

The 7th International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences
**Exploring Global Perspectives:
The Future of Economics and Social Sciences**
June 13-14, 2024
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

**Transformative Education: Economic and Political
Implications of the Conflicting Dynamics
within Traditional Schooling**

Hesam JEBELI-BAKHT-ARA^{1*}, Octavian-Dragomir JORA²

DOI: 10.24818/ICISS/2024/037

Abstract

This paper delves into the conflictual nature of transformative education, exploring the intricate dynamics at the intersection of race and social class within educational structures, aiming to unravel the conflicts that shape and perpetuate educational, economic, and social inequalities. Drawing inspiration from influential thinkers such as Paulo Freire, Angela Davis, Ivan Illich, or Bell Hooks, the aim of this paper is to showcase the power dynamics and conflictual nature that lead to and are created by educational inequalities. The current scientific literature on the matter underscores the critical need to address conflicts within the educational system, shedding light on power dynamics and systemic oppressions present in traditional educational models, in a world affected by postcolonialism, immigration, or gentrification. Regarding this paper, the emphasis is placed on the intersectionality of race and class, and how they influence educational inequalities and lead to economic disparities. Moreover, critically analysing the current educational approaches contributes to understanding its flaws and how the field can or should improve in the future. The study examines how systemic educational inequalities contribute to conflict and sustain cycles of disadvantage, advocating for changes in traditional education to foster inclusivity. It challenges the Eurocentric views and will call for the emergence of an educational system that validates the diverse cultural experience of all races, this being motivated by the need of inclusive and equitable educational environments. Insights urge policymakers, educators, and researchers to address root causes of conflict for positive change. The paper contributes by synthesising ideas from transformative education, offering nuanced perspectives on the impacts of race and social class in the educational processes. This foundation informs future research and actionable steps toward creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems. The contribution lies in deepening understanding and provoking critical discourse on transformative approaches to traditional education amid systemic conflicts.

Keywords: education, inclusivity, inequality, conflict, economy.

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, jebelibakhtarahasam17@stud.ase.ro.

* Corresponding author.

² Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, octavian.jora@rei.ase.ro.

JEL Classification: I21, I24, I25, A20, J15.

1. Introduction

The discussion about (pervasive) unequal social relationships and (the need for) inclusive education is commonplace in today's world, especially with the advent of globalisation via trade, finance and, notably, knowledge, notwithstanding the plethora of assorted technological, ecological, and ideological acceleration/attenuation/alteration phenomena. But this forwarding march of globalisation, either viewed as emerging spontaneously or being project-designed by intergovernmental or corporate institutions/organisations, whilst by no means a syncope-proof process, accommodates cultures, nations, and even regions/continents at different points of societal development, the cooperation between them implying unsteady interactions and unbalanced positions in the world order.

In this vein, the context of this research is defined around the idea of globalisation, a state/process understood (positively and normatively) as a synergy of nations and not as a simple sum of solitary, secluded, sheltered societies. But this perspective is not always easy to observe in practice, since concepts such as "culture of silence", "Eurocentric views", and "non-inclusivity" are challenging the (hoped-for) solidarity between the world's nations and highlighting a bias towards more powerful, mainly occidental nations/states' needs, interests, and viewpoints. These biases are also heavily manifested within the educational field, the present research looking into how they inflict both the "civilised" and the "underdeveloped" world and how this impacts the configurations of the societal landscape.

Summing up, the present review essay will acknowledge and assess how the educational sector influences systemic inequalities and conflicts within our world, while also trying to understand what "transformative" actions might be required in order to combat all these social injustices. Moreover, it will delve into the economic implications of unequal educational opportunities and the interconnectedness of economic and educational dimensions. Not least, this research is meant to be followed by a "symmetrical" overview of the phenomenology of transformative education as seen from the "classical"/"conventional"/"conservative" perspective on education, screening and signalling the unintended and the unforeseen consequences of the "diversity-equality-inclusivity", top-down, public policies.

