

СОЦИОЛОГИЯ И ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ

A Study of the Education-Poverty Relationship in the RA

Simonyan Aramays H.

PHD student at the chair of Management, ASUE (Yerevan, RA)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0867-0618>

mayis.simonyan01@gmail.com

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ՀՀ-ում կրթություն-աղքատություն կապի ուսումնասիրություն

Մինոնյան Արամայիս Հ.

ՀՊՏՀ Կառավարման ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ (Երևան, ՀՀ)

Ամփոփագիր. Աղքատություն ծնող գործոններից կարևորագույնը կապված է կրթության հետ, և հենց փորձն էլ գալիս է հաստատելու, որ աղքատ են լինում կրթական ցածր մակարդակ ունեցող անձինք, երկրները, որտեղ կրթական անհասանելիություն կա, դպրոցներում չկան համապատասխան առարկաների գծով մասնագետներ, իսկ կրթական աղքատության մակարդակը բարձր է:

Սույն աշխատանքը նպատակ ունի ուսումնասիրել կրթության և աղքատության միջև առկա փոխհարաբերությունները: Աշխատանքում ուսումնասիրվել են սոցիալ-տնտեսական ու քաղաքական այնպիսի գործոններ, ինչպիսիք են աշակերտների և ուսանողների համախառն ընդգրկվածության ցուցանիշները, կրթական աղքատության մակարդակը, պետական բյուջեից կրթությանն ուղղված ծախսերի մասնաբաժինը, քաղաքական կայունության ինդեքսը ՀՀ-ում և հարևան երկրներում: Աշխատանքն անդրադառնում է նաև «ՀՀ կրթության» մինչև 2030 թ. զարգացման պետական ծրագրի» նախագծին և լուսաբանում կրթական համակարգում առկա հիմնախնդիրները, որոնք պայմանավորում են աղքատության ի հայտ գալը:

Աշխատանքում կարմիր թելով օգտագործվում է «ալիքային էֆեկտի» և կրթության ու աղքատության միջև եղած ցիկլային կապի գաղափարը՝ հավաստիացնելու, որ կրթության ոլորտի բարեփոխումները, մասնավորապես՝ կրթական որակի բարձրացումը, կրթության հասանելիության ապահովումը և առհասարակ կրթական բոլոր տեսակի անհավասարությունների վերացումը աղքատության կրճատման ռազմավարական ուղիներից են:

Հանգուցաբառեր՝ կրթություն, աղքատություն, կրթական աղքատություն, կրթական անհավասարություն, դպրոց, բարձրագույն մասնագիտական կրթություն

Исследование связи образования и бедности в РА

Симонян Арамаис А.

АГЭУ, аспирант кафедры управления (Ереван, РА)

Аннотация. Важнейший из факторов, вызывающих бедность, связан с образованием, и опыт подтверждает, что бедными являются люди с низким уровнем образования, в странах, где нет доступа к образованию, в школах нет специалистов по соответствующим предметам, а уровень образовательной бедности высок.

Целью данной работы является изучение взаимосвязи между образованием и бедностью. В работе рассмотрены социально-экономические и политические факторы, такие как показатели валового набора школьников и студентов, уровень образовательной бедности, доля расходов, направленных на образование из государственного бюджета, индекс политической стабильности в РА и соседних странах. В работе также говорится о проекте "Программа государственного развития: образование РА до 2030 г" и освещает проблемы в системе образования вызывающие возникновение бедности.

В статье красной нитью проходит «волновой эффект» и цикличная связь между образованием и бедностью, утверждающая, что реформы в сфере образования, в частности, повышение качества образования, обеспечение доступности образования, и устранение всех видов образовательного неравенства, в целом, являются одними из стратегических способов сокращения бедности.

