

Sociological perspectives on education education essay



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Education is the key to achieving sustainability. Sustainable education or Education for Sustainable Development encompasses three main areas: the environment, society and the economy (Pace, 2010). ESD is meant to inculcate ideals and values about key sustainable issues such as poverty reduction, environmental protection, human rights, health, gender equality, sustainable livelihoods and so on. The basic concept of ESD entails helping people to develop the right attitude and knowledge to facilitate decision-making and create a better future for themselves and others (UNESCO, 2011).

For the last decade, there has been increasing pressure on educators to incorporate concepts and values of Sustainable Development in the curriculum. Consequently, it has become crucial for educators to be knowledgeable and fully committed to making SD an integral part of all curricular activities (Lozano-Garcia al., 2008).

Formal educational systems, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, have considerable social and economic roles vis-à-vis the society. However, the issue of private tutoring has not been subject to much attention until recently. Private tutoring has been found to carry major social and economic implications. Recent years have brought about changes in the forms and impacts of tutoring. Moreover, private tutoring has been given ample consideration and is not merely viewed as an informal activity (Bray, 2009).

Private tutoring helps the student to acquire knowledge and later use his know-how to contribute to economic development. On a social front, it allows for interactions between peers. It is also a means of generating incomes for

tutors. More basically, private tutoring enables students to better grasp lessons which they did not understand previously. Nevertheless, private tutoring also has some negative implications. For instance, it emphasizes social and economic inequalities and can also limit children's leisure time which can have undesirable effects on the latter's social and psychological well-being, and thus affect the overall academic performance (Bray, 2009).

Tutoring can be difficult to measure because it varies across cultures.

Tuitions can be given individually, to a whole class or even via the internet. Moreover, some students may receive tutoring in all subjects, while others receive it in only specific ones. According to Silova, private tutoring has become a 'major enterprise' since the 1990s (Bray, 2009). In this regard, private tutoring can become a tool to inculcating a sustainable lifestyle to present and future students.

Sustainable Development entails changing people's behavior to ensure that they adopt a sustainable path for the future. Sustainability is about securing resources and retaining future benefits. Education thus plays an important role in providing lifelong opportunities and in enhancing the quality of the learning process. Education can bring about changes in norms, values and interests which can significantly influence people's behavior (Wong, 2003).

Private tutoring can thus create an improved learning environment for both students and tutors. It can remove the traditional boundaries to create a sustainable way of doing things (Lipscombe et al., 2008). However, this would require genuine effort and commitment from the part of policy planners and educators, in creating a new paradigm which values the need

to attain and maintain social, economic and ecological well-being (Sterling, 2008).

1. 2 Problem Statement

Private tutoring is in itself not a bad alternative. In fact, many students do actually benefit from it. However, out of the 40% of students who fail the CPE exams annually, the issue of private tutoring has yet again resurfaced (Le Mauricien, 2011).

According to Kadress Pillay, former minister of education, " Right now, private tuition is a jungle" (Prayag, 2011). Others go to the lengths of saying that private tuition is a ' disease in the Mauritian culture'. This statement probably stems from the fact that private tuition is a must, irrespective of the level of education.

To start with, parents ensure that children have the ' best' private tuition teacher at the beginning of the school year (Varma, 2005). This issue may or may not have been previously discussed with the child. While there are teachers who can manage to have a class of 40 in their garages for private tuitions, some teachers have a limit of 4 to 15 at a time. Some teachers are very committed to their profession and won't charge a cent, however nowadays private tutoring is mostly business (Chady, 2011).

But more importantly, we should concern ourselves with students actually acquiring some sort of lifelong knowledge through these private tuition sessions instead of ' learning' restricted to passing exams only. In addition, students have been found to be excellent throughout their academic career,

but unable to cope with other spheres of ‘real life’, for instance work, socializing, etc.

The concept Maurice Ile Durable was introduced in 2008 by Dr. Navin Ramgoolam as a means to ensure Sustainable Development of the country. This new concept will be the key driver to transforming the country into an intelligent nation state (Maurice Ile Durable, 2011).