2. Problem Statement

The literature regarding education is vast and was covered by many important intellectuals throughout each era of human thought. Starting from the simplest storytelling, education had the scope of bonding human communities while trying to explain the biggest questions regarding life, afterlife, and even the creation of life. According to Emile Durkheim, school was a society in miniature, serving also as a place to socialise, developing their social solidarity and also specialist skills (Chapman, 2017). Thus, according to Karl Marx, via the educational processes, both nature and humans are active in a humanising process with the goal of achieving

their material and spiritual freedom, by posing questions regarding their being and by achieving praxis (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2008). A more modern view on education is that of Paulo Freire, who saw the classroom as a place of potential social change, believing that students are more than passive recipients of knowledge, constantly switching their role with the educators in the process of knowledge sharing.

Considering these views, this paper will look, obviously not in an exhaustive manner, into how the modern and past classrooms forged the men of today, while also trying to understand how to better the men of tomorrow. One aim of the study will therefore be to underline the (cor)relation between education and social change, understood as the transformation of society's structure and institutions driven by economic, political, and cultural forces. The present themes will be the ones that gained momentum in the contemporary times, as landmarks for progress (iveness), that is, inclusivity, social change, and conflicts, observing how educational processes are affected and affect them in a dialectical manner. The study will then turn its head into the problematic called the "circle of disadvantage", discovering the connection between the economic and educational fields and how the problematic of oppression fits into the discussion. This mashup of viewpoints and the addition of the problems of oppression and inclusivity serves as the topical novelty within this work.

3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research

What is the relationship between education and social change? This will serve as the core research question. Additionally, questions about the economic implications of unequal opportunities in education and the need for transformative education will also be posed in order to complete the work. Moreover, the main objectives are to better understand the various facets of transformative education and the magnitude of the interconnectedness of "power-and-statute structures".

The aim of the study is to highlight the importance of education and the way it transcends the classroom. The work also aims to reach extra-educational system audiences, trying to help to pave the way for inclusive education and a better understanding of conflicts, whilst also acknowledging the cultural peculiarities of different societies, their different scopes and speeds in processing change and the balance between "bottom-up" and "top-down" approaches.

4. Research Methods

This study will examine how institutional relationships shape human behaviour. The effect that education has on people's ability to accept rules and hierarchies will also be analysed, observing the multidimensional function of education in society. Moreover, concepts from economics will also be incorporated in the discussion, seeing how the educational and economic domains intertwine and do affect each other.

The research methods used in order to obtain and understand the aforementioned concepts and ideas will be mainly qualitative, asking open-ended questions throughout the text and looking for information within intellectuals from various

fields of study. The selection of the questions and authors relies on each particular situation, economic problematics calling for the usage of academics from the economic field.

Moreover, writers with different viewpoints will be analysed in order to complete the study, including both the supporters and critics of both educational systems that are going to be analysed, that is the “traditional” and the “transformative”. The study will be based on previous studies conducted by Paulo Freire or Ivan Illich as well as other authors that dealt with the subjects of education, power, resistance, conflicts, and capitalism.

5. Findings

In this part of the paper, the suppositions made in the previous sections are to be tested, according to the methodology and following the theme of the paper.

