

Education Policy

1. Concepts & Goals of Education Policy

- Formal & informal rules and practices through which the state shapes individuals' education & learning – funding, regulation & provision
 - Mainly school education but also includes lifelong learning & training
- Goals - *Economic*: human capital development, economic competitiveness
 - *Social*: basic social right; reducing inequalities (by gender, ethnicity, family backgrounds); promote social cohesion (foster 'good citizen for democracy')
 - *Capability* approach: human capability – basic need for participation in society & political activities, for self-realisation & autonomy

2. Educational inequality

- Why is educational inequality 'bad'?
 - Inequality of opportunity; economic inefficiency (missing talents)
- Cross-country inequalities in educational achievement: related to differential education systems, culture, resource allocation
- Within-country inequality: differential achievement & access to higher education by regions, family background, gender, race, disability
- Assessment: How do we evaluate school quality and performance?
 - *Input*: public spending on education, school budgets, teacher-student ratio, teacher qualification, classroom size
 - *Achievements*: performance league tables, GCSE, EBacc; Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA), proportion of students going to higher education
 - But the result may simply reflect school privileges than quality (selection bias: high-ability students are selected to good schools)
 - Qualitative evaluation (how they deliver curriculum) seems challenging

- Long-term outcomes: intergenerational mobility
 - Whether children's achievement (education, income, occupation) is higher (or lower) than parents (absolute mobility vs relative mobility)
- Mechanisms: family background → educational attainment
 - Cognitive ability (by early investment vs genetical?), health/nutrition, social/cultural capital, parenting, economic resources, information
 - Do schools exacerbate existing educational inequality? (see Downey & Condron, 2016; Engzell et al. 2021 – effects of school closures)
 - Even among similar (cognitively) high-ability students, socioeconomic background creates difference in achievements

3. Policies to Tackle Inequalities in Education

- Policy instruments for education: finance, regulation & provision
 - changing school structures (comprehensive vs selective; autonomy)
 - funding allocation (local authority control, additional compensation for the disadvantaged)
 - performance assessment (linked with funding)
 - (de-)standardize curriculum & pedagogy
- Horizontal stratification: the extent to which students at similar age are separated into different types of schools or different groups within schools
 - By students' abilities, interests, parents' preferences
 - High stratification in German-style education system
 - Performance inequalities by socioeconomic backgrounds reduced after reforms from tracked (selective) to comprehensive education systems (Vand de Werfhorst, 2018; Boliver & Swift, 2011)
- Early childhood intervention – earlier intervention produces higher rates of return (Heckman curve)
 - Sure Start (1998): early education, childcare, health & family support for disadvantaged children (cf. US Head Start)
 - Pupil premium (2011): additional grants to schools with more disadvantaged students, to reduce attainment gap

- Entitlement of free part-time early education for 3- & 4-year-olds (2-year-olds for the disadvantaged) (2012): local authorities take responsibility, strong role of voluntary or for-profit providers in delivery (nursery schools, children's centre)
- Quality of programme is important, particularly if the scale of the programme is large (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017)
- "A new study finds preschool can be detrimental to children", The Economist (03.02.2022)
- Even if the effectiveness of the pre-K-type programmes are contested, they can still be desired by parents as an alternative for childcare (esp. in the UK and US where day care is very expensive)
- Compulsory schooling: positive impact on educational attainment, but no large impact on social mobility (Sturgis & Buscha, 2015)
- Standardised curriculum & guidance: e.g., 'floor targets' for minimum achievement (New Labour government)
- Raising school autonomy (Eyles, Hupkau & Machin, 2016)
 - US Charter Schools (allocated by lottery): great achievement gains for less privileged students (increased schooling time, effective staff & instruction practices, culture of high expectation)
 - Swedish Free Schools: less evidence that free schools resulted in boosts of students' outcome (lack of standardised testing/monitoring of student performance)
 - England's Academy schools: Academies Act 2010 (triggered massive increase in the number of academies by deregulation of management)
→ admission of high-performing students & improvement of outcomes (KS4 exam, GCSE, stay on after KS4, entering universities)
- Higher education: do the state (at least partially) have to bear the cost?
 - It is the firms who benefit from trained labour; or individuals who mainly benefit from receiving higher education (with higher wage prospects)

