

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL'S EXPANSION FROM THE FUNCTIONAL AND CONFLICT PARADIGMS' PERSPECTIVES**

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**Abstrak:** Walaupun sekolah telah wujud sejak masa silam lagi, konsep pendidikan adalah berbeza merentas masa dan tempat, dari segi falsafah, hasil, akses kepada umum dan cara operasinya. Tetapi hanya selepas Perang Dunia Kedua barulah pendidikan menjadi terbuka kepada lebih ramai daripada kelompok populasi di kebanyakan negara dalam dunia ini. Kurikulum yang lebih sesuai untuk pendidikan populasi yang lebih besar ini dibangunkan, pembinaan dan pembentukan struktur baru sekolah mula berkembang. Fenomena perkembangan pendidikan yang pesat dan cepat ini telah dianalisis dan diterangkan oleh ramai ahli pendidik dalam pelbagai cara, bergantung pada paradigma yang digunakan. Justeru, dalam penulisan ini, idea daripada dua perspektif yang utama, iaitu paradigma "fungsional" dan "konflik" adalah dibincangkan. Seterusnya, aspek perbezaan dan persamaan serta kekuatan dan kelemahan kedua-dua paradigma dilihat dengan teliti. Akhirnya, sebagai kesimpulan, penulisan ini menonjolkan dua paradigma tersendiri sebagai alternatif kepada kedua-dua paradigma yang disebutkan di atas.

**Abstract:** Although schools have existed since ancient times, education has varied indefinitely across time and place, in terms of its philosophy, outcomes, accessibility to the public and method of operations. But it was not until after the Second World War that education was made available to a much greater proportion of the population in most countries in the world. Curriculum suitable for the education of a larger population was thus developed and new structures of schooling evolved. This rapid and massive expansion of education has been analyzed and explained by educationists in several different ways depending on the paradigm being used. Thus, in this paper, the ideas of two main perspectives, namely the functional and the conflict paradigms, are being discussed. Subsequently, the differences and similarities as well as the strengths and limitations of both paradigms are carefully scrutinized. Finally, as part of the conclusion, the paper offers two distinct paradigms as the alternative to the above mentioned paradigms.

## INTRODUCTION

The dominant way of explaining the theories of schooling has, for a long time, been the way known as the functional paradigm. The functional paradigm sees occupational roles in a modern society as achieved and not ascribed or inherited (Cremin, 1974). Thus high status should be achieved based on merit rather than passed on from parents to their children. It is therefore argued that schooling represents an efficient and rational way of sorting and selecting talented people so that the most able and motivated people attain the highest status position, thus creating a meritocratic society. The functional paradigm also sees the school as teaching cognitive skills and norms that are essential for the performance of most adult roles in society. Higher education is seen as producing new knowledge through research activities, and extensive schooling equips individuals with specialized skills and the potential of acquiring more specialized knowledge to further increase productivity and improve the whole society in general. This paradigm for the explanation of the importance of education in a modern society was questioned by some educators in the late 1970s, who were disillusioned by the reasons given for the growth of education and its effects on society in general (Goodlad, 1993). The critics of functional paradigm are known as *conflict theorists* who advocate the conflict paradigm for explaining the theories of schooling.

The conflict paradigm depicts schools as institutions that perpetuate the inequality in a society and convince the lower-class groups of their lower position in the society (Collins, 1979). Powerful elites in the society are pictured as manipulating and conniving to preserve their own entrenched positions. Although reforms are carried in schools and societies, the evils such as racism, poverty, and sexism were not being eliminated. The conflict theorists argue that most jobs require few complex cognitive skills and that employers use the lower school achievements of lower-class people in order to place them in lower paying jobs, although they have the ability to do the higher paying jobs given to upper-class elites who happen to have higher scores in schools. Schools are thus seen as instruments of the elites to dominate the working class and to render them docile and compliant. The conflict theorists are divided into two opposing camps, namely the Marxists as represented by Bowles and Gintis (1976), and the non-Marxists as represented by Collins (1979). In explaining the worldwide phenomena of rapid and massive expansion of schooling in the post World War II, both paradigms have similarities and differences.

