

Educational levels as a catalyst for socio-economic development: Observations from human resources viewpoints in sustainable community growth

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Abstract. This study explores the complex relationship between education and socio-economic development in a post-pandemic context, highlighting education as a transformative cornerstone. Research shows that improving education has direct and indirect social benefits, including promoting business development and reducing poverty in communities. In addition, education has a significant impact on governance and sustainable development, playing a key role in wider socio-economic transformation and sustainability. Research objectives include assessing the impact of education on life satisfaction, economic stability, prospects, and household income adequacy. A diverse group of 216 participants from Central Dobrogea, Romania, ranging from primary to postgraduate levels of education and representing both the public and private sectors, participated. Education is emerging as a linchpin of national development, particularly in the post-pandemic era where human resources are paramount. It serves as a foundation for promoting sustainable community growth and has a profound impact on an individual's life satisfaction, prospects, and resilience to crises. The positive correlation between higher educational attainment and increased life satisfaction underscores the indispensability of education in shaping human resource policies for sustainable development. In addition, education equips individuals with the tools to manage post-crisis recovery and fosters optimism for the future. In essence, education acts as an indispensable catalyst for socio-economic progress, providing a pathway for individual growth and the promise of collective progress, resilience, and seizing opportunities in the midst of adversity.

Keywords. Education, Human resources, Socio-economic development, Sustainable growth, Well-being

1. Introduction

The relationship between education and socio-economic development has been a persistent topic of investigation, appealing to interdisciplinary investigation that varies from policy-driven practicality to humanistic contemplation of well-being. This study is positioned at the junction of educational achievement and its manifold effects on socio-economic progress from a human resources perspective, particularly in the aftermath of the global pandemic - a time distinguished by upheaval and possibilities for systemic re-evaluation.

At the forefront of this inquiry lies the acknowledgement of education as a transformative power. A recent study expounds on the importance of high-quality human resources in attaining national prosperity and establish education as the foundation for such an aspiration. The claim that improving education can have wider socio-economic advantages initiates a discourse on the immediate and indirect impacts of attaining education on the welfare of society (Tri and Van Thanh, 2022).

Due to globalization, the demands on human resources have undergone changes, leading to a transformation in educational paradigms. Zaika et al. (2022) explores the development of human resources within enterprises amidst these global alterations. By stressing the importance of educational systems for individuals to be equipped for new economic challenges, their research sheds light on the direct relationship between education and enterprise development, which subsequently affects the broader socio-economic landscape.

Skhosana (2021) analyses an asset-based community-led approach aimed at reducing poverty, with emphasis on education as a key asset. The study suggests that education can empower communities, leading to sustainable socioeconomic development, and effective poverty reduction strategies. This viewpoint is consistent with the notion that education not only benefits individuals but also serves as a resource that can uplift whole communities.

Furthermore, Tripathy et al. (2021) investigate the connection between educational programmes and governance within cooperative societies. They contend that education enhances the competitiveness and effectiveness of the organisations, which serve a crucial part in both local and national development. This study emphasises the significance of education in governance and its resultant influence on socio-economic expansion. Focused educational initiatives can significantly improve organizational performance, according to research. Also, Morozova et al. (2022) investigates the management of sustainable socio-economic development and its correlation with the transition to innovative economic models. Their work advocates for an education system aligned with economic imperatives, which could facilitate socio-economic change. Education is, therefore, seen as a transformative tool that can contribute to promoting this change.

In their study of the intersection between education and sustainable development, Hubel (Anghel) and Condrea (2023a) examine how one's residential environment affects their comprehension and valuation of sustainability concepts. This aspect of education is essential as it influences awareness of sustainable practices and their availability, ultimately shaping strategic policies for development.

2. Literature review

The vast potential of education as a lever for socio-economic development is well-documented, with a plethora of studies highlighting its fundamental role in augmenting human capital, driving economic growth, and nurturing sustainable community advancement. This literature review aims to consolidate a varied range of scholarly outlooks that, collectively, vividly expound on the multidimensional impact of education on societal progress.

Aivaz (2013) provides foundational insight into the transformation of Romania's education system post-1990 and its effects on societal development, using principal component analysis to gauge educational metrics against societal change indicators. The study sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of education on societal development. Aivaz's (2021a; 2021b) subsequent work continues this narrative by exploring the relationship between education, health, and social care sectors, and economic growth in Romania, highlighting the necessity of educational investment for economic prosperity. In the same vein, Hübel (Anghel)

Stan and Tasente (2023a; 2023b) and Hubel (Anghel) and Condrea (2023b) address age-related socio-economic perceptions, advocating for age-responsive educational strategies within sustainable local development.

