

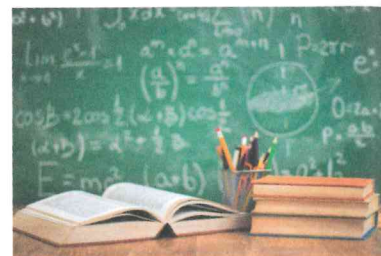
The Role of Education from a Functionalist Perspective

You must be able to:

- Explain the functions of education
- Describe and criticise Durkheim's key ideas on education
- Describe and criticise Parsons' key ideas on education.

Formal and Informal Education

- **Education** involves acquiring knowledge and learning new skills.
 - **Formal education** takes place in educational establishments such as schools and universities where people learn knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects.
 - **Informal education** takes place when people develop knowledge and skills by observing what is happening around them in everyday life.



Functions of the Education System

Function	Why it is important
Serving the needs of the economy	Education has an economic role in teaching the knowledge and skills that future workers will need in a competitive global economy .
Facilitating social mobility	The education system enables people to move up (or down) the social ladder. Gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve qualifications and move into a higher social class.
Fostering social cohesion	Through subjects such as Citizenship , students identify themselves as British citizens. Schools help to reinforce the 'glue' or the social bonds that unite different people in society.
Selection and role allocation	The education system works like a sieve, grading students and allocating them to jobs based on their individual merit, abilities and exam results.

Key Point

Functionalism focuses on the positive functions that the education system performs in society.

Schools (like families) function as agencies of socialisation and social control.

Key Thinker

Durkheim (1858–1917)

Durkheim's Key Ideas on Education

- The main function of education is to transmit society's norms and values. Subjects like history instil shared norms and values, and encourage individual children to see themselves as part of society.
- Through the use of sanctions (or punishment) at school and by respecting the school rules, children learn to respect rules in general.
- In a complex industrial society, education equips children with the skills they will need for their future work roles.



Through history lessons, individual students learn society's norms and values and come to see themselves as part of the social group.

Criticisms of Durkheim

- Marxists argue that the education system transmits ideas that benefit the ruling class rather than society as a whole. Some feminists argue that schools transmit patriarchal culture.
- Some students accept neither the school's rules nor society's norms and values.
- The education system does not necessarily teach skills that prepare students for their future workplace roles.

Parsons' Key Ideas on Education

- The education system is the main agency of socialisation in modern society. It acts as the bridge between the family and society, and prepares children for their adult roles.
- Children have **ascribed status** in families and are judged according to **particularistic standards**. In society, however, status is achieved and people are judged according to **universalistic standards** that apply to everyone in the same way. The education system prepares children to enter the wider society by treating everyone in terms of universalistic standards and by operating on the basis of **achieved status**.
- Schools, as an agency of socialisation, promote two key values – achievement and equality of opportunity. These values are important in the wider society. Advanced industrial societies need a system of rewarding people differently based on their achievement. Having been through school, people accept this as fair, so long as there are equal opportunities.
- Role allocation: the education system matches individuals to their future jobs and status in society, based on their talents and abilities. In a **meritocracy**, the most able reach the top jobs.

Criticisms of Parsons

- Marxists argue that the education system transmits values that benefit the dominant groups in society.
- Some feminists question whether the education system is based on meritocracy and whether it provides equal opportunities.
- Critics question how far role allocation is effective or meritocratic. People with the best qualifications do not always get the top jobs.

Key Thinker

Talcott Parsons (1961)

Think about how Parsons makes connections between families and education.

Key Point

As we saw in Chapter 1 (pages 8–9) and Chapter 2 (pages 26–27), Durkheim and Parsons are key thinkers within functionalism. Make sure that you understand Durkheim's ideas about the function of education in transmitting norms and values, and Parsons' ideas about achieved status and meritocracy in schools.

Key Words

education
 formal education
 informal education
 economy
 social mobility
 Citizenship
 ascribed status
 particularistic standards
 universalistic standards
 achieved status
 meritocracy

Quick Test

1. Achieved status is fixed at birth. True or false?
2. Particularistic standards apply to everyone in the same way. True or false?

