

Making Sense Of Education: An Expedition Through Major Sociological Approaches To Education

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Abstract

The interdisciplinary nature of social sciences provide much needed thrust to the development of ideas, creation of knowledge and sharing of thoughts which adds to the momentum of educational progress. Sociological theories in particular have a resonant effect in the history of educational development which have added much literature to the core framework of models associated with education. Human capital which is considered to be the most potent variable in the economic headway of a nation, had been nourished bountiful by the sociological approaches. These approaches are decidedly effective in framing the educational policies and programmes that shall govern the development agenda of the nations. Since investment in human capital is regarded as the guiding principle in the policy prescription of the governments, thorough grasping of theoretical knowhow is necessary to build a solid model that could add to the treasure of human development.

Keywords : Sociological theories, Human capital, educational progress

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I. Introduction

Sociological perspectives should be considered to better understand the role played by education in social development of a country. Investment in human capital will become more fruitful only when the social aspects, along with the economic aspects associated with education, are discussed in the true sense. There is an underlying connection between social progress and economic development that can lead to wonders in a society. Since the spread of knowledge is directly linked with the assimilation of social theories, it is vital that those theories be checked and effectuate so that a balance between growth and development be attained. School education has a prolonged effect on individuals that channelize the human capital resources to productive efficiency in the later stages of the individual's life. There are multi approaches to school education that provide insight in matters related with school curriculum, syllabus, overall development of students' character, social well-being etc. The notion of *socialization* is relevant for a child to evolve self in a society and become a contributing factor to the welfare of the society. An overview of various sociological approaches to education will be insightful to correctly understand the significance of school education as a prime factor of the society.

II. Functionalism

One of the significant aspects of education is that the benefits and costs associated with education do not turn into a micro perspective rather it take a wider scope with the whole society becoming the stakeholder (Durkheim, 1898). The needs of the society are carried over by the process of education. The most striking nature of education is the power to generate efficiency and skills using the born talents as well as acquired knowledge. Since school become a miniature form of society where different children from different backgrounds come together and spend valuable time in activities, the school can be considered as the driving boats of social life. Since socialization is inevitable for an individual's civic life, the fundamental lessons of social life will be taught in kindergartens and schools. *Emile Durkheim*, the French sociologist and the founder of *Structural-Consensus theory or Functionalism*, had focused very vividly on the concept of social responsibility of educational institutions. Education is subject to perform two basic functions, manifest functions (also called as primary functions) and latent functions (secondary functions)

The most conceivable role of education is preparing the children for '*socialization*'. Schools become socialization agencies that teach the children about active adult economic roles in future (Durkheim, 1898). Adherence to law and veneration to authority is being clearly taught in schools so that the concept of equal universal justice become clear in children's minds.

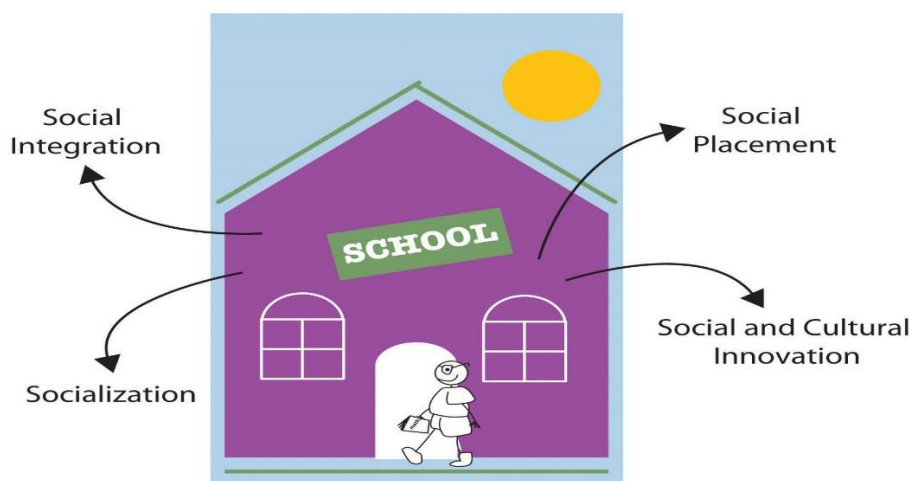
After the prelim goal of socialization has been established, the second one in the row is the process of '*social integration*', through which a child gets accustomed to the social beliefs, rules, customs, traditions, culture

and social way of life and thinking. It will be up to the intellect of the child whether to go in line with such traditions and beliefs or to move away from them. It is this feature that Durkheim focus on i.e. the development of social consciousness.

Durkheim uses the concept of Organic Analogy which describes the relation between the parts of human body that keep the entire body in motion and balanced, to theorise the interdependence of human beings and several institutions to keep the whole society in balance. Through this a child is expected to attain '**social placement**' which determines the actual societal role of a person. The citizen-turned-child has in the conscience the values accrued and skills developed through the education process which enable him/her to find a place in the social fabric. This place will determine the contribution to be done by the individual in the future.

The last aspect which Durkheim focus with regard to functionalist approach is that of '**social and cultural innovation**'. An individual is supposed to contribute in a good manner and amount, in some way or the other, ideas, products, expertise, manpower, skill, art, etc that will help the society to correct the path of social development and proceed towards economic development. This discourse will smoothly take place only when the education infrastructure is good enough to receive back quality output. Snags in the education system can harm the society because all the above stated functions of education cannot be fulfilled properly.

