her education is referred to as educational attainment (Wang et al, 2022). For example, it is defined as the number of years spent by an individual to achieve a specific goal. For instance, an individual's educational

attainment across all levels of education in Nigeria could be (6, 3, 3, 4), which could be interpreted as six years spent in the first level of education. This means that an individual's educational attainment in obtaining a bachelor's degree in science or education (BSc or BEd), among other things, is sixteen (16) years (6 + 3 + 3 + 4 = 16). Such a person may then choose to pursue additional academic degrees such as a Master's in education or science (MEd, MSc), and even a doctorate in philosophy degree (PhD). A person who pursues a MEd will automatically add eighteen months of the time required to obtain the certification to his or her current educational attainment. This implies that such a person will need approximately eighteen (18) years of education to achieve his or her goals. In the case of obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD), such an individual will add three (3) years to his or her educational attainment of a MEd, totaling nineteen (19) years of educational attainment in achieving his or her goals. Educational attainment is defined as the sum of all learning processes (Magnuson, Duncan, Lee, & Metzgar, 2016). That is, educational attainment reflects successful learning of learning domains such as the cognitive domain, affective domain, and psychomotor domain.

Differential educational attainment can be defined as the gap between an individual's highest educational level and his or her peers. It is the variation that exists, preventing a learner from reaching his or her educational potential. This includes, among other things, age, ability, culture, gender, family issues, or economic issues. It is a social concept used to determine an individual's educational level variation. It describes and identifies the differences in a person's educational level. It is a term used to describe the gaps that are impeding or acting as an impediment to achieving one's educational goals (Ward et al, 2014). Differential educational attainment has been observed as a result of an inability to meet one's basic needs such as food, clothing, medication, and educational achievement. Many researchers believe that individuals struggle to reach certain educational milestones. Nonetheless, everyone achieves some level of education. "Twenty friends cannot be in the same place in twenty years," for example. It means that learners in the same class will not be able to achieve the same educational level in twenty years. This could be due to some previously identified gaps.

Differential educational attainment refers to the variation observed in learners from different social classes and cultures (Flude, 1974). A study was conducted in the United Kingdom, where educational resources were made available to students. It was discovered that learners performed better, which could be attributed to their intelligence quotient. This also implies that learners' educational achievement "if all things were equal" would allow them to reach their educational goals. According to the study's findings, there should be more equality in the distribution of educational resources and opportunities. This would aid in the development of talents that could be applied to the advancement of society. As a result, it was determined that such a recommendation would aid in closing the gap in learners' educational attainment (Flude, 1974). Among the factors that may influence differential educational attainment are family issues, socioeconomic issues, political issues, and culture. Let us combine each of these variables with varying educational attainment.

**Family Issues and Differential Educational Attainment**

A family is a group of people who are related through blood, adoption, or marriage. There is no such thing as a perfect family. Family issues are problems that affect an individual's family. Disagreements between or among related family members is an example of family issues (Morelli, Hong, Garcia, Elzie, Alvarez, & Villodas, 2022). Family issues range from financing, health problem, and poor communication skills just to mention a few. When one or more of these issues arise, it becomes more difficult for a learner in such a family to reach his or her educational potential. For example, a family dealing with a financial problem may find it difficult to send their children to school. Such a learner may not be able to reach his or her educational potential. Lack of funding has hampered such learners' realization, which is a problem that could lead to disparities in educational attainment between such learners and their peers and invariably hinders the accomplishment of one of the sustainable development goals (ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting long life learning opportunities for all).

Families have ties. To help close such a chasm in the family, each member must see themselves as one and bear one another's

burden. Family members should be able to locate schools or educational institutions that are within their financial means. Individuals at all levels should have access to and be required to attend school. To help close the gap in educational attainment and in achieving sustainable development goals four, the government should invest in the education of all citizens by effectively implementing 26% of the nation's revenue budget into the educational sector. This is because its multiplier effect will be visible in the long run.