5.1 Traditional and Transformative Education. Their Impact on the Individual

Firstly, we must clearly define “traditional” and “transformative” education in order to be able to circle around the concepts with ease. So, by traditional education we understand a way of learning that is classroom-based, teacher-centred, and focused on content delivery, rote learning, and standardised examinations (Gowda & Suma, 2017). More so, by these concepts we understand the need for face-to-face interactions, the position of power of the teacher over its students by the need of the educator to be the main focus object, the transmission of fixed information via discourse or writing that has or usually is to be memorised, and finally by the assessment via tests of the aforementioned information that generates a grade. Oppositely, transformative education focuses on encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection, acknowledging and challenging fixed beliefs and stereotypes, implying that each student and teacher pave the way for positive change in their own lives and communities. The fundamental concept of transformative education lies in the different way of viewing the status quo, allowing the existence of questions regarding ingrained biases and assumptions, calling for a sense of awareness and responsibility of both students and teachers. Moreover, according to Paulo Freire’s definition of “critical pedagogy”, a different way of naming transformative education, the students and the teacher constantly swap their roles, almost completely ditching the idea of roles in the classroom. According to him, the teacher “is learning while in dialogue with the student [...] the students learn while teaching”. Therefore, the student is not limited to storing banking information, he has a “real opportunity to recognise reality and to act on that recognition” (Freire, 1970).

Now, having fundamentally defined both concepts, what are their implications on its subjects and what type of society do they form? Being teacher-based, traditional education becomes student-negligent. Dialogue, the most important aspect of the educational process according to Freire, is unequal in such a system of

teacher-based rules. Students are forced to listen, while teachers are forced to speak, being far from co-investigators of the present reality, but participants in an exhibition of the educator regarding his understanding of his reality, from a position of power. While students may pose questions to the leading figure of the classroom, the interaction will be one defined by power dynamics and unequal social positions. Therefore, the educational process is flawed by the existence of the assumption that the teacher should always understand and explain the codifications of reality better than its students, who are in a position of only listening and accepting the educator's views. The lack of acceptance of the teacher's reality by the enrolled student will affect his grades and future academic route, since the words of the teacher must be replicated within the examination at the middle or end of the semester or year. This brings up the problematic of oppression and the reality that traditional education aims to produce safe and sound citizens, while transformative education paves the way for subjects to critically assess their reality and to be able to call for change when needed. Regarding the teacher, under the reign of traditional education, he falls under the paradigm that while he underwent the oppressive reality of schooling, he shall become the new oppressor of his future students. Oppression in this situation is better understood as a controlling treatment that the teacher is expected to impose on his students. According to Paulo Freire, the teacher, whose role today is similar to that of the oppressor, should strive for the liberation of students and himself and not continue the legacy of oppression. But this oppression, according to Freire, cannot happen without the active participation of the students, who must differ from "objects that must be saved from a burning building". Thus, the need for problem-posing and critical pedagogy, since according to Freire liberation without dialogue is oppression (Beckett, 2013).

Moreover, the questions posed via traditional and transformative education, while similar, are way different in structure. Transformative education questions the world and leaves the chance of viewing it in another way, while traditional education tries to understand the world of today, without having to change it. This difference in the nature of the questions lies in the lack of need for the teachers to understand the subject they are teaching beyond the syllabus, while the student might find the need for extra-work to understand the subject better useless, since that might imply both the questioning of their superior, the teacher, and also the learning of information that will not be examined and, therefore, not approved by him. The difference then lies in a top-down and down-top views of understanding education and social change, Paulo Freire being in the first category via his critical pedagogy, while philosophers like John Dewey fall into the traditional category. Social transformation versus individual growth and dialogue versus experience are some of the different ways in which the two philosophers understand the subject. While both call for social progress and individual growth, the difference lies in the fact that critical education creates agents of social change capable of transforming the world, while traditional education creates individuals that grow and develop within the system they were educated in.

These differences within the two ways of viewing education not only produce individuals with contextual and strict aspects, but also to future systems that nurture the existing systems. Therefore, the problems of discrimination and inclusivity emerged in the context of traditional education failing to keep up with the problems posed by the modern world. In the following sub-chapter, the problems of inclusivity and discrimination will be analysed, while also mentioning Ivan Illich's impact on understanding education and educational institutions.