The Marxist Approach to Education

You must be able to:

- Describe the Marxist view of the role of education
- Describe the key ideas of Bowles and Gintis on education and capitalism
- Criticise the key ideas of Bowles and Gintis.

The Role of Education from a Marxist Perspective

What the education system does	Explanation
Serves the interests of the ruling class	By passing on ideas and beliefs that benefit the ruling class (for example, that capitalist society is fair and meritocratic), the education system serves ruling class interests.
Reproduces the class structure	Education appears to reward students fairly based on their individual abilities. However, it actually favours pupils from more privileged backgrounds. Over time, education reproduces (or recreates) the advantages that some social class groups have over others.
Breeds competition	Through exams and sport at school, students are encouraged to accept values such as competition . This helps to maintain capitalism, which is based on competition.
Secondary socialisation	Working-class students learn norms and values at schools that prepare them for their lower position in a capitalist society. For example, they learn to accept hierarchy at school and to obey rules.

Key Point

Marxist approaches examine the relationship between education and capitalism.



Marxists argue that schools breed competition and, in doing so, help to maintain capitalism.

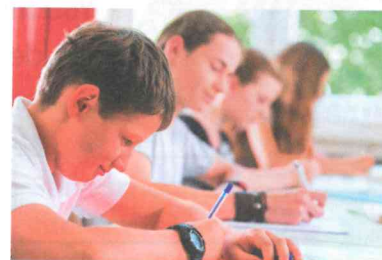
The Key Ideas of Bowles and Gintis

- The main role of the education system is to reproduce (recreate over time) a workforce with the necessary qualities to meet the needs of the capitalist economy. These qualities include being hard-working, disciplined, obedient and reluctant to question authority.
- Schools reward students who display these qualities with high grades. Students who show greater independence and creative thinking are more likely to get lower grades. Schools produce an unimaginative and unquestioning workforce with the necessary attitudes for exploitation.

Key Thinkers

Bowles and Gintis (1976)

- The education system helps to produce a workforce for capitalism mainly through the way schooling is structured and the **hidden curriculum**.
- Bowles and Gintis use the term **correspondence principle** to describe the way education and work connect or fit together (correspond) in capitalist society.



Bowles and Gintis argue that education creates a passive, obedient workforce to meet the needs of capitalism.

Bowles and Gintis's Correspondence Principle	
School and its Hidden Curriculum	Workplace
There is a rigid hierarchy of authority with coercive relationships, rules and discipline.	There is a rigid hierarchy of authority with rules and discipline.
The curriculum is fragmented or divided into little packages of knowledge.	Jobs (for example, in car manufacturing) are broken down into separate tasks.
Tasks are mundane or boring.	Tasks are mundane.
Students lack power over what they learn.	Workers have minimum control over work tasks.
Schoolwork is a means to an end (qualifications) rather than an end in itself (satisfaction).	Work is a means to an end (pay) rather than an end in itself (job satisfaction).

- Bowles and Gintis see meritocracy as a myth. Students' social class background rather than their **intelligence quotient** (IQ) is the most important influence on their educational achievements.

Criticisms of Bowles and Gintis

- Bowles and Gintis assume that students passively accept the values taught via the hidden curriculum. However, many students reject the values of the school and resist their teachers' authority (see pages 62–63 on Willis).
- Bowles and Gintis exaggerate the power of the education system in forming personalities and attitudes.
- Businesses today require creative, independent workers rather than passive, unthinking workers. Many teaching methods now encourage creativity rather than rote learning.
- Functionalist approaches see the education system as based on meritocracy and equality of opportunity.

Quick Test

1. Identify one difference between Marxist and functionalist approaches to education.
2. What term do sociologists use to describe the things learnt in school (such as valuing punctuality or obedience) that are not formally taught in lessons?
3. What term describes a score based on a test designed to measure a person's intelligence?

Key Point

Bowles and Gintis (1976) are key thinkers who studied schooling in America from a Marxist perspective. It is important that you are familiar with their ideas on education and the correspondence principle. In their methods, they drew on data from their study of 237 New York high school students, statistical data and historical studies of schooling in America.