## Socioeconomic Issues and Differential Educational Attainment

Socioeconomic issues arise as a result of societal economic activities. No society is without problems, among other things, social amenities, education, unemployment, citizen, and property security (The University of Wisconsin, 2021; AQA, Edexcell, OCR & Eduqus, 2019). Socioeconomic activities provide citizens with the opportunity to grow and achieve one's dreams, allowing every citizen to obtain educational attainment. Socioeconomic issues are impediments to a nation's development, affecting every citizen

in some way. No society is free of socioeconomic activities; rather, every society is affected by one or more socioeconomic issues.

Education is regarded as the mother of all disciplines because of its importance. Most schools are now privately owned, while some government-owned schools are still in their former glory, with dilapidated buildings or physical structures, no or limited availability of resource material, and nonchalant (carefree) behavior of some educational personnel towards learners, among other things. Such a "state of the institution" would result in learners' educational attainment differing from their peers. Privately owned institutions have no choice but to take advantage of the shortcomings of government-owned institutions to attract learners, which will invariably widen the gap in educational attainment through socioeconomic activities of the economy (Shava & Vgas-Dorgapersa, 2022). A study was carried out on the capability approach for rural youth inclusion in social and economic affairs in South Africa. It advocates for equal economic opportunity for rural youth, which could be caused by disparities in educational attainment, low educational levels, and a lack of

entrepreneurial skills, among other things. However, it was suggested that rural youth actively engage the government on issues of local economic development, entrepreneurship, and innovation, as this could be a critical empowerment to improve their social and economic status (Shava et al, 2022).

Consider the climate change crisis. The climate crisis is a term used to describe the sense of emergency and the importance or urgency of climate change caused by man's activities either within or outside of his environment. Cutting down trees and burning fossil fuels are two examples of such activities that have an impact on the earth's climate. This eventually produces a large amount of greenhouse gases, which harms our environment. As a result, the naturally occurring gas oxygen ($O_2$) in the atmosphere is reduced. This could eventually raise the earth's temperature, increase drought, and cause changes in rainfall, resulting in flooding, landslides, the destruction of communities, and the loss of property. Flooding is a natural disaster that destroys both people and property. For example, in April 2022, children's lives and rights were jeopardized due to the Kwazulu Natal Floods (unusual heavy rainfall). This flood had an impact not only on the community but also on the learners and their educational attainment. This is especially true when all school plants have been destroyed by the severe flooding and learners are left to pick up their pieces on their own while their counterparts in other neighborhoods attend school and are not affected by the flooding. This leads to disparities in educational attainment in socioeconomic activities which could hinder the actualization of learners having equal and quality education and disparities in educational attainment is a serious issue in the world that requires immediate action to save or rescue the situation (UNICEF, 2022).

However, man cannot live without one another, man's social and economic activities have an impact on the environment if they are not well managed. To achieve sustainable development goal four in the case of a climate crisis, the government should be able to implement some measures to control human activities, such as raising awareness of the impact of human activities on the environment, transforming the transportation system, afforestation/regeneration of trees, and maintaining political pressure on the

government, to name a few. As stated earlier, the government should provide basic amenities for its citizens and fund education, and make education free and compulsory at all levels.

## Political Issues and Differential Educational Attainment

Politics is the process of making decisions for a nation's general populace to harness the resources needed to build the nation and live together. Political issues are everyday happenings as it affects the lives of individuals or citizens. Among them are anti-corruption and transparency, counter-terrorism, Covid-19 response and recovery, cyber issues, floods, job creation, and education are just a few examples. Covid-19 is an excellent example. Coronavirus is another name for Covid-19. It is caused by a new coronavirus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This virus spreads from person to person via droplets, contact, and fluids, among other means. To halt the spread of the virus, the nation, and the world at large, halted their social-economic activities, which invariably affected education at all levels, both at public and private institutions,

where learners could not obtain adequate education. Some privately owned institutions took advantage of the situation to teach students online, resulting in a virtual (online) teaching method. Although, before the virus outbreak, there was a virtual teaching method in use especially in the developed and few developing nations. The virus outbreak highlighted the importance of application software for educators and learners to use for an effective teaching-learning process (Oredein & Obadimeji, 2022). This method has both benefits and drawbacks. The world as a whole was unprepared for such a shock, which disrupted human activities and claimed lives. In the teaching-learning process, for example, some developed nations took advantage of the use of cutting-edge application software to improve their teaching-learning processes. The lockdown had an impact on teaching-learning activities in these countries.

