

EDUCATION AND POLITICISATION

Education and politics have an influence on each other. This essay discusses about the symbiotic relation between education and politics. This relation can vary on case by case basis. In some cases it can be negative while in others it has a more positive nature. Thus it is important to have policies in place that will help eliminate the negativities of this interaction between politics and education and promote the positivity.

Education and politics are conceived as two separate entities as shown in the figure below (1.1): (adopted from R. Murray Thomas's book 1983). There are linkages going both ways with politics affecting the social order and exercising a certain level of influence on education and education on the other hand through its informal and formal system influences politics. But Thomas suggests that education should instead be considered as a segment within the political framework as shown in figure 1.2

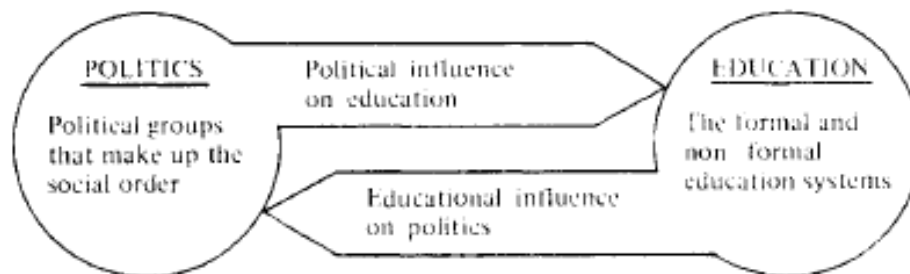


Fig. 1.1 Politics and Education seen as Separate Entities

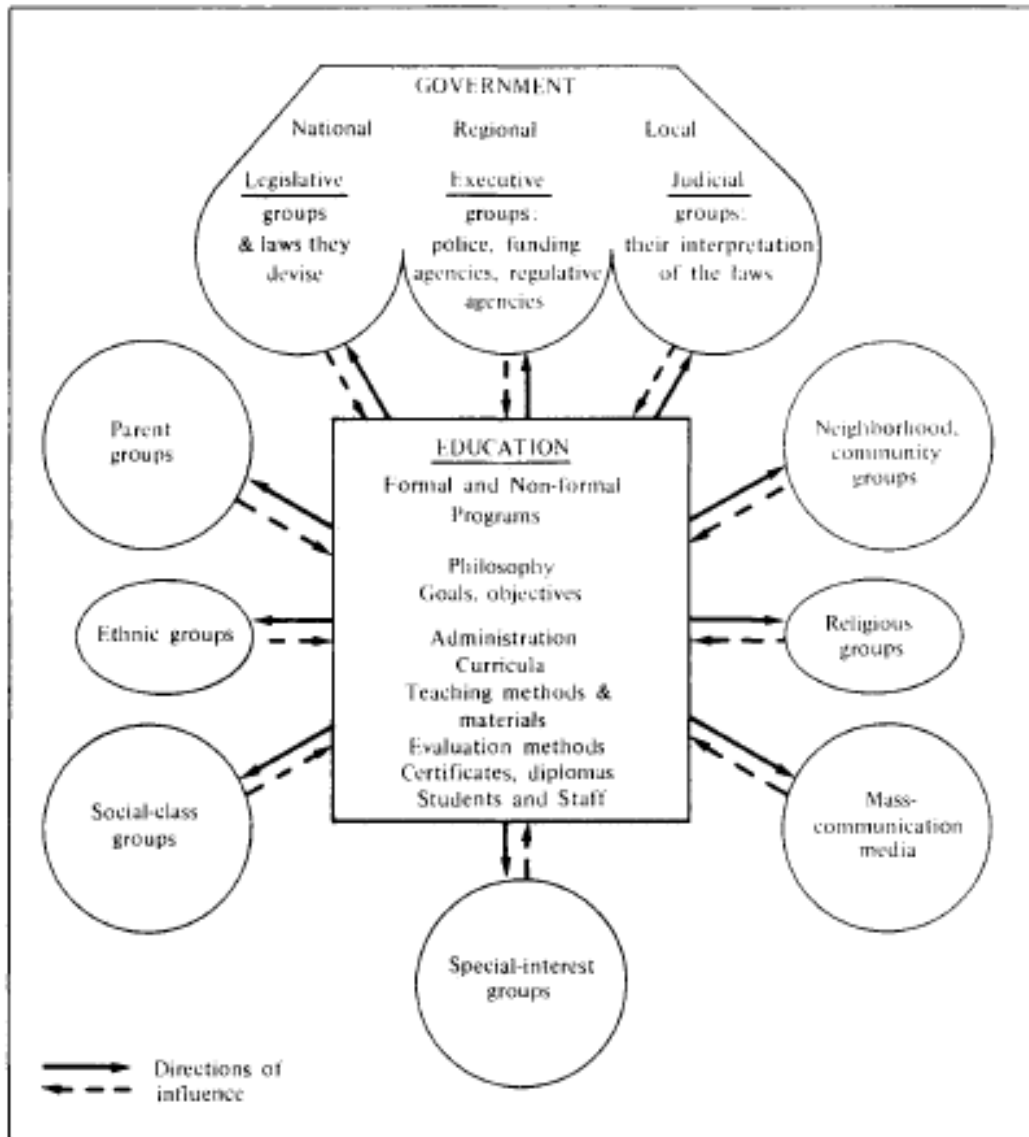


Fig. 1.2 Education seen as Enveloped in a Political-Ecology Setting

It can be seen that within the educational system there are various elements such as the teachers, students and staff. They exercise certain degree of influence on each other but I am more interested in the relationship of the system with the government at the national, regional and local level and in various areas which is the legislative, executive and the judicial system. These relations can sometimes be of mutual amity and support while in other circumstances it's more competitive in nature. It is the latter which leads to politicization of education, where the term politicize means third parties not associated with the system are directly influencing the system. There are variations in the degree of politicization and which areas are being politicized. Some of

the external groups such as NGOs may be interested in the sex education and drug usage among students, others might be interested in the promotion of religious ideologies such as churches, some might be interested in the representation of the minority, student population diversity etc. The extent of these relations is determined by the intensity of the public-private relation. In this case private schools are assumed to have greater autonomy as compared to public schools but there is a high possibility of the private school being controlled by the political agenda of the board of directors.

