

Study on the educational system in mauritius



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Abstract

Can the educational system in Mauritius be a Marxist one? In this paper, the educational system in Mauritius is analysed according to the Marxist perspective. The first part of the paper is concentrated on the historical side of the education system where it was observed that since the system was set up, there was favouritism, with the whites only gaining access to formal education. The Marxist perspective is then reviewed to gain an insight about this school of thought. After a thorough analysis of the educational system, it was found that there are many inequalities in the Mauritian school environment.

Chapter One – Brief History of Formal Education in Mauritius

The first setting up of an educational institute in Mauritius is dated back to the end of the 18th Century when Mauritius was under the French occupation. After the French Revolution in 1790, the colonial Assembly proclaimed that “ that the state had to provide moral and political education to its citizens. It was understood that a uniform type of education would be made available to all, irrespective of their social class” (Koodooruth, 2004). However, the first educational national institution set up was the “ L’Ecole Centrale” which provided secondary education for the elite and under the rule of General Isidore Decaen, “ L’Ecole Centrale” was converted to a Lycée, providing both primary and secondary education. In his time, some primary schools were made accessible to non-whites but secondary educational institutes were reserved for whites only. Hence, education was the “ province of the whites” (Koodooruth, 2004).

Few years after the capture of the island by the British in 1810, the needy and coloured children were provided with free primary education during the day. This initiative was taken by Reverend Lebrun in the year 1815. In the process, the latter was accused of “ conspiracy to set the slaves free” (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 38). Regarding the education of the slaves, Charles Telfair, in 1829, was the first to provide education in his estate at Bel Ombre.

Following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 of the Parliament of the United Kingdom which was passed in Mauritius in 1835 (Wikipedia, 2012) and the start of the Indian immigration in the 1830's, no provision was made for the children of those Indian immigrants. It was only in the 1850's, after Governor Higginson drew the attention of the local government as well as the British government of the Indians' situation, that “ grants-in-aid were offered to denominational schools” (Koodooruth, 2004). By the year 1882, there were 47 government schools with 6, 571 children enrolled and 57 grant-in-aid schools with 5, 316 children enrolled (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 72). In 1908, out of the 60000 children of school age, only about 7000 attended school as the Indians had difficulties to communicate and due to the lack of competent teachers.

In 1968, Mauritius obtained its independence from its British rulers and the primary concern of the Mauritian government was education. Since then, considerate efforts and investment of resources have been made in the education system and primary education was offered freely since its inception while secondary education became free as from 1976 and tertiary education followed as from 1988. Pre-primary schools however are not free but

According to statistics of the Government of Mauritius (2011), in March 2011, there were 1018 pre-primary schools, 305 primary schools, 121 secondary schools offering both academic and prevocational education, 59 schools were offering academic education only, 5 pre-vocational educations only and 49 Special Education Needs schools. As at December 2010, the number of students enrolled for tertiary education was 44, 334. The total government expenditure for the year 2011 for education was Rs 11, 709 million.

Chapter Two – Marxist Perspectives of Education

Unlike Functionalism, which assumes that education is fair, that is, it rewards the best candidates and disregards social inequalities that may restrict attainment, Marxism believes that education “ teaches the values and norms of the bourgeoisie” (Bryant, n. d.), that is, the elite group or the ruling group. The Marxist view on educational attainment is greatly influenced by social class background. It is said that education transmits ruling class ideology.

Althusser (1971) argued that the main role of education in a capitalist society was the reproduction of an efficient and obedient work force. This is achieved through schools:

1. transmitting the ideology that capitalism is just and reasonable (school teaches you to compete with your fellow pupils by trying to do better than them)
2. train future workers to become submissive to authority (school teaches you to accept as normal to do as you’re told, this way when your boss orders you what to do, it seems perfectly normal) (Anon., 2008)

In a study on interaction in classroom, Sharp and Green (1975) backs Althusser's Marxist view by maintaining that within the classroom a principle of hierarchisation is taught, which socialises pupils into accepting the principle of stratification. Pupils are taught this because they are categorised into three types namely

ideal pupils (they are those who are easily controlled and are self-motivated),

normal pupils,

problem children.

Wrong (1961) proclaims that "sociologists often have portrayed people as mere puppets manipulated by the invisible strings of society". As such, Wrong views students as puppets, in that they "passively accept and never reject their school's values" (Bryant, n. d.).

Marxists view hidden curriculum as propagating inequalities and preparing individual to become "docile, obedient and complying workers" (UOM). The hidden curriculum is thus perceived as a mechanism of the ruling class to perpetuate the system. Furthermore, Illich (1971), in his famous book entitled "Deschooling Society", claimed that the hidden curriculum imparts to the pupil to become passive and massive consumer. In other words, the pupil has no control over what he or she is learning. Moreover, it is argued that the power of authority makes pupils think that only conformity will bring rewards and is a door to the job market.

