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The Economic Foundation of Education: The Relationship Between Education and Economic Development

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the economic foundations of education and the relationship between education and economic development. Education is viewed as an investment with economic value because it can improve the quality of human resources by enhancing individual knowledge, skills, and productivity. The method used is a qualitative approach with a literature review of various relevant scientific sources. The study results indicate that education plays a strategic role in driving economic growth by improving workforce quality, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and reducing poverty and social inequality. However, various challenges in its implementation exist, such as limited access to education, high education costs, quality gaps, and low utilization of technology. Therefore, a comprehensive policy is needed to improve the quality and equity of education to support sustainable economic development.

Keywords: Economics of education; economic development; human resources; education investment

Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji landasan ekonomi pendidikan serta hubungan antara pendidikan dan pembangunan ekonomi. Pendidikan dipandang sebagai investasi yang memiliki nilai ekonomi karena mampu meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia melalui peningkatan pengetahuan, keterampilan, dan produktivitas individu. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi literatur terhadap berbagai sumber ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan memiliki peran strategis dalam mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi melalui peningkatan kualitas tenaga kerja, inovasi, kewirausahaan, serta pengurangan kemiskinan dan ketimpangan sosial. Namun, terdapat berbagai tantangan dalam implementasinya, seperti keterbatasan akses pendidikan, tingginya biaya pendidikan, kesenjangan kualitas, serta rendahnya pemanfaatan teknologi. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kebijakan yang komprehensif untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan pemerataan pendidikan guna mendukung pembangunan ekonomi yang berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Ekonomi pendidikan; pembangunan ekonomi; sumber daya manusia; investasi pendidikan



Introduction

Education is a fundamental element in national development because it contributes to improving the quality of human resources. Through education, individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities necessary to face the dynamics of modern development and the demands of the workplace. From an economic perspective, education is viewed as a long-term investment with strategic value because it can increase productivity, income, and the level of social welfare (Juhaidi, 2023). Thus, education is closely linked to a country's economic development process.

Conceptually, the economic foundation of education addresses the effective and efficient management of education to produce quality human resources. Education is not only understood as a process of imparting knowledge, but also as a means of developing human capital capable of driving national economic growth. In the study of the economics of education, education is positioned as both a necessity and an investment that provides social and economic benefits for individuals and the wider community (Suyanto & Hasibuan, 2021). Therefore, education is believed to enhance the work skills, creativity, thinking skills, and innovation of the community, supporting sustainable economic development (Saleh & Fauzi, 2019).

The relationship between education and the economy is reciprocal, with education playing a role in improving the quality of human resources, while economic progress supports better educational provision (Subroto, 2014). Various studies also show that increasing levels of public education contribute to economic progress by increasing labor productivity, innovation, and adaptability to global economic changes (Budiana & Pastika, 2025).

The link between education and economic development can be seen in its contribution to improving the quality of the workforce. Quality education can produce productive, innovative, and highly competitive individuals. High-quality



human resources will impact national productivity and accelerate economic growth (Maulida et al., 2024). Furthermore, education also plays a role in encouraging the development of science and technology, which are crucial factors in modern economic development. Countries that successfully improve the quality of education generally demonstrate more stable and competitive economic growth rates globally (Utomo et al., 2024).

Education also plays a crucial socio-economic role in reducing poverty and social inequality. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better job opportunities and income levels than those with lower levels of education. Therefore, education is a strategic tool for improving societal welfare (Joni et al., 2024). Furthermore, education plays a role in developing critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills, which are essential for facing global economic challenges. Education can also foster an entrepreneurial spirit and enhance individuals' ability to manage businesses effectively, thereby creating new job opportunities in the community (Rambe, 2024).

Technological developments in the digital era require the education sector to adapt to these changes. The use of technology in the learning process is considered to increase educational accessibility, effectiveness, and flexibility. Digital-based education and training are an alternative for improving skills across the broader and more equitable community (Rusdi & Cahyani, 2025). Furthermore, both formal and non-formal education play a crucial role in preparing human resources capable of competing amidst increasingly complex global economic developments (Sinaga et al., 2026).

Despite its crucial role, the education sector still faces various challenges that can impact economic development. One major issue is the implementation of a curriculum that is not fully aligned with the needs of the workforce and the development of the digital economy (Rachma, 2020). Furthermore, high education costs, limited facilities and infrastructure, and unequal access to education mean that some communities still struggle to obtain adequate educational services (Arsal,



2024). Various education costs, both direct and indirect, also have the potential to widen the gap in access to education, particularly for people from lower-middle economic groups, thus hampering the realization of educational equality (Teguh, 2025). The gap in education quality between urban and rural areas is also a problem that impacts the low quality of human resources. Furthermore, limitations in technology and educational funding contribute to widening educational inequality in Indonesia (Sutansyah & Ramdani, 2023).

