

Educational poverty: definition of the concept and ways to measure it. A literature review

Marco Ferracci (Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II), Antonio De Falco (Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II), Marco Gherghi (Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II), Rosaria Romano (Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II)

Defining educational poverty is a crucial challenge that involves different disciplines, such as Economics, Sociology, Pedagogy and Psychology. Educational poverty is a relatively new multidimensional concept that defines one of the many forms in which the more general condition of Poverty, specifically referred to the world of childhood, can be expressed. Due to this complex nature the debate on educational poverty, on the hybrid relationship among the factors that characterize it, on how to define and measure it, should be both multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. In the last decades, the study of educational poverty has been affected by pedagogical approaches that have limited their field of investigation to individual performances, such as educational attainment and skills of students. On the other hand, the definition of poverty has deeply changed during the years after 1980, with post-industrial societies, whereas in the period of Fordist capitalism it mainly referred to the consequences of prolonged unemployment, in modern societies Poverty is linked to a broader spectrum of factors, far beyond those attributable to mere economic conditions. Poverty is certainly attributable to objective, easily measurable causes, but also to subjective, contextual conditions, which make its definition extremely complex. The consequences of these conceptual uncertainties are not only limited to the academic debate but also influence the production of public policies and investments. The implementation of educational poverty reduction policies can be very different if based on different conceptual frameworks, and can therefore produce very different results, in some cases even exacerbating existing geographical and social differences. The search for a common definition of educational poverty is therefore aimed at a better understanding of the complex nature of the problem and the possibility of defining reliable measures of it so that concrete and effective policies of intervention can be directed.

Building on these reflections, this paper proposes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how authors have defined and operationalized the concept of educational poverty in empirical research, with a focus on identifying similarities and differences in their approaches. The SLR has emerged as an essential tool in academic research to summarise large bodies of information on a specific topic, enabling a comprehensive overview of the state of the art, as well as the identification

of gaps and the definition of new lines of future research. To perform the SLR on educational poverty literature, we adopted the following strategy.

Firstly, using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement, we ensured that the whole process of SLR was accurately and transparently reported. In short, The PRISMA approach consists of an item checklist outlining the key steps involved in conducting a systematic review according to a standardized and reproducible procedure. After defining our research question and the selection criteria, we searched for scientific publications on the analysed topic gathered from dominant authoritative databases. Once the selection process was completed, we performed a content analysis of the publications. We extracted the most relevant information, organizing it in a tabular form according to relevant features that allow for comparability among publications. Results of the SLR allow us to identify gaps in the literature, which may help future research and theory development in the study of educational poverty as well as defining a set of common indicators that allow for comparison between different territorial contexts, supporting the decision-making process in developing effective policies targeted to address the phenomenon.

Keywords: educational poverty, systematic literature review, PRISMA