Also, Munteanu (Florea) and Aivaz (2017), and Aivaz and Hubel (2023) provide insights into the tourism sector, where educational levels are directly tied to workforce competency and service quality, suggesting a focus on educational programs to diversify service provision. Rus, Sandu and Tasente (2020) bring to light the importance of education in managing crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by ensuring the dissemination of accurate information and adherence to public health measures. According to Stan et al. (2020), transparency in governance constitutes a fundamental aspect of democratic citizenship, and it fosters socio-economic development and well-being by fostering public participation and confidence in public administration.

The convergence of education, human resources, and socio-economic development plays an important role in promoting sustainable community growth and improving general well-being. Investigations by Stan and Cortel (2022) into rural development strategies further cement education's role in enhancing local decision-making and socio-economic project implementation. In this context, Haudi et al. (2020) indicate that the synergy between private and public sectors is paramount to socio-economic achievements. Moreover, this research underlines the importance of community empowerment as a driving force for such progress. These findings emphasise that community-level engagement and support are fundamental to the country's overall development.

When considering regional development, Brasoveanu (2023) highlights the balance between economic growth and environmental stewardship. The research indicates that implementing sustainable development policies is essential to sustain this equilibrium, emphasising that socio-economic progress must work in tandem with environmental sustainability for long-term community viability. Furthermore, Brasoveanu (2016) highlights the legal acknowledgement of the entitlement to a clean and salubrious environment, positioning it as a fundamental aspect of socio-economic and legal structures indispensable for sustainable progress. The entitlement to an unpolluted environment is presented as a catalyst for policy formation, which facilitates both socio-economic growth and environmental preservation, thereby lending to the general welfare of society.

Tofan and Aivaz (2022) delve into the intersection of technology and labour productivity, correlating digital literacy with economic efficiency. Moving on to consider, cultural consumption and its socio-economic implications are analysed by Mirea and Aivaz (2016), while Wijaya et al. (2021) explore the link between human development indices, the labour force, and economic growth, asserting education as a vital contributor to economic enhancement. Gender perspectives on socio-economic issues are examined by Hübel (Anghel) Stan and Tasente (2023c), underscoring the need for gender-sensitive educational policies.

The literature collectively affirms education's transformative power in socio-economic development, from improving living standards and economic growth to shaping societal perceptions and fostering sustainable community growth. Educational policies are essential for equipping human resources with skills to navigate and enhance the socio-economic landscape.

Ilie et al. (2022) introduces the 'Smart Village' concept, highlighting education's indispensable function in assimilating technology into rural development. Additionally, Oleg, Zaytsev and Dmitriev (2023) examine the interdependence between institutional capacity and education, demonstrating education's intrinsic part in cultivating institutional knowledge and competencies.

The importance of ongoing education for the growth of human resources and adaptability within socio-economic systems is demonstrated by the initial studies of Arafa (2002) and Sannikova and Dobele (1996). Sburlan and Stan (2019) explore how educational initiatives within public administration can facilitate administrative evolution and adaptability in socio-economic environments.

Finally, Condrea, Stanciu and Aivaz (2012) indirectly discuss the theme of education by stressing the significance of training and development of skills in quality management systems, resulting in significant socio-economic implications. Collectively, these academic efforts present a complete depiction of education as a pivotal and dynamic force in socio-economic progress and sustainable community expansion.

In conclusion, the body of research examined in this review converges on a clear thesis: education is a fundamental agent of socio-economic improvement. The empirical studies collectively attest to its critical role in developing human capital, promoting economic prosperity, and fostering community development.

3. Research methodology

Research objectives

The overarching goal of this inquiry is to dissect the nexus between educational echelons and the perception of quality of life, including financial health, individual well-being, and collective contentment from a human resources standpoint in the post-pandemic context.

The *specific research objectives* are:

RO1: Charting the prevalence of educational levels within the survey populace and their link to self-reported satisfaction in day-to-day life, highlighting the human resources aspect of societal well-being.

RO2: Exploring the perceptions of life quality and economic stability post-education, stratified by the highest educational plateau reached, against the backdrop of pre-pandemic benchmarks.

RO3: Probing into the projected personal welfare and economic forecasts among diverse educational groups, understanding how human resources development shapes prospects.

RO4: Examining how educational accomplishments influence the perceived adequacy of household income for daily sustenance and personal growth opportunities, with an eye on human resources policies that facilitate socio-economic advancement.