Educational inequality has a significant impact on economic development. Poor access to and quality of education can hamper productivity, innovation, and employment opportunities, thus widening the income gap (Riyadi, 2021). Individuals with low levels of education generally have limited job opportunities and lower incomes than those with higher education. This situation has the potential to strengthen the cycle of poverty and hinder the realization of equitable economic development (Darmuji & Hasanah, 2024). Therefore, policies are needed to improve equitable access and quality of education so that all people have equal educational opportunities (Sandriani & Riofita, 2025).

Besides serving as a means of improving the quality of human resources, education also plays a role in shaping the character and morals of society. Education is not only oriented towards mastering knowledge, but also towards instilling ethical values, social responsibility, and a spirit of cooperation in community and national life. In this context, economic education plays a crucial role in providing the younger generation with an understanding of economic activities, financial management, and appropriate economic decision-making in facing global challenges (Rambe, 2024).

Furthermore, economics-based education can foster a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in students. Understanding that education is an investment encourages individuals to be more productive and creative in creating business opportunities. The development of the concept of edupreneurship demonstrates that education aims not only to produce work-ready graduates but also individuals



capable of creating jobs independently (Putra et al., 2026). Thus, education plays a significant role in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Sustainable economic growth requires the support of quality human resources. Continuous population growth increases the need for education, employment, and social welfare. Therefore, investment in education should be a priority in national development because it can increase workforce productivity, reduce unemployment, and stimulate economic growth (Nur & Alauddin, 2018). Quality education will create a society that is better prepared to face future social, economic, and technological changes.

Based on the description above, it can be understood that education and economic development have an interconnected relationship and cannot be separated from one another. Education serves as the primary foundation for developing high-quality, productive, innovative, and competitive human resources in the era of globalization. However, various challenges related to equal access to education and the improvement of educational quality still require serious attention. Therefore, this study aims to examine the economic foundations of education and analyze the relationship between education and economic development, along with the various challenges faced in achieving quality and equitable education.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. Data were collected from various written sources, including books, scientific journals, and previous studies relevant to the topic of the economic foundations of education and its relationship with economic development. The data collection process was carried out by reviewing, identifying, and examining literature related to the concepts of educational economics, the role of education in economic development, and the various challenges faced within the educational sector. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative analysis technique by organizing, categorizing, and synthesizing information obtained from



various sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The results of the analysis were then used to draw conclusions regarding the importance of education as an investment in improving the quality of human resources and promoting economic growth.

Result and Discussion

Definition of the Economic Foundation of Education

The economic foundation of education refers to a field of study that examines how individuals and societies make decisions regarding the allocation and utilization of limited productive resources, whether financial or non-financial, to support the development of knowledge, skills, intellectual capacity, character, and other competencies through educational processes. Educational economics focuses on understanding the relationship between education and economic activities, particularly how educational investments contribute to human resource development and overall economic progress.

Educational economics is also understood as a concept within the field of education that seeks to develop education based on economic principles. This includes not only the financing of education but also the broader objectives of education that can generate economic benefits for individuals and society. Through education, individuals acquire competencies that enhance productivity, increase employment opportunities, and contribute to economic growth. Therefore, education is often viewed as a long-term investment that yields both social and economic returns.

The successful implementation of educational economics depends on the harmonious interaction between superstructure and infrastructure elements within a country. The superstructure encompasses formal governmental institutions and policies that regulate educational and economic activities. In Indonesia, these institutions include the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, which are responsible for formulating, implementing, and enforcing policies related to



education and economic development. Their roles are essential in creating regulations and frameworks that support equitable and sustainable educational advancement.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure component consists of various societal institutions and organizations that influence public policy and educational development. These include political parties, pressure groups, interest groups, and political communication media. Such institutions function as channels for public participation, oversight, advocacy, and constructive feedback regarding educational policies and practices. Their involvement helps ensure that educational programs remain responsive to societal needs and economic demands.

The collaboration between educational superstructure and infrastructure creates a supportive environment for the effective and efficient development of educational economics. When government institutions establish sound educational policies and societal organizations actively participate in monitoring and supporting their implementation, educational systems become better equipped to produce skilled and competent human resources. Consequently, the integration of these components contributes significantly to the achievement of educational goals and the promotion of sustainable economic development (Suyanto & Hasibuan, 2021).

Educational economics focuses on the study of how the educational process contributes to the development of quality human resources for a country's economic development. Educational economics views education as an economic good. Therefore, education is always positioned as a process for producing quality human resources, thereby contributing to improving economic well-being.(Juhaidi, 2023).

According to Yahya, educational economics offers opportunities for human capital investment as long as it generates higher returns and maximizes profits at low cost. Educational economics analyzes educational programs to guide the management of costs and profits. The primary consideration is the effectiveness of program financing, implementation, and goal achievement. In general, educational economics is a branch of science that analyzes educational problems economically,



thereby generating benefits in the form of values and economics.(Saleh & Fauzi, 2019).

