

Can epistemic 'de-linking' rectify ongoing crises of education in the Global South? A critique on Abebe & Biswas' work

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Abstract: No one doubts the paramount role of education in overall development. There have also been various attempts to enhance the quality of education worldwide and in the Global South in particular. With this in mind, global mottos such as education for all have been adopted and implemented worldwide. In the Global South, in particular, there have been continuing attempts to support the realization of this motto by global agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and others. The logic behind this and other related mottos of education are foregrounded in the human capital approach to development. Yet, researchers of both the Global South and the Global North have questioned the success of such attempts. In this article, we reflect upon a strategy, an epistemic 'de-linking' with global capitalism, suggested by Abebe & Biswas in an article published in Fennia, 2021. They have suggested this strategy to rectify the ongoing crises of education in the Global South. We, however, question, whether "de-linking" the Global South from global capitalism brings opportunities for schoolchildren and young people, on the one hand, and the very possibilities and impossibilities of de-linking in the current world which has been more incredibly interconnected than ever, on the other. In other words, we question whether or not the de-linking of education from the capitalist world market helps to realize attainable aspirations and "epistemic justice" in the Global South, and if such de-linking is even possible. In attempting to answer these questions, we reflected on the ongoing debates on the benefits of education in the Global South and the remedies suggested by Abebe & Biswas to address the problem. To this end, this article begins by conceptualizing education and schooling and then proceeds to a description of formal education through a historical lens. Then, it presents the nexus between education and development. From there, it unfolds the critiques of the human capital approach to education and examines the epistemological shifts from 'rights to education' to 'rights in education' in the repackaging and retheorizing of the local-oriented educational system in the Global South. By extension, this section questions how far "de-linking" would benefit the crises of schooling and attempts to provide a pathway to address the crises in the Global South. Our conclusion thereof is that (1) in the current global world order where partnership is propagated as one of the best strategies for sustainable development, the strategy of de-linking not only contradicts this global motto but also brings no convincing ground to suggest so; (2) the strategy may also leave the Global South to be politically and economically more powerless and marginalized; (3) the suggested strategy hangs upon a mere de-linking which takes binary opposition to global cooperation without trying to deal with the issue within the interconnectedness of global countries, systems, and processes; and (4) the authors conceptualized epistemic injustice in a very narrow manner. Therefore, we suggest a relinking strategy that duly considers and reinforces the current global scenario of almost unescapable interconnectedness that proactively and continually reacts to balancing the gaps in global partnership processes, systems, and participating institutions and scholars.

Keywords: Education, De-linking, Relinking, Global South, Global North

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Introduction

Although a contested notion, Global South here refers to the less developed countries which share similar colonial experiences and economic achievements. The notion also includes countries such as Ethiopia and Liberia with no colonial experiences but having almost similar challenges and situations as the colonized ones.

Modern schooling in the Global South is one of the most contentious areas of ongoing debates in childhood studies and development discourses (see Section 2 below). It measures education in terms of formal school enrollment while excluding the learning that is acquired from informal education systems. Inspired by the human capital theory of education, national and international agencies have prompted universal schooling in the Global South as a tool to reduce poverty and achieve development (Ansell, 2017). However, this goal has not been fully achieved in the era of the global capitalist order. With these questions in mind, Ansell et al. (2020) examined the failure of schooling in the Global South to enable children and young people to achieve the desired goals, and Abebe & Biswas (2021) have linked it with the notion of coloniality of knowledge and 'epistemological injustice'. Recognizing this failure, they suggested a de-linking strategy which leads to and/or is reinforced by the de-coloniality of schooling from the capitalist market-driven system and neoliberal ideologies and eventually uplifts the indigenous knowledge systems (Abebe & Biswas, 2021). This view acknowledges the cultural specificity cherished in childhood studies rather than the universality of education valued in many global development agendas. While initially cherished in childhood studies, the concept has nowadays been seriously questioned (Abebe & Biswas, 2021). Yet, given the growing global interdependence and the continued influence of neoliberal paradigm in the political and economic spheres, we question whether de-linking is even possible. We also question how the Global South, whose education has failed amidst global support, can withstand the situation if completely delinked from the Global North.

We begin this commentary by conceptualizing education and schooling through a historical lens. Here, we will discuss formal and informal education systems in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. We will also look at the role schooling played in the independence of countries in the Global South and explain how structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and neoliberal ideologies changed the conception of education from a schooling perspective (Ansell, 2017). Then we will present the nexus between education and development unfolding the critiques of the human capital approach to education. We focus on examining the vectors of academic debates raised on its benefits and the solution to the crises. Following this, we will examine the epistemological shift from 'rights to education to 'rights in education' in the repackaging and retheorizing of the local-oriented educational system in the Global South. Finally, we will question how far "de-linking" would benefit the crises of schooling and attempt to provide a pathway to address the crises in the Global South ahead of making conclusions.

