

Building indicators of educational poverty: a reflection on the measures to be adopted

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In recent years, the elaboration of the concept of educational poverty has been considered by various authors who have laid the foundations both to allow the construction of real indicators and to emphasize the importance of developing a clear definition of the concept.

Intersecting the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the rights of the child declared in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescence (ONU, 1991), the educational poverty is understood as moral and life prospects deprivation, which is related to the quality of the educational proposal and the values placed in it.

It emerges that one of the most appropriate framework in which to frame the notion of educational poverty seems to be that of the Capability Approach (Zoletto, 2020): availability and use of social and cultural opportunities assume an intimate value for the process of personal growth (Eccles et al., 2003) and, at the same time, produces indirect benefits for school learning (Seow & Pan, 2014). In this regard, Lohmann and Ferger (2014) explore education poverty to try to understand the mechanisms of intersections between educational and social policies, being better able to understand if educational poverty is a phenomenon to be addressed by looking at the cultural and social territorial context of all the different welfare systems.

This phenomenon affects the development of children, and indirectly the future of the countries, as those who grow up in situations of socio-economic disadvantage are at greater risk of educational poverty (Saraceno, 2015). The availability of early childhood services in the territory and the effectiveness of social spending are considered stigmatizing factors with respect to the multidimensionality of educational poverty (Naldini, 2021; Barberis & Martelli, 2021; Goffman, 2018). When adolescents live in a poor territory in which recreational and cultural offerings are scarce or not widespread enough, they have a lower level of education within the twenty years (Andersson et al, 2023).

In the light of these considerations, the paper intends to be inserted in this context by analyzing an evaluative research that the research group of the University of Bari is carrying out on a program to combat educational poverty, funded by Social Enterprise with Children (CIB). The aim of the study is to use the evaluation experiences made within some projects implemented by Third Sector Organizations

in central and southern Italy to stimulate the debate about the construction of PE indicators which are transversally usable for different age groups.

Since educational poverty is a complex construct, the methodological choice has been oriented to the verification of the effect that the actions have carried out on some variables and have led the researchers to reflect on the measure, also taking in account the different age group. In particular, beyond the ten indicators of Save the Children (2014), we have used also: a) a purpose-built tool that measures specific skills before and after the implementation of the pathway; c) a questionnaire on academic achievement exclusively for school-age children. For children of preschool age (3-6 years) it was thought to build an observational checklist that included cognitive and non-cognitive abilities specific and similar to the objectives of each laboratory. For adolescents aged 11 to 16, the questionnaire aims to measure the basic skills and skills and/or acquired during the project activities. Moreover, we measured also the socioeconomic status of the family based on the educational qualification and professional prestige of each of the partners the Barratt Simplified Measure of Social Status (BSMSS, Barratt, 2006). The limit of this study is that the indices and overall measures do not allow us to compare the construct in a transversal way between the different age groups, in addition to the fact that the 7-15 range is not being evaluated. It is expected that other projects with the same aims will be selected to fill this gap.