Key Words

competition
hidden curriculum
correspondence principle
curriculum
intelligence quotient

Different Types of School

You must be able to:

- Identify and describe different types of school such as primary and secondary, state and private
- Describe alternative forms of educational provision such as deschooling.

The Structure of the Education System

Early years education	State nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools, for example, offer free, part-time provision for children aged 3–4.
Primary education	Most state primary schools cater for girls and boys aged 5–11.
Secondary education	Secondary schools include comprehensive schools , special schools , free schools and academies . Most cater for students aged 11–16.
Further education (FE)	Further education mainly caters for students aged 16 years and over. Courses are usually provided by sixth form and FE colleges.
Higher education (HE)	The higher education sector includes universities that provide higher level academic and vocational courses (such as degrees).

The Independent Sector

- The independent sector refers to **fee paying schools**. It is made up of **private schools** (all fee charging schools) and **public schools** (older independent schools, such as Eton and Rugby).
- Around seven per cent of schoolchildren in England attend **independent schools**.

Think about how the functionalist and Marxist approaches might view the private sector in education.

Advantages of Independent Schools

- They usually have a lower teacher–student ratio than state schools so students receive more individual attention during lessons.
- Resources and facilities are often better than in state schools.
- Many are **selective schools** and their **ethos** stresses academic achievement. Exam results tend to be above the national average.
- Parents' input is high in terms of fees, support and expectations.



State Schools

- State schools are not based on parents' ability to pay fees.
- The intake is more socially mixed (for example, in social class terms) than independent schools.
- State schools may provide a route of upward social mobility for students from low income families.
- Students do not have to travel far to attend a local state school.

Key Point

Critics argue that the private sector maintains the privileges of the rich. Supporters argue that people have the right to choose between state and private education.

The Tripartite System

- The 1944 Education Act set up the **tripartite system**. It aimed to provide children with a free, state education based on their individual abilities. School allocation was based on the results of the **11-plus** examination. Children attended one of three types of school (secondary modern, secondary technical and grammar) according to their aptitudes and needs.
- Some local authorities such as Dorset still have grammar schools, with admission based on an entrance exam.

Advantages of the Comprehensive System Compared to the Tripartite System

- Comprehensive schools are designed to cater for children of all abilities. There is no entrance exam so nobody is labelled a 'failure'.
- Children from different social classes attend the same school, which breaks down social barriers.
- Comprehensives are usually large, so more subjects and facilities are available.

Problems with the Comprehensive System

- Critics argue the following.
 - Comprehensives limit parental choice. Students are expected to attend their closest school, regardless of its reputation.
 - Academic students are held back academically in **mixed-ability** groups.
 - Academic working-class children will achieve more at a grammar than a comprehensive school.
- Supporters argue that the principle of comprehensive education has not been achieved because comprehensives do not have mixed intakes, e.g. a suburban school's intake is usually middle class. Also, most comprehensive schools are not fully comprehensive because, for instance, they have **setting** in particular subjects.

Alternative Educational Provision

- With **home tuition** or home schooling, children are taught at home by parents or tutors rather than in schools. There are concerns, however, about the standards of home tuition and its impact on children's social development.
- Illich (1995) argues that schools repress children and promote passive conformity. He supports **deschooling** and argues that education in its current form should be abolished. Instead, people should set up learning webs, decide what to learn and go about it in creative and exploratory ways.

Quick Test

- Academies are funded directly by government. True or false?
- Comprehensive schools are selective. True or false?
- Identify one difference between a private school and a public school.

Key Point

State schools are publicly funded, for example through local councils or government. Most state schools must follow the national curriculum. Independent schools charge fees and do not have to follow the national curriculum.

The issue of grammar schools is still hotly debated among politicians today. Under Theresa May, the Conservative Prime Minister, grammar schools were a key part of education policy in 2017. By contrast, the Labour Party opposes grammar schools.

