

Social, Economic and Political Contexts of Education

Contents

Introduction

Pre-Test

Perspectives of Education

Functions of Education

Social Context of Education

Economic Context of Education

Political Context of Education

Summary

Objectives

1.0 Introduction

The education system with its elaborate network of sub-systems – pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, technical colleges, colleges of teacher education and universities, with its associated complex administrative systems, is one of the largest and one of the most expensive organizations in any society. The education system derives its mandate from the society and the individuals therein, which it is required to serve. Concomitantly, the education system is constantly in interaction with the many facets of society in which it operates. Society determines what tasks an education system should perform and in turn, the performance of the education system is closely affected by the varied and dominant forces that operate in society. Among these dominant forces, social, economic and political forces emerge as being of paramount importance.

A teacher will need to possess an adequate understanding of how these different forces influence the initiation and implementation of educational policy in the educational system in which he/she functions, if he/she is to be able to contribute and participate in educational decision-making and implementation of those decisions. He/She will also need to develop competencies to manage these contextual forces to ensure that expected policies are implemented and not subverted. This objective can be achieved only if the teacher educator to whom the development of relevant knowledge and competencies in novice teachers is assigned is confident of his/her own knowledge and competencies in respect of these contexts.

In order to analyze the social, economic and political contexts of education, it is pertinent to pose a number of questions.

1. What are the functions that education is expected to perform?
2. What are the factors that determine the nature and characteristics of education in a society?
3. What are the conditions that assist or impede the achievement of goals and objectives of education in a country?

In this lesson, let us seek answers to these questions.

Firstly, we will examine the different perspectives on education, which indicate what functions education should seek to perform. Specific focus will be on the functional, liberal, social-democratic and conflict perspectives.

Based on the identification of the functions of education, we will survey briefly the evolution of education in different societies to understand that the mix of these

background factors may vary from one society to another and also from time to time, with some factors taking precedence over others in certain historical periods.

Such a discussion would also indicate that these contextual factors do not operate independent of each other but function simultaneously, leading often to synchronization, with one supporting the others, or at times to dissonance, one conflicting with others.

We would also focus attention on how globalization has brought about less differentiation among the social, economic and political factors operating in a society thus adding on an international context and thereby resulting in broad similarities in the expectations from and delivery of education.

Finally, the discussion would enable you to analyze how social, economic and political contexts of education in Sri Lanka operate in determining the directions of the philosophy and practice of education in this country.

1.1 Pre-Test

- What are the factors that you would group under the “social context” of education?
- To what extent, does the political factor determine the philosophy of education in your country?
- Give one instance that indicates the influence of the economic context on the current educational reforms launched by your country.

2.0 Perspectives of Education

Sociologists who have inquired into the role of education have presented several perspectives: functional, liberal, social democratic and conflict. You are probably already familiar with these perspectives. Let us, however, briefly look at each of these perspectives in order to identify what functions have been attributed to education over time.

1.2.1 ***The Functionalist View of Education*** tends to focus on the positive contributions made by education to the maintenance of the social system. Among the prominent proponents of this view are those presented below.

Proponents of the Functionalist View

Emile Durkheim (1956)	The major function of education is the transmission of society's norms and values
Talcott Parsons (1959)	To internalize in its pupils both the commitments and capacities for successful performance of their future adult roles and social... to allocate those human resources within the role structure of adult society
Kingsley Davis (1948)	Education is the proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their capacities

1.2.2 Liberal Perspective of Education focuses on education in relation to the individual rather than to society. The main purpose of education is the promotion of the well-being of the individual and only indirectly the improvement of society.

The most influential proponent of the liberal view was John Dewey. The task of education is to encourage individuals to develop their full potential as human beings. He particularly stressed the development of intellectual potential. Schooling for all would help to foster the physical, emotional and spiritual talents of everyone, as well as their intellectual abilities. For Dewey, a progressive education system was a vital part of a successful democracy. The education system should provide flexibility and tolerance and individuals would be able to cooperate together as equals.

