

RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: PERSPECTIVE OF THE COURSE

Role	Name	Affiliation
National Coordinator		
Subject Coordinator	Prof Sujata Patel	Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Dr. R.Indira	Formerly Professor of Sociology, University of Mysore
Content Writer & Language Editor	Dr. R.Indira	Formerly Professor of Sociology, University of Mysore
Technical Conversion		

Module Structure

Relation between Education and Society:Perspective of the Course	Introduction, Meaning of Education, Relation between Education and Society, Functions of Education, Sociology of Education, Perspective of the Course,Key Points, References
---	--

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Education and Society
Module Name/Title	Relation between Education and Society: Perspective of the Course
Module Id	1a
Pre Requisites	Conceptual clarity about the relationship between education and society, Education as a social institution
Objectives	This module analyses the concept of education from a sociological perspective and brings out the mutually dependent relationship between education and society. This introductory module is also a curtain raiser on the course. It gives a brief insight into the different themes that are covered by different modules
Key words	Education, Society, Sociological perspectives on education

Relation between Education and Society: Perspective of the Course

Key Words: Education, Social Functions, Sociology of Education, Theoretical Perspectives on Education

Introduction

In the process of understanding the nature and functions of social institutions you must have, by now realised that education is one of the major social institutions that influence human behaviour. In common terminology education is associated with formal learning, but its scope extends far beyond classroom instruction. Besides imparting curriculum based knowledge and training, education has multiple functions, all of which have a direct or indirect bearing on society. Formal training imparted in educational institutions forms only one component of education. In fact education involves lifelong learning and is the sum total of all the experiences that an individual obtains during his/her lifetime in different social institutions.

Before taking you through the outline of this course that gives an idea of the diversity of themes and topics that it covers, this module introduces you to some of the basic features of the nature of relationship between education and society and the social aspects of education. We begin with the meaning of education, with a special focus on its sociological dimensions.

What is Education?

John Dewey (1944) refers to education as the process by which 'knowledge is transferred to other people through stories, discussions, training or research. Though learning takes place under the guidance of educators, learners also tend to educate themselves. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves in a process called autodidactic learning'. To Dewey education is a continuous reconstruction of experiences.

Giddens (2009:834) looks at education as a "social institution which enables and promotes the acquisition of skills, knowledge and broadening of personal horizons. Education can take place in many social settings".

Meaning and Social Functions of Education

No system of education can function in isolation from the social surroundings in which it exists. One of its fundamental aims is to build a bridge between one generation and another. The primary task of education is to socialize the young to understand the needs, goals and expectations of the society in which they live. Education is essentially a social system, and education and society are mutually interdependent institutions. Education shares the dynamic character of society and hence acts as the harbinger of change. However, as the institution entrusted with the responsibility of transforming values that sustain society from one generation to the other it has also has a conservation dimension to its functions. It is this sense that Durkheim (1956) referred to education as the 'methodical socialisation of the young'.

Parsons however was of the view that the "central function of education was to instill in pupils the value of individual achievement. This value is crucial to the functioning of industrialized societies, but it could not be learned in the family. A child's status in the family is ascribed—that is, fixed from birth. By contrast, a child's status in schools is largely achieved, and in schools children are assessed according to universal standards, such as exams. The function of education is to enable children to move from the particularistic standards of the family to the universal standards needed in a modern society" (See Giddens, 2009:835).

Functionalists see education as a system that serves society by performing several supportive functions which help to maintain 'order'. Conflict thinkers, on the other hand point out that in a society characterised by social inequalities education reinforces these inequalities by serving the interests of those in power. Conflict theory sees the purpose of education as maintaining social inequality and preserving the power of those who dominate society. By throwing open opportunities for achieving upward mobility through education to the advantaged sections education indulges in a kind of 'sorting'. They also refer to a 'hidden curriculum' which actually teaches pupils to passively accept hierarchies and status quo (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:131). Conflict theorists see the educational system as perpetuating the status quo by dulling the lower classes into being obedient workers. In their view education is not as a social benefit or opportunity, but a powerful means of maintaining power structures and creating a docile work force for capitalism ([http:// www.cliffnotes.com](http://www.cliffnotes.com)).

Ottoway (1957) contended that "one of the primary tasks of education is to hand over the cultural values of a society to its young. Society ensures that its traditional modes of life are conserved through education. However education also needs to prepare a society for change because new inventions and discoveries lead to creativity and set the stage for innovations. In Ottoway's analysis of the educational institution one can see a clear recognition of both its 'preservative' and 'change' dimensions.