Education for sustainability can sensitize Mauritians mainly through schools. This would however require a review of the current education system in terms of the curriculum and opportunities for the development of the child. The successful integration of this concept would also largely depend on the collaboration of the government and educational institutions in promoting extra-curricular activities like music, sports and arts. Moreover, learning should be geared towards creating awareness of economic, social, political and ecological issues, rather than the focus being solely on academic subjects.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

Aims

The aim of this study is to evaluate whether private tutoring contributes to Education for Sustainable Development in Mauritius.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are listed below:

To produce a comprehensive Literature Review

To assess how private tutoring is carried out in Mauritius

To determine the impacts of private tutoring on students

To evaluate students' views and expectations of private tutoring

To determine whether private tutoring actually contributes to sustainable education

To evaluate how private tutoring can be improved in this regard

1. 4 Research questions:

Does private tutoring actually benefit the student?

What is being done to inculcate a sustainable lifestyle at school?

What are students' views on ESD?

Are students prepared for a sustainable future?

Does the current education system promote ESD?

1. 5 Dissertation Flow

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 basically gives an overview of the practice of private tutoring across countries and its particular contribution to Education for Sustainable Development. Moreover, a thorough explanation will be provided on the concept of Sustainable Development and the importance attributed to education in achieving sustainability. Finally emphasis will be laid on the

Mauritian context, more specifically on the introduction of the concept Maurice Ile Durable.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods used to conduct the research and the variables that have been taken into account while designing the questionnaire. It also elaborates on the sampling method, data collection technique and the obstacles encountered while conducting the research.

Chapter 4 : Data Analysis

The data gathered from the survey has been analyzed and presented in a more practical form in this chapter. This will help to get a clear picture of whether private tutoring actually contributes to Education for Sustainable Development.

Chapter 5: Results & Discussion

This chapter is an extensive discussion of the results obtained through the questionnaire survey in terms of the theory and observations made throughout the research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings and results of the study. It also recommends some measures that can be undertaken to improve the current situation.

2. 0 Literature Review

2. 1 Sociological perspectives on Education

In a more general sense, education is one aspect of the socialization process. It involves learning and acquiring a set of skills. Education also, directly or indirectly, helps to shape a person's belief and moral values (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

Education was hard to define in non-literate societies. However, the young would learn and imitate adult behavior by joining social groups. Such behaviors for instance, entailed boys accompanying their fathers to hunt and girls assisting their mothers for the cooking. Educational institutions slowly developed in pre-industrialized countries with the specialization of the role of the teacher. It was only after industrialization that formal education was provided to the large mass (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

Sociologists and educators have different views on the functions of education. Two main theories debate on these functions : The functionalist theory and the conflict theory.

Functionalist perspectives

According to Durkheim (1961), the main function of education is to transmit societal norms and values. He argues that the school serves a function that the family or peers cannot provide. The school is a medium where skills and knowledge can be contextually provided. Moreover, the child interacts with others while abiding by some fixed set of rules. This eventually prepares the latter for interactions in society based on societal rules (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

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According to Talcott Parsons (1961), the school acts as a bridge between the family and society, thus preparing the child for his future role. The school treats the child in terms of universalistic standards, which are applied to all. It also prepares the child for the transition to adulthood and each pupil should achieve his own status. Status is achieved based on merit, whereby achievement is usually measured by performance in examinations. Parsons saw the educational system as a means to select individuals for their future roles. Thus schools enable pupils to match their talents and skills to the jobs for which they are best suited (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

Conflict perspectives

From a conflict perspective, education serves the interests of the powerful at the expense of the less powerful. According to Bowles and Gintis (1976), education benefits the capitalists by providing them with a more productive workforce. They believe that education shapes the future workforce by creating more docile and passive workers. Moreover, school is used as a mechanism of control whereby teachers can monitor students by giving orders (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

More importantly, teachers impose their knowledge, thus students get little satisfaction from studying. This is not surprising that many children do not enjoy schooling, but instead seek satisfaction from external rewards, that is results at the end of their studies. Like in the world of work, according to Bowles and Gintis, the worker enjoys no fulfillment, but instead toils based on the capitalist's desire for maximum profit (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007).