There have been several authors such as Stiglitz, 1974; Epple and Romano, 1996&; Glomm and Ravikumar, 1998; Glomm and Patterson, 2005 who have considered a public vs private schooling choice through a system of voting. De La Croix and Doepke (2009) discuss that the share of public and private schools in a region and the representation of a social class in the political power affect the quality of public school education. When there is higher representation of the poor in the political party, there is appropriate allocation of the tax revenue towards public schools thus increasing their quality but if there is lower representation of the poor the opposite is the case and private schools have a better quality of education. This is because in the second case the rich have the finances to spend on expensive private education so they would rather spend the tax revenue on other areas thus degrading the quality of public education. But when comparing both cases, the former seems like a better option than the latter. With good quality public education system, all the children of the country are subjected to the same level of education and development. This helps to prevent the inter-regional differences, inter- social class differences and students from rich or poor background will not have an advantage or disadvantage relative to the other. Now if the country had a higher representation of the rich in the political party all the aforementioned benefits would not be realized due to the politicization of the system.

Buckley (1976) shares that education and politics have undesirable and unexpected effects on each other with schooling being used as an instrument in public policy for achieving things as a last measure that political parties and churches could not produce. By increasing the dependency of the schools on the federal funding system, there is more autonomy on the part of the bureaucrats and the government to meddle with the schooling system. So, in order to eliminate this dependency Buckley suggested achieving financial autonomy through a system of taxation.