## **DIFFERENCES IN THE PARADIGMS**

In explaining the role of schools in a modern society, the functionalists place great emphasis on the necessity of the expansion of schools in providing cognitive skills that are required by increasingly complex jobs in modern society. The functionalists put forward the theory that industrialization and urbanization have weakened the tradition of passing on occupations from parents to children by destroying many existing occupations and creating new ones for which parents and communities were not sufficiently prepared to train their children. Thus a new kind of teaching the young for the satisfactory performance of these new occupations was necessary, and schools fit in. Martin Trow argues that "the growth of the secondary schools after 1870 was in large part a response to the pull of economy for a mass of white collar employees with more than an elementary school education" (Trow, cited in Hurn, 1993: 76). This argument was strengthened by the work of John Dewey and other progressive reformers who transformed the curriculum to be more relevant to the needs of the work place by emphasizing business English, book keeping, and citizenship and social studies as well as the standard curriculum that includes literature, algebra, history and geography. In general, the functional theorists view the expansion of schooling during the post World War II period, whether at the elementary, secondary, or higher education level, as meeting the need for developing more cognitive competence among the students so that they will be satisfactorily employed in the new jobs being created because of industrialization and modernization.

On the other hand, using the same context, *critical theory* looks at this role that the school is supposed to play as more of teaching the workers to be docile and compliant in serving the needs of the capitalists. The critical theorists argue that the factory owners were interested in the idea of compulsory schooling for children because this was the only reasonable way that they could get a steady supply of industrious and compliant workers on which the success of their enterprises depended. Factory owners were said to be uninterested in the literacy or arithmetical skills of the workers but paid more attention to their moral qualities. If ever literacy was important to the factory owners it was more so that they would be less likely to be criminal or potential troublemakers. The critical theorists also argue that most of the jobs at the factory then, did not require any level of proficiency in reading or arithmetic. Bowles and Gintis (1976), the neo-Marxist writers, do not deny that lower-class people did ask that their children be given education in the schools but they argue that the schools did not play their role so as to benefit these lower-class groups, but instead allowed the needs of the factory owners to dictate what went on in schools. Critical theorists also argue that the emphasis in progressive education in tailoring education to the students' need is just an excuse in channeling lower-class students into vocational

education and middle-class students into the academic curriculum. A non-Marxist conflict theorist, Collins (1979), maintains that most jobs are not of great complexity and the skills they require can usually be learned on the job. Collins also says that schools are not primarily concerned with teaching cognitive skills to the children but are more concerned with teaching middle-class standards of taste and manners. Whatever cognitive skills which schools teach are usually not of great importance and are rapidly forgotten.

The second major difference between the two paradigms in explaining the expansion of schooling involves the values that schools transmit to the masses. The functional theory stresses the necessity of some minimal moral consensus and cultural homogeneity in a modern and industrial society. It was necessary that these common moral and cultural values be taught to the population through the institutions of schools. Emile Durkheim "saw schools as crucial institutions in restoring some degree of cohesion and moral unity to a society torn apart by industrialization" (Hurn, 1993: 78). This is also seen as very appropriate and necessary in forging a sense of nationhood and a commitment to common values in a country such as the United States (US) where the population consists of immigrants of diverse origins. The functionalists thus see that these norms and traits that schools will be able to cultivate in the pupils, as strengthening their arguments that schools are functional in a modern society and that the family is not the appropriate unit to impart these norms and traits in the modern society.

In contrast to the functionalists, the critical theorists argue that schools are being used as a vehicle for imposing the values of the capitalist elites on the masses and these values are detrimental to the satisfactory progress of the lower-class groups. True to their assertion that we live in a divided and conflict-ridden society where groups compete for the control of the educational systems, the conflict theorists ask the question, "Whose values and ideas will be taught to the young?"

