

Impact of social class on education



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Assess and explain the impact of social class inequalities on education outcomes

In this essay I will explain and evaluate the impact of social class inequalities on education and its outcomes. Sociologists see society as a stratification system that is based on factors such as; hierarchy of power, privilege and wealth, which leads into social inequalities. Inequality is about who gets what, how they get it and why they get it. Social inequality is about class, gender and ethnicity, it is characterised by the presence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social groups. There are two main views of social inequalities in education within sociology; the functionalists and the marxists.

The functionalists believe that the education system is meritocratic because if you work hard, you get rewards. Emile Durkheim believes that education contributes to social solidarity which is essential for society as it binds society together. It has provided norms and values, a sense of history and a feeling of belonging in society. Durkheim also believed that education contributes to individual's specialised skills as these are taught with education and being passed on from parents. The education system teaches individuals the skills and knowledge required to enable an individual to do the job. Talcott Parsons developed further into Durkheim's theory and suggests that education is a secondary socialisation where schools build on the primary socialisation, which is taught by parents. That education system develops on value consensus and prepares children for their adult roles. He believed that education helps with individual achievement as it rewards high achievers with praise, it offers equal opportunity for individuals to a chance

of success. He also believes that schools are a miniature version of society which prepares them for adult roles and assists with role allocation as it helps them discover their talents and expands them further. However functionalists were criticised as there is evidence that certain groups underachieve in schools which suggests that individuals do not have equal opportunities, their talent is was not effectively developed or the role allocation is not effective.

The marxists believe that the education system operate as an ideological tool. Louis Althusser believed that schools prepare individuals for their roles in jobs, are taught to expect future exploitation and are provided with education and qualification to match their job roles. He believes that the education system brainwashes and manipulates individuals. Bowles and Gintis argue against Parsons's role allocation theory as they suggest individuals who get the highest qualifications and the top jobs do so because they work hard and do as they're told. They found the individuals with the high grades where obedient, hardworking and conforming and are rewarded with high grades as they are the qualities required for adult work.

It is said that the higher a person's social class, the higher their educational qualification, which has been proved over the past 50 years by sociological research and government statistics. For example statistic in 2012/13 show that in London, pupils living in the area of Westminster achieve 86. 6% in achieving 5+ A*-C grades, compared to pupils living in the area of Newham achieve 79. 1%. Although both areas are within inner London the results show a difference due to class social factors within educational attainment. It is also said that a parent's social class has a greater impact on how a child

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performs at school, research by the University of London's Institute of Education found that parent(s) who are in professional and managerial jobs were at least eight months ahead of pupils whose parent(s) were unemployed. They took into consideration such factors as ethnicity and family size. The education system has been suggested as being biased and designed for white, middle class children and ignoring the needs for the working class and ethnic minority. However it is argued that there is a similar range of ability in every social class and factors within society such as low expectations, lack of deferred gratification and economical issues are the reasons for failure in working class. Working class children tend to experience economical hardship than any other class, because it has been linked to material deprivation, such as lack of money and things money could buy is the reason for working class underachievement. Sociologists believe that the children are unable to obtain needed educational items such as computer with internet, desks and books which is a disadvantage for them as well as the costs of education such as tuition fees meaning that people within the working class believe they cannot afford to attend further education. Parsons believed that middle class children from a young age receive more attention and encouragement from their parent(s), which gives them a higher attainment for when they begin school. However J Douglas believed that the working class children's parent(s), do not understand what their children needs are to succeed in education. He believed that the interest displayed by parent(s) in the children's attainment contributed to their education. Also the attitudes of the parent(s) to the teachers becomes apparent and this can encourage a teacher to treat one pupil different from another.

Social class subcultures such as the differences between the norms and values suggests differences in attainment according to some sociologists. Barry Sugarman believed that working class subculture was fatalistic as they accepted the situation and did nothing to improve it, it was present-time orientated as there was no planning for the future. He also suggested concerns with immediate gratification as there was no sacrifices for the future, whereas the middle class saw things differently. These differences contribute to the attitude in education and will lead to lack of enthusiasm and mind-set to succeed.

Other sociologists believe that cultural deprivation such as an absence of certain norms, values, attitudes and skills that are needed for educational success and this is why the working class were also underachieving. However Basil Bernstein believed there are different speech patterns between different classes. He developed the cultural deprivation theory where he suggested that speech patterns of those at the bottom class are inferior. He suggested that working class children adopt a restricted speech code and the education system adopts an elaborated speech code. He also believes that children suffer due to a language barrier, restricting the teacher to be able to teach and the children being unable to learn, which then causes underachievement. Pierre Bourdieu agrees that the working class are discriminated because they are unable to grasp the teachers meaning of grammar, tone, accent and the delivery of teaching.

Bourdieu states that the higher people's position in the class system, the greater the amount of dominant culture they have. This culture is referred as superior as they have power which forms the basis of the education system.

He argues that the higher class cultures are better when compared to the working class, because of the perceived superiority where the middle class believe the working class have themselves to blame for the failure in education. Bourdieu believes that children born into the middle class have a built in advantage as their culture is closer to the school culture which gives them an advantage to succeed, such as their language is closer to the teachers which gives them more of an understanding of what's being taught. According to Bourdieu the dominant culture are seen as cultural capital, because it is converted into material rewards such as high status jobs and high salaries. He concludes that education is cultural and social reproduction as the education system reproduces the dominant culture which reproduces class system. By doing this it creates education success and failure which justifies the positions of those at the top and bottom. However Bourdieu believes that middle class should not assume that the higher class is better as the failures are measured in exam success, which is in fault with the education system and not the culture. He argues that individuals learn by what they see in life and what they expect, he states that different social groups have different chance and experiences in life. For example studying Spanish art, middle class children can go there and see it, whereas working class have to visualise it.

Diane Reay states that it is the mothers who make cultural capital work for their children as she believes that all mother are active in their children's education, that working class mother's work just as hard as middle class mothers. She suggested that middle class mothers had more educational qualification and knew how the system worked and used cultural capital to

good effect such as helping with homework. Because of this working class mothers believed that they lacked the knowledge to be able to help with their children. Reay argued that middle class women had more material capital by employing cleaners it allowed them time to help their children, working class women didn't have this as well as being able to afford private tuition. According to Reay it's the mothers that help with educational attainment, their effectiveness depends on the amount of cultural capital and this depends on social class.

There is evidence that suggests that working class pupils are discriminated against middle class pupils for example pupils are always being assessed, they're labelled as able and less able, placed into sets, entered for individual examinations and denied access to parts of school curriculum. It is suggested that middle class children are classed as able which is a disadvantage for working class. Once a pupil has been labelled they tend to respond or interpret that label which is a self-fulfilling prophecy and will continue to see themselves as that label. However it's argued that this has no effect on pupil's achievement, they believe that class differences in attainment are due to what happens outside of school. On the other hand others say it is a combination of differences in school as well as outside.

Statistic in 2012/13 show that girls achieve 86.5% in achieving 5+ A*-C grades, compared to boys who achieve 79.6% in achieving 5+ A*-C grades.

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