Ключевые слова: Образование, бедность, образовательная бедность, образовательное неравенство, школа, высшее профессиональное образование

Introduction: Poverty and its forms remain a key socio-economic issue worldwide, including in the Republic of Armenia. Despite the numerous initiatives developed and implemented to alleviate poverty in Armenia, targeted strategies to overcome

this enduring issue continue to evolve, yet the problem remains unresolved. Today, while crafting policies to combat poverty, governments primarily focus not only on meeting the basic material needs of the impoverished population through various

social support programs but also on addressing human development issues, emphasizing the provision of a dignified life, social integration, educational opportunities, and overcoming health-related disadvantages.

Research has clearly shown that educational issues have a significant impact on the formation of poverty in Armenia. Education is a central player in any country and is highly valued in the context of human capital development in the modern world. Significant investments in education are considered a powerful tool for societies, contributing to long-term economic growth, promoting innovation, strengthening institutions, and enhancing social cohesion [18]. Ultimately, globally, including in Armenia, the role of education is vital as a driving force in overcoming poverty.

Literature Review: Recent studies have extensively examined the complex relationships between education and poverty. The literature highlights the significant role of education in economic growth and the creation of strong, innovative institutions.

In 2019, the World Bank introduced the concept of "learning poverty," which refers to children under ten who are unable to read and understand simple texts. This composite indicator accounts for the percentage of children lacking basic literacy skills and those out of school at that age (currently 260 million children are out of school, and it is presumed they cannot read) [19]. Since the pandemic, the educational process has been largely disrupted worldwide. Naturally, this had a negative impact on educational advancements, although the educational sector was already in crisis before. For example, before the pandemic, the educational poverty rate in low and middle-income countries was 57% [20]. By 2022, in these countries, educational poverty had reached 70% [21, pp. 5-21]. The World Bank's assessments make the connection between education and poverty even more evident. According to these evaluations, students whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic will lose \$21 trillion in future earnings, which constitutes 17% of the current global GDP [22]. Ultimately, educational poverty is a leading edge of the educational crisis, hindering the development of human capital.

The "Theory of Human Capital," developed by American economist and Nobel laureate Gary Becker, which represents the economic value of education and skill development, directly links education to poverty. According to the theory, inadequate education or lack of educational opportunities impede the development of human capital. Lacking basic literacy skills restricts students' economic productivity in the long term

[15]. In this context, developing and implementing strategies to overcome educational poverty is crucial for reducing poverty and promoting economic progress.

The 4th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations is dedicated to quality education, aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal fundamentally aims to reduce inequalities in the education sector, including for vulnerable groups (such as refugees, children in rural communities, individuals with disabilities), ensuring quality education for impoverished populations [23]. Achieving this goal is closely linked to the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the goal of eradicating poverty, as education is seen as a primary route to overcoming poverty, and conversely, poverty hinders the attainment of quality education. Breaking the cycle of poverty through quality education allows individuals to acquire skills and knowledge necessary for better-paid jobs, more substantiated and rational decision-making. Being one of the fundamental human rights and a factor that stabilizes development, education can also reduce vulnerability to economic shocks and other factors that foster poverty, such as gender inequality, unemployment, and more.

According to researchers Hakhverdyan and Karapetyan from the Amberd Research Center, familial and institutional poor conditions decrease the accessibility of education, and one of the causes of poverty that generates educational poverty is this very lack of access. Scientists are convinced that measures aimed at reducing poverty should focus on education because its established system implies economic development, enhancement of society's value system, improvement of the population's living standards, and quality of life [1, pp. 74-84]. Summarizing the studied literature, we can assert that there are cyclical relationships between education and poverty: the presence of poverty prevents access to quality education, and the absence of quality education perpetuates poverty. Children living in poverty face numerous socio-economic barriers in the educational system, which reduce their integration level and increase the likelihood of discontinuing their studies in the future.

Research methodology: In Armenia, the research on the interconnection between education and poverty is based on the principles of validity and compatibility, utilizing both comparative and quantitative analytical methods.

For this work, the theoretical foundation was built on foreign literature related to "Educational Poverty", and theoretical overviews and approaches regarding the United Nations' Sustainable

Development Goals 1 (no poverty) and 4 (quality education). Statistical data on the state of the education system and poverty levels from the Statistical Committee of Armenia, reports from international organizations, specifically UNDP reports, World Bank data, UNICEF, UNESCO, and annual reports of the OECD, and other online publications served as the informational basis.