2.2 The private tutoring ‘phenomenon’

Private tutoring is defined as ‘tutoring in academic subjects which is provided for financial gain and which supplements the provisions by mainstream schooling’. In England, private tutoring refers to face-to-face tutoring usually in the home of the student (Ireson and Rushforth, 2004). In Egypt, private tutoring refers to the classes that take place in the afternoon during the week-ends, in line with the school syllabus geared towards helping the pupil improve his performance or results (Hartmann, 2008).

Private tuitions had a major role to play in learning for many young people. In England, parents started to select tutors more precisely during the 18th century. In the past, private tutoring was basically a hidden market, therefore very little information was gathered on the matter (Tanner et al., 2009).

However, during the last decade, private tutoring has reached a whole new dimension and has caught the attention of many analysts. It has evolved in a vast enterprise which involves thousands of people and carries huge economic implications (Bray, 2007).

Private tuition is commonly referred to as ‘shadow education’. This metaphor, according to Mark Bray (2009) is very appropriate in the sense that private tuition exists because of the already existing mainstream education system. Secondly private tuition changes as the education system changes. Third, more importance is given to the mainstream globally than to the shadow. Finally, the features of the shadow are more or less invisible.

The 'shadow' is generally criticized for its dominance over the lives of pupils and their families. But we should note that the world has become a global village and is more knowledge-based. Countries compete for the best workforce, which is determined by high levels of education. Since completing secondary education and even becoming a university graduate provides no guarantee against unemployment, the best a family can do is provide good education to their children at all cost.

According to a study in England by Ireson and Rushforth (2005), around one quarter of students received private tuitions firstly in mathematics, followed by English and thirdly science. Students had received tuitions in these prevalent subjects at some point in time during both primary and secondary levels. A student receiving private tuition is heavily dependent on the level of education and working status of the parents. For instance, parents who were university graduates were more likely to employ a tutor for their kid compared to those who received a school education. A much recent survey indicated that a child receiving private tuition was also dependent on the household income. In addition, despite wanting to pay for tuitions for their kids, some parents were unable to afford the high tuition fees (Tanner et al., 2009).

In Vietnam, 76% of students are tutored privately. This can be explained by a shift from a centrally-planned economy to a market-driven economy since 1986. This saw the rapid expansion of the private tuition 'market'. Both children and parents aspired for good qualifications to open new paths for higher education, thus better jobs. The curriculum reforms in Vietnam

caused the demands on students to be much greater than they were in the past (Dang, 2011).

The private tuition 'industry' is difficult to measure because it is rather complex and varies across cultures. Private tuitions also take a variety of organizational forms. These include high profile agencies and low profile teachers who don't necessarily advertise their services. This could also explain why there is no specific requirement for teachers to practice (Tanner et al., 2009).

2.3 Different forms of private tutoring

While school prevails as the main form of education, private tuition has reached a whole new dimension globally. However the practice of private tutoring is beyond government control. According to a study by Bray, private tutoring extends to almost every regions of the world, including Asia, America, Australia, and Europe, irrespective of their income levels (Bray, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, private tuitions vary across countries and cultures. Bray (2009) identified some important variations of what he called 'shadow education'. Those are:

Government-driven tutoring v/s market-driven tutoring

Online tutoring v/s face-to-face tutoring

Obligatory v/s voluntary tutoring

Tutoring provided by professionals v/s untrained students

One-on-one v/s large lectures tutoring style

On an economic front, private tutoring implies more expenses for parents and additional income for tutors. Socially, it may increase pressures on family members and exacerbate inequalities but on the other hand may bring relief and support to some families (Bray, 2009).

In countries like Korea, private tutoring is driven by a competitive environment. However, too much reliance on this system might seem unhealthy. In countries like France, private tutoring is mostly government-driven. Moreover, the government uses a tax system to encourage families to invest in tuitions. These contrasting cases allows for a distinction between private tuition as deeply ingrained in society and on the other hand as a useful tool (Bray, 2009).