Figure 1
Functions of school



Source: Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2012). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

The manifest functions stated and discussed above are the intended or visible functions performed by education. Each child become a part of these functions according to the viability of provision of education to them. However the latent functions are the ones that determine the real virtue of education. They include group works, courtship, engagement in social networks, and management of generation gap, integrating social and political aspirations according to the social environment. Symbiosis between these two categories of education determine the actual social role of an individual.

Functionalism adds that schools have taken many traditional functions that were performed by family as an institution for e.g. acquiring of basic skills, learning habits, sex education etc. Therefore the fundamental principle that govern the functionalist school of thought is the direct and indirect doles associated with the accruing of education.

Conflict theory

Just like education possess immeasurable merits which are realized in the long run by means of development of human capabilities there is an another side which is reflected in the basic fabric of provision of education. Even though education is regarded as the main weapon that can be used against social inequalities, the conflict theorists argue that education itself promotes social inequalities by preserving the interests of the ruling class. The roots of conflict theory can be attributed to Karl Marx and Max Weber. Based on dialectics and materialism it is argued that society itself will undergo conflict with which tensions will be generated (Marx, 1848). Such social tensions will bring about social normalization. The countries in which severe capitalism prevail as the ruling system, there is a natural tendency for the school curriculum and syllabus to preach that the higher class people are the ones who work hard and attain their goals in life while the lower income groups lack both skills and initiatives. This is being termed as *false consciousness* (Marx, 1848).

The education system thus can turn into a complex structure where the ideas of ruling class become interpreted as the ideas of society itself. Social control is forced on to the citizens whereby individuals and groups are regulated by the ideas of the ruling section as a result the society become very much orthodox and hierarchical in nature. Education, thus become the anti-force with which it act against what it is perceived to be. The rules and goals set by a section of people who are authoritative in nature backed by class, hierarchy, income and property become the rule of thumb in the society.

The social conflict theorists propose that the children are provided with a “*hidden curriculum*” which compel the children to accept the existing social values and customs without any chance for objection, and indirectly accept the social hierarchy (Booher-Jennings, 2008).

The education system is such that the children from various socio-economic strata are being locked into different tracks for e.g. faster track, lower track etc, based on their parents’ social status and economic position. The tracked – up students earn much confidence and self-esteem and strive to pursue their academic interests while the tracked – down students get demoralised and start losing their self-esteem and confidence which make them automatically backward in studies and academic ventures. The social conflict theory thus holds the view that tracking of students can disseminate social inequality on the basis of social class structure and ethnicity (Ansalone, 2010).

The class divisions prevailing in the society are passed over to educational system classifying children into higher class children, middle class children, and lower class children. (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). It is in this aspect that the statement being made as “*Education is free. Freedom of education shall be enjoyed under the condition fixed by law and under the supreme control of the state*” (Marx, 1867)

Symbolic Interactionism

This is a micro level theory being used to focus on the relationship between individuals in a society. Schooling become the very first step of socialization through which the children learn some ideas of life, participate in social interaction, and understand the social strata of the society. George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer popularized such a branch in social science. As the name indicates, the society gains much from social interactions by describing the different roles of gender prescriptions. In school, the various opportunities for interacting with other peer group members become helpful to define the specific social positioning. Even the games in which different chances for social interaction are possible, there is a reinforcement of gender socialization. Girls tend to prefer more co-operative games whereas the boys stick on to more competitive games (Thorne, 1993)

Another major effect of social interaction is that the teacher interactions can widely affect the intellectual domain of the children, in particular the social views of teachers, the communication techniques used, interpretation of things and situations, etc. Also the treatment of teachers towards students with regard to gender, achievement levels, learning capacities etc. have tremendous influence over the character building process of children. It is particular to note that the ability of teachers to efficiently control and manage the classroom atmosphere, the language proficiency, the ability to convey things in a clear manner, the usage of different learning aids, assigning of various group activities etc. have a significant impact on the development of personality and character formation of children. Schools thus are regarded as laboratories of social life where the moulding of fine individuals take place with utmost refinement, with active social interaction prospects and efficient guidance provided by the teachers.

Having discussed about various conceptual and theoretic aspects of education, the need of the hour as realized by the multifaceted approaches to education, is the quest towards the provision of free and compulsory elementary education to all. This was particularly emphasized in the human capital theory and various growth models. When human capital become the centre force of development, it is understood that the initiatives being taken at the government level should be goal oriented and pragmatic. Schools are the institutions which form the grass root level of human capital formation thereby demanding the attention of policy makers to clearly make development plans that support such institutions both socially as well as economically. The concept of universal elementary education evolved after many rounds of international summits and conferences which later found place as Goal 2 in the Millennium Development Goals of United Nations as to “Achieve Universal Primary Education”. This was later incorporated in the new Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, as Goal 4, to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The reason behind the terminology of Sustainable Development Goals is that development as a process has to be sustained for future generations too for retaining human life in this planet and if that to happen in a methodical manner the crucial elements should not be wiped out. Education is one such crucial element that will sustain and generate positive impulses throughout the generations. When human life become the crux of development, the skills of human beings turn out to be the determining factors of that development process. Among the skills, the ability to understand and interpret matters is the most crucial one with which the humans were able to contribute numerous inventions and discoveries to the development of human race. It is the

knowledge acquired through life experiences and domain development acquired through education, which equip humans to perform such roles. Therefore the real development goal is without any doubt, grossing quality education, with the provision of extending free and compulsory education to all regardless of any sort of discrimination.

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