1.2.3 Social Democratic Perspective is reflected in the work of sociologists such as A.H. Halsey and economists such as John Vaizey. They argue that state intervention is necessary to reduce inequalities produced by the free market economy. They disagree with functionalists' view that education provides genuine equality of opportunity and claim that education could actually create greater equality as well as promoting equality of opportunity only if the educational system is run properly.

1.2.4 Conflict Perspectives on Education are based upon the view that groups within existing societies have fundamentally different interests. They argue that significant improvements can be made only if they are accompanied by wider social changes.

Among the proponents of this perspective, Bowles and Gintis (1976) stand out. They maintain that there is a close "correspondence" between the social relationships which

govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the education system. Work casts a “long shadow” over the education system; education is subservient to the needs of those who control the workplace, the owners of the means of production.

3.0 Functions of Education

How do these perspectives on education become relevant to our discussion about the functions of education?

You will note, for example, that the first three perspectives we discussed above are quite different from the fourth, the Conflict Perspective. The first three enable us to derive the functions of education as presented by different schools of thought on education. At the same time, the fourth perspective helps us to gain an understanding of the constraints that impinge on the education system in striving to perform the functions envisaged from it. These constraints may lead to contradictions so that in actual fact, education performs in a manner totally different from the manner it is expected to perform. We will follow this line of thinking at depth, in the latter part of this lesson.

Let us now briefly try to list the functions of education that emanate from the above theoretical perspectives. In the table given below, the functions are listed under different columns, as they relate to society on one hand, and to the individual, on the other.

Table 1
Functions of the Education System

For the Society	For the Individual
Cultural transmission	Socialization
Supply of trained manpower	Occupational training
Creativity and innovation	Development of new skills
Greater social equity	Development of potential/status achievement

You may now realize that although the functions are listed differently under the two columns, each function on the left (society) has its corresponding function listed under the right (individual).

Cultural transmission is the traditional function of an education system. It is the task of transmitting the existing culture pattern of the group to new recruits, including the new immigrants. Increasingly formal education has taken on this task which was earlier performed by various socializing agencies, such as the family, religious organizations etc.

Supplying trained manpower is also specified as a function of the education system. As Drucker stated, as far back as in 1961, succinctly:

“ An abundant and increasing supply of highly educated people has become the absolute prerequisite of social and economic development in our world. ... The essential new fact is that a developed society and economy are less than fully effective if anyone is educated less than the limit of his potential. The uneducated is in fact becoming an economic liability and unproductive. Society must be an “educated society” today – to progress, to grow, even to survive”.

Drucker, Peter

(1961)

The school is becoming increasingly responsible for **the selection of personnel or status ascription**, and as far as the individual is concerned, for **status achievement**. The selection of personnel for different positions in the status hierarchy is more and more based on qualifications awarded by the education system. The education organization acts as an agency of selection for the allocation of status. It acts as a sieve, sorting students into different categories, according to their educational performance.

Creativity and innovation may seem as distinctly opposed to the task of cultural transmission. It may perhaps not be possible to perform both these tasks simultaneously. However, in its training process, through the development of skills, the education system also provides the basis for creativity and innovation, for the emergence of new technologies and new processes.

In the next section of the lesson we will examine how an education system has to interact with the social, economic and political forces in the society in which it operates to interpret how the above functions should be performed

4.0 Social Context of Education

While **cultural transmission** or **socialization** is a major function of education, an assumption implicit in this function is that educational institutions would develop in the younger generation the 'norms and values' accepted as worthwhile and appropriate in particular situations. The norms are enforced by positive and negative sanctions which may be formal or informal. Values provide more general guidelines. A value defines what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for.

"Education serves as a vehicle for cultures and values, creates an environment where socialization can take place and is the melting pot in which a common purpose takes shape....

Education can promote cohesion only if it strives to take the diversity of individuals and groups into consideration while taking care that it does not itself contribute to social exclusion.

Delors report,

(1997)

Many sociologists maintain that shared norms and values are essential for the operation of society. The school curriculum is the vehicle used by education for transmission of culture. The school curriculum is defined as the **'map or chart of organized knowledge and experience through whose systematic study the student is expected to learn efficiently and to apply that learning in the life-situations'** (Skilbeck, 1994). From a social standpoint, this map or chart of experiences serves as an orderly introduction in the culture, a means whereby the student is drawn into major forms and modes of thought and experience and learns to use them, creatively and practically as well as cognitively.