Key Words

comprehensive schools
special schools
free schools
academies
further education
higher education
fee paying schools
private schools
public schools
independent schools
selective schools
ethos
tripartite system
11-plus (eleven plus)
mixed ability
setting
home tuition
deschooling

Social Class and Educational Achievement

You must be able to:

- Explain how social class affects educational achievement
- Describe Halsey's key ideas on class-based inequalities
- Describe Ball's key ideas on parental choice and competition between schools.

Patterns of Educational Achievement Based on Class

- In general, middle-class students achieve better results in **public examinations** than working-class students. They are also more likely to study in higher education.

Halsey: Origins and Destinations

- Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) examined the social class origins and educational destinations of a large sample of men. Respondents' social class was based on their father's occupation and they were divided into three groups:
 - the service class (for example, higher-grade professionals)
 - the intermediate class (for example, clerical workers)
 - the working class (for example, manual workers in industry).
- Halsey *et al.* found evidence of social class inequalities in education. A boy from the service class, compared to a working-class boy, was four times more likely to be at school at 16, eight times more likely at 17, and 10 times more likely at 18. He was 11 times more likely to go to university than a working-class boy.

Key Thinkers

Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980)

Key Point

Key thinkers Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) drew on data from a face-to-face survey of men born between 1913 and 1952 and educated in England and Wales.

Explanations for Class-based Differences in Achievement

- Explanations for social class differences in **achievement** focus on home factors, school factors (see pages 56–57) and the impact of government reforms.

Economic Circumstances and Material Deprivation

- Poor housing and overcrowding adversely affect performance at school. Working-class children are more likely to experience these conditions.
- Students from affluent backgrounds are more likely to have facilities (such as computers and quiet spaces) to help them study at home.
- Many middle-class parents can afford private tuition and property in the catchment areas of good schools.

Parental Values and Expectations

- Parents in professional occupations often value educational achievement and expect their children to do well at school. Some working-class people may not particularly value education and achieving a high occupational status.
- Working-class children may have less parental interest, support and encouragement than middle-class children.

Cultural Deprivation

- **Cultural deprivation** theories suggest that the sub-culture of some low income groups inhibits educational achievement. Working-class children's home environment may not provide them with the cultural resources and educational experiences (such as family visits to museums or libraries) to perform well at school.

Cultural Capital

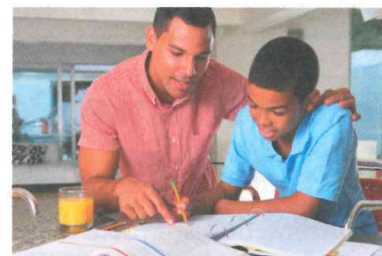
- Middle-class parents have the right sort of **cultural capital** to help their children succeed in schools. They know how the education system works and how to work it to their advantage.
- Well-qualified parents are better equipped to help with homework and monitor progress.

Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz: The Impact of Market Forces on Parental Choice

- Ball *et al.* focus on the effects that parental choice and competition between schools has on the education system, in particular whether it leads to greater inequality.
- With the publication of examination **league tables**, schools want to attract 'motivated' parents and 'able' children. More resources are directed towards students who are likely to perform well in examinations.
- Middle-class parents are more likely to know how to deal with secondary school choices. Working-class parents are more likely to prefer to send their children to local schools.
- Material resources bring advantages in the market place. For example, parents with their own transport have a wider choice of schools.
- Having the right sort of cultural capital helps parents to play the market. It brings knowledge of the education system and confidence in how to work it.
- Ball *et al.* argue that **marketisation** and **educational reform** reinforce the advantages of middle-class parents and make education less equal. Schools are now more concerned with attracting gifted and advantaged students than with helping disadvantaged ones.

Quick Test

1. Material deprivation refers to cultural rather than financial issues. True or false?
2. Marketisation refers to the policy of bringing market forces (such as competition and choice) into education. True or false?



Some parents are better qualified than others to help with homework.

Key Thinkers

Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1994)

Key Point

Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1994) interviewed staff and governors in 15 secondary schools, as well as primary school heads and parents of primary school children. They also drew on secondary sources of data.