Chapter Three – Marxist Perspectives in the Mauritian Context

The materialistic model of society can be found in the Mauritian education system. According to Karl Marx's sociological concept, the work that people do determines their material wealth which in turn influences their social order. In Mauritius, people who have high paid jobs and rich businessmen can afford to live in specific posh regions. The schools belonging to such catchments areas are therefore prestigious institutions to which access is quite restricted. Consequently, the prevailing school culture in these areas is that of the ruling class of the society. Often such schools receive the best educational resources, such as the best subject teachers, rectors or head teachers and the best laboratory facilities among others, and they obtain more public attention. Furthermore, the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) funds collected and donations receive make it easier for these schools to improve further the educational facilities for the students. According to Koodooruth (2004), National Colleges (previously known as Star Schools) "are found in urban regions and their school population comes mainly from middle class and upper class families. They have good infrastructure, parent-teacher's associations are very dynamic and students normally perform well in examinations". The resulting values and beliefs imparted by schools confirm and reinforce what the students have already learnt and experienced at home. For instance, in a "Star" school, students get the message that due to their high intellectual ability, they are the best suitors as the future leaders of the country. The school culture being a reproduction at a micro level of the large society, socialization in the school is a smooth procedure for "Star" school students. Hence, this is why, each year, the

greatest number of laureates for the ' A'-level is from National Colleges like the Royal College of Curepipe and the Queen Elizabeth College. Research shows that students from upper and middle class families show higher level average levels of achievement on test scores and stay longer in school than low class students (Alwin & Thornton 1984, Goleman 1988). There are many reasons to explain this result. The social class of the student will determine many family atmosphere variables such as income, resources, health care, attitudes and behaviours at home, family intellectual activities, and so on. This can further illustrated by taking a look at the pass rate of the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) for different primary schools in different regions. From the statistics given by the Government of Mauritius regarding the CPE pass rate for the year 2012, the following is worth noted:

School

Locality

Pass Rate

Emmanuel Anquetil Govt School

Tranquebar

19. 63

Aime Cesaire Govt School

Camp Levieux

36. 59

Albion Govt School

Albion

34. 78

Bambous ‘ A’ Govt School

Bambous

35. 04

James Toolsy Govt School

Curepipe

80. 87

J. T Ramsoondar Govt School

Vacoas

83. 33

Hugh Otter Barry Govt School

Curepipe

95. 09

ZEP Schools

—

35. 6

The above table is just an example of how the pass rate of some public primary schools at CPE level is at the different regions in Mauritius. It is observed that those schools in poor areas have low pass rates whereas those schools in posh areas have higher pass rates. When analysing thoroughly the pass rate of all public schools the tendency is the same in most cases. Even Dr The Honourable Vasant Bunwaree, Minister of Education and Human Resources of Mauritius, conceded, in an interview by Leelachand (2011) after the announcement of the 2011 CPE results, that there is a great demarcation between the ' elite' group and the working class children. He said: " In general, the tendency is that the education system favours the elites but we have to look at the other students as well. If we want to improve the system, we have to make an effort. I am not satisfied with the CPE results. We have to do much better."

Moreover, teaching is seen as a middle-class job and many teachers come from this social class. Sometimes, they tend to have low expectations of working class children; they may see the students as being only capable of reaching a certain level of academic achievement and would not see any importance in trying to develop the students' performance any further. This is known as ' self-fulfilling prophecy', a term coined by the late Jamaican sociologist Robert King Merton, and this attitude does not encourage these children to go ahead with new challenges. This is the extreme contrary when we observe how the teachers in the National Colleges will strive to produce the laureates. At schools, some teachers tend to assess the children in terms of their language, dress code and other related behaviours. In Rosenthal and Jacobsen's study called " Pygmalion in the classroom", some students were

selected at random in a classroom and the teacher was made to believe that they had developed a test to determine the future of the students; which students would “bloom academically” the next year. This led to the teacher making more considerations to those students who would “bloom” and eventually it happened to become true. It is therefore proven that labelling has an influence over the success or failure of students. Unfortunately, in some schools in Mauritius, teachers label those students, who cause trouble in class or are reluctant to work, as “couyon” (which means not intelligent or have no skills in Creole) while those in the National Colleges are always encouraged to perform better and have the support of their teachers as well as the school.

Many students from poor socio-background suffer from “learned helplessness”. After failing continually, these students feel that they will never do well at school; they are often labelled negatively by their schoolmates or teachers, so they prefer to quit. Zhao (2011) found that in 2009, “the dropout rate for low-income students was five times greater than their high-income counterparts”. Fortunately in Mauritius since the 1970’s, secondary education has become free. The system of ranking was then established for the CPE examinations which allowed many families from the working class to quickly climb the social ladder. However, this system has been replaced by the grading system and the introduction of National Colleges. It is observed that, even though, education is free, there is a “high rate of dropout at the ‘A’-level” (Study Advisor, n. d.).