Education and schooling through a historical lens

It is not uncommon to hear people use the terms "education" and "schooling" interchangeably despite the fact that they are distinct. In this article, we attach education to the precolonial period and schooling to the colonial era as a project in the Global South. In the most general sense, education encompasses acquiring knowledge both in the formal and informal settings of individuals' everyday lives. Formal learning takes place in "modern schooling," which is believed to be "inherently a Western epistemological project" criticized for its rejection, at least for deemphasizing the indigenous ways of learning (Abebe & Biswas, 2021, p.121). It has also been objected to since it encourages children to strive for impossible or unattainable goals (Ansell et al., 2020). Despite this, it is still seen in the Global South and North alike as the only way out of poverty and underdevelopment. As a result, children are pushed into schools. While we agree with Abebe & Biswas on the source of the problem, in this piece, we intend to reflect on their de-linking strategy which we discuss below.

Pre-colonial education was mainly characterized by indigenous education, where children acquired skills and knowledge transmitted through their own language. More emphasis was given to the non-economic aspects of learning but such education had become disassociated as a result of colonial education. That was the period when Western ideologies were disseminated to non-Western societies, initially through missionaries and later in the name of development agendas. It argued that schooling was used to perpetuate Western values and to maintain Western domination of the Global South (Abebe & Biswas, 2021; Ansell et al., 2020; Ansell, 2017). Schooling in the Global South, on the other hand, was essential in the independence of several Asian and African countries. Though the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WB implemented SAPs in the 1980s with the intention of addressing the economic difficulties of countries in the Global South, it had an adverse effect on household economies, reducing the enrollment of children, particularly girls, who are the primary sources of domestic labor for many households (Ansell, 2017).

Schooling in the era of globalization has become the agenda for many multilateral and transnational organizations, such as the WB and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which have been involved in designing development policies and programs. The Millennium Development Goal as another global initiative for development calls for every child, boys and girls, to receive a full course of primary school education by 2015 (see goal 2). These international organizations have influenced the forms of education. The recognition of schooling as a tool to eradicate poverty and achieve development goals considerably becomes the focus of their agenda. Based on an economic perspective, it is examined that these global agencies have promoted the production of knowledge motivated by the neoliberal ideology of market economy and the expansion of primary education with certain standards of measurement of the outcome, mainly its economic benefits in the formal sector (Ansell, 2017).

Yet, the effects of indigenous education on informal sectors such as domestic labor, subsistence agriculture, and informal trading, which provide a living for many people in the Global South, as well as the social consequences, are often overlooked (Ansell, 2017). The knowledge and skills that are obtained from informal learning are also de-emphasized or ignored. Besides, Western-style schooling has not been practiced in a vacuum, meaning, it is embedded in the existing socio-economic and cultural arrangements of a given society and politics governing them and global power relations. In this regard, from the political economy perspective, Ansell (2017) argues that the benefits of schooling as proposed by human capital theory reject the role of power and politics in shaping education in the Global South. Section five of this commentary provides the details of this critique and examines schooling from the theories of the "new social studies of childhood."

Human capital approach to schooling and its critiques

The development could be conceptualized as a (re)making of a better life for everyone and includes socio-economic changes that transform societies to make human survival possible (Ansell, 2017). It is not a mere growth in the conventional measure of gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national income (GNI) per capita of a nation but also a macro socio-political transformation and micro lifestyle choices of children and young people that are largely constrained by the life chances of the probability of realizing these life choices, for example, learning. Among the life chances which typically influence the lives of the majority in the world are international politics and development policies. Sometimes these policies are implemented dialectically to realize the needs, wants, interests, and aspirations of children and young children in the Global South (Ansell, 2017). In this sense, education becomes the desired element to achieve development.

The notion of development as a universal agenda was promoted initially by Global North to get royalties from their colonies and then it became the transnational agencies'/institutions' main task. For example,

achieving development seems modified to mean meeting UN MDGs some years back and SDGs now. Such development goals have not only been predominantly designed by the Global North but also funded by their transnational institutions for countries that implement their agendas. For their desire to obtain financial support, the Global South falls under the North's agendas. Thus, the policies of International Financial Institutions (mainly the WB) which promote a global model of education are based on the Westernizing and Westernized development equation. Therefore, the Global South is regarded as awaiting change that needs the disintegration of the so-called traditional institutions of the Global South and their replacement by 'modern' and rational institutions of the West, one of which is modern schooling. It suggests changing the personality of children and young people in the Global South through Western education and global media which, of course, represents and reflects the supremacy of the West. However, this global model of development has viewed children of the Global South as passive to internalize the educational values of the Global North and underscores the negative impacts of indigenous knowledge systems on development. Therefore, the main area of contention is whether development agendas are working under the educational philosophies and interests of the Global South which Ansell (2017), and Abebe & Biswas (2021) have reflected on.

