

Education in the uk: social policy changes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The 1944 Education Act has a significant role in the British education system. According to Bochel et al (p. 238), the legislation of this Act initiated free secondary education for all children and raised the school leaving age from 14 to 15. Control over education system was shared between central government and local government. It also gave local authorities the power to control education affairs while the central government was in charge of providing financial support. In relation to this, the Act created three secondary systems (Tripartite system) namely: the grammar school (for the academic), technical (for practical or vocational studies) and secondary modern (for less academic). Admission into these schools were based on entrance examination called eleven-plus. One of the impacts of this policy was to establish a system that allows children from diverse background to schools most suitable for their needs and ability.

The return of conservative government in 1979 alleged that change was necessary in order to raise the standard of the British education system. The change did not neutralise until 1988. Bochel, et al (2009) wrote: 'Thatcher's government of 1980 placed at least part of the blame for Britain's economic ills on 'trendy' educators who they perceived as having emphasised equality and new teaching methods at the expense of providing a solid educational foundation for children' (p. 240).

This means that the conservative government believe the possible way to revive the education system was to take control of the provision and policy of education from the hands of local authority and teaching professionals and centralized it to the central government. This was responded through the 1988 Education Reform Act. The key significant of this legislation was to

introduce market mechanism which encourages competition among schools and parental involvement (i. e. giving parents an informed choice in terms of choosing schools for their children).

GRANT MAINTAIN SCHOOLS

Thatcher's government initiated two tier systems in to the British education in order to promote competition among schools. This was achieved through given grant maintain status the opportunity to opt out of the control of Local Education Authority (LEA) and become independent schools through parental votes. The benefit of opting out meant that the school will be able to receive its budget directly from the central government and also have the power to manage its affairs such as pupil entry and selection process. However, schools which chose to remain under the umbrella of LEA had its budget controlled by local management of schools (LMS). Under the LMS control, the schools were able to manage 85% of its budget. (Alcock 2008 p. 317).

According to Bochel (p. 241) the aim of the conservative was to establish a market strategy for the two schools (i. e. GMS and LMS) to compete for pupil numbers. To the policy makers, based resources on the number of children they could attract not only encouraged them to perform well but also meant that those which perform below standard would be forced to improve or face the consequence of closing down whereas those that attract more pupils receive greater resources and continue to remain in operation.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM, STANDARD TEST AND LEAGUE TABLE

The second area of concern to Thatcher's government was the poor basic skills of the British population especially among young children in school leaving age compare to other countries (reference this part). In response, the policy makers introduce a national curriculum and standard test for all state schools which was to be published in a league table. The content of the curriculum included maths, English and science as the core subjects in addition with other subjects like history, languages, geography and daily worship if it is a faith school.

The standard test on the other hand was initiated to test children's understanding or attainment on the curriculum on four key stages between the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. However, testing at key stage 4 was later polish due to children under taking GCSE.

Publication of the result along side with GCSE and A- levels in league table gave parent the choice to compare schools and also to check it performance before enrolling their children. (Alcock 2008, p. 318). However, the information published could be misleading because the pupils achievement might be determine by various reasons outside the control of the school. For example, a child from a high class social background might need a might receive little support from the school and still high result from test compare to a person from a low social background who gets good quality of teaching fro the school but still perform poor in test. The result therefore courage schools to select children from the high class academic families.(Hill 2009).

However, it could be argue that the 1988 Education Reform Act has lead to creation of class differences and inequality in to the British education

system. For instance, Brown and Lauder deem that bringing marketing in education would benefit children from high class family as they will be influence to educate their children in independent schools where as children from the minority and working class families end up LMS schools which could be classified as less successful schools (Haralambos 2000 p. 798).

In addition, Gewirtz et al argue that even though the act has giving parents the autonomy to make choice, however, parents from high class families are more likely to excise this choice as compare to parents from the working class families. For example high class families are more able to move house to certain areas in other to have access to good education. They are also likely to appeal against a decision if their children are tune down of their preferred choice of school and often educate children in a primary school which has link to their preferred secondary school. Working class families on the hand might be force to choose a local school because they can not afford to move house or has no means of transportation either than public transport (Haralambos 200 p. 806).

