

Exploring Karl Marx Conflict Theory in Education: Are Pakistani Private Schools Maintaining Status Quo?

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Abstract

Social class inequality is deeply rooted in our society. All spheres of life are subjected to this disparity even educational institutions are no exception. Different sociologists have explored underlying factors behind this phenomenon. One of the most prominent figures among these is Karl Marx who believed that between the two classes (ruling and the subject); first one remains on same positions due to economic superiority over the years as compared to the proletariat who experience restricted social mobility. Keeping in mind the existing educational structure based on class position as determined by Karl Marx theory, this study aims to see whether private schools are maintaining status quo in Pakistani society or not. In this regard, secondary data regarding key position holders (Matric.) of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Lahore was obtained (last 5 years) and an overview of public and private schools fees and amenities was given on the basis of observation. Preliminary findings of the study suggest that private schools have been successful in establishing a status quo in education system of Pakistani society. This phenomenon is quite relevant to Karl Marx conflict theory which confirms that power group has access to resources and life chances which unprivileged have not. It is social class which determines the choice of educational institution and consequently future success. This study presents the true depiction of existing educational inequality in Pakistan and will help to re-initiate a debate for policy makers to overcome the educational inequalities in Pakistani education system.

Keywords: Karl Marx conflict theory, education system, status quo, class inequality

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Introduction

Inequality is considered as an inevitable result of capitalism. Education system along with other institutions is assumed likely. It exhibits and funds the existing inequalities in the culture through schooling. Now education has turned into an industry which gives birth to a breeding ground and apparatus for reproduction of same social thought over the generations (Greaves, Hill & Maisuria, 2007).

This educational industry has also been flourishing in Pakistan with a mushroom growth of private institutes especially schools. The increase in private institutes means more difference in educational opportunities on the basis of income. Highly paid schools maintain certain standards of education and are linked with societies' elite whereas in government schools quality is linked with availability of teachers and resources (Bari & Sultana, 2011; Bowles & Gintis, 2013).

Research on educational quality of public and private schools demonstrates the fact that performance of children in private schools is higher as compared to public schools in developing countries. The most prominent factor towards choice of schooling is income. It is observed that poor people due to resource constraints admit their children to government schools. On the other hand, those who can afford send their children to private schools (Cox, Donald & Jimenez, 1991; Kingdon, 1996).

Class analysis in sociology purely indicates the educational inequality. Sociologists (Ball, 2004; Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2004) related the choice of schooling to availability of resources. This resource distribution in the society is exploitative; rich have an access to resources and they have better life chances than poor who have limited access to resources and minimum life chances.

Historical evidence suggests that working class is still a determinant of educational opportunities for individuals. Current education system is an extension of past elites prejudices system. It serves the interest of elites in private sector and at public level it is more oriented towards lower middle class interest (Reay, 2006).

This context of inequalities led the researcher to explore the existing education system with reference to Marx conflict theory.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx sees society as an arena of social conflict. To him, function and role of social institutions can be best understood by its economic system. As per his doctrine, social institution; education system strengthens existing class system that contains two main classes: bourgeoisie, haves; and proletariat, have nots. In this

system “haves” own the means of production, base and run the social institution while proletariats have not the base, they can only sell their labor at cheap rate for their survival. According to his approach, educational institutions provide the workforce to bourgeoisie class. The ideology of ruling class is disseminated by education system which establishes status quo. For this, two type of school system are developed in society: public and private. Public schools are for those people who cannot afford high fees and they are supposed to send their children to common masses schools. The other types of schools are private in which those pupils got admission whose parents has more resources and life chances with power and wealth. These schools serve the purpose to maintain status quo for elites. In contrast, the public schools seed the ideology of submission in the children of proletariats.