The Relationship Between Education and Economic Development

The relationship between education and economic growth can also be viewed from an innovation perspective. Good education facilitates the development of skills necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship. Innovation, in turn, drives economic growth by creating new products and services that can improve efficiency and productivity. In this context, education serves not only as a tool for acquiring knowledge but also as a key driver of sustainable economic development. For example, in Southeast Asian countries, investment in education has resulted in significant economic growth. Countries like Singapore and Malaysia have successfully improved the quality of their education, positively impacting their economic growth and global competitiveness. This demonstrates that quality education can be key to achieving sustainable economic growth.(Utomo, Sumartiningsih, 2024)

Education and economic growth have a very strong and persistent relationship. Growth improves the quality of human resources by providing individuals with knowledge, skills, and abilities, making them more productive and innovative, ultimately contributing to economic growth.

More productive workers can also use more efficient production methods and technologies, thereby increasing their productivity and economic output. Fostering innovation and technological advancement that improve production efficiency, create new products and services, and enhance economic competitiveness, higher education produces a skilled workforce in research and development. Furthermore, education provides the knowledge and skills needed to start and run new businesses, fostering entrepreneurial ventures that improve work schedules and increase sales. Education also provides equal opportunities for every individual to develop their potential.(Maulida et al., 2024)



The Role of Education in Improving Economic Development

Developing a person's ability to face life's challenges is the goal of education, which is a deliberate, methodical, and ongoing process. Developing skills and fostering a respectable national character and culture are the goals stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Educating students goes beyond simply imparting facts and figures; it shapes their ethics, values, and personality so they can grow into loyal, hardworking, innovative, and successful individuals. Education is crucial for developing competent human resources. People can help address society's economic and social problems by developing critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills through formal education. A person's social awareness, sense of responsibility, and ability to collaborate with others toward common goals can be enhanced through formal education (Sinaga et al., 2026).

Education also serves as an investment in creating a society's economic well-being by building moral character, enhancing social consensus, and strengthening ethical values. In a changing global context, a deeper understanding of the relationship between education and economic well-being is becoming increasingly important. Education not only serves as a foundation for sustainable economic growth but also plays a role in reducing social inequality, creating jobs, improving workforce skills, and facilitating innovation.(Joni et al., 2024).

From an educational economics perspective, digital education and training act as investments in human resource development, ultimately contributing to economic growth. Digital-based training in non-formal education provides greater flexibility for individuals to acquire skills without having to follow the rigid formal education system.(Rusdi & Cahyani, 2025).

Education also plays a role in fostering an entrepreneurial spirit. Through education, individuals acquire the skills to think critically, take calculated risks, and manage businesses effectively. Vocational education and entrepreneurship training



are crucial elements in creating new entrepreneurs who can create jobs and strengthen the informal sector. In the context of the digital economy, digital education and technological literacy are increasingly important in equipping the younger generation with future skills. The impact of education on economic growth is also evident in its contribution to reducing poverty and social inequality.

Education enables vertical social mobility which allows individuals from lower economic backgrounds to gain better opportunities in life.(Budiana & Pastika, 2025). That education significantly contributes to economic development has become an axiomatic truth and its existence is recognized. Education is not always considered as consumption or financing because education is an investment in human resource development, the contribution of which can be felt in the long term.(Subroto, 2014)Economic education plays a crucial role in preparing young people to face the challenges of the global economy. Economic education provides an understanding of how the economy works, both nationally and internationally. This understanding helps young people make informed financial decisions, understand global economic issues, and participate productively in economic activities.(Rambe, 2024).

The research results show that the economic foundation of education plays a crucial role in fostering students' entrepreneurial spirit. Understanding education as an investment and a source of economic value fosters a productive and innovative mindset. Students who view education as an investment tend to be motivated to develop value-added educational products.(Putra et al., 2026).

High and sustainable economic growth is a primary condition or a necessity for ongoing economic development and increased welfare. The population increases annually, so daily consumption needs also increase annually, thus requiring an increase in income each year. In addition to the demand side (consumption), from the supply side, population growth also requires an increase in job opportunities (sources of income). Economic growth without an increase in the workforce will result in inequality in the distribution of this additional income



(*ceteris paribus*), which will then create a condition of economic growth with increasing poverty.(Nur et al., 2018).

Economic Challenges in the World of Education

Economic education in Indonesia shows that there are several major challenges in developing economic literacy.

1. The first and most prominent challenge is the limitations in curriculum implementation. The economics curriculum in Indonesia is not fully aligned with global needs, particularly in preparing students to face the economic challenges of the digital age. While economics is introduced at various levels of education, the curriculum content tends to be theoretical and not fully applicable.