5.2 Inclusivity and Discrimination within the Educational System

In the reality of formal and institutional education, according to Ivan Illich's "Deschooling Society", school became the primary and almost only vehicle of education that occurred within a specific time, space, and under the unquestionable supervision of teachers. Learning became the materialisation of schooling, just as petrol became the product of the oil industry. Schools are the industries of learning and of truth, leading to the need to participate in this industry to acquire a "schooled mind". According to Illich, the industrialisation of education led to the centralisation of power of knowledge in the classroom and also contributed to need to need to take part in the schooling process, as previously stated (Illich, 1971).

Therefore, combining the information mentioned in the previous section and the institutionalised view of education provided by Ivan Illich, the problems of inclusivity and discrimination rise in the context of existence of societies based on racism, gender biases, and other forms of discrimination. In a state where traditional education is applied and gender and racial laws are also present, the problems of inclusivity and discrimination within the educational system and even beyond it arise. In apartheid South Africa, the education system discriminated racially by unequally allocating resources to schools. The emergence of white and non-white universities also led to racialisation of different areas of the country, since cities such as Cape Town or Witwatersrand, translated as white-water ridge, became essentially white cities with rich universities, while non-white universities and cities were located in remote areas and had limited academic offerings. Both the funding and infrastructure of white-based universities were higher compared to their non-white counterparts. This reality had a profound impact on both students and teachers, perpetuating racial inequalities and limiting opportunities to achieve the full potential (Beale, 1998).

Even if the educational system in South Africa was traditional, aiming to promote and not question the state's view on the present situation, resistance and protests rose in the non-white community. Even if transformative or critical education was not applied in the context of South Africa's schooling system, through the processes of dialogue and critical thinking the need to achieve critical consciousness and engage in collective action outside the classroom was heightened. SASO, South African Students' Organisation and Black Consciousness Movement called for resistance against the apartheid policies regarding education, being inspired by ideas of black consciousness and empowerment, conducted protests and academic resistance, even if they were subjects of traditional education that promoted the apartheid. In the

context of globalisation, individuals and organisations from other countries supported the anti-apartheid movement via boycotts and advocacy efforts.

Apartheid South Africa also presented sexual divisions. According to Beale Mary Alice, “African women constituted less than 10% of African student enrolments, while white women constituted over 20% of white student enrolments. Educating women at universities was often seen as a “waste” of both time and money, as women were generally expected to spend their adult lives in unpaid employment in the home.” Moreover, education was perceived as unsuitable for women, not leading to particular advantages for them. As an example, in Beale Mary Alice’s study, it is mentioned that members of staff from the dentistry and law universities did not find women as well fitted for these domains. Moreover, the rules regarding dress codes restrictions and residential options for women limited the free movement and the desire of women to adhere to the higher education field. This also applies to female professors, seniors, and other lectures, accounting only 3% and 18% of all available positions. The absence of female personnel in the educational field led to the lack of potential role models for young women students. Moreover, the aforementioned study also mentioned that women students and professors were also discriminated against with a repertoire of other less formal practices like sexist assumptions (Beale, 1998). The need for the liberation of women is evident, the lack of it leading to the creation and perpetuation of a misogynistic society that has effects on both male and female citizens. “There is no true social revolution without the liberation of women. May my eyes never see and my feet never take me to a society where half the people are held in silence”, said Thomas Sankara, the former president of Burkina Faso (Sankara, 1987).

The need for transformative education is therefore illustrated in the historical pages of South Africa, when traditional education is rooted for racism, ethnic, and gender biases as universal and philosophical truths. Transformative or critical education denies the existence of universal truth, leaving space and paving the way for contextual truths and for the constant bettering of society and individuals, by listening to their needs and wants and acting upon them as a community.

