

What are the key social elements that impact on a learner's ability to access education?

There are many social elements that can impact a learner's ability to access education. In this essay three social elements will be discussed, these social elements are Poverty, ethnic groups (Romany Gypsy Travellers) and children with disabilities which are all covered by the Equality Act 2010. Throughout this essay it will be discussed as to how these social groups are impacted when accessing education. These social elements usually are not the learner's fault and they are not to blame for their inability to access the education. Article 28 of the UNCRC suggests children should always have the right to have an education regardless of what background they come from, what gender they associate themselves as or what disabilities they may have (UNCRC, 1989).

According to Child Fund International (2018), there is a clear link between poverty and education as people living in poverty opt to drop out of school in order to gain a full-time job. This can leave these people lacking the literacy and numeracy skills needed to progress in their careers. The children that these people then have face a similar path as they also opt to leave school and seek work, this can also hold another factor as the parents of these children are unable to nurture them as they don't obtain the needed literacy and numeracy skills to help. 29% of children in Wales are eligible for FSM's, meaning that these children's parents earn less than £16,000 a year, and therefore fall into the poverty group (Child Poverty Action Group, 2016).

From 1944, the United Kingdom has rejoiced in being able to provide school free of charge. However even now there still comes a price tag when attending school. Parents must pay for resources such as uniforms, school materials, food, books and school trips. Failure to afford these resources would certainly have a detrimental impact on any young person's opportunity to attain results and enjoy school. Since the last official survey which had taken place in 2007, parents and guardians are paying astonishing amounts of money in order to ensure their children gain the best education. The average cost of school-related resources for a secondary student

amounted to £1,195 and £684 per student in primary school. If a child is in poverty then there is a very strong chance that the parent or guardian is unable to afford such amounts of money in order to give their children the education required, therefore this would hinder any child's development and affect their happiness (Farthing, 2014).

Isaacs (2012) notes that children who live in poverty start school at a disadvantage to their wealthier peers. They may start school at a disadvantage in terms of their behaviour, health and early skills. Goodman and Gregg (2010) state that children from poor backgrounds face much less advantageous 'early childhood caring environments' than children from wealthier families. Children learn from home first and during their early years. Children are stimulated by what is around them, therefore the home environment is crucial in their early years. The home learning environment can affect a child's early education. It is thought that reading regularly to a child can develop a child's vocabulary, but unfortunately many children from disadvantaged homes don't experience this. In addition, parenting styles and rules can affect a child's discipline and how they behave in school.

Although many children can access school, many children that are living in poverty can't participate in extracurricular activities, and that is usually due to parental financial difficulties (Raphael, 2013). Sports may not seem an obvious form of 'education', but actually participating in school sports is a great way for children to stay healthy. Additionally, the benefits go far beyond that. Pupils who participate in sports have higher academic achievement and develop skills like decision making, communication, team work and time management. Unfortunately, team sports are a luxury many kids don't have access to.

It is believed that poverty has started to become more of a culture issue over the last few years (Dobrin, 2012). Many schools based in areas that are deprived are underfunded. Children miss out on the opportunity to attend school trips, because the parents can't afford them, and there isn't enough funding from the government to pay for these trips. It is thought that funding in schools is a huge issue, as those schools in deprived areas are more likely to have rookie teachers or newly qualified

teachers working for them because they tend to have cheaper salaries than those teachers who have years of experience. Additionally, most books in these schools are out-dated, therefore children and teachers can't get access to reliable and relevant resources.

Education has the ability to connect communities and families and help them break out of poverty. As children are able to learn they will gain knowledge, which will inspire them and boost confidence to remain in education, which will then brighten their future. Education has a huge impact on everyone, including adults as when adults learn they start to develop into role models in their children's eyes.

Coleman (1966) concluded and started a debate that schools only play a limited part on children that live in poverty. Many researchers have since suggested that schools only have a certain amount of influence on a child in poverty's access to education. Ending child poverty is vital to ensure children can access education efficiently.

In third world countries, the poverty crisis is much worse than it is in the UK, and most children aren't able to access basic education at all. Many developing countries do not have the appropriate financial resources necessary to create schools, provide schooling materials, nor recruit and train teachers (Ortloff, 2014). Funding is crucial in order to provide resources and an effective education system. Children in poverty need support.

Another key social element that can impact on a learner's ability to access education is race. The 2011 Census allowed respondents to identify themselves as part of a Gypsy or Irish Traveller ethnic group for the first time. 58,000 people had identified themselves as a Gypsy or Irish Traveller. This made it the smallest ethnic group in Britain in 2011, accounting for 0.1% of the population of England and Wales (ONS Census, 2011). The minority ethnic group here faces many challenges, especially within education.