The methodology is designed to provide insights into the cyclical relationships between education and poverty.

Analysis: To understand the relationship between education and poverty, it is necessary to consider the numerous external factors that influence them. For analyzing political factors, let's focus on several aspects. In 2020, the share of public educational expenditures in Armenia's GDP was 2.8%. Comparatively, in countries like Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic states, this indicator was

respectively 3.8%, 6.1%, and 4.5% [24, p. 14]. To illustrate this more vividly, note that the average for the OECD in the same year was 5.1% [25].

The proportion of educational expenses directed towards education within the state budget is depicted in Figure 1 (for comparison, indicators from neighboring countries are also presented).

The latest data for all countries in the region, from 2020, shows that Armenia directed only 8.83% of its state budget towards education, which is the lowest rate among the mentioned countries, with Georgia at 11.17%, Azerbaijan at 10.5%, Turkey at 9.38%, and Iran at 23.14%. In 2021, educational expenditures in Armenia were reduced by 0.55 percentage points.

It is evident that in recent years, the portion of funds allocated to education from Armenia's state budget and its GDP has decreased.

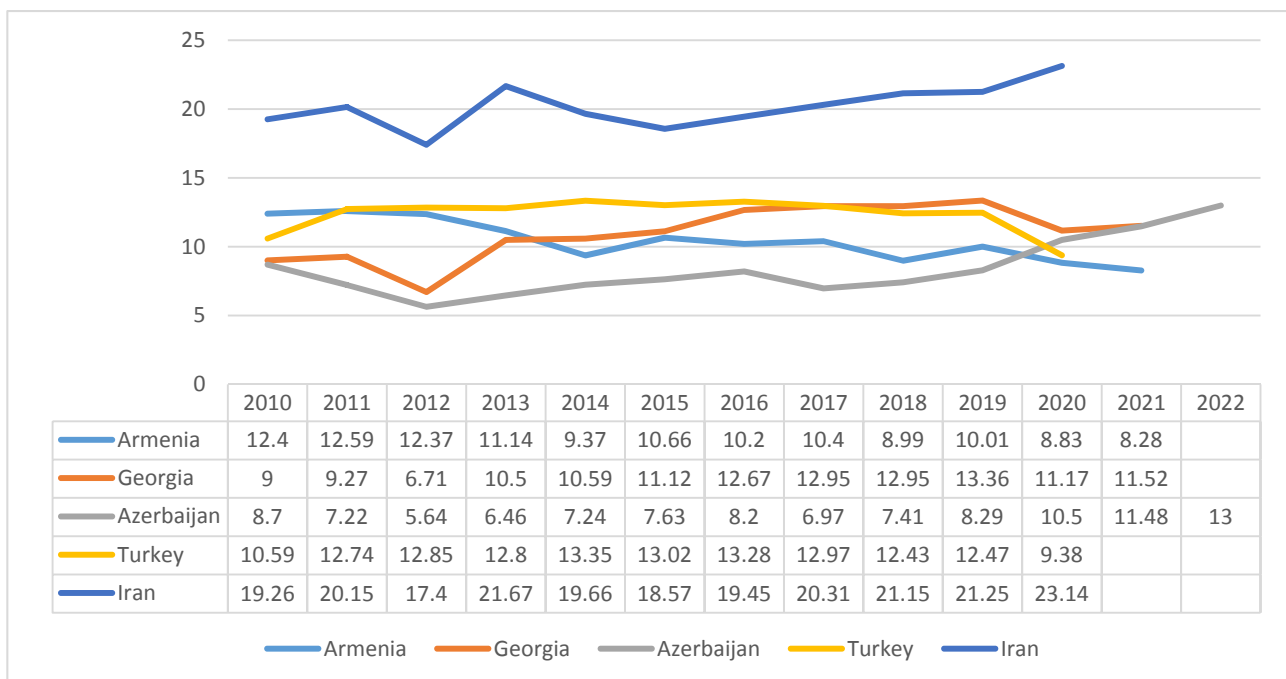


Figure 1. The share of education expenditures in state expenditures in RA and neighboring countries in 2010-2022. (%) [26]