Although, the emergence of this virus resulted in a setback in learners' educational attainment, with some learners in the said developed nations able to use application software, electricity supply, and good internet connectivity, to name a few, to aid teaching-learning processes, while their counterparts in

the rest of the world were left to figure out how to impart knowledge to their learners. This resulted in differential educational attainment, with most learners in developing or underdeveloped countries of the world unable to access education during the initial stage of the Covid-19 lockdown due to epileptic (unstable) supply of electricity, disruption of internet connectivity, and high cost of renewing internet data, to name a few. To achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals-four), every individual must consider ways to better their country and the world at large. The government must assist research institutes in carrying out findings on an identified problem and ways to solve that problem.

**Culture on the Educational System and Vice Versa**

Culture is a person's way of life in general. It is the way people perceive things and objects in and out of their environment. It can also be defined as a way of life passed down from generation to generation. Every country in the world has a distinct culture, and culture varies from region to region. It refers to the characteristics of certain groups of people, such as their beliefs, language,

food, clothing, music, and predominant occupation, among other things. In South Africa, for example, there are numerous cultures, including Zulu, Xhosan, Hindu, Muslim, Pedi, and Tswana (SAHO,) (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). The Zulu community, for example, is a group of Nguni-speaking people in South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province. Culture and education are inseparable. It has an impact on the content of a community's educational system. It is the foundation of all educational systems. For example, the philosophy of education in South Africa's National Policy on Education will be centered on the country's culture. Culture will be transmitted or instilled in students through a variety of subjects such as arts, languages, social studies, geography, music, and government, to name a few. This will increase cultural awareness and continuity from one generation to the next. Zulu is one of South Africa's cultures, they speak the language of the Kwazulu-Natal province of South Africa. Such a language could be used for communication. Aesthetic values are taught through arts, environmental awareness is taught through geography as a subject, food types and home-keeping are taught through Home-economics, and defense against external

and internal forces is taught through the study of military science. This implies that education derives its philosophy from culture, which can be imparted to learners in a variety of ways, including formal, non-formal, and informal education. A formal education entails the transmission of culture through specialized and trained professionals (teachers) in subjects such as music, language, and arts, among others. Culture can also be passed down through non-formal education (parents, community, and society at large) (Jullieflavia, 2012).

Education is the transfer of knowledge from the knowledgeable to the unknowledgeable, and it can take the form of formal, informal, or non-formal education. It is the instillation of morals, values, and beliefs about society's desires. The transmission of culture through various courses develops a complete child who is acceptable and fits into society. This implies that culture could be a factor in education towards realizing Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG). There is a need to prevent our culture from extinction through education. As a result, it is critical and necessary that a society's culture be instilled in every child through the agent of socialization. In other words, education, as one of the agents of socialization, can be used to preserve, promote, transmit, conserve, and raise cultural awareness.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The word sustainable development goals (SDGs) comprise three words which are "sustainable", "development", and "goals". Sustainable means to maintain what has been created or worked upon. Development in this case means expanding or creating growth and 'goals' mean an intended outcome. In other words, sustainable development goals simply mean the intended outcomes set aside for the development of a nation and the world at large. The SDGs were planned and adopted in 2015 by the United Nations to help eradicate poverty, hunger, and gender inequality in the world among all others. The SDGs comprise seventeen (17) main goals which include;

**Goal 1**- End poverty in all its forms everywhere;

**Goal 2-** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;

**Goal 3-** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;

**Goal 4-** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;

**Goal 5-** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;

**Goal 6-** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;

**Goal 7-** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all;

**Goal 8-** Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;

**Goal 9-** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

**Goal 10-** Reduce inequality within and among countries;

**Goal 11-** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable;

**Goal 12-** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;

**Goal 13-** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

**Goal 14-** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

**Goal 15-** Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt biodiversity loss;

**Goal 16-** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels; and

**Goal 17-** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (United Nations, 2022).

Differential educational attainment could be well explained using social reproduction theory.