Drawing on the tenets of the human capital approach to modern schooling, which has guided the workings of the WB and other multilateral organizations, and the critiques provided against it by Ansell (2017), we have attempted to further examine it through childhood perspectives. Education, according to the human capital approach, is both personal and collective good, with the premise that educational investment yields both personal and social gains. Individuals with advanced human capital are monetarily rewarded, and this benefits the economy as a whole (Ansell, 2017). Yet, Ansell (2017) has examined the backdrops of this individual-dependent assumption of education and its economic analysis. We discussed each of them with further examination.

Decontextualized schooling

One of the criticisms forwarded against global modern schooling views of the human capital approach is its lack of insight into the contexts in which schooling happens (Ansell, 2017; Abebe & Biswas, 2021). Regardless of the diversity and differences in historical experiences and the socio-cultural logic to the education of societies, Western-style schooling homogenizes the experiences of all children and similarly considers them as a single social category living in both the Global North and South. In doing so, it takes the Global North's model of child development which fails to adequately accommodate the Global South contexts and realities. This could be more explained from the perspective of childhood as an embedded concept.

According to Gittins (2004), a "child" is an "embodied individual," and "childhood" is a historically and socially produced social form that is continually generating structure and changing through time and space. Children's experiences are also impacted by their sociocultural and historical circumstances, according to Vygotsky (as stated in Woodhead, 2013). Similarly, it is claimed that children's experiences and lives are socially embedded (James & Prout, 2015; Ansell, 2017). In her critique of the liberal concept of agency, Valentine (2011) also emphasizes the uniqueness of children and the social embeddedness of their lives. This might imply that the implementation of schooling to education, which has disembodied the children's locales and experiences, will not be realized. This could be better understood when readers note that schooling is a recent phenomenon within colonial frames while indigenous education in every society existed long ago.

Non-schooled abilities and attitudes

One of the most voiced criticisms of the human capital approach is that it downplays the "inherent abilities of those who gain the most education" (Ansell, 2017, p. 300). It undermines non-school skills and knowledge acquired in the informal educational system. In this view, unschooled

children are portrayed as incompetent beings who are objects of knowledge and as unfinished or imperfect human beings who are unable to participate in decision-making on issues that directly affect their lives. One could also say that children's ability to create and re-create meanings, as well as their influence on the construction of social structures and their social positions in society and lived experiences, are undervalued in the approach. Despite their active engagement in the construction of realities and the formation of social structures, children in the Global South, we may say, increasingly experience contradicting socialization. On the one hand, they are strongly socialized to internalize and affirm adult cultures and live through intergenerational engagements in numerous routine life circumstances and socio-economic engagements as well as through indigenous education which is usually integrated with their religions. Notwithstanding this, they are also exposed to Western values and ideologies, through so called modern schooling systems which might have contradicted their experiences and perspectives.

'Human beings' versus 'human becoming'

One of the areas in which the human capital approach to education has been criticized is its market-driven and future-oriented schooling philosophy. Its emphasis on years of schooling and the future economic rewards of it both for the individual and the nation at large discounts on the present ('here and now') lives of children (Qvortrup, 2009; Corsaro, 2015). Taken on Corsaro's (2015) critique against Qvortrup's structural perspective, we would say, the human capital approach focuses on the "anticipatory outcomes of childhood", and it views children as "becoming adults". From the perspective of interdependence, it is conceivable that being and becoming are mutually constitutive and intertwined (Abebe, 2019). Childhood entails both being and becoming in many forms. The binary logic of agency and structure is rejected in this perspective. From a collectivist standpoint, we would argue that placing childhood realities either at the 'human being' or 'human becoming' extremes of analysis is a theoretical mistake because it does not provide a complete picture of

childhood as a construct and does not reveal what it means to be a child in collectivist societies of the Global South. Thus, the conception of 'being' and 'becoming' as mutually constitutive would help consider multifaceted experiences in the remaking of schooling in the Global South.