Education must also inculcate in the young a spirit of 'questioning', a desire to create a new social order and deconstruct many myths that have acted as constraints to social change. It is no doubt true that education must conserve those values which contribute to the sustenance of the social system, but it has to prepare the younger generation to accept as well as initiate social change. The critical importance of the twin functions of conservation and change that the educational institution is entrusted with is evident in the words of Shah (2011: 3) when he said "the educational system of any society is related to the total social system of that society. Whether it prepares the new generations for status quo or for change depends upon the need and goals of the society concerned. In a modernizing society the educational system has two main functions (1) transmission of cultural heritage to new generations (2) enabling the new generations to develop a degree of adjustability to change in the society. The cultural heritage of any society can be said to be the aims and goals it cherishes as a group at a particular point of time, the values and attitudes it considers desirable and the skills and knowledge it needs for the achievement of the goals. In a changing society these keep on changing from generation to generation. It is necessary to therefore that the educational system in a changing society must not only transmit necessary skills and knowledge, desirable values and attitudes and a sufficient awareness of its goals to its new generations but it must also prepare them to for adjustment to any likely changes in them. An educational system that is geared to mere maintenance of the status quo is bound to become dysfunctional no sooner the society begins to change and in a fast changing society it becomes dysfunctional very rapidly. In a changing society therefore the educational system performs the function of social control as well as social change. It fosters conformism up to a particular limit in individuals and groups but beyond that limit it fosters judgment and deviation among them enabling them to accept and adjust to change".

Sociology of Education

Though the emergence of sociology of education as a specialised branch of sociology is of more recent origin its beginnings can be traced to the relation between education and society as enunciated by Emile Durkheim in early twentieth century. His approach to education was functional in nature as he maintained that the primary function of education is the maintenance of social order. Later theoretical approaches looked at the goals and functions of education from different points of view. But the essence of all these theories is that education is primarily a social institution which both impacts and is impacted by social factors.

Sociology of education is that branch of sociology which studies, explains and critically interprets

the different facets of the relationship between education and society. It analyses the process of education from a sociological perspective. It is the application of sociological theories, perspectives and research methods to an analysis of educational processes and practices. Broadly speaking sociology of education or educational sociology (the two words are used interchangeably in many writings) is interested in the study of the educational system in relation to the social system.

Sociologists of education argue that educational processes and practices are influenced by social phenomena. Education is not just about knowledge acquisition. It is the social set up that basically decides 'who gets, what type of education'. Also, social conditions, societal needs and society's power structures determine educational content and the nature of pedagogical practices. Since most societies use education as a mechanism for retention of their dominant cultural points of view they try to control the institutions and individuals who are engaged in the process of knowledge creation and knowledge transfer. Sociology of education is interested in "the power distribution in the larger community outside the school as far as the educational system is concerned; it is interested in the power structure within the school system also" (Shah, 2011: 6).

Though there is a feeling amongst many that educational opportunity, aspirations and achievements are all individual centric they are actually determined by factors such as class, race, gender, caste, region and religion. Sociology of education thus provides the theoretical and empirical framework for analysing the role of non-academic factors in educational attainment. Sociology of education is also interested in analysing the role of factors such as caste, class, gender, religion and region in determining educational access and utilization.

Perspective of the Course

This module, which is also the introductory module in the *Society and Education* course provides a comprehensive view of the many facets of education as a social institution. The course content is divided into eleven (11) units and each unit contains a certain number of modules ranging between one and ten. In the process of making you understand the social context in which education functions, this course takes you through some select theoretical perspectives on education as expounded by both Western and Indian thinkers, besides introducing you to the ways by which major social institutions function as agencies of education.

The second unit of the paper *Sociological Perspectives on Education* contains three modules that provide a theoretical perspective on the role of education in society. Since the emergence of the study of the field of education from a sociological dimension, sociologists have been discussing the relationship between education and society. In this background the thoughts of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber on education have been analysed.

It is not to be interpreted that only in the writings of these three thinkers you can get a total picture of all the angles from which education can be understood from a sociological perspective. But since they reflect two dominant schools of thought, viz., functional and conflict, it is possible for us to review and revisit other sociological theories on education.

The section on *Modernity and Education* contains two modules that try to place education in a socio-historical context in the Indian setting. These two modules focus attention on the colonial period and the developments that took place in the field of education during the nationalist movement and the way the movement responded to these developments. It is not that a system of education was created in India after the country came under the colonial rule, but the period saw the emergence of the modern system of education. The module on colonial encounter and education discusses the developments that took place in India in the field of education during the rule of the British, French and Portuguese. The

module on nationalist responses to colonial education shows how colonial efforts at educating Indians mainly concentrated on preparing a class of people who would only perform the tasks set for them by the rulers. However, Indian thinkers did try to evolve alternative systems of education but even today the British system of education continues to be in operation in most of the academic institutions.