- *Market model* of job training (firms bear costs): ‘poaching’ between firms leads to suboptimal outcomes – incentives to poach a trained (experienced) worker or invest in highly firm-specific skills
- *Individual financing*: unequal access to opportunities, social division of education quality by class/gender/ethnicity

4. Education Policy (in Britain)

- Britain’s education: Conventional focus on elite & general education (literacy, numerical skills); Weak focus & regulation on vocational/practical education (lacking national education system for training/apprenticeship)
 - “Complaints from industry that new recruits from schools sometimes do not have the basic skills to do the job” (Green Paper 1977)
 - Primary education: vast majority attend near-home schools, except for very few private/specialist schools
 - Secondary schools: vast majority go to comprehensive schools, and about 5% are in highly selective grammar schools
 - School autonomy (curriculum, budget, teacher hiring): very high in England (Faith School/Free School/Academy/City Technology/State Boarding School/Private School) but not in the rest of the UK
 - Private schools: these are ‘independent’ schools without state funding, funded by fees (about 15,000 p.a.), independent curricula, but not always highly selective (some are selective more than others)
 - Grammar schools: state-funded free schools, selective schools but follow government curricula, focusing on academic achievement
 - Other state schools: vast majority, but varies a lot (local authority, faith schools, academies, and so on...)
- 1944 Education Act: beginning of universal, free, compulsory education in England & Wales (from age 5-15 → 5-16 in 1972)
 - Pre-War: strong tradition of local authority funding & church schools
 - Tripartite system: grammar / technical / ‘secondary modern’ schools
 - Intelligence test at age 11: classification to different types of education

- School selection became the mechanism of social class reproduction
- Technical schools were minority and post-secondary vocational training was weak (as opposed to continental Europe)
- Labour government 1965: introduction of **comprehensive education** → integrated schooling for all levels of ability, replacing the tripartite system
 - Additional resources & special educational support allocated for socially, economically disadvantaged communities for compensation
- Conservative reforms: increasing parental choice (1980 Education Act)
 - **1988 Education Reform Act**: school autonomy ('grant-maintained schools' can opt out from local authority control); introduction of league tables; National Curriculum & Assessment; quasi-markets (*formula funding*: budgets determined by number of pupils); open enrolment (parents can choose school outside their local authority area)
 - Logic included tackling inequalities: competition might increase pressures on schools to raise quality; standardised curriculum would ensure quality education for all students
 - Problems: performance results affected by socio-economic backgrounds, not necessarily by school quality; cream-skimming (schools control admissions to select advantaged students); choice driven by parental resources (information gap, cost of travel, childcare)
- New Labour: market-oriented reforms in school management & increased school diversity (publicly funded **independent academies**)
 - Academies: autonomy in budget use, staff hiring, and curriculum → introduced in 2002, massive increase after 2010 (now more than 60%)
 - New Labour increased spending on school education: some reductions in socioeconomic inequalities (Lupton et al., 2016)
- Coalition government: spending on school education remained stable despite the austerity
 - Introduction of free schools, massive increase in 'converter' academies
 - Pupil Premium: additional grants to schools by the number of students eligible for free school meals, focusing on reducing attainment gap

- Recent issues
 - Achievement gap persists (students in poverty, boys than girls, black Caribbean/Pakistani underperforming) → Sure Start (1998)
 - Overall cuts in social spending after the Great Recession → closure of many children's centres
 - Weak vocational education for the majority not going to universities (further education colleges mainly provide post-secondary training)
 - Growing student debt after introduction of tuition, as more students enter higher education (participation rate 20% in 1990 to 50% by now)