The curriculum of an educational institution cannot exist in isolation from the wider community or separate from the society from which it draws its students, teachers and resources.

Yet whether there is consensus regarding norms and values shared by all in society is being questioned. What is considered as worthy of being transmitted may be decided upon by a few powerful groups or decision-makers in a society. What happens is that the education system in practice seems to give high status to certain kinds of academic knowledge and ways of learning and to confer related advantages on the minority who

perform well in this curriculum. Thus it reinforces the social and economic advantage enjoyed by the more prosperous and socially powerful sections of the population and at the same time, does too little in response to the needs of all students, and the requirements of the economy and society in a state of flux. It is argued that access to knowledge via the academic curriculum is not in practice equally available to all, nor is that knowledge, as structured into separate disciplines, sufficient as a preparation for effective social participation. This emphasis and status, by spreading into the curriculum of all students, creates a mismatch between social, economic and cultural needs, personal development and learning tasks.

The socio-cultural critique of the curriculum draws attention to other social issues and trends to which the curriculum of educational institutions is felt to be insufficiently responsive. Discrimination against particular races/ethnic groups and against economically less favoured sectors of the population, sex bias in teaching certain subjects, especially mathematics and science have brought about equality of opportunity movements.

It was also argued that schools are important and effective modernizing institutions. People who attain higher levels of education (or who achieve at higher levels) also have higher levels occupational aspirations, have little adherence to traditional customs and beliefs, an openness to new experiences, a willingness to migrate and a reduction of family ties. Thus Inkeles and Smith (1974) found strong correlation between educational attainment and individual modernity in their study of adults in Argentina, Chile, East Pakistan (Bangladesh), India, Israel and Nigeria. Delacroix and Ragin (1978) in their study of 49 less-developed countries concluded that the school had the potential to modernize without Westernizing and that countries with strong state sponsored programmes used education as a modernizing agent more efficiently than states with weaker programmes.

Armer and Youtz (1971), however, suggested that under certain circumstances, schooling could have a traditionalizing rather than a modernizing effect. Similarly, Wagner and Lofti (1980) found that Koranic schools actually inhibit the acquisition of modern values. Critics also question whether modernization *per se* is desirable. The 'brain drain' of educated and skilled persons from developing countries, the disruption of social relationships as a result of the modernizing process, the destruction of useful traditional institutions and the creation of a modernized elite who are out of touch with the general population, are but a few of the negative consequences of modernization (Saha and Fagerlind, 1994).

The decisions about these norms and values and their actual transmission may differ from time to time also.

Let us first look at how education changes with time, that is, with social change.

Social change, intended or unintended, refers to variations in the relatively stable relationships that comprise a pattern of social organizations within a culture and the associated values, beliefs and behaviours (Hanna, 1994). Technology, economic relations, ideology and politics may cause social change.

- Before the industrial revolution formal instruction was a highly restricted activity designed for the sons (and occasionally for the daughters) of the ruling classes, for the clergy, for the practitioners of law and medicine, and for government officials.
- With the onset of industrialization, the economic and social role of education radically changed.

‘The skills required by a nation become a part of the financial capital of that society.’

Adam Smith

‘Knowledge is our most powerful engine of production; it enables us to subdue nature and force her to satisfy our wants’.

Alfred Marshall

While the direct impact of industrialization was felt on the economy, it transformed the social scenario also. Agricultural workers in rural areas migrated to the towns and cities to become paid labour and the establishment of industries led to the formation of trade unions and a demand for workers' rights.

Nineteenth century processes of industrialization ushered in mass schooling (Levine and White, 1986). In England, for instance, industrialization led to the extension of the right to vote to the working class in 1867 and the ***Elementary Education Act of 1870*** and later the ***Secondary Education Act of 1902***.

- In the sixties, with technological advancement, education was increasingly considered as a major force for social change.

'Education is a crucial type of investment for the exploitation of modern technology'.