Another difference between the conflict and functional paradigm in their ways of analyzing the expansion of schooling is the role of schools in providing equality of opportunity. While the functionalists see the mass expansion of schooling as meeting the demand for equality and equality of opportunity, and minimizing the disadvantages suffered by the children of poor and minority parents, Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that the educational system reinforces the inequalities in the contemporary society. They also reject the meritocratic hypothesis being put forward by the functionalists, which stated that schools are efficient ways of selecting talented people for suitable jobs. The functionalists argue that schools have been made compulsory and thus are available to all; there is no tuition required and thus the poor are able to attend; and finally ability rather than social background determine a student's course of study. Thus, schools could create avenues of mobility previously closed to the poor and disadvantaged, thereby

erasing class distinctions between the poor and the rich, and privileged and unprivileged. Bowles and Gintis (1976), however argue that different social classes in the US usually attend different neighborhood schools and that these schools usually have differing financial resources as well as teach different values and personal qualities to the students. School serving the students with lower socioeconomic background will impart knowledge and values that will make the students suitable for manual and lower level white-collar occupations, such as to follow order reliably, to take explicit directions, to be punctual, and to respect the authority of the teacher and the school. But schools serving the more elite group will encourage students to work at their own pace without continuous supervision, and teach other qualities that are essential to effective performance in middle or high-status positions in large organizations. This view is supported by the findings in the study conducted by Jean Anyon as reported in Husen (1975: 257–279). Bowles and Gintis (1976) further argue that schools works to convince people that the society is meritocratic and that the people in the high-status positions do deserve the positions because they are more talented and hard working. Thus the poor are convinced that they are poor due to their own fault and quietly accept the status quo. The purportedly objective criteria that schools use to track students based on ability and intelligence do not reveal the fact that success in schooling and eventual success in later life is strongly related to social class.

The next difference in the way that the two theories explain the expansion of schooling is in the models of society that is implied in the explanation. In the functional paradigm's explanation, society is seen as a self-regulating organism that recognizes its changing need and adjust its values and priority accordingly. For example, the society as a whole sees these changing needs for cognitive skills and transmission of core values and immediately commission the institution of schools to do the job required. The critical theorists, however, see the society as made up of two groups with conflicting interests – the capitalists and the lower-class workers (proletariats). As the capitalists' needs and characters change from small-scale family firms to larger corporations, and from factory to office work, they alter the character of schooling to meet their needs of maximizing profits. For example, instead of just stressing on obedience and rule following, the schools were required to also emphasize working with others. Also, as the capitalists' needs change from factory to office work (that is, from merely producing manufactured goods to selling the goods and other services), the schools were required to add emphasis on the internalization of rules and do a way with previous stress on mere obedience to external authority (Goodlad, 1979).

Finally, the two theories differ in whether they regard the expansion of schooling as a good or progressive development. The functional theory sees the expansion

of schooling as a triumph of liberal values over ignorance and prejudice. Schools are seen by the functionalists as an institution that could foster the development of liberal and human values such as rationality, tolerance, and equality of opportunity. The critical theorists, in contrast, see schools in the capitalist society as repressive in nature.

**Table 1.** Differences in the functional and conflict paradigms in term of different concepts

| Concepts                | Functional paradigm/theory   | Conflict paradigm/theory  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Role of school          | Providing the cognitive skills and competencies needed for jobs                | Supplying the industrious and compliant workers to the industry                   |
| Values transmitted      | Common moral and cultural values   | Values of the capitalist elites   |
| Equality of opportunity | Efficient ways of selecting talented people for suitable jobs                  | Reinforces the inequalities in the society  |
| Model of society        | Society seen as a self-regulating organism that reorganizes its changing needs | Society made of two groups (capitalist vs proletariats) with conflicting interest |
| View on the development | As a triumph of liberal values over ignorance and prejudice                    | Repressive in nature  |

**SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE PARADIGMS**

There is however a few similarities in the way the two theories explain the expansion of schooling. Both theories see the development of schooling as very closely connected to the changing character of work and the industrialization of modern society. Both these theories argue that schools taught skills, values and personality characteristics which became more useful as factories and large organizations replaces farm work. Although their explanations of what happens and why it happen differ, they both explain them based on the same phenomena, the industrialization and modernization of society. The functionalists predicted a rapid increase in the demand for highly skilled labor due to the increasing complexity of work. This then triggers the rapid expansion of higher education in the US. The critical theorists, meanwhile, sees the expansion of higher education as merely a process of status competition between groups. Collins (1979) argue that because education is closely linked to power and status, different groups seek to improve their position by obtaining more education for their children that they

themselves had in the past. This also true for the disadvantaged group but the conflict theorists see their efforts as similar to fighting a losing battle. This is because as these children of disadvantaged groups get more education, the middle and upper-class groups also increases their own children's level of education to a higher level. In the end, it is not the requirement of the job that is at issue but rather the jockeying for status by the privileged groups that increases the requirements of schooling for any particular job. Similar jobs begin to require higher amount of schooling than they did 20 years before that.

Both theories see the rapid and mass expansion of schooling as a way of socializing and unifying a heterogeneous population and reducing ethnic and class conflict. The functionalists see it from the point of view of providing equality of opportunity to children of the underprivileged groups for upward mobility. The critical theorists do not see this happening in the system of schooling that is being implemented in the capitalists' world but want it to happen through the same mechanism of schooling, only in a way that would help the underprivileged groups overcome their disadvantages. In other words, the conflict theorists agree that the expansion of schooling is the vehicles necessary to achieve unification and equality in the society. There are however, some who believe that this could not be done other than the complete overhaul of society through a revolution.

Finally, both theories agree that the expansion of schooling comes about due to the demands for equality and equality of opportunity. The poor people and minority groups want their children to be educated so that they will be able to compete for jobs and status in society on an equal footing with children of the privileged groups. It is only the control that is inherent in the privileged groups that is preventing the underprivileged groups from getting their fair share of the limited benefits that the society can offer.

**Table 2.** Similarities in the functional and conflict paradigms

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- (i) The development of school connect to the changing character of work and industrialization of modern society.
  - (ii) The mass school expansion is a way of socializing and unifying a heterogeneous population and reducing ethnic and class conflict.
  - (iii) The school expansion comes about due to the demands for equality and equality of opportunity.
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## **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE TWO PARADIGMS**

The argument of the functionalists that the expansion of education at all levels was due to the increasing demand of the complexity of work, falls apart when the institutions of higher education in western Europe and other developed countries do not expand at the same rate as that in the US. In fact, there has been a steady decline of educational expansion in the developed countries over the last 20 years (Bailey, 1976). There is also the phenomena of unemployment or under-employment of graduates although some functionalists attribute this to the temporary slowing down of the economy. But the more obvious fact is that jobs that were previously done satisfactorily by high school graduates are now being given to university graduates. Educational requirements for essentially similar jobs has increased steadily. There is a feeling that most of what is learned in schools and colleges, is not being utilized in the jobs that the graduates take after their education. Although it is agreed by most functionalists that as the labor force changed from working with machine to working with people, the desirability of a new set of interpersonal skills was created, they could not justify that these changes require four more years of secondary education. Most of the new occupations that were created between 1950 and 1960 only required the workers to be able to read some written materials and perhaps written memoranda (Davis, 1980). This only requires schooling at the level of basic literacy and certainly do not require the mass expansion of higher education as happened in the US.

The functionalists' argument which indicates that employees who spend more time in schools and have better cognitive skills perform consistently better than those who spend less time in schools and thus possess lower cognitive skills, has been proven to be weak since there has been little evidence of such performance. Neither is grade-point average in college found to be consistently related to occupational status nor future earnings. Although comparisons of cognitive skills with job status and earnings have found positive relationships, this relationship is more attributed to the family background of the workers than their cognitive skills. Thus, the functional paradigm argument that the increasing levels of education are necessary for the performance of increasingly complex jobs, is not supported by the findings that there is no significant relationship between cognitive skills (presumably imparted by the schools) and occupational status, earnings and job performance.

The functionalists' argument that educational institutions sort and select talented people to appropriate jobs, has also been proven false by research data. Bowles and Gintis (1976) show that when socioeconomic status is controlled, intelligence quotient (IQ) exerts only a slight effect on earnings. Socioeconomic status of parents are more closely associated to the income of their children than to IQ or



school achievement. Studies by Jencks (1973) show that those with the lowest socioeconomic scores, but average IQ scores, have a 6% chance of being in the top one-fifth of all wage earners, while those with the same IQ scores, but come from highest docile of socioeconomic background have a 41% chance of being in the top one-fifth of wage earners.