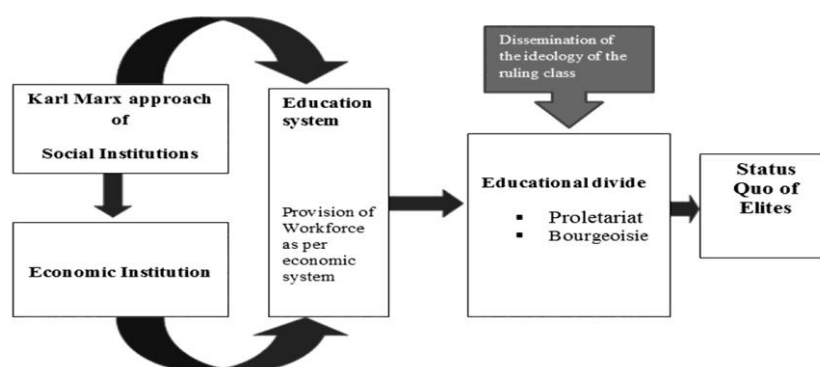


Figure 1 Karl Marx Conflict Theory and Educational System

Marx believes that current education system is reproducing social classes; the students passed out from the public schools have least social mobility. Bowls and Gintis (2013) support his argument “Education reproduces the attitudes and behavior for divisions of labor. It teaches people how to accept their position, to be exploited, and to show the rulers how to control the workforce”(p.03). As Marx claim that education system supports the wealthy in society and helps them in perpetuating status quo that means the students enrolled in elite school system have more exposure, facilities and chances of getting higher position and social prestige in the society. Keeping in mind the context of Karl Marx theory, this study is an attempt to apply his theoretical approach in Pakistani education system. Researcher analyzed the private and public school facilities, fee structure and position in annual results at secondary and higher secondary level.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the application of Karl Marx's conflict theory in Pakistani Education system
- Find out whether private schools are successful in maintaining status quo in Pakistani Education system.
- Determine the difference between public and private schools facilities that affect the quality of education

Research Questions

1. Are private schools maintaining status quo in Pakistani education system?

Method and Procedure

The basic aim of conducting this research was to see the difference between standard of private and public sector standard of education on the basis of Karl Marx the class based theory. Higher the divide, more will be the reinforcement of previous social positions. To measure this, researcher used multiple methods to get evidences and data. The position holders' data over last five year for secondary level education results details were obtained to be compared from Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Lahore. Researchers visited the BISE Lahore office and collected data by putting a formal request. It has been decided that along with the data of results, the fee structure and amenities of public and private schools registered in BISE Lahore was also be compared. List of fees was also collected from Lahore board for verification. The information about the facilities provided by public and private institutes was also gathered. For this purpose, researcher visited two public and two private schools. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis and observations were narrated in qualitative form.

Results

Table 1

Frequency distribution of the Matriculation position holders from year 2009-2013

Year	Public Schools				Private Schools			
	Arts		Science		Arts		Science	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2013	0	0	1	0	3	3	2	3
2012	2	0	1	0	1	3	2	3
2011	1	0	0	1	2	3	3	2
2010	0	0	1	0	3	3	2	3
2009	1	0	0	0	2	3	3	3
Total	4	0	3	1	11	15	12	14

Source: BISE Lahore

Table 1 depicts the frequency distribution of public and private schools results over past 05 years (2009-2013). Overall in last five year, public schools results remained unsatisfactory as compared to private schools. Most of the positions were obtained by private schools. Specifically, female from public schools were unable to take positions. Almost all positions holder in arts and science group were taken by private schools.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of private and public school matriculation positions comparison of 5 years (2009-2013) as per science and Arts subjects

Types of school	Science group		Arts group	
	f	%	f	%
Public schools	04	12.2	1	3.33
Private schools	26	78.8	29	96.67
Total	33	100	30	100

Source: BISE Lahore

Table 2 explains the descriptive statistics of matriculation result for last five year. In science group only 12.2% position were obtained by public schools in last five years (2009-2013). Where as 78.8% positions were got by private schools. In Arts group the trend is more adverse and only 3.33% position were taken by any student from government and public schools whereas majority of the position holders (96.67%) were from private sector institutes.

Table 3

Fee structure of Public and private schools at matriculation level

Private schools expenditures per student		Public schools expenditures per student	
Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
2000-15000	500-3000	20	20

Source: BISE Lahore and Private schools association

Tables 3 gives an overview of fee structure in public and private schools registered under BISE Lahore. Currently, fee structure at matriculation level is similar (20 rupees per month) for rural and urban areas. With reference to the private schools, it is found that total 1144 schools are registered under BISE Lahore and fee structure at villages and urban level varies a lot. Survey results show that in rural areas private schools fee starts from Rs. 500 and last range is about 3000 Rupees. In urban areas, †fee structure is high. Fees start from Rs. 200 and ranges about 15000 per month. Overall, private schools have very much high fee structure as compared to private rural schools.

