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Education as a Tools for Social Change: Perspective of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

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Abstract

Education has long been powerful tools for social transformation. Educational philosophy and its role in social transformation have been greatly influenced by the ideas of thinkers such as Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. Freire promotes critical pedagogy and social justice, Dewey emphasises experiential learning and democracy in education, while Ambedkar regarded education as a tool for eradicating social injustice and

inequities. This study finds out their contribution by analysing how their Perspective still influences current issues about education and its function in bringing about social change. This study gives a broad idea about how education may be used to eliminate systematic injustices, foster critical thinking and enable people to take part in the social and democratic processes that characterise a progressive society.

Keywords: Education, Social Change, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

Introduction

Education is not just the transmission of information or knowledge; it is merely a means of social and cultural transformation which leads the process of all round development. Education plays a major role to carry out a productive and high quality of life. It improves the quality and value of every one's life, a quality education always removes all forms of discrimination from the society, blind beliefs and social evils (Doreswamy, 2019) [9]. Education has always been an essential factor of social mobility, shaping individuals, communities and entire societies. It serves as a medium through which knowledge, values and skills are transmitted across the generation, influencing political structure, economic opportunities and social orders (Chandanpat, 2018; Zainuddin, 2017) [5, 54]. However, the nature and objectives of education have been widely questioned by many philosophers, thinkers and educators; few of them thought that education is a means of maintaining societal stability, while others see it is a tool for challenging oppression and promoting societal justice (Tochhawng *et al.*, 2024; Pramanik & Chaudhary, 2023; Kumar, 2016) [45, 29, 18].

The three well known philosophers John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar offered distinct yet related viewpoints on how education shapes both individual and societal lives. American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey highlighted the connection between democracy and education, contending that schools need to serve as miniature representations of democracies. (Williams, 2017; Luff, 2018) [50, 20]. He believed that learning should be interactive, experiential, problem solving and developed critical thinking skills (Perez-Ibanez, 2018; Jia, 2005) [30, 15]. Paulo Freire, a thinker, educator and social reformer who advocate for 'Critical Pedagogy', saw education as a tool for liberation (Muslikh *et al.*, 2023; Pouwels, 2019; Freire, 2005) [24, 31, 10]. He accounts the traditional 'Banking Education' model, where students passively received knowledge and instead championed a dialogical method that empowers to questions and transform their reality (Rugut & Osman, 2013; Keriapay & Tafonao, 2022) [34, 16]. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian social reformer and father of the Indian Constitution, believed that education as the most powerful weapon against caste-based oppression and social discrimination (Sowbhagya, 2014; Bhoomanagoudar, 2020) [40, 4]. He argued that 'Education was essential for the upliftment of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and emphasized its role in achieving social, political and economic equality' (Thiagarajan, 1981; Alabanoor, 2021; Naik, 2024) [46, 2, 26].

All three thinkers, despite of their distinct socio-political contexts shared a common belief that education should be an active and transformative process. Their viewpoint of education has profoundly impacted on modern educational theories; progressive teaching methodologies and policies aimed at promoting inclusivity and social justice.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach based on document analysis and interpretative review. The study focused on synthesizing their educational theories, historical contexts, and practical applications for transforming society through education. The data for this study were collected from secondary sources, including Books, Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, seminar papers and scholarly reviews highlighting the social, political and educational impact of these philosophies.

Literature Review

John Dewey (1859-1952) an American philosopher, thinker and educational reformer, believed that education should be grounded in experience and active learning (Perez-Ibanez, 2018) [30]. Woods (2011) [51] in his paper explore the importance of Dewey's Experiential Learning on Social change. He found that experiential learning increases the engagement and awareness of social issues. Chengbing and Ming (2019) [6] explore the concept of growth of Dewey; he explains that growth is reorganization and transformation of educational experience. According to Dewey growth is based on democracy and education aims to saturate citizen with democratic ideals. Perez-Ibanez (2018) [30] explores the thought of Dewey that he believed in a more democratic, free and peaceful world, where civil liberties and human rights are respected. Sikandar (2015) [38] conducted a study and showed that Dewey's philosophy is basically understanding the educational and pedagogical issue and also the linkages between democracy, education, society and experience. Ye and Shih (2021) [52] concludes that a democratic education enables children to engage in the process of problem-solving, that the ongoing engagement with actual social issues improves children's democratic literacy, and that the effectiveness of children's education is influenced by teachers' dedication to social responsibility. Dar (2021) [7] emphasise the idea of Dewey's social learning that develop cognitive functioning by participating in socio-cultural practice. Williams (2017) [50] explore the view of John Dewey regarding his social learning, Dewey believed that education is play a critical role in social and moral development and effective education came mostly through social interaction. In this paper researcher focus on the idea of John Dewey's responsive classroom, Place-based education. Synytsia (2020) [44] identified the philosophical dimension of education and the role of activity of the subject plays in the learning process. Hassan *et al.* (2024) [13] conclude that learning based on experience is much more relevant in students' life. Mangue and Gonondo (2019) [22] aims to focus on Dewey's thought on creating an environment that could be more inclusive and focused on the creativity of each learner.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) a Brazilian philosopher, thinker, and advocate for social change. In his seminal work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970), he articulated the concept of the 'Banking Model of Education' which portrays students as passive recipients of knowledge. Trindade *et al.* (2024) [47] examines 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed,' which is regarded as a key text in critical pedagogy. Freire argued that critical pedagogy fosters an educational approach that connects recognizing problems with proactive measures for social change and transformation. Tochhawng *et al.* (2024) [45] explore the idea of critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and focuses on the