**Halsey, Floud and Anderson,
(1962)**

"What the railroads did for the second half of the last century and the automobile for the last half of this century may be done for the second half of this century by the knowledge industry; that is, to serve as the focal point for national growth'.

Clark Kerr, (1963)

On the one hand, there was an effort to democratize education, for example, the establishment of the comprehensive schools in England and on the other hand, to reform education to emphasize the technical and vocational aspects.

The last few decades of the 20th Century has witnessed a concern about increasing income disparities between nations and within nations, in spite of harnessing technology for economic development: a spread of unemployment, resource exhaustion and environmental hazards has occurred. There has been a re-awakening regarding ***the rights approach***- focusing on human rights, rights of children, women, indigenous peoples, minorities and of the environment, in sum, on different facets of ***human development***.

Increasing acceptance of the need to move towards the assurance of these rights and the recognition of the gap between expectations and the reality has brought about a radical change in education. This change is reflected in the emphasis currently being given to,

- The goal of education for all,
- The spread of open and distance learning,
- Emphasis on continuing and life-long education,
- Inclusion of such components as human rights education, gender issues, multicultural education, and environmental education in the curricula, and
- Creation of more democratic institutions and structures for provision of education.

Activity

Reflect on what we have discussed above.

Examine the educational policies that have been introduced in your own country to enable education

1. To contribute to economic development
2. To keep pace with technological advancements
3. To implement 'the rights approach'

Here it is necessary, once again, to reiterate that it is not possible to separate the societal context into different isolated compartments such as the social context, economic context and the political context arbitrarily. What occurs in reality is that all these determining factors, social, economic and political, operate together, interlocking with each other in a mutual relationship. **Social change can be brought about as a result of industrialization, technological advancement or a political ideology.**

In considering the influence of social context on education another aspect that needs to be considered is the stratification that exists in a society. Two terms which are of relevance here, are **social inequality** and **social stratification**, terms with which you are already familiar with.

Social inequality refers to the existence of socially created inequality. **Social stratification** is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess. Because indirectly or directly, these inequalities have derived from the division of labour and also because occupations have become the most distinguishing characteristic of modern societies, in most cases occupations are used as the basis for social stratification scales.

Caste is an example of a social stratification system. In Hindu society in India, castes were occupational groups. Sri Lanka also inherited the caste system due to its strong links with India in the past. Caste has now been made illegal in India even though it still persists very strongly, especially in rural India. In Sri Lanka, the influence of caste is even more limited to remote areas and some ethnic groups.

Medieval European society did not possess such a rigid stratification system yet a feudal system in which the monarchy, the aristocracy and the plebians (ordinary masses) with groups who are further disadvantaged such as serfs in Russia, existed.

Modern society, on the other hand, is more characterized by its class system. Often three classes, upper, middle and working or lower class, are recognized in this stratification system. In essence, however, the major division is between capital and labour. The concentration of wealth and power is in the hands of the upper class (Westergaard and Resler, 1976). Manual workers are regarded as being working class and non-manual workers as middle class.

Another aspect that has to be considered is **social mobility**. Social mobility is the opportunity to move from one stratum to another. It can be upward or downward. A stratification system which provides little opportunity for social mobility is described as 'closed' while those with a relatively high rate of social mobility are called 'open'. Caste is a good example of a closed stratification system. In such societies, an individual's position is largely ascribed. In an open system an individual's class position is largely achieved. It results from their personal qualities and abilities and the use they make of them rather than ascribed characteristics.

Education has a particularly significant role to play in opening up stratification systems for education, and is expected to provide the opportunity to individuals to strive towards improving their status through achievement.

Mobility studies have, however, regarded education as one of the most important mechanisms for transmitting parental social stratification positions to their children in societies which are not based upon hereditary occupations. Blau (1967) and Duncan (1962) found the largest part of the overall relationship between the occupations of fathers and sons in the United States to be transmitted by educational level of the sons, which in turn is influenced by the occupational level of the fathers.