The frequency of political shifts in our country obstructs the formation of political stability, which is essential for the implementation of effective educational policies. Generally, an indicator of political stability in the context of education provides an understanding of how fluctuations in the political environment affect funding and structural underpinnings of education. Some authors have concluded that political stability is more significant for ensuring quality education than other factors [17]. Frequent changes in institutions are characteristic of countries with unstable political environments, where educational reforms and initiatives can be hindered.

As of 2021, Armenia ranks 153rd out of 193 countries in the political stability index (-0.84), Georgia is 127th (-0.42), Azerbaijan is 154th (-0.85), Turkey is 168th (-1.1), and Iran is 177th (-1.62). Observing the top ten countries in terms of the political stability index, there is a highlighted correlation between this index and the educational poverty index. For instance, Singapore ranks third in political stability, with an educational poverty index in the same country at 2.8%. Iceland and Luxembourg share the 8th and 10th spots, respectively, with their educational poverty rates at 9.3% and 3%.

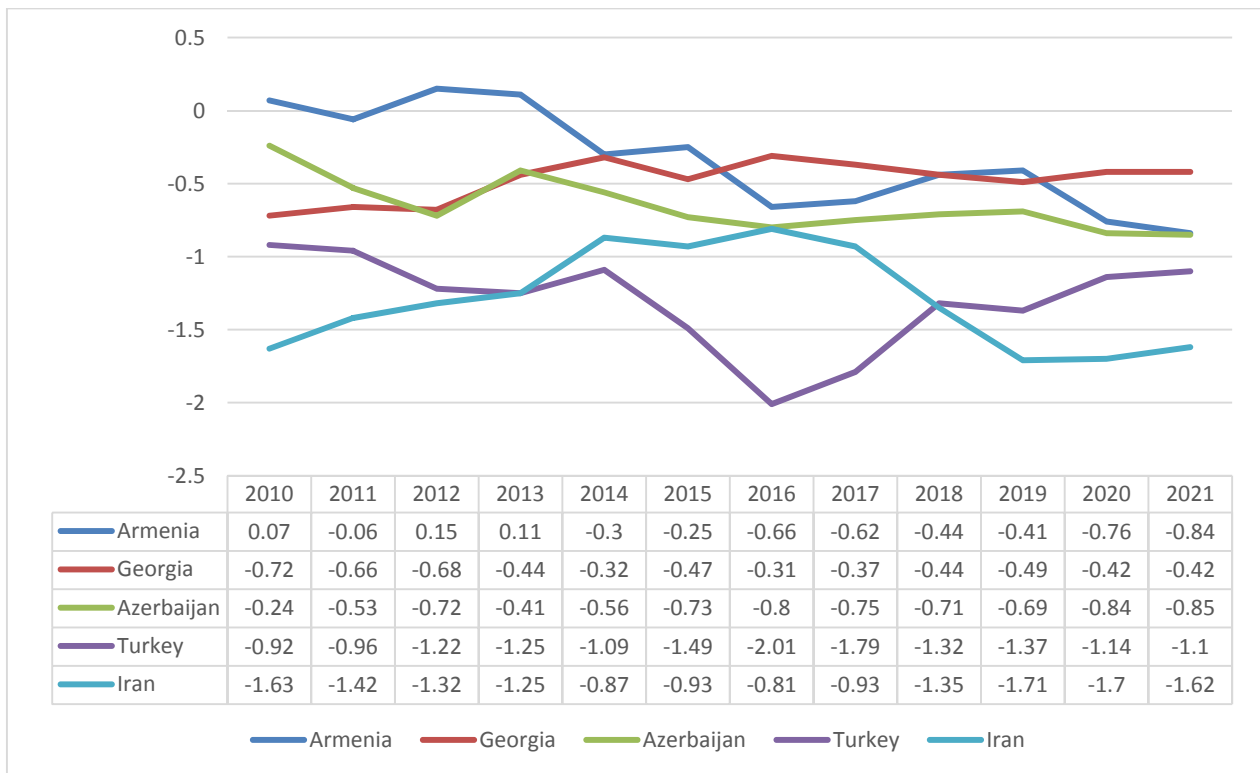


Figure 2. Political Stability Index in Armenia and neighboring countries, 2010-2021 [27]