Private tutoring can also happen via the net. More commonly referred to as online tutoring, this form of tutoring is created by a virtual environment whereby teachers and students communicate via a screen. Compared to face-to-face tutoring, online tutoring is more flexible, in the sense that tuition materials can be pre-recorded, tutors are requested on demand and there are no geographical constraints. Online tutoring however has proved to be more effective for students who were prepared beforehand (Hedrick, 2009). On the other hand, face-to-face tutoring can allow for a correlation between actual syllabus and tuition material. These forms of tutoring might be beneficial for certain groups of people, based on important dimensions like income, gender, ethnicity, etc.

While in some countries private tutoring is more of an academic routine, in others it is only a helping hand. In countries like Vietnam for instance, parents' and children's aspiration for a better future, that is finding a place in the competitive job market, has led private tuition to become a must. It is also important to consider that the culture in Vietnam dictates that hard work and good education is the basis of a good life. This would explain the high rate of 76% actually receiving private tuition (Dang, 2011). By contrast, in countries like France as stated above, private tuition is more or less encouraged and is generally viewed as a useful and promising.

Since private tutoring, cast as 'shadow education' is difficult to measure, there is no proper control on the matter. In more simple terms, 'anyone' can be a private tutor. There is therefore the risk of encountering unqualified tutors. Parents usually employ a tutor based on word-of-mouth, that is from friends or acquaintances who previously trusted a particular tutor and were satisfied with the overall performance of their children.

Private tutoring classes may vary from 1 to 40. While some teachers are perfectly comfortable in squeezing 40 pupils in a class after school hours, others prefer one-on-one sessions whereby the child can receive individual attention.

2. 4 The prevalence of private tutoring across the globe, and its implications

Private tuition is a worldwide educational phenomenon. It has been practiced for several years now. In fact, it has become part of the educational system to such an extent that nobody really questions its existence. An extreme

case in Korea, reported that parents actually spend 150 % the sum that the government invest in education (Bray, 1999).

In many countries, having a diploma doesn't weigh much. Moreover, the rapid developments in the labour market fuelled the demand for private tuitions. In addition, many teachers have established these tuitions as a means to generate more income. This to and fro cycle clearly underlies an extreme reliance on private tuitions.

Millions of children across the world leave their schools without a break and rush to private supplementary tutoring as the bell rings. Sometimes, the private tutors are the very school teachers the children just had a class with. Many children also receive private tuitions on week-ends and holidays (Bray, 1999).

Despite knowing the social and economic implications of these tuitions, not very much is done to try to regulate or change this system. Private tuitions seem to have an upper hand on the lives of many and people do not want to leave their comfort zone, because it would imply too big of a change to handle.

Below is a table which indicates the prevalence of private tuitions in selected countries.

Country

Scale of private tutoring

Sources

Brazil

A study in Rio de Janeiro public schools found that over 50% of students received tutoring and saw it as a way to reduce the likelihood of having to repeat grades

Paiva et al., 1997

Cambodia

Respondents in 31% of 77 primary schools surveyed in 1997/98 indicated that pupils received tutoring.

Bray, 1996a; 1999

Egypt

In 1991/92, 54% of 9000 Grade 5 pupils (300 schools) and 74% of 9000 Grade 8 pupils were receiving private tutoring. A 1994 survey of 4729 households found that 65% of urban primary children and 53% of rural ones had received tutoring.

Fergany, 1994; Hua, 1996

Guinea

A 1995/96 survey of Grade 6 pupils in two urban and four rural schools found 19% receiving private tutoring.

Tembon et al', 1997

Hong Kong

A 1996 survey of 507 students found 45% of primary, 26% of secondary, 34% of middle secondary, and 41% of upper secondary students receiving tutoring.

Lee, 1996; Liu, 1998

Japan

A 1993 survey found 24% of elementary pupils and 60 % of secondary pupils attending tuitions. Another 4% receiving tuitions at home. Nearly 70% of all students had received tutoring by the time they had completed middle school.

