

How fair british education for all

[Education](#)



HOW FAIR BRITISH EDUCATION FOR ALL This essay will analyse how education system helps to maintain class inequality in contemporary Britain. In Britain, a good quality of public education service has been promised for all children regardless of ethnicity, race or income. Unfortunately, School League Table and recent surveys show opposite. In 1944, the government passed Education Act which allowed all children to receive secondary education.

Children would be selected by ability for different types of school through an IQ test called the 11+ (in Scotland, the qualifying exam). Between 1964 and 1974, all secondaries re-organised into comprehensive schools instead of IQ test selection. In today's Britain, there are state (92%) and private (8%) schools with level of primary, secondary and tertiary. Vocational or non-vocational curriculum is being used and leaving school age is 16 since 1972.

Universities continue to grow and now 40% of 18 year olds go onto university whereas in 1960s it was 5% of school leavers. Although the vast majority (80%) of private school pupils go into the university, almost 40% of state school pupils go into the further education. This shows that class inequality exists in British education system. All sociologists accept that education is important in society as people receive 15000 hours of compulsory education. However, they have different opinions about the role of education in society.

The originator of the functionalist ideology, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) argued that education is an agent of secondary socialisation which transmits norms, values and roles (value consensus) and acts as a bridge between family and the whole social system. He claims pupils should see themselves as part of a nation by learning of certain subjects which can

establish a common political identity for social solidarity, i. e. history, so pupils can see similarities between themselves and the past society.

American sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1903-1979) developed Durkheim's ideas. He argues that everybody has the same chance to succeed, therefore pupils who are most successful in schools due to their effort and ability and different talents are fitted into appropriate jobs. This is known as meritocracy. People also learn skills required by modern industrial society in order to keep nation efficient and allow people earn a living. These skills may be general skills such as literacy and numeracy or specific skills required by particular occupations.

The weakness of functionalism is no explanation for how all schools, including religious and fee-paying schools, can transmit a common value system while there are many individuals with different values. They assume the education system establish fair standards for everyone so pupils can achieve their status in society. This meritocratic approach cannot be true if private and grammar schools are considered as private schools have advantage to state schools. 40% gap of entering higher education between middle class and working class children shows the reality.

The other strong ideology is Marxism. The founder, Karl Marx (1818-1883), assumes that education is part of society that is vital for the ruling class (bourgeoisie) to exploit the working class (proletariat). French Marxist philosopher, Louis Pierre Althusser (1918-1990) argues that education system tells people what to believe and how to achieve it which creates false consciousness known as Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The system also

legitimizes inequality. Meritocracy and hidden curriculum makes people believe that individual differences are the reasons for success and failure.

In addition, Bowles & Gintis suggest that education system produces a workforce with the skills and attitudes required by employers, thus ensuring that profits continue to be made for the ruling class. They also insist there is a pattern of success or failure related to social factors such as class, ethnicity and selection does not occur on basis of ability. Although Marxism provides strong ideas, it has some weak points such as not telling how teachers are “ tools” of the system and showing pupils as passive. It does not explain how the bourgeoisie control the system for their own benefits.

Functionalists defined “ cultural deprivation” to explain working class underachievement. It means children who lack the basic cultural norms, values, language and skills that commonly shared by most other members of society. As Basil Bernstein states that working class families speak in “ restricted code” which means smaller vocabulary, less adjectives and adverbs, information is short with no details or additional explanations, while middle class families speak in “ elaborated code”, with more effective communication.

Therefore working class pupils have limited skills required by education such as describing, analysing and comparing whereas middle class pupils have enough mental stimulation which is crucial as teachers use elaborated code. Hart & Risley supported this thesis by saying a professional’s child knows more words than a working class family’s child and likely to be more

successful in school. However, it fails to consider material deprivation and structural inequalities, the organisation of school and teacher's expectations.

Nell Keddie states that working class culture is different not deficient.

Blackstone and Mortimore (1994) argue that working class families have no less interest in their children's education. Paul Willis tries to answer criticism of Marxism and shows that there is no meritocracy in a capitalist society in his study called "Learning to Labour". The "lads" (12 pupils) had their own counter-school culture which was opposed to the values espoused by the school. The lads felt superior both to the teacher and to conformist pupils.

They can see through the ideological smokescreen which means they are aware of capitalistic society is not meritocratic and they will end up having low-paid jobs so there is no need to gain qualifications. Although they believe workplace is a sense of adulthood/manhood, they still have the same attitude: the lack of respect for authority and having a "laff". Therefore education can have unintended consequences on pupils which may not be completely beneficial to capitalism.

Despite the significant findings, this study has a small-scale view as it includes only 12 boys and is gender biased so it is difficult to generalise the findings. Functionalists and Marxists try to address the problem differently, but none of them have satisfying explanations. Functionalists see the education system as providing a positive educational experience which benefits the children and society. They blame working class families or culture for the poor results of working class children. Whereas, Marxists

claim that the system oppresses and harms people, and that it only benefits the powerful.

Both of them ignore gender, ethnicity and labelling (Stephen Ball) which develops self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson) means when people treat you as if you had certain attributes, you start acting that way. All these studies and recent surveys show that there is a class inequality in Britain and education system maintains it. The Sutton Trust suggests a solution: secondary schools should be more balanced and disadvantaged youngsters should be attained in order to be in better position. Tevhide Turkmen