The addition of 'other parental resources' such as father's and mother's education, financial income, occupation of the mother, residence and so on, increased the explanatory power of the basic model of Blau and Duncan. These factors partly explain the educational level of the offspring which could not be explained by father's occupation. Sewell and Hauser (1975) in their Wisconsin model included neighbourhood and school contexts, educational aspirations, the influence of 'significant others' and scholastic ability in the basic model. Their findings were also similar to those of earlier studies (Sewell and Hauser, 1980). On the whole, these studies make clear that parental resources affect by way of a common family background, the education and occupational attainment of all their children. A conclusion from these studies is that the family structure adds to the inequality in intergenerational mobility opportunities.

One important question in mobility research is whether mobility differs between societies or between generations. Liberals see a positive relationship between industrialization and mobility and a resulting increase in equality of opportunity. Marxists often argue that there is no relationship at all or if any, a negative one between industrialization and mobility in capitalist societies, but that a positive relationship existed in socialist societies. Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) reject both liberal and Marxist theories about the relationship between industrialization and mobility. They admit that political intervention (income policy and/or educational reforms) may be a source of cross-national differences in mobility, but reject that the assumption that this variation must necessarily be systematically related to regimes or governments of various types. The relevance of this conclusion for education is that claims regarding the effectiveness of an educational system in promoting or obstructing more equal opportunities are not justified (Dronkers, 1994).

Farrel (1994) discusses what he calls the 'guardedly pessimistic' stance. The poorest nations of the world have been hard hit by the world-wide financial and debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. As a result educational opportunities have actually decreased in both total and per capita terms. As a consequence, for about 2/3 of the world's children, educational access equality is stagnating and survival and output equality are deteriorating. Farell argues, however, that as a consequence of the massive investments in educational provision, there has been a change in the critical locus of the inequality problem. It has shifted from the earlier problems of equal access to primary education to equal output at the end of primary education and equality of access to secondary education and so on.

Thus the relationship between the social context and education is a mutual relationship. Education is expected to change the stratification system, to make it more open by providing greater chances for social mobility. At the same time, the possibility of education performing this role can itself be constrained by the social stratification system, for the opportunities are often, directly a function of stratification.

Sri Lankan Students

Let us now examine the development of Sri Lankan education and see whether we can identify any instances in which the social context has influenced education.

Consider each of the following:

- The switchover to the mother tongue as the medium of instruction,
- The establishment of Madhya Maha Vidyalayas (Central Schools),
- The introduction of a common curriculum at junior secondary school level,
- The introduction of the District Quota Scheme and
- Standardization of marks for university entrance.

Analyze the social context that prevailed at different points of time in Sri Lanka's history and examine the extent to which the social context has influenced the introduction of the above measures.

Was it only the social context that has been instrumental in bringing about these measures?

Non-Sri Lankan Students

Examine your own country and try to identify significant measures that have been implemented to ensure improved educational opportunities to all.

What were the social contexts that operated in the country to initiate these measures?

Was it only the social context that has been instrumental in bringing about these measures?

5.0 Economic Context of Education

Theories of economic development agree that one component of progress is the human dimension, for example, the quality of the work force and the skills that it possesses.

Examine the functions of education that we specified in section 4.0.

You would note that the functions of supply of trained manpower, supply of personnel and creativity and innovation are also linked to the economy. **Human Capital Theory** assumed that any improvement in the health, skills or motivation of the workforce would improve the productivity of workers. By doing so, education is seen as contributing to economic growth. While considerable evidence supporting this thesis has been put forward, Psacharopoulos (1981) perhaps, provided the most comprehensive evidence by his study of 32 countries for 1973 –1980 on rates-of-return to investment in education. He showed that in developing countries the rates of return to primary schooling was 27 per cent and 16 per cent and 13 per cent respectively for secondary and higher education.

Critics of Human Capital theory (Coombs, 1968, 1985; Weiler, 1978; Blaug, 1985; and Bowles and Gintis, 1976) questioned the notion that expansion of education would automatically lead to economic growth. Especially neo-Marxist political economic theory, focuses on the ways that education leads to the reproduction of social inequalities and the detrimental effects that these processes have on economic growth.