The Plowden Report (1967) stated that children from Traveller, Roma and Gypsy groups (GRT - Gypsy, Roma and Travelers) were the most disadvantaged group in

the British education system. This is supported by Ofsted (1996) who has recognised that children from a Traveller, Roma and Gypsy background are in the 'most at risk' group in the British education system. They still remain the group with the lowest rates of attendance and academic attainment today.

Bhopal and Myers (2008) state that around 12,000 children out of about 70,000 GRT children are not enrolled at all in schools. Although so many GRT children do not attend school, the law requires that all parents including those from GRT communities send their children to school when they are of compulsory school age (Education Act, 1996).

It is often believed that most GRT parents and guardians understand how beneficial primary education can be for their children as they attend key stages 1 and 2 in order to gain the basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, when it comes to making the transition from key stage 2 to 3 the parents don't see this necessary as the rest of their education can be provided within the Traveller community. From leaving primary school, boys tend to work with their fathers and girls tend to work within childcare and other domestic tasks such as raising children and managing house duties. Another factor why GRT parents are withdrawing their children from education is due to the negative experiences that they received when at school and do not wish for their children to receive the same experience (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

According to the Welsh Assembly Government, (2008) in order to tackle the barriers that GRT children face, schools need to understand that there should not be different policies for GRT children and should in fact promote inclusion. It is strongly recommended that schools should be enforcing anti-racism, anti-bullying and equal opportunities in order to meet the needs of these children. Schools should also raise awareness to other children about race equality to ensure that minority groups are to receive more respect.

The difficulties Gypsy / Traveller children face in their education is exacerbated by the UK's rigid education system that is structured around the statutory curriculum (Wilkin, Derrington and Foster, 2009). Robinson and Martin (2014) suggest that cultural training for teachers and the inclusion of Gypsy / Traveller culture within the curriculum will help children keep their culture and fulfil their educational potential.

The last factor that will be discussed that can impact on a learner's access to education is disability. Mattingly and McInerney (2010) stated that children with a disability face segregation which can hinder their attendance in school. There is a lack of training provided for teachers working with children with disabilities and there are not enough incentives to make teaching children with disabilities a demand. Many of schools across the world lack the financial backing to be able to support the needs of children with disabilities as they do not have the resources, equipment or staff to be able to allow these children with disabilities to flourish to their true potential. It is often the case that these schools attended by children with disabilities have inaccessible buildings and high pupil to teacher ratios, therefore children with disabilities can only expect a certain amount of support which is unfair on the child. Due to a lack of training, teachers tend to have little awareness of disabilities and do not fully understand the demand that children with disabilities desperately require.

According to the World Health Organization (2012) disability occurs in any family, however, there is a strong link when it comes to disability and poverty as pregnant women who are living in poverty can be phased with restricted diets, exposure to toxin and pollution and poor health, these factors can play a huge part in the birth and development of children. Children who live in poverty are more likely to suffer developmental delays than children from a wealthier background due to them being more exposed to risks. Risks that can be suffered by children in poverty could cause disability.

Children who suffer from disabilities can see their education hindered as they are one of the worlds most stigmatized and excluded group of people. Children with disabilities face being excluded from activities in and outside of the classroom as

they may not be able to participate in activities due to their disability, these activities can play a crucial role in the development for any child. As well as suffering through the lack of inclusion, children with disabilities can often have the lowest of self-esteem which again can have a detrimental impact on their access to education as it is commonly known that children learn best when they are happy. Children with disabilities can often be left behind and forgotten about by their peers as there can be little interaction with others as they are not being included in activities that their peers are (World Health Organization, 2012).

According to UNICEF, (2012) in order for children with disabilities to improve their access to education, there needs to be ensured physical accessibility to move around the school. Learning materials need to be suitable and efficient for children with disabilities. More investment needs to be made for teachers to understand the needs of those with disabilities.

In conclusion there are many factors that can affect a child's access to education from being in a racial group (Romany Gypsy Travellers), living in poverty and suffering from a disability. If a child is brought up in an ethnic group, in this case the GRT pupils, they can be deprived of education due to the morals that the GRT community expect them to have, these morals are not learnt in school and are learnt from the community. Living in poverty has a huge effect on children accessing education as the parents of these children may not have the basic numeracy and literacy skills to help their child learn whilst at home, also there may not be enough money to ensure a prosperous well-being for their children. Finally, suffering from a disability can effect access to education as these children can be segregated from activities that they desperately need to develop themselves.

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