

Candidate 3 evidence

Educational attainment pupil essay

Educational attainment is a topic that involves many debates and questions especially surrounding what causes some to attain highly whilst others achieve lower attainment. Many factors can contribute to an individual's chance of attaining highly- Including gender, social class and ethnicity. Throughout years many studies have been carried out to explain differences in educational attainment and to try find out reasons why these differences exist.

Covid highlighted further educational attainment inequality, with learners from more deprived backgrounds unable to access online learning opportunities, further impacting their progress, whilst more affluent learners using laptops and tablets at home, continued to make progress and ultimately were more successful. Evidence shows that schools in lower income areas have on average, lower academic attainment, such as fewer pupils achieving 5 Highers, whilst schools in more affluent areas high greater proportions of their pupils achieving this level of academic success.

Theory 1 – Marxism

One theory that explains differences in educational attainment is Marxism. One key feature of Marxism is that it claims the inequalities and social relations are caused by the capitalist society. This means that there is inequalities in our society due to its lay out of two classes and this gives some more privileges in education compared to others such as the bourgeoisie have more privileges in education like going to a private school compared to proletariat who are more likely to go to a community public school.

Another key feature of Marxism is that it is a structural perspective theory. This means it is 'top down'- that institutions such as education control the people in it and not the other way round. Institutions such as education control people's actions and behavior such as telling them what to wear, what time to eat and what classes to attend at what time.

Another key feature of Marxism is that it suggests education is used by Bourgeoisie to control the working class Proletariat and socializing them to accept this layout in society. This means that education is used to make proletariat obey what they are told to do to prepare them for future work under the Bourgeoisie as pupils obeying teachers so in the future they will obey the Bourgeoisie and not question it.

A strength of Marxism is that it argues against meritocracy that claims education is based on the people who try the hardest will get the highest awards such as in education . It argues that society does in fact not run on meritocracy but runs on class division that means the bourgeoisie class essentially 'buy' their way in education that the proletariat can not do. This divide makes it more likely for the bourgeoisie to succeed in education and to a certain extent not because of meritocratic principles.

A weakness of Marxism is that it disregards other factors such as gender and race that could be contributing factors to differences in educational attainment. This means it focuses too primarily on social class, when other things could be contributing to the situation such as low attainment is caused by a number of factors not just the individuals social class.

Another strength of Marxism is that it is good at analysing inequality in educational achievement between social classes, which is reflected by inequality between social classes in adult life in the Capitalist economy.

Study – K&C

One key finding of the Kingdon and Cassen study is that boys outnumber girls as low achievers by three to two. This shows overall boys have lower attainment whereas girls will have better and do more well

in school even from the same similar deprived background. Coming from a deprived background boys still struggle more.

Another finding is that the amount of boys compared to girls claiming free school meals is equal. Eligibility for free school meals is strongly associated with low achievement. This shows that although there is an equal amount of boys and girls living in deprivation, it must be affecting boys educational attainment more than girls.

Another finding for this study is that schools make a difference to pupils outcomes. 14% of the incidence of low achievement is attribute to school quality. This shows that the students social and economic circumstances are some of the most important factors explaining their educational results.

One strength of this study is it takes into account more than one factor ~ gender, race and social class. This gives a better overall view of the situation without focusing too much on one factor as it is evident many factors contribute to each individuals attainment.

Another strength of this study is that it is a large sample size therefor a good representative of the total population. This means it has taken a larger portion of different types of people so is reliable when talking about the population as a whole.

A weakness of this study is that it was only carried out once, so it is not reliable, whereas if it was carried out more than once, in a longitudinal study, over a number of years, or years later, it could see if there is any change/differences in data or if it is the same.

This study supports the claims of the Marxist theory as it shows that schools do make a difference to pupils attainment such as going to a good school in an affluent area will increase individuals attainment whereas going to a school in a more deprived area will have lower attainment. This supports the claim that pupils will achieve accordingly to what school they go to, and it's most likely that bourgeoisie will go to higher attaining schools while proletariat will go to lower attaining ones. This supports the claims of Marxism that the children who achieve highly in school will be the next generation of bourgeoisie.