**Social Reproduction Theory in Education**

This theory has its origin in the capital theory which was originally proposed by Karl Marx and worked upon by one of his scholars known as Pierre Bourdieu. He defines Social

Reproduction Theory (SRT) as the reproduction of social class and systems mainly based on particular preconditions in age, education, and inheritance of legal rights. It is seen as the existence of the social structure in a given society. It suggests that differential educational attainment is caused as a result of societal imbalance, inequalities, and structural factors that perpetuate socioeconomic disparities. It based its assumption on the role of social class, cultural capital, and social reproduction in shaping educational outcomes toward the realization of sustainable development goal four (4) (The Free Encyclopedia, 2022).

**Applicability of the Theory**

SRT can be applicable among learners having differential educational attainment towards achieving sustainable development goal four. Although, the theory emphasizes the role of social class, cultural capital, and social reproduction in shaping educational outcomes. This theory lay more emphasis on the need of the society to reproduce itself for her existence. The world revolves; hence, society must adapt to new development towards sustainability. Every individual in a

society has a role to play in bridging the gap of differential educational attainment. Hence, it is therefore important that every stakeholder in education put in a joint effort in ensuring the eradication or reduction of differential educational attainment. By so doing, society reproduces itself and sustainable development goal four (4) will be achievable.

**Implications for Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Four**

To achieve sustainable development goal four (4), the Social Reproduction Theory could be looked into. Despite education being the totality of man, it makes man aware of himself and his environment. Every individual makes a society and the society reproduces itself through education. This means that it is not the sole duty of an individual or a parent to train a child, but rather the society. This is so because, every child is the reproduction of the society which implies that to have a sustainable society in achieving sustainable development goal four (4), every stakeholder in the educational sector should shoulder this task of training or educating an individual as a way of giving back to the society. Nevertheless, some factors have to be considered if differential educational

attainment must be reduced or eradicated towards ensuring the realization of sustainable development goal four. Among the factors are family issues, cultural issues, and socioeconomic issues. Sustainable Development Goal four (4) identifies the essence of education to an individual and the society at large (United Nations, 2022). The family as a factor should develop mutual ties in bearing one another's burdens. A child born into a family should see his/herself as a member of such a family.   To build such ties, every form of disagreement between or among related family members should be resolved.

Another factor is the socioeconomic factor such as dilapidated buildings for teaching-learning activities. The immediate society should create a conducive teaching-learning environment for all learners, and provide adequate teaching-learning resources which will invariably help in bridging the gap in learners' educational attainment (Shava et al, 2022).

In addition, the government need to make a concrete decision on the implementation of the 26% planned educational budget as slated by UNESCO. The implementation of the planned educational budget will help actualize sustainable development goal four which will also make the society not just become developing or developed but also make the society a better place which will help eradicate unemployment, illiteracy and social vices just to name a few. By so doing, sustainable development goal four - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all will be achievable to make the world a better place.

## Summary

All learners aspire to attain educational heights to an extent. But this height could be distorted, causing gaps in the educational attainment of learners in their chosen field. Differential educational attainment is the identified gap hindering learners from attaining their educational height. Among the factors of differential educational attainment as discussed are; family issues and differential educational attainment, socioeconomic issues and differential educational attainment, and political issues and differential educational attainment just to mention a few.

## Recommendations

SDGs are the intended preplanned outcomes of a society. SDGs help to make the society a better place for all. From the foregoing, below are the recommendations;

1. Both parents and families should learn to live within their means of livelihood and help invest in their children's education.

2. Government should provide basic amenities for its citizens;

3. The nation's revenue budget should be effectively implemented in the educational sector;

4. Government and nongovernmental organizations should give support to research institutes, to help identify a likely problem and also proffer possible solutions to such an identified problem; and

5. Since education derives its philosophy from culture, culture should be integrated into the school curriculum. This will help in the preservation of culture and also enables learners to know more about society.

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