Key Words

public examinations
achievement
cultural deprivation
cultural capital
league tables
marketisation
educational reform

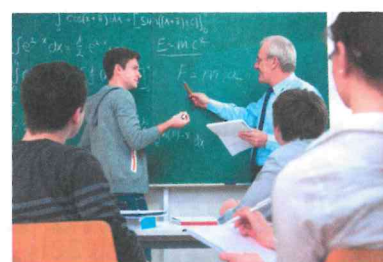
The Impact of School Processes on Working-Class Students' Achievements

You must be able to:

- Describe interactionist perspectives on education
- Explain how processes such as streaming, setting, mixed-ability teaching, labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy affect the achievement of working-class students
- Describe the key ideas of Ball on teacher expectations.

Interactionist Perspectives on Education

- **Interactionism** focuses on small-scale interactions between individuals, such as teachers and students in classrooms. Research suggests that teachers classify students into types based on factors such as their appearance, ability and how conformist they are. Once particular students are judged as deviant types, it is difficult for their behaviour to be seen positively.
- Some teachers label students on the basis of their social class rather than their ability. Labelling theory suggests that labels are sticky. Once a label is attached to a student, they may come to see themselves in terms of the label and behave accordingly. Other people may see them in terms of the label.
- Negative **labelling** of working-class students (for example, as unlikely to do well in maths) can lead to a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. In this case, students perform as badly or as well as their teachers expect them to.



Interactionists study the interaction between teachers and students in classrooms.

Key Point

When explaining working-class educational underachievement, it is important to focus on home factors, school factors and the impact of educational reforms.

Effects of Streaming and Setting

- With streaming, students are allocated to a class based on their general ability and are taught in this class for most subjects. With setting, students are allocated to classes based on their attainment in particular subjects such as English.
- Research suggests that streaming is often linked to social class. A disproportionately higher number of lower-stream students are drawn from the working class.
- Streaming and setting may have unintended effects. If the confidence of students in the lower streams or sets is damaged, they may not try to improve. Teachers may give less attention and encouragement to students in the lower streams. Some commentators see mixed-ability teaching as more fair than streaming.

Ball: Banding and Teacher Expectations

- Stephen Ball (1981) undertook a **case study** of a mixed comprehensive school and examined the way it was organised.
- In the banding system, students were placed into one of three bands (similar to streaming). Band 1 contained the most able students and band 3 contained the least able. Although placement was supposed to be based on test scores, in practice, banding did not necessarily operate on ability. In cases where students had similar abilities, those whose fathers were not manual workers were more likely to be put in band 1.
- Some students' behaviour changed over time as a result of the bands they were placed in. Ball linked this to **teacher expectations** of each band. For example, teachers expected band 1 students to be well behaved and hard-working, and band 2 students to be difficult and uncooperative. This led to a gradual change in the behaviour of band 2 students to mirror their teachers' expectations.
- Each band was taught differently and followed different educational routes. Students in band 1 were encouraged to have high aspirations and to study academic courses. Students in band 2 were steered towards more practical subjects and lower-level examinations.
- With the introduction of mixed-ability groups at the school, students were less obviously polarised (or divided into two contrasting groups). Teachers, however, continued to label middle-class students as the most able and cooperative. This labelling was reflected in exam results.

Key Thinker

Stephen Ball (1981)

Key Point

Ball used participant observation: he observed lessons and taught some classes. He interviewed students and teachers, and carried out small-scale questionnaires. He also analysed secondary sources such as school records and registers.

Pupil Cultures

- Research suggests that streaming can lead to the development of an **anti-school sub-culture** that opposes the school's learning objectives.
- In response to being labelled as 'failures', some lower stream students reject the school's academic values and rules. Instead, they develop a sub-culture that stresses defiance of teachers and authority.
- This provides them with an alternative source of status among their peers.

Paul Willis also studied the creation of a counter-school culture (see pages 62–63).

Quick Test

1. What do interactionists focus on when exploring educational achievement?
2. Identify one secondary source of data that Ball used.
3. Identify one possible consequence of banding.

