

The Importance of Government Interventions in Education Institutions - A Discussion Based on the Comparison between the American and European Education System

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Abstract: This paper mainly talks about government interventions in education systems, especially focusing on the U.S. and Germany to illustrate the importance and the influence of government involvement. As we all know, government involvement divides schools into public schools and private ones. What a school teaches may shape how its students view other races and the world. In addition, the change of central authority concerns the corresponding education system. This paper demonstrates the significance of government intervention and puts the problem in public eyes, alerting people to think it over in a critical way.

1. Introduction

Government intervention in any country's education system is integral and essential. However, there needs to be a balance. The right amount of involvement helps to promote the overall quality of education and literacy rate. Too little involvement can lead to the disintegration of the system, as it lacks a strong central force to keep all of it in place. On the other hand, excessive intervening can deprive the institutions of their flexibility and autonomy, thereby causing extreme centralization, which is equally harmful in this case.

2. Government Involvement and Schools

Public schools prevail almost all around the world. As the name suggests, these institutions are owned, controlled and monitored by the Government. The state is responsible for keeping these schools functioning by providing the necessary funding. The fund sourced from taxation, is used for the regular maintenance of the institutes such as renovating the classrooms, building a new washroom, paying for the salaries of the teachers and most importantly offering subsidized or free education to the pupils, etc. On the other hand, in a private school, the cost of all the above things is borne by the parents of the students. Therefore, for a country where the majority of its students belong to middle or lower-middle-class families, public schools are a great option for providing quality education at a minimal cost or for free. If governments are not involved, public schools may not receive their funding and less privileged students, who can't afford to go to private schools, would end up receiving subpar education and services. Finland is considered the world leader in education globally. One of the many reasons for this is that Finnish schools are completely state-funded. Parents don't have to worry about paying a high cost for their child's quality education [1]. As a result, enrollment and literacy rates are at the highest in Finland and the schools here are considered one of the best in the world [2].

1) The Government Involvement in the U.S. Schools

Government involvement is also necessary because it promotes inclusivity and diversity. A study published by the Washington Post in 2016 found out that the majority of the private schools in the U.S. have only white pupils [3]. This could be caused by private institutes, run by autonomous bodies, holding a religious, political or ethnic affiliation to a particular section of the society. This may lead to a prejudicial or biased environment where one child is favored over the other.

Government intervention in public schools makes sure that each child, irrespective of their race, caste, gender, ethnicity, etc., enjoys equal opportunities. The following figures are testimony to this statement. In the US, white students in public schools account for 24.4 million; Hispanic 13.6 million, Black 8 million, Asian/Pacific Islander 2.8 million, American Indian/Alaska native 0.5 million; Mixed race student 1.5 million [4]. These statistics reflect the diversity in public schools controlled by the Government. It is because “The public-school system is built on the bedrock notion that we want each child to have a chance for a good education,” said Suitts, now an adjunct professor at Emory University [5].

3. The Influence of Government Involvement

As much as involvement is necessary, limited government intervention in the education system is equally important. If the centre holds unrestrained power to do as it likes it, then schools will have to strictly adhere to a state-standard curriculum. It means being taught what the government thinks is appropriate. Often it is good for the state to decide the curriculum, but in some instances, the government may abuse its power and try to subconsciously or consciously indoctrinate children to view the government as a righteous body. This means, children enrolled at public schools may often end up growing and learning propaganda spread by the government. One of the most suitable examples of this would be Germany before World War II. The Nazi party spread dogma through the school syllabus [6][7]. They instilled in the children from a very early age the principles and ideologies of the party. School textbooks often depicted the Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, as the father and saviour of modern Germany. Besides, the books also spewed hatred against the Jews and furthered the Nazi party's agenda of Anti-Semitism. The following extract is a math problem from a German school textbook that helps us understand the extent to which propaganda was rife: “The Jews are aliens in Germany. In 1933, there were 66,000,000 people living in Germany. Of total, 499,862 were Jewish. What is the percentage of aliens in Germany? [8]” Membership in Hitler's Youth Organization was mandatory for each pupil. Here they were brought to believe that the Germans were physically and mentally superior to everyone for they belonged to the ‘Aryan’ race. Anybody who wasn't an Aryan was inferior in all aspects and by that means not fit to live. The propaganda spread by the Third Reich went on to influence the young minds so much so that children would spy on their parents and if they were to speak ill about Hitler, his policies or the Nazi party, the children would turn them up to the Gestapo - state secret police in Nazi Germany [9] .

Furthermore, minimal government intervention can be a boon because governments in democratic nations change after every set year. As one party steps down, the other rises to power, which may translate to more fluctuations and changes in the education system as well. Each will have different priorities and policies for the sector. To simplify this further let us understand it with the help of an example. Let's say ‘Party A’ has won the elections and formed a government. Party ‘A’ will have their set visions for the education sector and they will introduce new laws to help achieve those goals. In five years, they successfully implement their policies, but after their stipulated tenure is over, elections are held once again and this time ‘Party A’ loses to ‘Party B’. Now the new party will have their set of priorities and ideas for the education sector. ‘Party B’ will implement their policies in place of ‘Party A’. If in the next elections Party A again comes to power they will bring back their policies. So, before the policies implemented by either party have a chance to settle down, they are changed. This will result in excessive fluctuation, thereby leading to a state of instability in the education sector. The Indian government, under the premiership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, introduced National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020 - a major reformation that brought drastically new changes to the education system in India [10]. Whether it will prove beneficial or not, only time will tell. But if the Modi government steps out of power in the next election and the existing policies are altered or abolished by the new government, then it may prove difficult for students and teachers to cope up with the frequent changes. All in all, there can't be a clear win-win situation here.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the involvement of the government, whether more or less, will bring its share of benefits and drawbacks. However, the education system is closely related to its country. This paper only discusses the relationship between education systems and government interventions, so it has limitations. I however, still wish this paper could provide an opportunity to allow people to seriously consider the government intervention in education systems.

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