Reconstituted power and politics in schooling

Another criticism leveled at the human capital theory of education is that it ignores, or at least downplays, the topic of power relations in determining educational goals and providing educational services. One of the most important reworkings of power as a socially relationally embedded reality owes much to Michel Foucault, a French social theorist. In terms of viewing discourse as something that 'defines what is meaningful and how it exercises power' (Gelcich et al. 2005, p. 379, as cited in Hannigan, 2006), a growing body of literature in social research takes this Foucauldian notion. Although power exists in all social domains, it is rarely balanced or fully democratic. Power and knowledge complexes piqued his interest, which he saw as inextricably intertwined. The focus of Foucault's research was on how people use knowledge to manage themselves and others. Using Foucault's claim that social relations embed power relations, one could argue that schooling as a form of the institution is an area of power relations where schoolchildren are constrained by the system in the sense that it may not encourage them to be active social actors and responsive to their communities' local needs.

Schooling is used to perpetuate the Western experiences of knowledge construction and power system. Based on the Marxist analysis of class inequalities, Ansell (2017) also says that this modern schooling heightens education consumption, which would sustain capitalism that provides high quality of life for the few at the expense of the rest. Thus, it ostensibly legitimizes Western political hegemony through multinational corporations and agencies which have been hugely sponsoring the explanation of schooling in the Global South. Children

have been exploited unprecedentedly by the economic system and its underlying ideologies of the segments of the society, including the adult group, which monopolizes the economic and political resources and powers. The ideologies heighten the level of exploitation of children. For instance, the profit motive doctrine of neoliberalism exploits the labor of children and alienates them from their social lives.

One might further suggest that the crises of education in the Global South might be linked to historical relationships throughout the colonial period, as well as the Global North's continuous hegemonic domination over the undeveloped, weak periphery. However, the political economy/Marxist explanation offered above has less emphasized this historical reality and, therefore, it partly justifies educational crises in the Global South. Moreover, one might argue that the political economy approach externalizes the crises and glosses over internal factors of inequalities which might be associated with sociocultural and personal. Whilst acknowledging the Global South's incorporation into the hierarchy of global states, the approach does not attend to the active ways in which children and young people adapt to, and actively exploit, their capacity to mediate between national-level and global processes, resources, and actors, in order to retain influence and advance poverty reduction agendas. One could also argue that the political economy approach to the benefits of education focuses uncritically on situational reconstructions of gender inequalities, which holds that men and women are treated unequally in society and are less empowered, and how these inequalities perpetuate poverty, inequality, and labor exploitation across social categories (boys and girls) (Ansell, 2017; Abebe, 2019).

The most compelling criticism comes from Ansell et al. (2020, p.17) who say that modern schooling in the Global South promotes "occupational aspirations that are unattainable by most" and has failed to bring promised employment opportunities and economic benefits. Yet, schooling continues to be the hope for thousands of children in the Global South (Ansell, 2017), and many governments believe that

schooling brings societal transformation. This remains an unanswered question.

Epistemological shifts: from 'rights to education to 'rights in education

One important implication that criticisms against the human capital approach to education could have in childhood discourse about schoolchildren is an epistemological shift from objects of schooling to subjects of knowledge. This might go with what Abebe & Biswas (2021) suggested a shift from rights to education to rights in education. Benefiting from their arguments about 'rights in education', we examined how this shift would benefit in rethinking schooling in the Global South and also reflect on 'de-linking schooling from capitalism' (Abebe & Biswas, 2021, p. 8). This was originally proposed by Ansell and her colleagues (2020) in their article entitled, "Educating the "surplus Population": Uses and Abuses of Aspiration in the rural peripheries of a globalizing world" as an alternative to schooling where children's capacity and abilities are undervalued and they are imprinted with "unattainable aspirations."

As mentioned above, the human capital approach argues that access to education reduces social inequalities, empowers girls, and enables schoolchildren to realize their human potential, albeit it has been objected to on various grounds, as mentioned above. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, P. 8) recognizes this access to education under Art. 28, which reads, "State Parties recognize the right of children to education and should take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity." Yet, this right-based approach to education underestimated the effects of today's global inequalities that arise partly because of unequal historical relationships and contemporary power dominance in shaping modern schooling as evident both during the colonial era and postcolonial period. Decolonial studies also questioned the UNCRC, and transnational organizations' works that promote the

Western model of children and hegemonic ideologies that conceal non-western conceptions of childhood and forms of education. It also does not consider the contemporary local realities where schooling could not help children to realize their human potential in Global South (Ansell, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, Ansell et al. (2020) argued that modern schooling inculcates children and young people in Global South with the most inspirational hopes in the capitalist economy where the labor market opens opportunities for a few. They believe that the prevailing neoliberal global economy could not solve all problems, rather it is countering the people's system of knowledge which they have used to get their livelihoods by drawing a significant number of children and young people to schooling. As a response to this and the 'rights to education' notion of schooling inspired by neoliberal capitalist economy and human capital theory, Abebe & Biswas (2021, P. 4) suggested 'rights in education' which challenged "not only the global knowledge order but also inscriptions of new practices through the mediums of resistance, revolution, and activism so as to re-politicize knowledge and reintroduce it in the debates around epistemic justice".