importance of dialogic learning, problem posing education for bringing social change in oppressed class. Mollick (2021) [25] explain that critical pedagogy is about making teacher and students aware about the social issues and politics related to education. Iqbal (2024) [14] adds to the current discussion surrounding the link between critical pedagogy and the empowerment of women, offering practical applications and insights into the potential for larger social change. By highlighting the transition from awareness to freedom, this research emphasizes the importance of Paulo Freire's educational framework in promoting gender equality and cultivating empowered communities. Harris (2024) [11] examines how Freire promoted a liberated and conversation-based educational philosophy. Social and political change happened as a result of discourse. Ammarul (2024) [3] found that Freire's educational philosophy and problem-posing education that foster critical consciousness and active participations. Pandey and Waris (2018) [27] conclude that critical consciousness and dialogue both are involved with teaching of adults to enable them understanding the social condition and realize the importance of critical consciousness in the sphere of social change. Suzina and Tufte (2020) [43] explain that Freire's significant legacy along with global intellectual pathway both within humanities and social sciences. Vittoria (2018) [49] explains the idea of Paulo Freire's critical education that critical pedagogy is the critical path by which social transformation evolved.

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956), a key architect of India's constitution and a social reformer, saw education as the primary means for social change upliftment, particularly for oppressed communities like Dalits. Shastri (2023) [37] discusses the importance of educational thought of Dr. Ambedkar on bringing social equality and empowerment. In this paper researcher revealed that education was the necessary precondition for the reconstruction of the society on the principle of equality and justice. Ravinder (2022) [33] explores the relevance of Ambedkar's social reform work i.e., struggle to achieve dalit rights, spreading education, political upliftment of the underprivileged etc. which had an impact on Dalit's social life. Alabanoor, (2021) [2] explain the idea of Dr. Ambedkar on Social Transformation that social justice is more important than political justice. He believed that equal opportunity with individual liberty that were laid much emphasis on caste system. Bhoomanagoudar (2020) [4] found that Dr. Ambedkar made a significant contribution towards social and political thought, criticizing the discriminatory practice of Brahmanical Hinduism towards the untouchable and working for the emancipation of the oppressed class from high caste Hindus. Mani and Singh (2024) [23] discuss the significance of colonial education system on social change in India and also revealed that education has the ability to subvert long-standing social mores. According to the researcher Dr. Ambedkar concentrated on the advancement of lower caste and women's education, using education as a tool to fight gender inequality and caste-based discriminations. Sutradhar (2019) [42] expresses the idea of Ambedkar on social change; Ambedkar believed that the caste system should be eliminated from the society because it promotes social inequalities and injustice. He thought education is the key through which we remove all the social inequalities and injustice. Korada and Babu (2012) [17] explored the idea of Dr. Ambedkar on social change. They found that Ambedkar

wanted to bring the change through peace and persuasion, Ambedkar gave utmost importance to love as a means of social harmony, he stressed upon the change of the heart and mindset of the people. He strongly believed in the Buddhist teaching, that hatred cannot be put an end to by hatred. Sabharwal (2020) [35] explored the educational and philosophical perspective of Ambedkar on the caste system and the political role of education in reconstructing the social order in order to build a way of life that acknowledges equality, liberty, and fraternity as essential values of life. Patade (2024) [28] stated that Ambedkar's educational philosophy and vision emphasis on social justice, equality and empowerment. According to Dr. Ambedkar education was the primary key to unlocking the doors of light and wisdom. Rajak (2018) [32] found that Ambedkar identified education has real power to control and transform anything and wanted to use it as a weapon of social change. Agrawal (2021) [11] explain that knowledge and power as the crucial elements in reconstruction of modern India. Maheshwari (2024) [21] found that Dr. Ambedkar's vision towards education epitomizes the transformative power of knowledge in empowering marginalized communities and fostering social change. According to Ambedkar education is not only a tool for acquiring skills, but the pathways to equality, liberation. Doddamani and Ramesh (2024) [8] explore the relevance of Ambedkar's approach to education in addressing structural inequality and promoting progress in society. Ambedkar established the People's Education Society to give Dalit students access to education because he believed that education was the key to eradicating social injustices. Naik (2024) [26] explores the perspective of Dr. Ambedkar's on education and his conviction in the principal of education, unity and struggle. Sharma (2019) [36] believed that social education and women's political advancement are the cornerstones of the social transformation. Zaidi (2020) [53] and Valeskar (2012) [48] showed that the demands of the global feminist movement were similar to Dr. Ambedkar's views on women's issues, which focused on their rights to education, equality of opportunity with men, property rights,