5.3 Economic Impact of Traditional Education

While the societal impact of education is obvious, what is the impact within the economy and on the economic nature of individuals? The educational system is the leading industry in the human capital production. It also has a strong influence over the dynamics of the economy, playing also a central role in any ideological project. According to Henry Giroux, education cannot be invisible in terms of ideology, since it possesses a large content on power, knowledge, social values, agency, and narratives about the world. Moreover, according to him, the neoliberal economic model also serves the role of a public teacher, which strives for the individualisation of citizens. This system strives for a way of understanding the world that is market-driven, which also leads to the use of traditional education to supply skilled workers for the economy, rather than encouraging critical thinking and emancipation. Therefore, the education was “commodified”, schools being viewed

as economic entities, while students are its consumers. Moreover, via the implementation of traditional education, these consumers act in the classroom as if they were in the market, prioritising competition, individualism, and efficiency. So, according to Giroux, the privatisation of the educational system highly influences the marketisation of the economy, while the marketisation of the economy demands from the educational system characteristics that are easily obtained by applying traditional education policies. The rule of maximum profit with minimum investment, which used to apply to manage material resources, has now found its way into the human resources rhetoric (Giroux, 2005). Moreover, this formula of infinite growth of profit, even if applied only in the field of material resources and nonhuman entities, has a strong impact on humanity, the material being highly influenceable in how humans develop. Education was also affected by this formula, leading to what Giroux also mentioned in his works, but it is simply put by Cruz Flores-Rodriguez and Miguel Martin-Sanchez in their article titled “Neoliberalism and Western Education crisis. Causes, consequences and opportunities for the change”. In this paper, the authors mention that education is viewed as a tool of increasing performance and productivity being a mere preparation for employment, while also being used for constructing identities in the context of the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism.

The Marxian concept of “fetishism” can also be used in the concept of analysing education and the economy. Via the marketisation of education and by trying to obtain an economic value out of it, education is commodified, used for its exchange value, and not for its intrinsic worth. Education is accessed in order to obtain a future social status or pecuniary gains by acquiring degrees, diplomas, and certificates that are themselves commodified. Therefore, the emergence of inequality and exclusion within the educational system, those lacking the financial means needed to obtain those commodities being marginalised and even excluded, depending on their financial power (Marx, 1867). Leaving behind the concept of fetishism, since the educational processes are built around the idea of job hunting and usefulness of an individual in the market, marginalised groups have a difficult time in adapting to the needs of the market. Therefore, students with disabilities, low-incomes or of colour have different experiences in the educational field compared to their colleagues (Flores-Rodríguez & Martín-Sánchez, 2023).

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, education is an important, if not one of the most important factors in the discussion on societal change, all the more noticing the plurality of perspectives surrounding it (Jora et al., 2020; Jora et al., 2022). Both ways of understanding education, the traditional and transformative ways, affect the individual in the classroom and even outside of the classroom. While the discussion on the best way of viewing education is more profound and complex than this paper, the debate on this subject is to be analysed in the future via more comprehensive and contextual papers on the matter. The role of education for the economy was also highlighted as important in the text, understanding their symbiotic relationship in

forging an individual, also looking into how they can minimise his importance and decelerate his development. Also, the problematic of inclusivity and discrimination in the educational field and created by the educational field was discussed, observing the insides of the system in South Africa in the apartheid period, and recognising that these problems might persist today with the lack of social change.

Moreover, this paper stands as a call for transformative change within the educational, economic, and political fields, aiming to raise awareness about the importance of the relationships between the three. The paper therefore addresses to students, teachers, economists, sociologists, activists, and even entrepreneurs and politicians, in the hope of achieving an inclusive society whose goal is to forge a better sense of community and a greater level of acceptance. Although important, the study also exhibits limitations, mainly the lack of quantitative data, narrowing the ability of validating the findings within the text. The distinct philosophical leaning of the paper towards authors like Paulo Freire or Ivan Illich can also lead to neglecting their counterparts and to inadequately capture the diversity of educational and economic experiences or conditions. Therefore, this study calls for the need of another paper that focuses on traditional education, observing it in a similar way to the transformative approach, discerning, in an educated manner, between rationality that is informing reasonability and narrative aspiring to normative.

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