



International School

Chapter 4: Education

4.6 Ethnicity and educational attainment



Key concepts in 4.6

- **KC 1 – Inequality and opportunity**
- **KC 2 – Power, control and resistance**
- KC3 – Social change and development
- **KC4 – Socialisation, culture and identity**
- KC5 – Structure and human agency



The key concepts for Cambridge International AS & A Level Sociology





Racism in Schools

- **Racism**: discrimination based on **ethnicity, nationality** or **skin colour**.
- The education system has been accused of institutional racism, where its policies, procedures and practices discriminate on ethnic or racial grounds as opposed to just individuals acting on racial prejudice.
- The “hidden curriculum” is one part of this institutionalised racism in that it affects minority ethnic groups in subtle, yet significant ways and its effect is that it maintains social hierarchies of the status quo
- Low post-16 participation rates in the UK suggests that racism plays a role in the schooling of black students in two ways:





Overt Racism

- Harassment and abuse from peers.
- Being blamed for social problems (especially if they're immigrants).





Cultural Racism

- Ethnocentric curriculum.
- **Blair et al. (2003)**: lack of role models in schools for ethnic minority in schools.
- **Ross (2001)**: Only 5% of teachers have an ethnic minority background, while 15% of the population has an ethnic minority background.





Teacher Racism

- **Figueroa (1991):** teachers frequently limit ethnic-minority opportunities through culturally biased forms of assessment (e.g. how students speak and write) by committing students in lower bands on the basis of teacher assessment.
- Teacher's lower opinions of the abilities of ethnic-minority students leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the teacher's attitudes transmit to the students.
- The students come to see themselves as lacking talent or ability, which leads them to stop trying to achieve.





Institutional Racism

- **Gillborn (2002):** schools and their curriculums are institutionally racist. Curriculum developments are 'based on approaches known to disadvantage black pupils'
 - Selection by setting- black students are routinely assigned to lower sets.
 - Schemes for 'gifted and talented' students where white students are overrepresented.
 - Vocational schemes for 'non-academic' students where black students are overrepresented.
- Teachers 'generally underrate the abilities of black youngsters' based on racial stereotypes about ability, intelligence, and effort.





Institutional Racism

- **Runnymede Trust (1998):** A range of hidden processes occur within schools that deny ethnic minorities equal opportunity and worsen their educational performance.
- E.g. high levels of teacher *control* and *criticism*, *stereotypes* that reveal negative or patronising attitudes.
- Black Caribbean boys start school scoring as highly as the majority, but achievement falls until, at GCSE, their academic performance is lower than most other groups.





Reasons

1. Masculinity being defined in terms of rebellion against 'white' teachers and schooling i.e. their behaviour puts them in lower sets, not their academic ability.
2. **Hinsliff (2002)**: Teachers do not always challenge disruptive behaviour, leading to black boys being excluded from school.
3. Single-parent family structure leads to worse educational experience across all ethnic groups. Black Caribbean families have the highest rates of single parenthood.





Cultural explanations for links between ethnicity and educational attainment

- Cultural advantage/disadvantage - difference in educational attainment
- Black Caribbean working-class boys in the UK fail due to:
 1. many female-headed single-parent families - lack of male role models for boys
 2. anti-education subculture and large scale unemployment; Bail et al. (2012): unemployment 50% for young black boys - little chance of getting paid work as adults - no point in education
- Sewell (2010): black children's educational performance weakened by: poor parenting, anti-school peer group pressure, lack of ability to take responsibility for anti-school behaviour





Cultural explanations for links between ethnicity and educational attainment

- UK's Asian minorities have better results - family and cultural values of educational success and extended family structure that supports children through schooling
- Chua (2011): higher achievements of Chinese students partially due to “tiger moms”
- New Right perspective: out-of-proportion representation of minorities in the underclass - explains educational failure; black ethnic minorities disadvantaged themselves through dysfunctional family structures
- Saunders (1990): underclass life, black and white, characterized by dependency cultures involving passive acceptance of low status - cycle of deprivation - low educational and job expectations





Cultural explanations for links between ethnicity and educational attainment

- Lower attainment - language barriers
- Minority ethnic groups, usually working class - need of elaborated code for schooling - Bernstein
- US: use of dialect (Black English Vernacular) by African-American students
- Labov: long term participant observation of African-American children - dialect was different but equal; use the same basic vocabulary, conceptual learning and logic used as well - yet, value of the way they spoke was not recognized by the school system - lead to labelling and underachievement





The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) 2003-2013

Indian and Chinese pupils have consistently outperformed the White British average. For both groups the odds of achieving 5As are currently over twice as high as for White British pupils.