FORMS OF RELATION BETWEEN POLITICS AND EDUCATION:

First, in a country where the educational curriculum is geared towards patriotism and nationalism or emphasis on extra-curriculum activities such as being an army cadet, for example the National Cadet Corps in India, the students are more likely to join the army and some might even choose to be a civil servant. Both these career options help them serve the country better as emphasized by the school curriculum. On the contrary, some curriculums may be geared towards denationalization which in the long term may instigate the students to participate in anti-national activities or even plan a coup to overthrow the current framework of governance. Secondly, there can be a scenario when politics and education interact in such a way where one region is favored over the others for producing better results in the country and the students enjoy a superior quality of education as compared to other regions. An example of this can be the despite the presence of branches of Delhi Public School all over the country of India, parents prefer sending the students to the branch located in Delhi which is the capital of the country. The main reasons being that it is the oldest and produces the best results. Now, if students graduating from this school become political leaders, they will have a natural inclination towards developing the facilities of this school and the region. Other long term effects can be the presence of higher proportion of students from this region in civil service due to their better performance. Again, there is a bias created for this region and school which although benefitting the future students of the region will negatively affect the students belonging to other regions or branches in other regions. There will be long term growth inequality because the human capital formation of one region overshadows those of other regions with the support provided by the political leaders and the civil servants. A third linkage between politics and education can be through the promotion of one dominant religion. Political parties that have an affinity towards one religion can pass laws for the teaching of the religion in the curriculum. This, in the long run will create more of an orthodox outlook towards religion for the students further strengthening the position of the one religion over other religions. An apt example of this is the case of India where the Bharatiya Janata (BJP) Political party has the agenda of promoting hindutva which is based on “an organic view of the Indian society where the different social limbs have complementary roles within a national whole unified by Hindu cultural values” (Lars Tore Flåten ,2017). When BJP came to

power they made changes in the elementary education material especially in the history books. All this leads to indoctrination of the children into Hindu centric ideologies. This is an early warning sign of the possibility of religious civil war in the future.

As mentioned earlier there is a two way relation between politics and education. The influences can be discussed as follows and I have given Indian examples to supplement these influences:

INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON EDUCATION:

(a) ***The financial support and access to education:*** Public bodies such as political parties have an influence over who receives the scholarships and accessibility to education especially in developing countries such as India. In the Indian scenario the government has set up quotas and reservations for admission of the socio-economically backward classes on the basis of caste and ethnicity. The objectives of these schemes were to reduce the inequality in the social classes. But in the current years this has been criticized because the students admitted under the schemes do not have the same skill set thus failing in achieving good results and there is creation of more competition for the limited number of seats for the other social classes. The political parties have continued this affirmative action programs despite the limited achievement of the desired goals in the hopes of votes and political support from the backward classes thus using education as a means to achieve their political agenda and stay in power. This not only degrades the quality of the students but also leaves out the potential students who could have achieved better results but failed to get admission since they do not belong to the politically favored group.

(b) ***The content and procedures of education:*** the political parties can have an influence on the content being taught in the schools such as change textbooks or prioritize one subject over the other, change the procedure of admission which can favor a particular ethnic identity or religion in exchange for future political support. An example of this can again be provided from India, as mentioned in previous paragraphs about the BJP government's promotion of Hindu centric ideologies in schools. The Rashtriya Swayamseval Sangh (RSS) which is the parent organization of BJP has been trying to promote Hindu

supremacism so when BJP gained parliamentary majority, they tried to initiate reforms for promotion of Hindu nationalism. The education sector which falls under the Ministry of Resource and Development had Murli Manohar Joshi appointed as the HRD minister who was a hardcore RSS follower and he attempted to introduce changes in the curriculum of the schools run by RSS to integrate the hindu centric ideologies into the education system but upon facing backlash dropped the idea.

- (c) ***The scale of socio-political activism permitted to students and staff:*** One of the most politicized aspects of education is the freedom given to students and staff within the country to discuss political issues outside their educational institutions' campus. It has been seen that students who instigate political protests and try to spread their opinions on a political issue have been suppressed by the political parties in power. An example of this can be the 2016 Kanhaiya Kumar case of India who was the President of the student union of Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, he was arrested and accused of sedition on the grounds that he did not try to suppress the student protest in regards to the hanging of a Kashmiri separatist and promoting the use of anti-India slogans. Later he got bail due to lack of evidence, however, the ruling party BJP was criticized by opposition for suppressing of student's freedom of speech and pushing Hindu nationalist ideals.