The recent events in Artsakh significantly impacted the stability of the educational system in Armenia. Approximately 30,000 students were forced to receive education under disrupted conditions for nearly a year [28]. This unstable political situation had a clear impact on all levels of education, which hindered the development of human capital, encouraged migration growth, and intensified brain drain immediately after the forced relocation of Artsakh Armenians.

Studying social factors allows for an understanding of all the social barriers that have impacted education, which can be mitigated with the clear application of tools.

Figure 3 shows the gross enrollment ratio of students in Armenian public schools from 2010 to 2023, according to general education levels¹. The most recent data for the 2022-2023 school year shows that the gross enrollment ratio for primary classes was 93.9%, basic school was 91.5%, and high school was 54%². Over recent years, there have

been slight fluctuations in gross enrollment ratio across all levels; however, if we compare the 2022-2023 indicators with those of previous years, we will see that there has been a decline in gross enrollment ratio in primary classes by 2.9 and 5.1 percentage points for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, respectively, and in basic school classes by 3.3 and 4.8 percentage points for the 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 academic years.

¹ Gross enrollment ratio in educational system – the percentage share of the total number of pupils from all grades of educational system in relation to the number of the age group officially established for the same educational system of the permanent population.

² The gross enrollment ratio in high school is low, (as the 18.3% of population – 2022-2023, 18.3 %-2021-2022, and in the presented other academic years until 2013-2014, respectively 17.4%, 14.9%, 14.9%, 15.9%, 14.5%, 15.3%, 19.1%, 18.2%) at the corresponding age group continued studying in preliminary vocational and middle

vocational educational institutions after graduating basic school.

