

EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits. Education methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research.

From a sociological point of view education is a formal organisation or institution in which formal instructions are conducted. To sociologists, therefore schools are not physical buildings or a collection of people but rather a system of behaviour taking place within a formal organisation; i.e. schools are the social settings or social environments where instructions take place.

Closely linked to the concept of education/school are the two concepts namely: schooling and learning.

Schooling: The process through which the instructions occur.

Learning: Includes the entire process by which individuals acquire new values, new interests and new ways of looking at the world around them.

Learning includes three components:

- (i) **Change:** Learning results in some measurable change which could be increased in some knowledge or skill. We assume that a student who can perform at B some tasks he or she could not do so at A has learned something.
- (ii) **Substance:** A student learns or fails to learn something. In sociological research, the kinds of learning substance often studied are cognitive skills such as writing, computing etc.
- (iii) **Interaction:** Learning requires active relationship/interaction between the learner and the instructor for any other teaching device such as a computer.

Different views on Education

Functionalist view on education:

Sociologists who follow the functionalist perspective believe that functions performed by the educational institutions work to maintain the stability and smooth operation of society.

Manifest Functions

- 1. Transmission of culture through the process of socialisation adherence ensures survival of society**, i.e. it reproduces norms and values so as to ensure survival of society. To one Functionalist Theorists namely Durkheim, this ensures balance and equilibrium in society and is specifically important and necessary in modern urban life where cultural values and norms are threatened due to rapid changes.
- 2. Tracking/Principle of Meritocracy:** This is the sorting out pupils or students or assignment of pupils to different educational programmes, e.g. vocational training, college/university, carpenters and mechanism, lawyers and doctors, development planners etc. So when functionalists look at tracking, they argue that through this process, education ensures that occupational roles are achieved and based on the principle of meritocracy i.e. on one's talent and achievement. They note that all pupils are given maximum freedom to fulfil their potential and have equal chance to get into different positions in society i.e. whether a university graduate, college graduate, cleaner, carpenter, a clerk etc. Therefore, the most talented people will attain the best education and ultimately the best jobs and hence the most important positions in society. According to Kingsley Davies and Wilbert Moore, this is beneficial not only to the individual recipients but to society as a whole because the process ensures that people are prepared for appropriate position within the labour force and also ensures that all social positions are occupied and balance maintained in that way. So need for a cleaner, a hair dresser, a teacher, lawyer, doctor, political advisor, development planners. Need for society must distribute its members among a variety of social positions.
- 3. Maintaining of Social Control:** Through education, children are introduced to standards of proper conduct, so that they are prepared to lead productive and orderly lives as adults by introducing them to norms and values of larger society; acceptance to it produces citizens who share a common set of values.
- 4. Social Change:** Education can stimulate desired change by promoting new ideas through intellectual inquiry and critical thinking, e.g. through university academic staff, new insights and people's attitudes.
- 5. Social Justice:** Educated people are better informed and, therefore, less prejudiced citizens. This will in turn provide the necessary support for a more equitable society.
- 6. Social Integration:** Education works to forge a mass of people into a unified whole. This function is of particular importance in nations with pronounced social diversity

with various cultures which are at times even hostile to each other. One way in which this integration is done is through the establishing of a common language, for example, English in Zambia.

Latent Functions

- Help keep youths off the street.
- Serve as a market place for marriage partners, sugar daddies not take you anywhere, potential marriage among class mates and within the university.
- Broaden relationships from nearly at each level; primary, secondary, university, new friends.

Conflict Perspective

Oppose the functionalist perspective. Conflict perspective (sociologists) believes that the educational system serves to limit the access of individuals and groups to power and social rewards.

1. Social Control:

For Functionalists sociologists, this was viewed as beneficial as the school produces citizens who share a common set of values.

- For Conflict Sociologists, this control service to produce citizens who largely accept the basic inequalities of the social system without questioning.
- Argue that this is possible because in most cases, the school has a **hidden curriculum** which involves teaching of conservative values and norms that centre around obedience to authority.
- According to Conflict Sociologists, therefore, this serves the dominant groups in society by helping them maintain their positions of power because the system will produce cooperative citizens or workforce who cannot be able to question anything or accept things the way they are.

2. Principle of Meritocracy/Tracking

- Is the assignment of students to different types of educational programmes, for example vocational training, college/university bound programmes; on functionalists view this is good because it ensures that people of different abilities are trained to take over the wide variety of jobs that exist in society, conflicts view tracking as a means

through which the wealthy and powerful maintain their positions in society while keeping down the disadvantaged and the poor.

- Reasoning is that in most cases, it is the children of the poor or lower classes who will be assigned to lower classes, for example, carpenter, mechanic while those of the upper class will be university graduate, engineers, doctors, lawyers, because their foundations is bad from the home exposed to reading, completing.
- Further, reasoning is that children of the poor will go to government schools and so will not do very well (no reading materials) and up in vocational training while the children of the rich will go to fee paying schools, end up at university and be able to get themselves prestigious jobs.
- In this way, according to conflict sociologists, education perpetuates social classes in society and broaden gap between poor and rich.
- Conflicts further argue that sometimes students may change/switch tracks but this is very rare. Reason is because of **the self-fulfilling prophecy**, i.e. a situation whereby pupils in lower tracks come to think of themselves as incapable and not good enough or meant for the lower position, treated like that by society because they have and continue to be treated as dull, inferior and incapable by society, family members, peers, teachers, vice versa for pupils from higher tracks.
- So to them, how one performs in school and they eventually become social stratification system is not purely dependent on one's ability or merit but on the parents social and financial standing in society.