This results in students being unable to understand how the economic concepts learned in class can be applied to everyday life, ultimately limiting their economic literacy. Furthermore, gaps in teacher competency persist, hindering improvements in the quality of economics education. Teacher competency in teaching economics varies widely, with many still using conventional teaching methods. Teachers often struggle to utilize digital technology in the learning process, even though its use can increase student engagement and help them understand the material more deeply.

The use of digital technology in economics education also presents a significant opportunity to address some existing limitations. Technology can facilitate access to more up-to-date and relevant educational resources. For example, e-learning platforms allow students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere, enabling them to learn more independently and flexibly. Furthermore, technology enables the integration of multimedia into economics teaching, which can help students understand abstract concepts through interactive visualizations and simulations.



However, despite technology's enormous potential to improve economic education, its adoption in many schools in Indonesia remains very limited, particularly in remote areas, posing a major obstacle to implementing digital technology in education. Furthermore, while some urban schools have begun adopting technology in their learning processes, many still lack the resources to fully support technology integration. This demonstrates a digital divide that needs to be addressed through more comprehensive government policies to ensure that all schools, both urban and rural, have equal access to educational technology.(Rachma, 2020).

2. High Cost of Education

Over the past several centuries (the 19th and 20th centuries), technological advances have driven a shift from an agrarian to an industrial system. Subsequently, the philosophy of life shifted from spiritualism to positivism and materialism. Industrialization aimed to increase the production of necessities through easier and more efficient means. Furthermore, the formation of political systems of power was heavily influenced by the industrial system. The capitalist economic system became more flexible when the spirit of political power combined with the characteristics of industry.(Arsal, 2024).

Financing education is not without obstacles and challenges. Challenges in education funding include: 1. Insufficient government budget allocation, 2. Social disparities that make it difficult for some groups to access education, 3. Lack of access to educational technology and infrastructure, and 4. High education costs in some countries.(Sutansyah & Ramdani, 2023).

At the higher education level, another challenge is the low student interest in certain study programs, including Economics. This reflects the unequal public perception of the relevance of various fields of study to national development. To address this issue, universities need to reform their educational approaches, placing greater emphasis on job market needs and



providing needs-based services to make higher education more inclusive and responsive. Educational equity policies can also be analyzed from a public service perspective.(Sandriani & Riofita, 2025).

Educational Inequality and Its Impact on the Economy

A country with high educational inequality has a lower level of innovation than a country with low educational inequality. Furthermore, high educational inequality indicates low levels of production efficiency and tends to perpetuate poverty between generations. Educational inequality can be caused by household characteristics, children's circumstances, the quality of education, and the rate of return to education.(Riyadi, 2021).

This inequality in access to education not only impacts children's learning opportunities but also the quality of their educational outcomes. This impacts their ability to compete in the workforce and change their families' socioeconomic conditions in the future. Unequal and less inclusive education will hamper poverty alleviation and sustainable development efforts in Indonesia. Therefore, more comprehensive and integrated policies are needed, ranging from increasing the education budget, improving facilities, enhancing teacher quality, to truly targeted assistance programs so that all Indonesian children can receive a decent education without being burdened by heavy costs.(Teguh, 2025)One of the main causes of income and expenditure inequality is inequality of opportunity, particularly in the context of education. Inequality in access to and quality of education can have a significant impact on income distribution in the long run.

People with better education tend to have more opportunities to obtain better jobs and thus, higher incomes. Conversely, those who are less fortunate in terms of education may be trapped in low-paying jobs, leading to greater income inequality between these groups.(Darmuji & Hasanah, 2024).

Conclusion



Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that education plays a crucial role in economic development. Education serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a long-term investment in improving the quality of human resources. Through education, individuals can increase productivity, innovation, and adaptability to economic change.

Furthermore, education contributes to poverty reduction, job creation, and improving public welfare. However, various challenges remain, such as unequal access to education, high costs, limited infrastructure, and low quality in some regions. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed from the government and all stakeholders to improve the quality, equity, and relevance of education to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

However, various challenges remain, such as unequal access to education, high costs, limited infrastructure, and low quality in some regions, particularly remote ones. These challenges could hinder the optimal role of education in economic development if not addressed promptly and sustainably.

Therefore, strategic and collaborative efforts are needed from the government, educational institutions, the private sector, and the community to improve the quality, equity, and relevance of education. These efforts can be achieved through increasing the education budget, developing curricula that align with the needs of the workforce, improving the quality of teaching staff, and utilizing technology in the learning process.

Thus, education is expected to serve not only as a tool for improving individual quality, but also as a key pillar in driving inclusive, sustainable, and socially just economic growth. Ultimately, a nation's progress is largely determined by the quality of its education, so investment in education must be a top priority for long-term development.

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