In 2003 the odds for Black Caribbean pupils achieving 5 As were less than half the odds for White British pupils. In 2013 Black Caribbean students have closed the gap with White British students, from 18 percentage points in 2003 to just 2 percentage points in 2013.

A very large improvement for Bangladeshi students occurred in the years from 1991 to 2003, but in 2003 they were still below the White British average. However, by 2013 Bangladeshi students are achieving above the White British average.

Pakistani pupils have also improved substantially. In 2003 their odds of achieving 5As were only two thirds the odds for White British students. However, they closed the gap steadily and achieved parity with White British students in 2011.



Ethnicity and subcultures

- Student subcultures: based on ethnicity, social class; pro- or anti-school; pro- or anti-education
- Sewell: how black youth in the UK adapted to schooling

1. Passive acceptors: African-Caribbean boys unconsciously accepting white cultural values; generally pro-school; accepted “conventional wisdom” that black kids give bad reputation

2. Active acceptors: “acted white” in the school; most common strategic response

3. Passive resisters: balanced between minor delinquency to satisfy peers while avoiding confrontation with teachers; usually black girls and neither pro- or anti-school

4. Active resisters: rebel against teachers





Ethnicity and subcultures

Shain (2003) investigated subcultural responses of Asian girls in UK schools:

1. The Gang: generally anti-school; adopted “Us and Them” approach, involved a positive claim of Asian identity; opposed the dominant culture in school which they saw as white and racist
2. The Survivors: pro-education and pro-school; “ideal pupils”, worked hard, avoided confrontation, positively labeled as “nice girls” and “good workers”; Asian stereotypical girls shy and timid; self-advancement strategy through education



Ethnicity and subcultures

3. The Rebels: pro-school and rebellion was against their own cultural background; adopted Western models of dress and distanced themselves from other Asian groups; survival strategy was academic success and connected school with positive experience they didn't find in their home life
4. Faith girls: developed identity around religion, pro-education in terms of promoting positive relation with staff and students and pursuing academic success; aware of racism as school as a source of oppression - making some of them anti-school





More on subcultures

Mac an Ghail's study of a British school: "crisis of masculinity", traditional manual labor that no longer exists, rationalizing the situation with "the blacks have taken our jobs"

Mac and Ghail: 'Real Englishmen', aspired university and professional careers enjoyed by their parents, simultaneously making fun of school values and working hard in private outside school

Paul Willis claimed that 'the lads' had formed an anti-school subculture. They rejected school and all its values and instead focussed on the day they would eventually be allowed to leave. They formed their own set of values opposed to those of the school. For example, valuing 'having a laugh' in lessons instead of learning





Geert Driessen (2015) study

Teacher ethnicity, student ethnicity, and student outcomes:

This study shows that there is little empirical evidence that a stronger degree of ethnic match, be it in the form of a one-to-one coupling of teachers to pupils with the same ethnic background, or a larger share of minority teachers at an ethnically mixed school, leads to predominantly positive results.

So far positive effects were found; they apply to a greater extent to subjective teacher evaluations than to objective achievement outcome measures.

That more positive effects were found for subjective measures is not surprising.

This can be explained from a positive bias of the teachers toward pupils from their own ethnic group, and possibly from a negative bias against those of another group.

After all, the teachers have a direct influence on these evaluations.





The relationship between ethnicity, social class and gender

- The factors that ethnicity, class and gender have are all combined in one individual to form their experience.
- There are arguments, however, about how significant each factor is relative to the other - i.e. to treat them in combination or as separate categories.





Combination Perspective

- Combination approaches are associated with Marxist perspectives- class is the primary source of educational disadvantage, gender and ethnicity are secondary.
- In the UK there is no decisive evidence that girls outperform boys on the lower end of the class scale.
- The picture is broadly the same in across all class groupings.
- Although in the 7-14 age range girls are different in boys in English, the same cannot be said for maths and science.
- Asians and Indians have higher-than-average educational qualifications, but also higher-than-average levels of educational underachievement - hence social class is still more significant.





Combination Perspective

- **Gillborn and Mirza** argue that of 'these three best known dimensions of inequality':
 - Gender is the narrowest
 - Ethnicity is in the middle
 - Class is the highest
- How and why inequalities combine and are compounded is more significant than simple class *or* gender *or* ethnic differences.





Separation Perspective

- Gender and ethnicity are not necessarily more important than class.
- However, they are important dimensions of inequality that must be considered factors in their own right.
- These can be found by holding social class constant and measuring differences between genders and ethnicities.
- Small but consistent differences are present in all social classes.