Though Ansell et al. (2020, as cited in Abebe & Biswas, 2021) proposed to "de-link" schooling from the market-driven requirements of the capitalist economy and neoliberal ideology, the question remains as to how practical it would be to "de-link" deep-rooted schooling in the Global South in the current era of global interconnectedness and the continued unequal power of influence. In what follows, we attempted to question the notion of de-linking from the capitalist order and the neoliberal ideology.

Challenges to epistemic 'de-linking' and the quest for alternative strategy

The basic impetus for the idea of de-linking derives from the dependency approach, which argues that the underdevelopment of the Global South

was the result of historical and contemporary relations with the Global North which made them underdeveloped.

Similarly, Abebe & Biswas (2021) delimited de-linking to mean detaching the education system of the Global South from the Global North. They suggested de-linking as a policy alternative to the global capitalist order in order to achieve development and economic growth in countries of the Global South. Yet, we argue that North-South relationships have been well established in the educational sector, and detaching this is near impossible for the Global South governments which have neither their own well-established modern educational policies nor the capacity to adequately finance it. In the closer support of global financial support for education, de-linking may mean complicating the existing challenges for school expansion and quality enhancement initiatives. This could include limited chances for pre-existing opportunities to academicians for higher level studies, short-term training, other academic fellowships as well as academic partnerships which could facilitate and redirect rethinking on indigenous education. Moreover, de-linking the education sector alone for governments in both the Global South and North may be tricky as the education sector is embedded with other sectors such as economic and political partnerships. They also did not point out concrete actions de-linking countries in the Global South should take and what priorities they should possess to realize this. Furthermore, economic history reminds us that the economic de-linking strategy of the dependency theory, on which the educational de-linking strategy espoused by Abebe & Biswas was based, itself failed to succeed during a period where global interconnectedness was shallower and narrower than what it is today.

Apart from the above questions about the (im)possibilities of de-linking as suggested by Abebe & Biswas, the question remains whether "de-linking" with global capitalism brings opportunities for schoolchildren and young people in the Global South. Does the de-linking of education from the capitalist world market help realize attainable aspirations and "epistemic justice" in the Global South? One of the intellectual criticisms is that it undervalues the mutual relationships of dependency. Some

societies in the Global South, for example, some Asian countries, have benefited from their contact with the global capitalist order. In a similar vein, one might argue that de-linking education from the capitalist-driven economic system and the neoliberal paradigm might not necessarily promote employment opportunities and development in the Global South. It may disconnect the generations of the Global South from other parts of the world. De-linking means de-centering the coloniality of knowledge. Yet, one might ask whether a decolonial epistemic shift in the Global South (Abebe & Biswas, 2021) could be achieved through de-linking in the contemporary world where global interconnectedness and reciprocal influences are heightened through 'modern education'. The suggestion was given to revolutionize the political-economic structure of the Global South and make it represent the idea that the Global South knowledge is valuable. However, this view has a tendency of idealizing the process of de-linking. As an alternative to this, we suggest re-linking or repacking the education philosophies of the Global South through hybridizing the knowledge that does not homogenize the uniqueness of different knowledge systems.

Conclusions

One of the main complaints leveled at the global model of education by the "new social studies of childhood" and development discourses nowadays is that it ignores local knowledge and imposes the epistemologies of the Global North on children from the Global South. This is tantamount to utilizing it as a tool to maintain Western dominance. Furthermore, it attracts a large number of children to school by motivating them to achieve unattainable goals. The fact that it is built on the global capitalist market economy is one of the reasons for this. As a result, decolonization of knowledge and de-linking have been proposed as solutions to the problem. De-linking, on the other hand, might not be enough to solve the problem; to what extent de-linking is done is also contentious. How can it be possible for Global South countries which are highly dependent and/or interdependent with Global North countries to be delinked and what are the local and global implications for this? We

argue that these questions cannot be easily and effectively answered by the strategy of de-linking suggested by Abebe & Biswas (2021). As a result, with the ongoing effects of globalism, repackaging or relinking local knowledge to the global in a balanced and mutually interdependent manner could be beneficial in terms of competitive advantages and knowledge sharing.

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