In the introductory part of the module I mentioned that all social institutions continuously act as agencies of education. The fourth unit of the course *Education and its Institutions* contains three modules that discuss the social context in which educational institutions function. The modules in this unit concentrate on examining the structure and functions of these institutions as agencies of society. Though economic and political power structures have been advocating the idea of educational autonomy, in reality they try to regulate the way educational institutions function and the way knowledge is transmitted. The two major institutions that organize education in our society are school and university.

While the first module in the fourth unit profiles the school and university both from historical and social perspectives the other two modules focus on curriculum, which is the instrument through which societies try to orient learners to accept the values which structures of governance profess. The fact that the classroom and curriculum are both used as sites of power struggle is an indication that educational institutions cannot function in a social or political vacuum. Recent incidents across the country involving academic institutions in a debate over the content of courses and the pedagogical practices that have to be adopted in class rooms only point to the need to revisit the processes involved in curriculum formation from a sociological viewpoint.

The fifth unit titled *Education and Economic Development* has five modules which basically focus on the history of education in India and the changes that the introduction of modern education brought about in the economic life of the country. While the first module in the section concentrates on the stages through which education policy passed in India, the second and third modules trace the growth of education in India from a historical perspective. The period covered by these two modules range from 1947 to present times. Beginning with India's independence, state initiatives and interventions have been continuously charting the path for education policy and programmes. The constitutional commitment to establishment of an egalitarian social order laid the foundation for introducing educational reforms that were aimed at reducing inequalities characteristic of a severely stratified society. The impact of India's economic liberalisation regime on India's educational system is also discussed in these modules. Education is basically seen as a lever of social transformation and development.

The fourth module in unit 5, however reminds us that in spite of the expansion that has taken place in educational opportunities the education system reinforces existing socio-economic inequalities. In practice, divisions based on caste, class and gender continue to deprive vulnerable groups from utilising these opportunities. In that sense the educational system only reproduces social inequalities and lends itself to power structures that control society's economy and polity.

The fifth module in this unit analyses the mutually interdependent relationship between education and labour. This module finds a place in a discussion on education and economic development because opportunities for upward social mobility open up only when education leads to productive economic activity. In other words education has the responsibility of building capacities of individuals to engage in socially useful and relevant work that ultimately results in social transformation.

Unit six titled *The Political Economy of Education: Structures and Discourses* contains five modules that engage in a critical discussion of how established dogmas and practices confer educational privileges on some groups and deprive others from scaling up the social ladder. All the five modules in this unit argue that in reality education is not a 'level playing field' that it is often made out to be, but a 'divisive mechanism' that is deeply influenced by the divisions and deprivations that already exist in society. As the

first module in this unit delineates, at different points of time in the history of human society, attempts are made by those enjoying political power to achieve 'consensus' either through subversive or subtle means by making the stakeholders in the field of education accept their ideologies. It is this attitude of dominating over those who do not have the power to 'govern' that creates a situation referred to as 'hegemony'. Those individuals or groups that control society's resources also try to gain power over the vulnerable by making them believe that values and practices perpetuated by the ruling class have to be accepted unquestioningly. Education serves as an agency to achieve consensus and reinforce hegemonic controls by preparing learners for unconditionally believing that 'cultural might is right'. Instead of inspiring individuals and institutions to 'question' and 'challenge' hierarchies, education often 'marginalises' them to unconditionally accept the views and versions of those in power.

This module provides a framework for understanding, analysing and interpreting the themes discussed in the other four modules presented in this unit. Educational opportunity is closely affected by issues of caste and gender as discussed by the second and third modules in this unit. In spite of equal access provided by the Constitution, caste based discrimination continues to exclude many groups from utilising these opportunities equally. Caste based inequality and discrimination continue to affect educational aspirations, opportunity and achievements. Though there is a feeling that reservation of seats in educational institutions has been able to break through caste barriers, those deprived of social capital and financial assets are not in a position to use these reservation based admission options. The module on caste and educational discourse discusses the various ways in which caste continues to play a decisive role in the field of education, besides analysing the reservation policy in a historical perspective.

The module titled gender and educational discourse examines how gender continues to play its part in determining educational access. In theory men and women are equal but in reality men and women are equal but in reality women and girl children face several hurdles in pursuing educational opportunities. Though at the primary level enrollments are nearly equal, as we move from lower to higher levels the number of girls/women keeps on declining. Gender continues to determine who studies what type of courses and up to what stage. In spite of exceptional performances and exemplary academic records most girls are under pressure to accept the stereotypical role of 'motherhood' as imposed by patriarchal structures. Gender driven prejudices cut across all social barriers but intensify with poverty, caste and regional inequalities. The series of state and civil society interventions that have been initiated since independence to promote a gender inclusive education system have no doubt made an impact, but patriarchy which has assumed hegemonic proportions continues to affect educational opportunities for women.