The above findings reveal that the society is still not meritocratic, a claim made by the functionalists as the reasons for rapid expansion of schooling. Intelligence or talents still do not determine success in schools, and success in schools has very little relationship to success in the job market. In contrast, socioeconomic status of parents act as a better predictor of their children's future economic success.

Another flaw in the functionalists' argument is that educational expansion increases meritocratic selection in the work place, and that the chances of underprivileged youth to gain access to high-status jobs would thus increase. If this is so, we would see a gradual decline of the relationship between parents' status and that of their children. Instead, "evidence for the US indicates that the relationship between parents and child status has not declined in the last four decades" (Hurn, 1993: 54).

The critical theorists see an inequality of educational opportunity in today's society due to unequal financial resources available to different school districts. This, therefore, would theoretically perpetuate the inequalities that already exist in the society. However, Coleman (1968) in his study, finds that the quality of schools and achievements in schools are not related. According to this finding, poor students who would go to schools with better facilities would not show any significant improvement in performance. Thus Coleman would argue that schools are not directly responsible for the poor performance of students who come from poor backgrounds. This is a very weak argument and there are flaws in the research. Perhaps, an experiment could be done by providing a group of poor kids the facilities that are usually available in schools for the middle or upper-class kids and the outcome compared to those who were not. It is possible that the results would be the same for both groups of kids. The critical theorists' argument in this case must be taken seriously.

There is an assumption, in the critical theorists' argument, that what everyone wants is material wealth, and that once this is achieved everyone will be satisfied. It is also assumed that material wealth determines the happiness of people in a society. These assumptions lead to the dissatisfaction of the critical theorists, i.e., if such equality is not achieved and thus if schooling is not able to effect the change then the expansion of schooling has not served its purpose. This assumption is far from the truth. A poor person can just be as happy, if not

happier, knowing that his welfare is taken care of by the richer members of the society. There must be rich people and capitalists in the society so that those who are not as capable can rely on them for their well being.

The critical theorists' arguments also assume that material wealth do not depend on effort and ability, and thus everyone should be equal in terms of possession of material wealth. It is our opinion that people have differing abilities and differing needs. Those who are able should be allowed to continue getting the wealth that are available as long as they are able to put this wealth to good use and use them efficiently for the benefit of the society. A society with many rich people is better than a society where everyone is equally poor. This latter situation could happen if the persons who are capable are denied the opportunity to accumulate wealth and thus not able to provide opportunity to the not-so-capable in the society. However, this argument would certainly break down if the capable people who are allowed to accumulate wealth do not care for the others around them and got their wealth through oppressing the lower class. Worse still is the scenario if the rich squander their wealth on wasteful activities.

The critical theorists have maintained throughout that training the children to be obedient, reliable, and being respectful of authority only serves the interest of the factory owners so that they can get the workers that will maximize their profits. This is not always the case since there are also positive aspects of obedience, respect and reliability, as opposed to anarchy, incompetence, rebelliousness, and disrespectful towards people. These values that schools impart on to the students are desirable outcomes for any society that wants to progress in an orderly manner and achieve higher goals of productivity and prosperity regardless of groups.

## **ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS**

There are two ways we propose that this issue of expansion of schooling can be looked at as an alternative to the functional and the critical paradigms. Since both the paradigms have their strengths and limitations, it would seem that neither will satisfy theorists from the opposing paradigm. It might thus be sensible to consider looking at the issues through a combination of the two paradigms, if this is at all possible. The strengths of the two paradigms can be taken together and their weaknesses and limitations discarded. For example, instead of looking at the expansion of schooling as purely meeting the needs of society for training the populace for the more complex jobs, we can adapt the critical theorists' objection to this by incorporating the idea of the need for an institution to impart the knowledge required by any society to continuously progress. The functional paradigm should also try to explain the reasons for the increasing inequality in

the society despite rapid expansion of schooling, and not just brush it aside as being an insignificant factor. More research should also be done to find out the reasons why there is no significant relationship between the quality of schools and the amount of schooling to school achievement and success in jobs. Perhaps some qualitative studies of a few specific individuals in each category would shed some light on these reasons.