Theory 2 – Labelling

Another theory that explains differences in educational attainment is the labeling theory. One key feature of the labeling theory is that it suggests if an individual is labeled a certain thing they will internalise it and live up to the label. This means the person will most likely live up to what is expected of them e.g A teacher labeling a student as badly behaved. The student may live up to this as its already expected of them

Another key feature of the labeling theory is the typing theory. This is when teachers 'type' or categorize pupils as good or bad. Teachers then interpret this behavior based on these terms. There are different stages including the first stage 'speculation'. This means the teacher begins to speculate things about the pupil based on their appearance, manners ect. The second stage 'working hypothesis' is when the teacher predicts the pupils future performance and behavior. The teacher either confirms or refutes the initial hypothesis. The third stage 'stabilization' is when the pupils behavior is interpreted through the lens of the teachers fully formed assumptions

Another key feature of the labeling theory is self-fulfilling prophecy – teachers who label pupils as achievers, are motivated to try harder, study, are well supported and challenged by teachers, and ultimately fulfil the prediction of positive results. Conversely, those labelled as ‘trouble makers’ or ‘less able’ are given easier work, are de-motivated and do not try hard, resulting again in the prediction of low attainment coming true.

One strength of the labeling theory is that it reconsiders the significance of small scale interactions between individuals within the classroom. This means it explains how a small interaction between pupils and teachers can have a wider impact when looking at the bigger picture.

Another strength of this theory is that it gives guidance for teachers in terms of not stereotyping pupils in classes. This means the theory makes teachers more aware of how labeling individuals can affect their attainment and stops them from assuming things about certain pupils too.

A weakness of this theory is that it is said to be too subjective. This means it emphasizes individuals own interpretation of their personal experiences. E.g One label from a teacher should not dramatically affect one pupils attainment, it may only be a small part of the picture. Against the labelling theory argument of ‘internalizing the label’ in actual fact, conversely, a pupil may well reject the label rather than internalize it, and try harder to ‘prove the teacher wrong’ and ultimately do well in school, despite being labelled a low achiever.

Study2 : R&J

One key finding of the Rosenthal and Jacobson study of “Pygmalion in the classroom” is that children who were labeled more able at random scored significantly higher in their tests than the previous year. This shows that if a child is told they are more able and expected of something that they will live up to this and internalize it.

Another finding is that teachers tended to have low expectations for students who needed high expectations the most. This means the teachers focused on making sure those already achieving highly continued to do so, and spend less time focusing on those who actually needed help meaning they did not progress any further

Another finding of this study is that pupils were ‘warmed up’ with additional, challenging work tasks, if labelled a high achieving pupil by the teachers, whilst those labelled as low achievers were ‘cooled down’ and given less challenging work tasks than they were capable of completing, causing different levels of progress between the two equally able groups of pupils.

One weakness of this micro study is that it was only based off of a small sample of the population. This means it was not a representative of the whole population of typical of ‘schools in the country’ and therefor results and conclusions can not be generalized to the wider population of schools.

A strength of this study is the study provided robust research evidence highlighting the impact teachers’ assumptions and prejudice and labelling can have on the attainment of learners in their classrooms. This study helped improve teaching and learning in classrooms, as teachers were more aware of the negative impact of labelling on some pupils.

Rosenthal and Jacobson study supports the labeling theory as it shows that individuals can in fact internalise their labels and live up to what's expected of them. In this case it shows the pupils who got labelled something positive succeeded higher than those who got labelled more negatively

In conclusion, educational attainment inequality is an ongoing social issue. League tables highlight the highest attaining schools in the most affluent areas of Scotland, and many of the lowest attaining schools in some of the most deprived areas. Schools and Government re prioritizing equity and closing the attainment gap, through support such as breakfast clubs, uniform banks and stationery packs and the empowered learning project giving all pupils an ipad tablet to access online learning.

The fact still remains though, that pupils from more affluent backgrounds have better access to quality educational experiences and are still more likely to achieve positive outcomes at school, further increasing their life chances such as better health, higher paid jobs, accessing Higher Education and a better standard of living as an adult.