The next two modules engage in a discussion of the educational situations of tribal and minority groups. The fourth module in unit 6 examines the educational status of tribal children and analyses the role of different state initiated support programmes aimed at enhancing their enrollment and retention. The module also brings to focus the cultural and economic constraints that act as blocks to meaningful utilisation of educational opportunities by tribal groups. The module on minorities and educational discourse discusses the educational scenario of minority groups in the country, with special reference to religious and minorities. The different provisions available for educational the educational advancement of minorities are also discussed. It emerges from the module that different minority groups are at different stages of achievement in the matter of using educational opportunities.

The seventh unit titled *Cultural Diversity and Education* contains three modules that basically try to bring out the need for the education system to keep abreast of changes taking place in the world-at-large, while at the same time protecting those elements of indigenous modes of knowledge transfer which have contemporary relevance. Given the cultural diversity that characterises societies world over, education cannot remain insensitive to issues of language, indigeneity or local cultural needs. The first module in this unit which describes the different ways by which language is related to education also discusses how

economic liberalisation necessitated the movement of people from a mono-lingual to multi-lingual space. Also, the debate surrounding the question of medium of instruction has been critically analysed. The second module in the seventh unit titled Indigenous modes of education traces the path of transformation that took place from indigenous modes of knowledge transfer to modern methods of teaching and learning. The role of the colonial rule in weakening indigenous modes of education is discussed. In this background the need to revisit methods of knowledge generation and knowledge transfer is brought forth. The third module in this unit looks at the new teaching-learning methods such as open and distance learning, virtual universities and multimedia that are gradually emerging as alternatives to traditional methods of knowledge transfer. In a world physical boundaries are closing due to the vast strides made in the field of information technology, both access and utilization of educational opportunities have widened. Education is no longer the prerogative of a select few but it has almost become an open access system because of innovations such as learning through the distance mode, internet driven pedagogies and the flexibility that these new modes of education has given both to teachers and learners.

Unit number eight *Human Rights Discourse and Education in India* analyses the need to incorporate the human rights perspective in education. Though the Constitution and more recently the Right to Education Act have laid down very clearly that education is an inalienable right, in reality not all children in the country have the opportunity to access educational opportunities. It is only when education is seen as a human right that the barriers to equal utilisation of educational opportunities are removed. It is also equally important that both curriculum and pedagogy must instill in the learners a respect for human rights. Education is not just about knowledge acquisition, its fundamental objective is also to ensure that the rights of other human beings are respected. By providing a conceptual understanding of human rights this module engages in a discussion on the relevance of human rights education.

The ninth unit titled *Educational Thinkers*, which contains ten modules analyses the perspectives and visions of both Indian and western thinkers on how an ideal educational system must be conceived and operated. These include Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule, Gijubhai Badeka, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jiddu Krishnamurti, John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Two points stand out in each of these modules. First, all these thinkers have critiqued the stereotypical notions of education, and second, each of these thinkers has proposed an alternate system of education that questions existing systems of education and sets us thinking about new pedagogical values and practices.

The penultimate module of the course entitled *Undoing Education-Learning Decolonising the Mind* discusses the need to free knowledge from prejudices and biases that are symbolic of the colonial legacy. Society can be transformed only when the mind is decolonised. The importance of designing a curriculum incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, local cultures including native languages is brought out by the module.

The eleventh module titled *Critical Pedagogy and Educational Challenge* explains how decolonisation of the mind is a fundamental requirement for deconstructing the myths that were created by colonised knowledge. The central point that needs to be understood in the discourse on critical pedagogy is that knowledge is politicised and institutions are oppressed by those who hold the reins of power to toe the line. The proponents of critical pedagogy believe that academic institutions perform their role in a just and impartial manner. Such aspects of education as language learning, hiring of teachers and the kind of books got for the library are all determined by the agenda of powers that be. This module brings out the need to revisit the entire process of education and raise very fundamental questions about the goals of education itself.

Concluding Note

The module introduces the reader to the need for understanding the institution of education from a sociological perspective. Since education is primarily a social institution and functions in a societal context, it cannot be analysed in a vacuum. The entire course brings to focus the different ways in which socio-political-economic factors have a bearing on education. The module also gives a brief update on the contents of each of the thirty four modules covered under eleven units in this course.

References

- Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dewey, John. 1916, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, New York: Macmillan Company. Durkheim, Emile. 1956, *Education and Sociology*, New York: The Free Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 2009, *Sociology* (6th Edition), Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ottoway, A.K.C. 1957, *Education and Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education*, Routledge & Paul.
- Shah, A, M. 2011, "Sociology of Education- An Attempt at Definition and Scope" In *Studies in Indian Sociology: Themes in Sociology of Education* (Editor: Indira), New Delhi: Sage Publications.