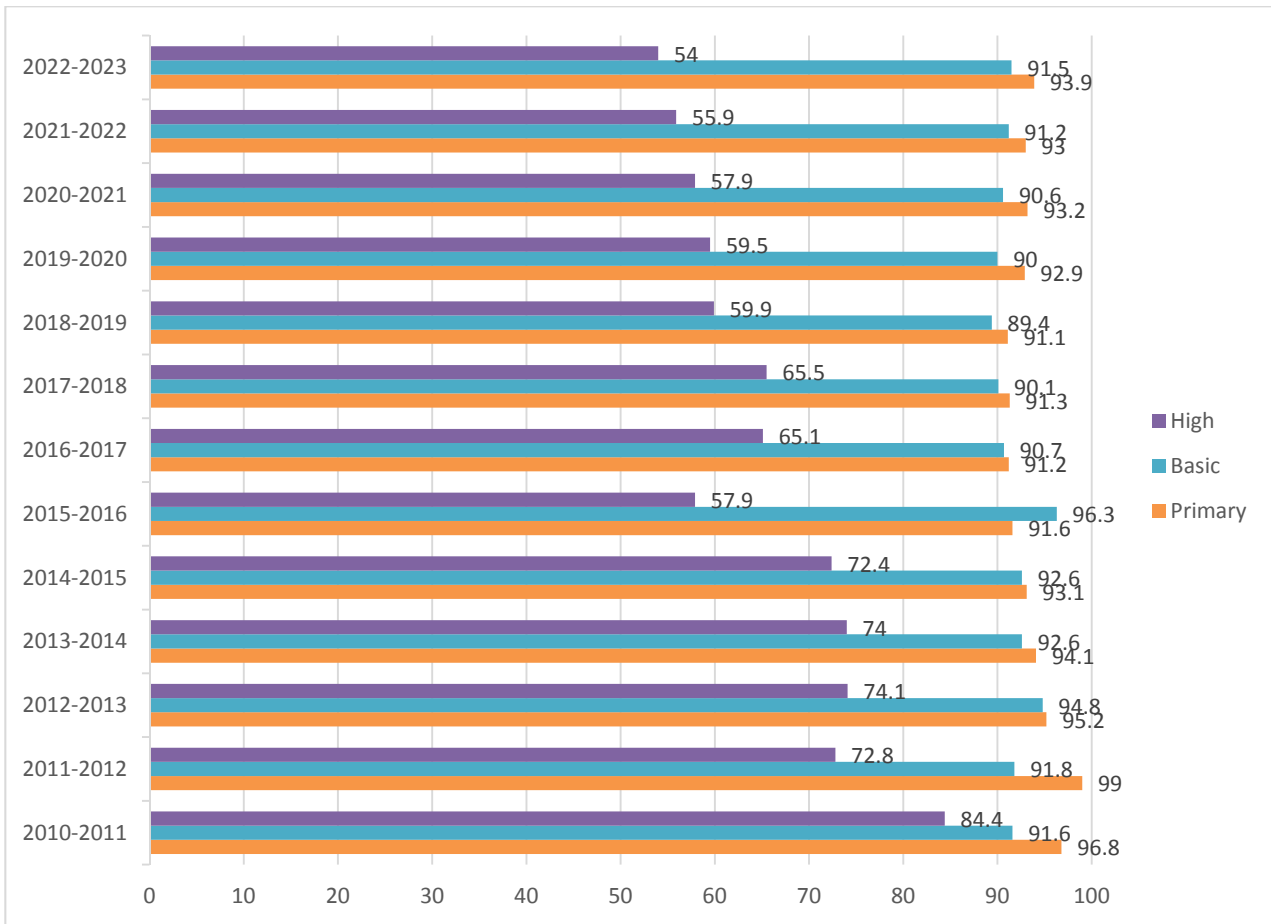


Figure 3. Indicators of gross enrollment ratio of students in general schools of RA for the academic years 2010-2023, by public education levels (%)

(The figure was created by the author based on the "Activity of General Educational Institutions" section of the "Social Situation of RA" statistical collections of the RA Statistical Committee of the relevant years.)

Regarding higher professional education, it should be noted that during the 2022-2023 academic year, the gross enrollment ratio for first degree

educational programs was 53.4%, while for master's degrees it was only 12.3% (see Figure 4). This is the lowest figure recorded in the last decade.