†The school fees at private school specifically in urban areas include generator charges, library, lab facilities, stationary, Games, Sports, repair and maintenance of machinery and equipment, security etc. AT some schools annually 500 is charged for confirmation of seat for next academic years.

Findings Based on Researcher's Observation

Comparative structure of General Indicators of public and private schools/colleges

Indicators	Public	Private
Students enrollment	All students are accepted and enrolled without any segregation	Students' acceptability and admission depends upon the cost of education, behavior and ability as well.
Accountability	There is proper mechanism and regulatory authority which monitor and see the working of public institutes	There is no accountability to general masses. Only in some cases accountable to parents.
Cost of attendance	At schools education is free of cost,	At private schools tuition, transportation, and Fees are charged from parents that also include cost for books, bags, uniforms etc. Only limited scholarships are available
Curriculum and books	Books are free and curriculum is prescribed by Government	Curriculum and books are self-regulated. No legislative body see and decide the selection of curriculum
Equalization of educational cost	Equal education is provided to all without any discrimination	No proper resource equalization is found, it depends on market competition and forces.

Source: Authors field observations

Observations about Private and Public Institutions

For the sake of observation, researcher visited 2 public sector and 2 private sector schools. It was observed that in public schools in cities facilities regarding library and laboratory were available but there was no proper mechanisms developed to run these systems. In libraries books were out dated. Even the available books were not in approach of students. Culture of reading was not developed in students and they rarely issue any book for their reading. Due to limited resources students were not able to do their practical work in labs individually and have limited exposure for learning too. They had less guidance from technical staff. Schools of rural areas were also not as much equipped. Libraries were present there where books were available in small numbers. Similarly in labs equipment was insufficient to meet the needs of students and without proper technical staff.

Researcher also visited two private schools. It was found that schools in urban areas of Lahore were well equipped with the library and laboratory facilities. In these schools, students were supposed to attend 1-2 library period (compulsory) in a week in which they were asked to read book on given topic and then teachers conduct discussion on the given topic. This is how habit of reading is developed among students. Matriculation students were attending LAB period on regular basis in which they were involved to do different experiments with help of teachers and technical staff. It was observed that private schools at rural areas were not well-equipped as compare to urban private schools. In rural schools; students belong to low economic strata, there was no library facility available. There were laboratory in some schools but lab material was not properly provided and at some places schools were taking their students to other institutes for doing practical/ experiments.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of current research was to track the Karl Marx conflict theory of education in current scenario of educational institution in Pakistan. Karl Marx's idea of class and societal divide was explored with reference to the working of public and private educational institutions in Pakistan. In order to determine the application of his theory at educational institutions of Pakistan, secondary data analysis and observational study was conducted.

Findings of the results confirms the assumption behind Karl Marx theory i.e. elites maintain status quo in education system, as upper class have more resources and life chances to avail the opportunities and quality of education so the students of these institution get higher positions in examination system and have more chances to get high education and highly paid jobs. Perpetuation of specific ideology is observed in the education sector as well. Results of five year (2009-2013) position holders evaluation confirms that private institutes are successful in establishing their status quo. Specifically, this fact is confirmed by the data of position holders at matriculation level. Very few students can secure their positions in annual exams from public sector. In arts group, over the period of five years no female was able to get position and same bad situation was observed for boys. Most important factor behind it is the lack of affordability and facilities at public schools. In public schools, those students get admission that are from poor families or lower middle class families, cannot pay high fees. At government schools, technical and lab facilities are limited and students in rural areas are specifically unattended. Students' enrollment is high whereas student teacher ratio is high and in this situation it is impossible for teachers to give individual attention to every student. At private institutions, schools

are accountable to parents, they highly charged fees and in return maintain certain standard of education. It is ensured in schools that each and every student is attended individually. They are given the chances for personality development and grooming through innovative activities.

On the basis of study findings, it can be concluded that Pakistani private institution are successfully maintaining status quo as prescribed by Karl Marx conflict theory. In return, persistent pattern of social class over the generations are observed. Restricted social mobility is also an outcome of this situation for people of lower class. To change the existing patterns of social inequality at every level it is needed to revise educational policy of Pakistan and incorporation of a uniform policy of education is required to be implemented.

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