Japan, 1995; Russell, 1997

Korea

A 1997 survey indicated that in Seoul, 82% of elementary, 66% of middle and 59% of academic high school students received tutoring. In rural areas, proportions were 54%, 46% and 12%.

Paik, 1998; see also Yoon et al., 1997

Malaysia

In 1990, 8420 students were surveyed in secondary Forms 3, 5 and 6.

Respective proportions receiving tutoring were 59%, 53% and 31%. About 83% of students had received some form of tutoring by the time they reached upper secondary level.

Marimuthu et al., 1991

Malta

A 1987/88 survey of 2129 pupils found that 52% of primary and 83% of secondary students had received tutoring at some time during their careers. In that year, 42% of Grade 6 and 77% OF Grade 11 pupils were receiving tutoring.

Busuttil, 1988

Mauritius

A 1991 survey showed 56% of students receiving tutoring in secondary Form 2. Proportions rose to 98% in Forms 3 and 4 and 100% in Form 5 and 6. A 1995 survey of 2919 Grade 6 pupils reported that 78% received extra tuitions.

Foondun, 1998; Kulpoo, 1998

Morocco

A 1993 survey of 1953 mainstream secondary science teachers indicated that 53% provided after-school tutoring. The lowest proportion (27%) was in the first year of secondary education, but the figure rose to 78% in the most senior grade.

Caillods et al., 1998

Myanmar

A 1991 survey of 118 Grade 9 and 10 students in Yangon Division found 91% receiving tutoring. Among 131 students in Grades 5-8, 66% received tutoring.

Gibson, 1992

Singapore

A 1992 survey of 1052 households plus interviews with 1261 students found 49% of primary pupils and 30% of secondary pupils receiving tutoring. Findings matched an earlier study of tutoring in languages among 572 primary and 581 secondary students.

Kwan-Terry, 1991; George, 1992; Wong; Wong, 1998

Sri Lanka

In 1990, 1873 students were surveyed in Years 6, 11 and 13. Proportions receiving tutoring in Years 6 and 11 were 80% and 75%. In Year 13 the proportions were 62% for arts students, 67% for commerce students and 92% for science students.

De Silva et al., 1991; De Silva, 1994a

Taiwan

Government statistics indicate that in 1996, Taiwan had 4266 tutoring centres with 1, 505, 491 students. Other centres are unregistered and are illegal.

A 1998 survey found 81% of 397 senior secondary students receiving private tutoring.

Taiwan, 1997; Tseng, 1998

Tanzania

A 1995/96 survey of Grade 6 pupils in three urban and four rural schools in mainland Tanzania found 26% receiving tutoring. In a Dar es Salaam school, 70% of Grade 6 pupils received tutoring in 1998. A 1995 survey of 2286 Grade 6 Zanzibar pupils found 44% receiving extra tuitions, though not all pupils paid for the classes.

Peasgood et al., 1997; Nassor; Mohammed, 1998

Zimbabwe

A 1995 survey of 2697 Grade 6 pupils in all nine regions reported that 61% received extra lessons. The regional range of proportions was from 36% to 74%.

Machingaidze et al., 1998

Source: International Institute for Educational Planning, <http://www.unesco.org/iiep>

Along with the expansion of the private tuition ' industry', came huge economic implications. For instance in Japan in the mid-90s, tutoring revenues accounted to \$ 14, 000, in Singapore households reported spending \$ 200 million on private tutoring in 1992, in Egypt private tutoring cost accounted for 20% of total household expenditures and in the Republic

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of Korea \$ 25, 000 million have been spent on private tuitions in 1996 (Bray, 1999).

In addition to fees, parents had to add books, stationery and travel to the list. Private tutoring also bears an opportunity cost, mainly from the time children had to provide in lessons, preparations and travelling. According to a study by Marimuthu et al. in 1991, 70% of students receiving tutoring had to spend 3 hours per week to and from tutors, and 17% spent more than 6 hours (Bray, 199).