We need to examine the inter-relationship between education and the economic context bearing in mind the above background which placed differential emphasis on education as a means to economic development and the implications such an emphasis would have in moulding education.

As we explained earlier, the contribution of education to economic growth is presumed to occur through its ability to increase the productivity of an existing labour force in various ways, including both technical training and general education. It is accepted that a shortage of educated people might limit growth, but it is not clear that promoting education will foster more rapid growth. Nor is it clear what kinds of education are best at assisting growth: general formal education, technical training, or informal education related to specific jobs.

Economic context affects education especially when access to education is expanded because employers tend to use education as a screening device for making hiring decisions. Faced with a large number of applicants for a given job, an employer tends to narrow his or her options by looking seriously only at those with the highest levels of education, even when high levels of education are not necessary for the job. This is especially true of economies where due to low economic growth the number of jobs remain restricted when education expands.

Assumptions on which the Human Capital theory is based on, are also relevant. It is assumed that rational people will attempt to invest in education up to the point where returns to the investment in terms of extra income are expected to balance the costs of undertaking education, including the income foregone while education is foregone.

Decisions on investment in human capital generally relate to the amount of education to give children; ... Parents must decide how much of present consumption to forego in investing in the education or human capital of the children which is counterbalanced by the real or expected income earned by more educated offspring. Expected returns from education, however, can vary in perception and in fact, parents may be unwilling to take the risks associated with such long term investment.

Hicks (1994)

Thus education's impact on economic growth depends on the level of development of both the economy and the labour force and will be country and time-specific. The whole process becomes self-equilibrating; an over-supply of a certain class of educated people will drive down the salary and lower prospective rates of return which in turn will discourage entrants. Another aspect that needs to be considered is the dualism in the labour markets, especially in developing countries. In these countries, markets are divided between formal and informal sectors and these can be generally characterized as having high and low wages, respectively. They also treat the education of those who work in these sectors differently.

Specifically, this analysis suggests that labour markets are segmented. That segmentation emerges from demand-side forces and that the productive traits that define the quality of labour are rewarded differently in the two segments.

In both sectors, there is a segmentation of workers, and the pay-off to human capital varies depending on the sector and the labour segment in which individuals are located. Labour segmentation, thus refers to a differentiation of economic opportunities and rewards among objectively comparable groups of workers. It suggests a process of division and isolation of different social groups and the rewards to workers depend not only on their productive traits but also on the structural working conditions or the sector in which they find an occupation, that is, the demand side of the market (Carnoy, 1980).

Deficient capital accumulation (deficient demand for labour) determines the relative size of the formal sector of the economy. As a result, the mass of workers finds employment in the low-income and the low-productivity jobs of the informal sector (Hallak and Caillods, 1981).

Economic changes also dictate changes in education. Thus the radical transformation of the world economy since the 1970s is changing the international division of labour and the national conditions of labour markets in both developed and developing countries. As a result, a growing number of firms are establishing their own training centres. These focus on specialized occupations as a way of keeping pace with the personnel needs of the labour market.

Capitalist countries are locating their labour-intensive processes of production in the labour-surplus economies to take advantage of their relative low wages and lax working conditions. Multinational companies decide where they will establish their factories. This estimate is influenced by the existence of 'good' workers in quantity and quality which in turn decides educational policy. What kind of education should governments promote? What kind of workers' skills and behaviour must be stimulated in order to attract capital and create an increasing labour demand?

Technological changes, especially the development of information and communications technology, have effected a phenomenal change in the production and dissemination of knowledge. These changes alter the demand for specific occupations and skills and create a demand for new ones which generates the conditions for training, retraining and conversion of workers' skills. The educational system has to instill attitudes and cognitive abilities that would enable individuals to face job uncertainty and to adjust to changes in labour markets. General education may be preferred to vocational education for training people of both formal and informal sectors for inculcating the required attitudes and abilities. Increasingly, general transferable skills such as adaptability, flexibility,

decision-making ability and inter-personal skills are being shown as more important than academic knowledge.

