

Trinidad education

Education



In Trinidad, The Ministry of Education has the policy of free education for all. They preach that this 'free' education is not based on class, wealth, race, gender or ethnicity but rather is a way to ensure that the entire nation is educated. Though these are the promises on Trinidad's and Tobago's Education Policy Paper, how is it that only nine of every one thousand people continue onto college, university or any higher education after secondary school? Twenty-one percent of Trinidadians live in poverty, which means that twenty-one percent of citizens do not have access to running water or proper healthcare.

Because of this, many children in these poor families immediately enter the world of work or become 'beggars' to help feed their family. This shows the importance of social class on the initial decision of whether a child will be educated or not. This is not common as only two percent of Trinidad's population is illiterate. I would categorize myself in the middle to high status class in my country and this has, in many ways affected my educational opportunities.

I lived in a town known as Diego Martin and though my neighborhood mostly consisted of people within my same social class, the town itself has many neighborhoods consisting of people living in poverty. Pre-school education is not considered by government policies and therefore, there are no public pre-schools and if a family wants to enroll their child in preschool they would have to do so privately and with their own money. This goes to show that the first level of education in Trinidad is in fact not free.

Because of this, my parents enrolled me in a private pre-school, which would indeed have to be paid for with their own money. This shows the immediate impact that class has on one's education from just the first steps. Pre-school in Trinidad usually takes about two years and here is where a child learns his numbers and letters and therefore these children living under the poverty line are somewhat 'robbed' of these essential learning years.

After this, a child must then be signed up for primary school where he or she will spend the following seven years. There are two hundred and sixteen primary schools in the country, one hundred and sixty-three of which are funded by various religious institutions, thirty-two of which are funded by the government and therefore are completely free of charge, and twenty-one of which are privately run. I attended a privately run school as these had higher success rates in the SEA or Secondary Entrance Assessment examination that all primary school students are prepared for in order to gain placement in the school of one's choice.

Once again, though there is an availability of free primary level education, the members of the middle and higher social class send their children to privately run schools in order to ensure that teachers are constantly present and not on strike due to low government wages, and that their children receive a more well-rounded education as there are funds now for sports and other recreational activities.

Personally, attending a private school made me not only feel safe, as there were not usually guards present in government funded institutions due to high cost, but to also gave me the opportunities to join different sporting

teams and go on school ‘ outings’ to various national attractions and the necessary preparation to gain a placement in the secondary school of my choice- the number one girls secondary school in Trinidad.

The entrance examination is one aspect that I can truly say that had absolutely nothing to do with class, race or ethnicity as each student was given an identification number and placement into choice schools was done based on results. These secondary schools were again a seven-year course. Therefore, in total one should spend sixteen years at school in order to complete what is considered a general education but the average number of years spent at school in Trinidad is eleven.

This means that the average student ‘ drops out’ of secondary school after two years. As a female in the top all girls’ institution, I became very gender bias as my school continuously obtained the most government scholarships year after year. Not only that, but nationally women received a significant number of scholarships more than the men did. This may have wrongly shaped my idea that women are in fact smarter than men based on what I experienced at home.

Tertiary education for many Trinidadians is extremely class bias. There is one university known as the University of the West Indies and though it is extremely renowned in engineering and mathematical studies it can only facilitate a very small percentage of graduates every year. Therefore, if one wishes to study, he or she may have to look at schools abroad which is a huge expense for any family.

Studying in the United States has been a great privilege for me that would never have been possible if I belonged to a lower social class. Overall, my social status granted me opportunities unimaginable for many residents in my country. Despite government efforts to better the education levels of the country there is still a lot to be done in order to meet the goal that class does not determine one's level or education.