Research instrument

The research instrument is an online questionnaire designed to collect quantitative data on individuals' educational attainment and subjective evaluations in various areas of life. The questionnaire is likely to consist of closed-ended questions, allowing for quick, structured responses that are easy to analyse statistically.

Methodologically, the questionnaire data were analysed using IBM SPSS software. This analysis was likely to include descriptive statistics to summarise the data and inferential statistics to test hypotheses about the population from which the sample was drawn. Specifically, the Pearson chi-square test, likelihood ratio and linear-by-linear association were used to examine the relationships between levels of education and other variables. The 'df' or degrees of freedom in these tests refer to the number of categories minus one, and the 'asymptotic significance' indicates the probability that the observed distribution occurred by

chance. A significance level (p-value) of less than 0.05 usually indicates a statistically significant association. The 'N of valid cases' refers to the number of respondents who provided usable data for each analysis.

Participants

The study involved 216 citizens from central Dobrogea (Romania), specifically from the villages of Casimcea, Saraiu, Crucea, Peștera, Ciocârlia, Horia, Tortoman and Seimeni, representing both the public and private sectors. In the context of the study, the distribution of participants according to the last level of education completed is as follows: A small fraction, amounting to 0.90%, have completed primary education, which encompasses the first four grades. Those who finished gymnasium, covering grades five to eight, make up 4.05% of the sample. Participants who have partial high school education or attended a School of Arts and Trades, equivalent to ninth and tenth grades, constitute 4.50%. Slightly more, 5.41%, have completed vocational school, which typically includes up to the eleventh grade. A significant portion, 19.82%, have fully completed high school, attending from ninth to twelfth or thirteenth grade. Post-secondary education attendees represent 6.31%, while those with university-level education make up a substantial 35.59%. Furthermore, participants with postgraduate education, including master's and doctoral degrees, account for 21.62%. A small percentage, 1.80%, preferred not to disclose their educational level.

4. Data analysis

The data indicates a general trend of increasing life satisfaction with higher levels of education. For instance, those with primary education rate their life satisfaction as 'poor', while those with postgraduate education predominantly rate their life satisfaction as 'good' or 'very good'. This gradient of life satisfaction across educational levels suggests that education plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their daily lives, which is an important component of the human resources perspective on societal well-being, according to Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Self-Assessment of Daily Life Quality in Relation to Educational Attainment

Highest level of education completed	Don't know	Very poor	Poor	Neither good nor bad	Good	Very good	Total
Primary education (grades I-IV)				50.00%	50.00%		100.00%
Lower secondary education (grades V-VIII)	22.22%			55.56%	11.11%	11.11%	100.00%
Partial high school / Vocational school (grades IX – X)		10.00%	20.00%	50.00%	20.00%		100.00%
Vocational education (grades IX – XI)			36.36%	45.45%	18.18%		100.00%
Complete high school (grades IX – XII/XIII)		4.65%	9.30%	51.16%	27.91%	6.98%	100.00%
Post-secondary education			14.29%	28.57%	57.14%		100.00%
University education				22.08%	67.53%	10.39%	100.00%
Postgraduate education (Masters, Doctorate)			2.17%	15.22%	65.22%	17.39%	100.00%
Prefer not to answer				75.00%	25.00%		100.00%
Total	0.93%	1.39%	6.02%	31.94%	50.46%	9.26%	100.00%

Moreover, the statistically significant p-value from the Pearson chi-square test reinforces the existence of a correlation between educational attainment and life satisfaction (Table 1.2.). This supports RO1 by highlighting the importance of educational achievement as a potential human resource tool to enhance societal well-being. Also, the analysis substantiates the concept that educational attainment could be a pivotal element in socio-economic development, which is a key consideration for human resources policies aimed at sustainable growth and development.

Table 1.2. Self-Assessment of Daily Life Quality in Relation to Educational Attainment (Correlations)

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
Pearson Chi-Square	128,884 ^a	40	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	93.864	40	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	42.573	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	216		

The data show that people with primary education are evenly split in their assessment of their current life as 'neither good nor bad' or 'very bad' compared to the pre-pandemic period. In contrast, those with higher levels of education, such as university or postgraduate degrees, are more likely to rate their current life as 'neither good nor bad' or 'good' (Table 2.1).

This analysis is in line with Research Objective 2 (RO2), which aims to explore perceptions of quality of life and economic stability post-education, stratified by the highest educational plateau reached, against the background of pre-pandemic benchmarks. The significant differences in perceptions across levels of education underscore the potential long-term impact of education on resilience and subjective well-being during post-crisis recovery.