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON POLITICS:

Similar to the influence of politics on education, there is a reverse causality with education affecting politics which can be discussed as follows:

- a) ***Political affiliation and citizenship training:*** schools teach students the appropriate behavior as citizens of the country. Depending on the lessons learnt in school as discussed in the previous paragraph, there can be nationalism fostered in students or the opposite is also a possibility. In the case of political socialization, there can be development of the students opinions aligned with that of the ruling

party or sometimes through educational institutions there can be lobbying by third parties to formulate new opinions among the students as can be seen in the student political protests. This is a possibility in higher level of educational institutions such as universities and is usually not observed in the schooling levels.

- b) ***Legitimization of political leaders***: the incumbent political leaders whether belong to the left wing or right wing want to legitimize their rule and their form of governance. Education is instrumental in the legitimization process. Leaders can use formal and informal tools such as newspapers and television to justify their elected representation and continue to do so for popular support in future elections.
- c) ***Sorting and selecting youths***: Data shows that in developed countries the schools have admission procedure that favors a specific social class thus maintaining the status quo of power and the order in the society. This affects the political structure and the regime followed in the country in the long run. E g.: if the elite schools admit students of industrials, capitalist when these students later go into politics they will promote capitalism.
- d) ***Political critics***: There are critics of the political regimes in the society and these compose of college professors, researchers and other directly or indirectly associated with academia. They are responsible for passing their opinions and their way of thinking to the next generation. These opinions can stimulate the youth and spread their political ideologies which at times may not be aligned with the ruling political party as was seen in 2016 Kanhaiya Kumar case of India. Governments if they feel their opinions are being overpowered by the educational system may decide to include these critics in the political system and bring the appropriate changes which is a positive scenario otherwise this can take a negative direction with the government being more oppressive in nature and suppressing the youth's opinions. Thus, education has a huge impact on political processes.

POLITICIZATION OF EDUCATION IN INDIA:

The RSS which is a right wing organization promoting Hindu ideologies in India has been focusing on the education sector to promote a concept of Indian nationalism based on Hinduism. It has been systematically placing its hard line followers in the top universities of the country and executing changes at the schooling level by changing school textbooks and including courses that teach Hinduism rituals. This type of education will change the thinking process of the newer generations and instill the philosophies of medieval Brahminical societies. The orthodox way of thinking I believe will make the newer generations less tolerant towards other religions and philosophies that goes against those of the upper caste Brahmins. The RSS has gained more power since its political faction which is the BJP got electoral majority and formed the government, they have started criticizing the textbooks that are already being used to teach students because they believe they portray the invaders of India as heroes. The leader of RSS has gained significant influence now and he successfully pressurized Penguin the world's largest publisher to remove Wendy DOniger's scholarly book "The Hindus: An Alternate History" which interprets the sensitive topics of caste and gender in a manner that goes against the hierarchical system as planned by RSS. There has also been production and introduction of books in certain states as a trial run to make the younger generations devoted to hindutva and nationalism. With these immense pressure on the government, the top institutions of the country that deal with history, education and branches of social sciences have leaders in power that have ideologies aligned with the RSS ideology of Hindu nationalism which is in stark contrast to that of Indian nationalism as stated in the constitution.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND CONCLUSION:

There are various forms of interaction between education and politics but some forms of interactions must be systematically suppressed over the others and in order to do so there needs to be proper understanding of the channels that operate both ways. As can be seen education is

part of the political environment and not a separate entity however, when there is overpowering of some of the elements of the political environment there are negative effects which may not be immediate but are more conspicuous in the long run as in the Indian case of Hindutva with the RSS slowly but surely overpowering education through its political faction. In such a case there needs to be more privatization of the education system both at the schooling level and the university level. In addition to this there has to be a proper public-private balance. The lobbying of third parties such as the RSS needs to be suppressed and freedom of speech should be promoted. Books and other teaching materials alterations should be left to the academicians and specialist in the education sector that benefit the student and not serve the political agenda of third parties. Schooling system throughout the country must be standardized so that students have a level playing field to compete and achieve the positions of power. This will not only bring in the necessary diversity but also smooth out any regional inequalities. Any affirmative action programs such as the reservation system for the people belonging to lower socio-economic background should be eliminated as it doesn't seem to be achieving the necessary results and has received considerable criticism because of the biasness shown towards a particular social class.