The nation curriculum on the other hand could be view as initiating inequality into the education system. For example, the study of history is about the British history or empire without considering other cultures such as the Asian or African history which might have a significant influence on the consumers.

Lawton has critics' that testing between the ages of 7 and 14 would label some children as either failures or achieves. Those labelled as failures could

result in leaving school early or not having much interest in school which lead to affect their future prospect (Haralambos 200 p. 811)

NEW LABOUR POLICY

Following a successful election in May 1997, new labour came in to power with Tony Blair as the prime minister. New labour gave education policy a high priority in it agenda. According to Alcock (2003), new labour has continued the regime of conservative ideology of marketization and parental choice; however, the first major change was the school standard and framework Act 1998. the aim of the legislation was to bring social exclusion and inclusion as well to tackle child poverty in education and creating opportunity for every child to developed.

The impact of the policy resulted in revising the national curriAccording to Baldock (2007), even though new labour still continue to or are in use of the nation curriculum, it has however made some significant changes which include daily hour of literacy and numeracy strategy in primary education. It has also introduced citizenship teaching and, information and communication technology.

In addition, labour has reduced class size for key stage 1 and 2 to a maximum of 30. The importance of reducing class size as argue by new labour was that large class size distract pupil from learning. Funding for achievement was derived from scrapping off the Assisted Place scheme implemented by previous conservative party.(check alcock 2003 for referncing).

Statistics by Adcock shows an improvement in reducing class size and also bring in literacy and numeracy hour on top of the national curriculum in primary schools. By 2007, 88% of pupils in primary education were taught in class of not more than 30 children compare to 1997 which had a percentage of 72. Moreover, the percentage of literacy achievement at key stage 2 at 2007 was 80% compare to 75% in 2002 and 54% in 1996. Numeracy on the other hand achieved at key stage 2 in 2007 was 77% compare to 72% in 2000 and 54% in 1996 (Alcock, 2008). This improvement shows a significant raise in labours policy.

Education action zone, this framework was established to support schools within poor areas to improve education attainment. In order to achieve it aim, the government enter in to partnership with private business, individual schools and education authority. The intension of the partnership was to formulate new strategies of teaching in areas where social exclusion and poverty were high in order to raise standard in attainment (Blakemore 2003).

Aside the action zone, the 1998 frame work act encourages the establishment of specialist school. These emphases on the promise to promote “ diversity and excellence” in schools as cited in Alcock 2003, p . Comprehensive secondary were given power to bid and became specialist school in areas such as Arts, Business, science, language or sports as well as selecting 10% of it candidates based on aptitude. The impact of this was to create diversity which meant that schools differ from each other and offer a curriculum which best suit the needs of the student in the chosen area. By 2006 it was recorded that 80% of the secondary school in Britain had

become specialist school. Adcock(2005). This percentage shows that high proportion of secondary school bid to specialise in particular area of interest.

The consequence however, from opting out as noted from Thatcher's government in 1988 which lead to a two ties system could also implied in specialised schools. Blakemore (2003) highlighted the fear that specialist schools can fully funded and resource where as non specialist become under resourced.

Another concern to the policy makers was the failing schools. According to Blakemore (2003), the Act gave central government power to intervene when local authorities fail to provide adequate support for a school to perform well. Both the failing school and the local authority were identified by Ofsted and shamed. Moreover, the government initiated that if matters are not resolved; than the local authority is not equipped to handle matters and therefore the school management would be transfer over to private sector for management. Examples such local authorities that went into private management are Hackney and Guildford.

The consequences of labours 1998

In spite of labour's promise to change years of underachievement for the country's most disadvantage schools, educational opportunity still reflects on class deference, ethnicity, and gender inequality.

According to Hill(2009), the issue of gender still remain in education but on the reverse. It is no longer the female discrimination as it used to be years ago. Female

According to Blakemore(2003)

Hill, M. and Irving, Z. (2009) understanding social policy. 8th edn. Oxford:
Blackwell publishing Ltd.