Table 2.1. Personal Life Comparison to Pre-Pandemic Period

Last level of education completed	Don't know	Very poor	Neither good nor bad	Good	Total
Primary education (grades I-IV)			50.00%	50.00%	100.00%
Lower secondary education (grades V-VIII)		11.11%	77.78%	11.11%	100.00%
Partial high school / Vocational school (grades IX - X)	10.00%		80.00%	10.00%	100.00%
Vocational education (grades IX - XI)		54.55%	45.45%		100.00%
Complete high school (grades IX - XII/XIII)		27.27%	61.36%	11.36%	100.00%
Post-secondary education		35.71%	64.29%		100.00%
University education		18.42%	75.00%	6.58%	100.00%
Postgraduate education (Masters, Doctorate)	2.22%	11.11%	62.22%	24.44%	100.00%
Prefer not to answer	25.00%		75.0%		100.0%
Total	1.40%	20.00%	67.44%	11.16%	100.00%

The statistical tests presented in Table 2.2 support these findings. The Pearson chi-square test indicates a statistically significant association with an asymptotic significance of 0.000, suggesting a strong correlation between educational attainment and perceptions of quality of life in the post-pandemic context. However, the linear association has a significance of 0.354, which is above the standard alpha level of 0.05, indicating no linear trend across ordered categories in this relationship.

The 'N of valid cases' indicates that 215 people responded to the survey, providing a substantial sample for analysis. The Pearson chi-square value of 55,431, together with the likelihood ratio, suggests that educational attainment and perceived change in quality of life since the pandemic are not independent; there is a significant relationship between these variables.

Table 2.2. Personal Life Comparison to Pre-Pandemic Period (Correlations)

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
Pearson Chi-Square	55,431 ^a	24	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	43.928	24	0.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.860	1	0.354
N of Valid Cases	215		

It is clear from the data that expectations about the future vary considerably according to education level. For example, people with a primary education have a 50% chance of expecting their situation to remain about the same, with no expectation of improvement. Conversely, those with postgraduate education are more optimistic, with 33.33% expecting a better standard of living (Table 3.1.).

This analysis is particularly relevant to Research Objective 3 (RO3), which aims to explore the projected personal well-being and economic outlooks of different educational groups, to understand how human resource development shapes future prospects. The optimism observed at higher levels of education suggests that educational attainment may be associated with a more positive outlook on future economic and personal welfare, which is a key consideration for human resource development policies and initiatives.

Table 3.1. Expected Personal Living Standards in One Year

Please select the last level of education completed	Don't know	Worse	About the same	Better	Total
Primary education (grades I-IV)	50.00%		50.00%		100.00%
Lower secondary education (grades V-VIII)		11.11%	55.56%	33.33%	100.00%
Partial high school / Vocational school (grades IX - X)	30.00%	30.00%	40.00%		100.00%
Vocational education (grades IX - XI)	18.18%	54.55%	18.18%	9.09%	100.00%
Complete high school (grades IX - XII/XIII)	9.09%	25.00%	50.00%	15.91%	100.00%
Post-secondary education	7.14%	21.43%	50.00%	21.43%	100.00%
University education	10.67%	16.00%	48.00%	25.33%	100.00%
Postgraduate education (Masters, Doctorate)	20.00%	6.67%	40.00%	33.33%	100.00%
Prefer not to answer	75.00%		25.00%		100.00%
Total	14.49%	18.22%	44.86%	22.43%	100.00%

The correlations presented in Table 3.2, the Pearson chi-square with a value of 44.363 and an asymptotic significance of 0.007, indicate a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment and expectations of future living standards. The likelihood ratio also supports this finding, although the linear association does not show a significant linear trend across the ordered categories.

The 'N of Valid Cases' indicates that the survey had 214 respondents, providing a sample for analysis that is large enough to infer trends, yet small enough to be handled efficiently. The statistical evidence supports the conclusion that educational attainment and

future expectations are correlated, with higher education often associated with more positive expectations for the coming year.

In summary, the data underline the importance of education as a determinant of future life prospects, which is consistent with the notion that investment in human capital through education is crucial for improving individuals' expectations and potentially their future economic and personal well-being.

Table 3.2. Expected Personal Living Standards in One Year (Correlations)

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
Pearson Chi-Square	44,363 ^a	24	0.007
Likelihood Ratio	43.003	24	0.010
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.346	1	0.246
N of Valid Cases	214		

The data show a clear gradient, with those with higher levels of education reporting a better financial situation. For example, 50% of those with primary education report that their income does not cover the basics, while those with postgraduate education are more likely to report that they can afford more expensive goods with some restrictions or that they have everything they need without restrictions.