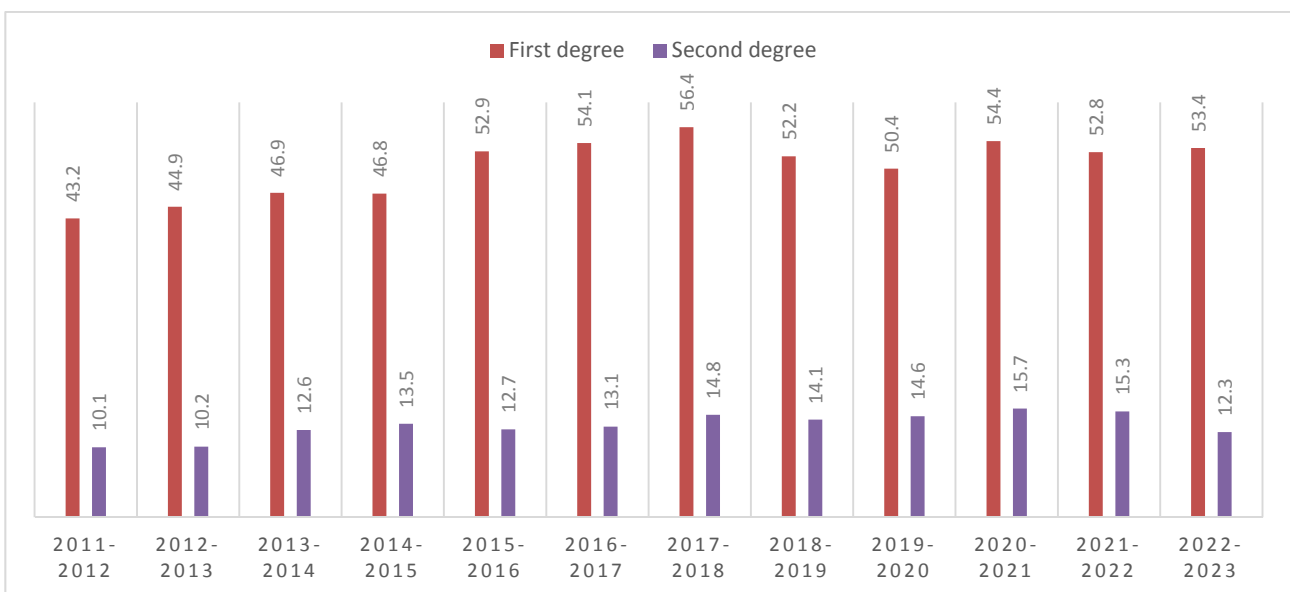


Figure 4. Gross enrollment ratio of students in higher education institutions in Armenia from 2011-2023, according to the first and second degree educational programs (%)

(The figure was created by the author based on the "Higher Professional Education" section of the "Social Situation of RA" statistical collections of the RA Statistical Committee of the relevant years.)

"The State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Armenia until 2030" by the Ministry of ESCS has evaluated the current state of the Armenian educational system as critical. The general education sector is particularly problematic. According to the program's point 43, 46% of the teachers currently working in Armenia are over the age of fifty, implying that they will retire within the next decade. The number of new teachers being trained is insufficient, and teachers under the age of thirty constitute only 11% of the total. This could lead to a physical shortage of teachers, despite the fact that there are currently 600-700 vacant teaching positions throughout the republic [29].

The situation with higher professional education indicators is also intriguing.

In recent years, there has been a sharp decline in the number of university graduates (see Figure 5). Comparing the data for the academic years 2022-2023 with 2012-2013, the number of graduates has decreased by more than 50%, and the number of admitted students has decreased by almost 30%. The situation becomes more concerning when considering the specialties of graduates and admitted students. One in ten graduates has a degree in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). For example, in 2021, there were only 27 students nationwide studying chemistry. Overall, considering the expected significant decline in the number of qualified teachers, the number of qualified individuals is insufficient to maintain the stability of the general education system, especially in STEM subjects [30].