The second alternative paradigm is that of caring and love. One should be made to understand that it is not possible for any nation to be prosperous and yet be all equal (Goodlad, 1975). For example, the communist countries that embody equality similar to that proposed by the critical theorists, have failed to produce prosperity and absolute equality. We should understand that the human feelings and emotions are more complicated than those analyzed, and that these emotions and feelings do affect the actions and the success of human endeavors. However, it is useful to acknowledge that human beings, if carefully nurtured and given personal attention, can be very productive as well as nurturing. Thus it is necessary that each individual be taught to be loving, caring, and sympathetic toward the unfortunate. As for teaching children more than what is required for the work place, it should be acknowledged that no one can predict the future and what is required for the future. Schools would not have done its job if it only teaches the pupils to prepare them for the work place of the present. Knowledge is important for the development of the individuals and society and must be used thoughtfully. For example, one can always see a strong positive relationship between the levels of education and prosperity of the country in general. Just compare Ethiopia, Zaire and Mali with the US, Japan and Germany. It is not clear that the more educated the populace is the more prosperous the nation is as a whole? Some uses of knowledge are not directly related to physical wealth but do relate to respect for individual life and self-esteem. Physical wealth alone should not be the criteria for equality because it is possible for any individual to be happier than another person even though he or she is not as rich as the other person. Physical wealth is not the only achievement in a society, and material wealth has never been known to be linearly related to the person's happiness. For example, a successful university professor can be just as happy or happier than the rich capitalist or the President of the University. What makes the society prosperous and peaceful is that if those with physical wealth feel responsible for the well-being of those who do not have the wealth. However, the society in general must be made to realize that they should respect the more knowledgeable and that they must try to increase their own knowledge (Goodlad, 1993). This could be done by eliminating illiteracy and inculcating the love for learning and reading among the population. Any society that loves reading and learning should be able to progress and would be happy even though not everyone has abundant material wealth. This requires the rapid expansion of schooling, but the curriculum must be significantly changed so that the children will neither look at

the world as a place to gain physical wealth nor a place to fight for complete equality of physical wealth. There will be rich people and poor people and all those in the middle, but as long as everyone cares for the other and are always sympathetic toward the unfortunate, the world will be a much better place to live for everyone concerned.

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Functional theory stresses the functions that education serves in fulfilling a society's various needs. Perhaps the most important function of education is socialization. Education and Inequality. Conflict theory does not dispute the functions just described. However, it does give some of them a different slant by emphasizing how education also perpetuates social inequality (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2012). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (7th ed.). A third critique of conflict theory involves the quality of schools. As we will see later in this chapter, US schools differ mightily in their resources, learning conditions, and other aspects, all of which affect how much students can learn in them. According to the functional perspective, education helps socialize children and prepare them for their eventual entrance into the larger society as adults. The conflict perspective emphasizes that education reinforces inequality in the larger society. The symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on social interaction in the classroom, on school playgrounds, and at other school-related venues. Social interaction contributes to gender-role socialization, and teachers' expectations may affect their students' performance. For Your Review. Review how the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives understand and explain education. Which of these three approaches do you most prefer? Why? PDF | Conflict is an essential and unavoidable human phenomenon because where there is human interaction; there is a likelihood of personal likes and | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. Getting the most out of diversity means often-contradictory values, perspectives and opinions. Conflict is often needed. Conflict Management in School. The better educators and students understand the nature of conflict, the better able they are to manage conflicts constructively 10 . Moran (2001). sees conflict management as a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict. as it arises in all aspects of their lives 11 . Conflicts as a concept never. Conflict theories are perspectives in sociology and social psychology that emphasize a materialist interpretation of history, dialectical method of analysis, a critical stance toward existing social arrangements, and political program of revolution or, at least, reform. Conflict theories draw attention to power differentials, such as class conflict, and generally contrast historically dominant ideologies. It is therefore a macro-level analysis of society.