Some schools still work under the system of streaming with an ideal objective to meet the educational needs of individual students. However,

<https://assignbuster.com/study-on-the-educational-system-in-mauritius/>

streaming is often linked to social class, with a disproportionately higher number of lower-streams students being drawn from the working class. This encourages a form of stigmatization on the students whereby the pupils often feel rejected.

Another reason that explains poor performance of lower class students is that their home environments do not give the head start in school provided by middle class and upper class homes (Epstein, 1995). They then have problems to adjust in schools because they had very little support from their parents since their birth. The parenting style and expectations of middle class families are different from lower class. Basil Bernstein (1961) stated that working-class children often communicate ineffectively because of different “ language codes”. Moreover, many of the working class students have single parents and as such, they lack the parental affection and are often neglected. In some cases, one of the parents is undergoing specific sentences in jail. In some parts of the country, it is observed that some students, upon returning home from schools, do not actually stay in their houses. They are seen on the streets till late. This leads to juvenile delinquency. The rate of juvenile delinquency has gone on the rise these past years in Mauritius (Fulena, 2009).

In addition, children coming from high-class families have the chance of being acquainted with certain ‘ refined’ knowledge about the norms of culture and cultural heritage. This is referred to as the ‘ Cultural Capital’, by the famous sociologist Bourdieu. Cultural Capital is formed from the fact that parents, especially those from the higher classes of society, get well acquainted to art, music, art galleries, museums and reference libraries and

<https://assignbuster.com/study-on-the-educational-system-in-mauritius/>

will therefore inculcate this cultural knowledge to their children. Children therefore learn to appreciate art and other cultural items, from a very tender age. Some also get the chance to go abroad and to visit many foreign countries and thus, will be exposed to foreign languages, different art of living, cultures from multiple ethnic groups and communities and will also learn to appreciate the culinary art of these countries. These children will no doubt have an advantage over their peers who come from the working class, since the former will be exposed to multiple facets of culture since childhood and will be provided with educational toys and computers and even internet access. Thus, these children will be one step ahead, as compared to students from the working class families, who will suffer from cultural deprivation, and who are unable to distinguish ‘cultural cues’, when their teachers refer to films, famous artists, wonders of the world, cultural heritages and historical places and events.

Also, the official curriculum which is taught at school and examinable is prepared by people belonging to the ruling class. Knowledge which is considered important by this category of people is set as the study program. This idea has been interpreted by Paulo Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in which issues of the curriculum content were raised. For instance, working class children do not in the majority of cases possess prior exposure to the elements of the Official curriculum. Thus, the subject matter taught remains an abstract concept which accounts much for their failure at school. On the other hand, middle and upper class pupils who possess the material advantage are able to make meaning out of the taught content and they succeed at school. In Mauritius, most “Zones D’éducation Prioritaires”

(ZEP) schools where CPE pass rate is very low are found in regions where parents are from poor economic backgrounds. According to Koodooruth (2004), the ZEP or low performing schools are “ characterised by a very small school population, poor infrastructure and are normally found in rural regions and the peripheries of towns.”

Although education and transport are claimed to be free for students in Mauritius, parents still have to incur certain costs to educate their children. It is easier for middle class families to provide educational materials, compared to low income families. This does affect performance of the students at school since it helps them to better adapt to their school environment and be accepted among their friends. The lower class children cannot participate in some extracurricular activities such as some sports and outings, just because their parents cannot afford to pay for it. These students do feel rejected and develops a negative attitude towards schooling.

Technology has really become an indispensable tool for our students nowadays, but not all parents can afford to give their children these facilities. This causes the poor students to be at a disadvantage and to have lower self-esteem. Many students from poor families do part time jobs to help their parents in fulfilling their needs, and these students cannot give their maximum time to education. This implies that either they under-achieve or they are forced to leave the school at an earlier age, compared to their upper or middle class peers. According to Koodooruth (2004), individuals of the lower class “ have many difficulties to meet ends financially and do not have the resources to meet their child’s educational expenses adequately, though they might be interested in their child’s education”. In a study by <https://assignbuster.com/study-on-the-educational-system-in-mauritius/>

Chinapah (1983), he found that the performance of a student at school does not depend directly on his/her ethnicity but rather on the type of school he/she attends.

Further studies have shown that low class families cannot always provide a balanced diet and proper health care to their children. The latter have higher risks of infection, are sick more often, and this gives rise to high rate of absenteeism for these students. This may explain the poor performance of students from lower class students. Dr James Griffin, of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, said: “ High quality child care appears to provide a small boost to academic performance, perhaps by fostering the early acquisition of school readiness skills” (Fox, 2010).