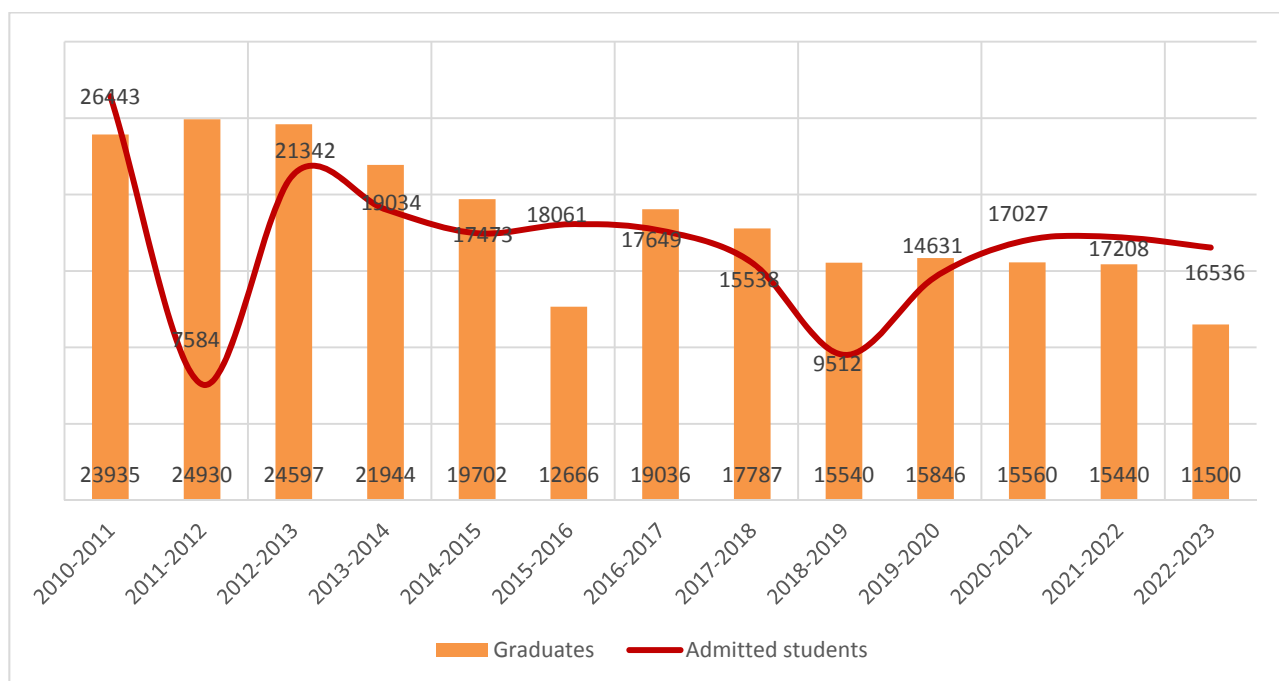


Figure 5. Flow of students admitted to and graduated from higher education institutions in Armenia from 2010-2023 (individuals)

9The figure was created by the author based on the "Education and Culture" section of the yearbooks of the RA Statistical Committee of the relevant years.0

In 2019, Armenia participated in the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), which aims to measure the achievements in mathematics and science among fourth and eighth graders. Armenia scored below average (38th place), falling behind Turkey (23rd place) and Azerbaijan (28th place), but ahead of Georgia (42nd place) and Iran (50th place) [16, p. 9]. This evaluation involved 58 countries, and the results

have been used to measure educational poverty in several countries. According to the World Bank, educational poverty in Armenia was 35% in 2019 and decreased to 26.1% in 2021. As of 2022, educational poverty in Armenia stood at 27.2%, which is significantly high compared to regional countries (though better than Iran, where it was 35.2%). In Georgia, it was 15.3%, in Azerbaijan 23.3%, and in Turkey 14.5%.

Table 1. Levels of educational poverty in Armenia and neighboring countries (%) [31]

	Armenia	Georgia	Azerbaijan	Turkey	Iran
2019	35	13.8	23.3	21.7	35.7
2021	26.1	13.8	23.3	15	35.7
2022	27.2	15.3	23.3	14.5	35.2

Conclusions. In Armenia, the interconnection between education and poverty has a profound impact on the country's socio-economic outcomes. This work shows that education is not only a clear indicator of human capital development but also a powerful tool in combating poverty. The existing gaps in the sector, such as poor quality of education, high levels of educational poverty, low gross enrollment ratio of students, and unfilled teaching positions, do not allow for breaking the cycles of poverty. For example, if all eligible individuals complete secondary education, 420 million people could be lifted out of poverty, cutting the global number of impoverished individuals by nearly half, and by two-thirds in Africa and South Asia [32].

The relationship between education and poverty is cyclical, and while quality education can ensure a reduction in poverty, the presence of poverty can impede access to quality education. Children from impoverished families often do not attend school because they prioritize securing their other basic needs or are working during that time. Currently, millions of children worldwide do not attend school because their daily income does not exceed \$1.90 [33]. The lack of access to education is a fundamental predictor that poverty will be passed from generation to generation, and in this context, the appropriation of education is one of the main pathways to achieving financial stability.

Thus, the results of the studies clearly show that there are cyclical relationships between education and poverty, and breaking this cycle becomes a priority in the context of sustainable development, requiring systemic reforms and substantial investments in the education sector.

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