Since tutoring is mainly a ' shadow activity', the government cannot exert any control on the amount of revenue received by tutors. The intensity of private tutoring also varies. Children in high-income countries would be expected to receive more tuitions than those in lower-income countries. In general, the subjects given more attention in private tuitions are those which are the most needed for educational and socio-economic advancement. For instance, demand for english tuitions was low in countries where English is spoken at home (Bray, 1999). The higher demand for tuitions in urban regions is normally due to competitive nature of urban life. Also, parents in urban society have higher educational backgrounds than those in rural societies and are thus better off and can afford tuition fees.

Private tutoring, in different forms, is practiced in almost every country. This certainly gives an overview of the importance attributed to tuitions. While the impacts of private tuitions are debatable, we should perhaps reflect on the lasting consequences of such practices on our young brains and future society.

2. 5 The good side to private tuitions

Private tuitions may be considered as a good thing in that it provides an income to many teachers, who are very often underpaid and also to university students who teach on a part-time basis to cover their fees. For instance, in Sri Lanka, a good private tutor earned up to 130 USD per month in 2007, which is equivalent to one month's pay for only 4 days of work (Borodchuk, 2011).

Parents invest huge amounts in private tuitions yearly, because it's the only option they have in securing their children's future in terms of the best possible preparation to eventually gain access to prestigious schools or universities, and get the best jobs (Bray, 1999).

Through these private tuition sessions, children get the opportunity to better grasp lessons which they previously didn't understand at school due to various reasons. Each pupil has his/her own learning speed, and very often classes are filled with up to 40 students which can render things difficult for the latter in receiving personal attention. Thus private tuition is an outlet for a more interactive class.

More positively, it is a mechanism through which current students can extend their knowledge and gain human capital, which eventually benefits the society as well as themselves. This can allow for opportunities to work abroad; i. e. to travel, meet people from different culture, gain experience which is in itself a challenge to one's potential.

Private tutoring may also reduce the workload of teachers in a way, since the major ' teachings' are effectuated at school (Bray, 1999). Therefore, the job <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-perspectives-on-education-education-essay/>

of private tutors is to supplement the school syllabus. The situation can also be reversed, in the sense that mainstream teachers have less to do, since students rely more on private tuitions, thus pay less attention to school lessons. Mainstream teachers usually benefit from this situation and work for namesake and still receive a salary at the end of the month.

According to Ireson and Rushforth (2004), the main reason for students to take tuitions was to pass the examinations. Private tuitions were also very important in case the child missed school. According to their study of the British education system, Ireson and Rushforth also found out that most secondary students took private tuitions to improve their GCSE grades, especially in Mathematics. Tuitions were in this case were helpful in making a successful transmission to higher levels of education.

Private tuitions can also be considered as a constructive way of engaging students after school hours. Some parents even report sending their children to tuition because they are not around when the child gets back from school (Borodchuk, 2011).

2. 6 The other side of the coin

Private tuitions have potential negative implications. In many countries, parents and educators are seriously concerned about the extent to which private tutoring is dominating the lives of pupils and their families (Bray, 2007). Private tuitions do not only affect the social and economic structure of a country but can have considerable impact on the psychological well-being of the child. This can affect the latter's academic performance and can

impede his/her healthy development. Over-reliance on private tuitions has also affected overall mainstream education.

Private tutoring thus affects:

the mainstream system

Private tutoring also affects the dynamics of teaching and learning in the mainstream curriculum. For instance, mainstream teachers are not required to work hard because every pupil receives tuitions. Moreover, this enlarges the gap in the classroom between quick (generally those taking tuitions) and slow learners. In cases where the mainstream teacher is the private tutor as well, those not receiving tuitions may find themselves lagging behind. This pressurizes parents to invest in tutoring regardless of their financial status or their beliefs (Bray, 2003).

According to Yasmeeen's ' culture of dependency', most students tend to rely explicitly on private tutors. This includes dependence on homework and even exam tips. Hussein points out that tutoring has caused students to lose interest in mainstream classes. Students have even reached the point of thinking that private tutors are better, since they are paid. So they attend school only when stipulated by school regulations. Hussein also report that the rate of absentees has risen, more particularly two months before the end of the semester, during which the child stays at home in the morning and att