This analysis is relevant to Research Objective 4 (RO4), which focuses on examining how educational attainment affects the perceived adequacy of household income for daily living and opportunities for personal growth. The pattern observed here suggests that higher educational attainment is associated with a better assessment of family income relative to needs, which is fundamental for understanding the impact of education on socio-economic advancement and for informing human resource policies.

Table 4.1. Family Income Assessment Relative to Needs

Last level of education completed	Not enough even for the bare necessities	Only enough for the bare necessities	Enough for a decent living but we cannot afford more expensive goods	We manage to buy some more expensive goods, but with restrictions in other areas	We manage to have everything we need, without restrictions	Total
Primary Education (grades I-IV)	50.00%	50.00%				100.00%
Gymnasium (grades V-VIII)	11.11%	66.67%	11.11%		11.11%	100.00%
Partial High School / School of Arts and Crafts (grades IX - X)	40.00%	40.00%	10.00%	10.00%		100.00%
Vocational School (grades IX - XI)	36.36%	45.45%	18.18%			100.00%
Complete High School (grades IX - XII/XIII)	16.28%	39.53%	13.95%	25.58%	4.65%	100.00%
Post-High School Education	14.29%	35.71%	28.57%	14.29%	7.14%	100.00%
University Education	1.32%	21.05%	35.53%	32.89%	9.21%	100.00%

Postgraduate Education (Master's, PhD)	2.27%	9.09%	25.00%	47.73%	15.91%	100.00%
Prefer not to answer	75.00%	25.00%				100.00%
Total	11.27%	27.70%	24.41%	28.17%	8.45%	100.00%

Table 4.2 provides statistical evidence to support the observations in Table 4.1. The Pearson chi-square, with a value of 89,004 and an asymptotic significance of 0.000, indicates a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment and income assessment relative to needs. This is further substantiated by the likelihood ratio and linear-by-linear association, both of which yield p-values of 0.000, suggesting a significant linear trend across the categories.

The 'N of valid cases' shows that 213 people were interviewed, giving a broad perspective across different educational backgrounds. The statistical results in Table 4.2 support the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between educational attainment and perceptions of income adequacy.

Table 4.2. Family income assessment relative to needs (Correlations)

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
Pearson Chi-Square	89,004 ^a	32	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	90.456	32	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	34.227	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	213		

Therefore, the analysis of data indicates that creating a dependable connection linking education, human resources, and socio-economic growth is essential to foster sustainable community development and enhance overall welfare.

Conclusions

Education is a vital component of national development, supporting socio-economic structures and improving quality of life. With the world recovering from a pandemic, the connection between education and socio-economic advancement has taken on new significance, with the cultivation of human resources now essential.

In the broader context of socio-economic development, the role of education is often emphasized as a fundamental pillar of sustainable community growth. Examining educational attainment as a catalyst for such development through the lens of human resources provides compelling evidence of the impact of education on life satisfaction and future expectations. The data clearly show a positive correlation between higher educational attainment and increased life satisfaction, confirming the central role of education in enhancing individual well-being and, by extension, societal prosperity.

This gradient of life satisfaction, which extends from primary to postgraduate education, not only reflects individuals' perceptions of their daily lives, but also underscores the importance of education as a human resource tool for societal development. Such findings are consistent with the hypothesis that educational attainment is instrumental to socio-economic advancement and serves as a critical consideration for human resource policies aimed at promoting sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the relationship between educational attainment and perceptions of quality of life, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape, highlights the long-term impact of education on resilience and subjective well-being. The significant differences in quality-of-life

perceptions across educational strata point to the role of education in equipping individuals with the coping mechanisms necessary for post-crisis recovery.

Expectations about the future also show a clear variance associated with educational attainment. The optimism prevalent among the more educated suggests that educational attainment is associated with a more positive outlook on future economic and personal well-being. This finding has important implications for human resource development policies, as it implies that education provides a forward-looking perspective and enhances the ability to envision and strive for improved living standards.

In conclusion, the observations derived from the human resources perspective highlight education as an indispensable catalyst for socio-economic development. The clear gradient observed between different levels of education in terms of life satisfaction, resilience, prospects and income adequacy outlines a roadmap for sustainable community growth. It compels education and human resource stakeholders to advocate for and invest in comprehensive educational frameworks that promise not only individual enrichment but also collective progress. This is the promise of education: a promise to unlock potential, build resilience and set the course for a future of opportunity and growth.

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