Another consequence which has stemmed from the economic context, in the wake of globalization, is the liberalization of economies. Privatization and open competition policies have imposed the withdrawal of state assistance to social welfare, especially education. As a result even countries which recorded positive achievements in human development through state intervention in education are forced to reconsider financial allocations to education. This has led to a general deterioration in academic standards and an exacerbation of disparities in the school systems. Entry of foreign higher educational institutions into the “educational market” has created further stratification in the school systems, especially in developing countries. Demands from the international labour markets have given rise to new priorities as regards the medium of instruction, curricula, etc.

Sri Lankan Students

Let us consider the implications of the above trends for education in Sri Lanka.

You will remember that, on regaining independence, the state decided to make a heavy investment in education believing that the future development of the country depended on the development of its human resources. While the decision to provide free education, to establish Madhya Maha Vidyalayas and a good network of schools throughout the country and to provide scholarships were guided basically by the social democratic philosophy of successive governments, a strong economic position could provide resources to implement these decisions.

The mismatch between the demands of the labour market and the output of the educational system, which was basically biased towards academic education led to an emphasis on diversification of the school system and a strengthening of technical and vocational education. These measures however, could not be adequately or effectively implemented mainly due to the economic stagnation which had occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. The Educational Reforms of 1972 were initiated by both social and economic imperatives. The introduction of Pre-vocational Studies is a clear instance of the influence of the economic context.

The current shift towards an emphasis on the teaching of English and computer education, emergence of international schools providing English-medium instruction and the stress placed on general transferable skills and social skills are evident indicators of the consequences of attempts to cater to the signals emanating from the economic context.

Non- Sri Lankan Students

Read the above description about Sri Lanka.

Can you identify similar developments and reversals in your own countries?

To what extent are these changes emanating from within and outside your own country?

Activity

Assign two teacher trainees each to five organizations, which employ at least 10 employees, located in the vicinity of your College.

Make them interview five employees from each organization on the following:

- (1) The extent to which they utilize the knowledge and skills acquired through education received at school,
- (2) The knowledge and skills they lacked at the time they joined the organization,
- (3) Strategies employed to develop these desirable knowledge and skills in them,
- (4) Employees' suggestions to make education more relevant for employment.

6.0 Political Context of Education

In Table 1 in section 3.4, we specified several functions of education which included 'socialization'. One component of socialization is **political socialization**. Political socialization is the process of learning political attitudes and behaviour through social interaction. Education is the principal institution in society formally charged with teaching the younger generation about political society and citizenship. Political socialization is considered as an important source of societal and political stability by some while others consider political socialization as a force for change. Thus although adults attempt to inculcate political values and norms, young people perceive, interpret and respond in their own ways and generational and group conflict becomes a significant source of political change.

The manner in which the function of political socialization is performed varies from one society to another. A democracy may attempt to perform a system-maintenance function, that is, to ensure that the political values of democracy are transmitted to the young. A totalitarian state, on the other hand, would attempt to indoctrinate the younger generation into the 'correct' political thinking and to induce conformity to that regime and perform a system-creation function. Similarly societies undergoing transformations, new-nation status or political upheavals (e.g. Eastern Europe, South Asian countries in the later half of the 20th century, and the Middle-east), have used

education as a means of system-creation (Farah and Kuroda, 1987; Heater and Gillespie, 1981).

Such variations occur not only from one society to another but also in the same society during different political regimes. The state may attempt to use education to promote the political ideology which it advocates. These political ideologies may range from western democracy to communism or socialism or to national variations such as those in operation in Afghanistan, Malaysia or countries of Eastern Europe.

What are the principal mechanisms of political socialization?

Firstly, it is attempted to create awareness and understanding of political concepts and symbols. Most societies have introduced civics/civic education courses for adolescent children so that they can become acquainted with their own rights and duties as citizens. Adolescence and youth are considered as the 'critical stage' for the formation of political values and norms (Braungart and Braungart, 1986).

The influences that may arise from the political context could include

1. The community and the school environment (local economy, culture, social structure, sources of conflict and pressure groups and organizations),
2. Regional, state and national politics, trends and events, and
3. Global structure, changes and influences.

Each of these forces may have a direct or indirect bearing on educational policies. These levels of influence also provide important sources of cross-pressure that may mitigate the political socialization effects of the schools.