and democratic engagement. Dr. Ambedkar championed for women to have equal access to participation and decision-making in social, political, and economic spheres. Dr. Ambedkar was a firm believer in women's power and their contribution to social change. Chandanpat (2018) [5] shows Dr. Ambedkar believed that education could drastically alter a society that was oppressed and open doors for equality for all. Sirswal (2011) [39] attempts to draw an outline of Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education and social change. In this study the author stressed on the 'Proper Intellectual Training', that means education enriches the intellectual powers of the students and promote the respect for reason. Ambedkar wanted to create a critical and systematically inquiring mind in students. His philosophy of education aims at creation a liberating consciousness. Kumar and Ratne (2018) [19] conclude that In India, Dr. Ambedkar imagined an educational system that taught justice and human dignity. Ambedkar believed that education should empower the oppressed to fight for the eradication of exploitation and injustice in society. Dr. Ambedkar favoured humanistic education, which allows a man to rediscover himself and ensure freedom. Hashmi (2024) [12] explored Ambedkar's ideas regarding the educational device and assesses its applicability in present time. Ambedkar emphasised the significance of the education as a driver of social change. His criticisms of prejudice based only on caste and support for inclusive education are put to the test in a variety of challenging and cutting-edge educational scenarios.

Social contributions of three thinkers in the context of modern social paradigm

Thou these three famous social reformers emerge in a different time but they have unique societal contribution for present social upliftment. Their radical thinking not only change the thought process among the masses but their ways of path breaking endeavours create a vibrant within the society.

Table 1: Social Contributions of Three Thinkers in The Context of Modern Social Paradigm

Components	John Dewey	Paulo Freire	Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar
Education	Social reality with dynamic characteristic	Education is the means of conscientization.	Education is the ways for establishment of dignity, fraternity, liberty, equity and equality.
Society	Society is a dynamic organization where individuals cooperate; education shapes active citizenship	Society contains oppressive structures; education should empower the marginalized.	Society is hierarchical but can be transformed through education, social justice.
Aims of education	To promote democratic participation, problem-solving, and experiential learning.	To liberate learners from oppression and develop critical thinking.	To achieve social mobility, equality, and empowerment.
Learner	Active participant; learns through hand on activity.	Co-creator of knowledge, not a passive recipient.	Learners should develop self-respect and ability to fight against discrimination and injustice
School	School is a miniature of society; democratic environment for experiential learning.	Space for dialogue, reflection, and action rather than a top-down knowledge transfer.	Institution to ensure equal access and promote social justice.
Curriculum	Integrated, flexible, child centred, interests based and solving real-life problems.	Rooted in local reality and learners' experiences; includes themes of liberation.	Focus on modern knowledge, constitutional values, and eradication of social discrimination.
Methods of teaching	Learning by doing, problem-solving, projects, and inquiry.	Dialogic methods, participatory learning, and critical pedagogy.	Rational, evidence-based teaching fostering social equality and awareness.
Teachers	Guide and facilitator who encourages exploration and democratic habits.	Co-learner and co-investigator with students.	Social reformer and mentor, advocating equality and justice.
Teacher-students relationship	Cooperative and democratic; mutual respect.	Horizontal relationship; teacher and student learn from each other.	Teachers should treat students with dignity and promote equality.
Institutions	Schools as social institutions nurturing democracy.	Educational institutions as spaces for conscientization and transformation.	Institutions as instruments to fight against social injustice and ensure constitutional rights.

Conclusion

Education is not just the transfer of knowledge but it is a dynamic force that shapes societies, empowers individuals and challenges systemic inequalities. The thinkers like John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and their philosophy give a profound insight into how education can serve as a weapon for social change. Dewey emphasized the role of education in fostering democracy through experiential learning. Democratic education is reflected in modern students-centred learning approaches and participatory teaching method. Freire considers the idea of education as a liberating process that enables individuals to challenge oppression. His critical pedagogy continues to inspire peoples to empower marginalized groups through dialogue and consciousness. Ambedkar, on the other hand believed that education as the most powerful tool for breaking social inequalities and achieving justice for marginalized communities. Ultimately the true purpose of education is not just preparing individuals for economic productivity but to cultivate a society where justice, equality and democracy are upheld. By applying the ideas of these great thinkers into education, we can ensure that education remains a powerful tool for developing a progressive civilisation.

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