For example, a school may have a mandated curriculum which includes political and social components with clearly defined goals. Yet children and adolescents acquire knowledge not only through formal classroom learning but also through informal experiences and indirect kinds of learning, such as class elections, extracurricular activities and group interaction. Students may also react against the presented material, misinterpreting or misunderstanding important concepts and deciding that politics and government are irrelevant or uninteresting.

The broader political context can also influence educational policies. For example, a society genuinely interested and concerned with the maintenance of democratic values, and egalitarian social policies would use education to achieve these goals. These would mean a fair curriculum, a just system of schools which is not based on social privilege, and suitable methods of teaching –learning. For example, it is argued that totalitarian regimes would more often use rote memorization with minimal activity learning or encouragement of questioning or critical thinking. Others would not restrict political socialization to the teaching of civics but would attempt to incorporate new topics such

as multiculturalism, gender issues and environmental issues in the curriculum. They would move beyond to include critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making and student participation skills. They would encourage students to use the scientific method to investigate political questions, issues and problems. Similarly, in a society which wishes to practice democracy the structure of the education system, school management etc. also would reflect the spirit of democracy.

What often occurs is a mismatch between the espoused goals and practice in reality. While cooperation and team work is advocated in school as well as in wider society, the political ethos which prevails is competition and winning. As the economic and the political contexts are irretrievably linked with each other, open economic policies are politically validated resulting not in equal educational opportunity but an aggravation of existing inequalities in education. This brings into question the credibility of most educational goals and leads to a rejection of what is taught for political socialization at school level by most students.

Sri Lankan Students

Let us turn to Sri Lanka now.

Identify the major political decisions that have affected educational policies in Sri Lanka since 1977.

What are the major educational measures that were taken as a result of these political decisions?

How has the current political context led to

- i. A reform of curricula in education,
- ii. Changes in the medium of instruction
- iii. Modifications of the school system
- iv. State participation in education ?

Non-Sri Lankan Students

Are there any parallels to above - time-lines, measures that have been mentioned in the case of Sri Lanka, in your own country? If so, identify the specific dates and measures.

To what extent are political decisions related to the identified changes?

Self Assessment Question No. 3

1. List the problems that have arisen in achievement of social functions of education in your country as a result of globalization and technological developments.
Specifically list the problems related to the following:
 - a. School system
 - b. Financing of education
 - c. Place of English language in schooling
 - d. University education
2. Suggest action that you as a teacher educator can take to guide your student teachers to give them the competence to handle such problems in schools.

7.0 Summary

In this lesson, we have looked at the interaction between education and the social, economic, and political contexts of education within which education operates.

You would have noted firstly, that the influence exerted by these different contexts is often a cumulative influence, with the different forces operating in a society working in relation to each other. Thus a change initiated in the economic context often reverberates on the social, spilling out to economic and social spheres.

Secondly, the influence of these different contexts is often time-bound. Social, economic and political ideologies often change over time and accordingly succeed in moulding the education system to fit the expectations from ideologies which are dominant at a particular point of time.

Thirdly, advances in communications and information technology affect education directly as well as through globalization which has taken place during the last decade. This has brought into the fore, an international context, which at times transcends the local and national contexts. The goals of education which originate from the international context has brought new challenges and issues to education as they often run counter to the aims and objectives of education formulated by the policymakers in different countries. This is the situation in which developing societies often find themselves in, especially when they are forced to succumb to the pressures of international donor agencies.

Objectives

You should now be able to

1. Identify the functions that education is expected to perform in any society,
2. Examine the goals of education as specified in the current educational reforms in your country and find out how these goals relate to the functions identified earlier,
3. List the factors that determine the nature and characteristics of education in a society and describe the nature of this influence,
4. Explain how the social, economic and political contexts within which education operates can assist or impede the achievement of goals which a society has focussed on,
5. Analyze the contextual situation to understand the gaps in achievement of educational goals formulated by your country, and
6. Explore how teacher education should provide opportunities to teachers to understand and manage the challenges that originate from the contextual situations.

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