Key Words

interactionism
labelling
self-fulfilling prophecy
case study
teacher expectations
anti-school sub-culture

Ethnicity and Educational Achievement

You must be able to:

- Explain how home factors can affect the achievement of different ethnic groups
- Explain how school factors can affect achievement
- Explain how government reforms can impact on achievement.

Patterns of Achievement

- Generally, students from some minority ethnic groups (such as Chinese and Indian) achieve better results in public examinations than others (such as Black Caribbean and Pakistani groups).
- Some of the differences in achievement between ethnic groups may reflect social class differences.
- White working-class boys achieve the lowest GCSE grades compared to other ethnic groups.

Home Factors

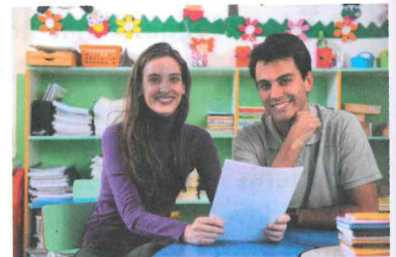
- **Material deprivation:** students from some minority ethnic groups (such as Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean) are more likely to experience material deprivation than white British pupils. Economic circumstances can affect achievement.
- **Cultural factors:** schools are seen as institutions in which white, 'mainstream' norms and values dominate. As a result, students from some minority ethnic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage.
- **Parental values:** research suggests that British Chinese parents value education and that, in Chinese culture, children respect older people. So British Chinese students develop high educational aspirations and get positive self-esteem from being 'good students'.
- **Cultural capital:** white, educated, middle-class parents are likely to have the right kind of cultural capital. They may draw on their own learning, for example, to help with homework. Their knowledge of the education system places their children at an advantage. Parents who were educated outside the UK may not be able to support their children to the same extent.

School Factors

- **Type of school attended:** research suggests that the main factor in explaining differences in educational attainment is the school attended. The quality of teaching, resources available and equal opportunities policies within the school can influence achievement. Some sociologists argue that minority ethnic students who attend good schools do as well as other students in these schools.



Look out for links between the topics of education and families.



Some parents' cultural capital gives them the confidence and knowledge to work the system.

- Teacher expectations and labelling: some teachers may have different expectations of students based on their ethnic origin. For example, teachers may have high expectations of Chinese students, who are seen as capable and hard-working, and low expectations of Black Caribbean students. Teachers' labels may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy which affects students' educational attainments.
- An **ethnocentric curriculum**: one view is that the **formal curriculum** is ethnocentric (biased towards white, European culture). The national curriculum, for example, generally ignores non-European languages, literature, art and music. Subjects like history, for instance, may be taught from a British or European perspective. If students feel undervalued at school, this may lead to underachievement.
- School culture: critics argue that schools are dominated by a white, mainstream culture. Aspects of school life may affect the achievements of some minority ethnic students. For example, expectations about clothing may not take into account some minority cultures' norms and values.
- **Institutional racism** occurs when an organisation fails to provide an appropriate service to people because of their ethnic origin, culture or colour. Institutional racism is an unintended consequence of the way institutions such as schools are organised. The relatively high rate of fixed-term **exclusion** of students from Black Caribbean backgrounds, for example, has been linked to institutional racism.

Government Policies

- Legislation such as the Equality Act makes it illegal for educational providers to discriminate on the basis of **ethnicity**.
- If a school's admissions policy gives it scope to select its intake, some minority ethnic and working-class students may be disadvantaged.
- The emphasis on marketisation, parental choice and competition between schools to raise standards may have made life more difficult for some urban schools with an intake of minority ethnic (or working-class) students.

Key Point

Educational reforms and classroom practices may have unintended consequences.

Key Point

When discussing the underachievement of students from some minority ethnic groups, it is important to discuss home-based factors, school-based factors and educational reforms.

Look out for links between explanations of the underachievement of students from working-class and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Quick Test

1. What term describes a curriculum based on white European culture?
2. Identify one possible reason for the relatively high rates of exclusion among students from Black Caribbean backgrounds.
3. Identify one home factor that could explain the underachievement of some minority ethnic students.

Key Words

ethnocentric curriculum
formal curriculum
institutional racism
exclusion
ethnicity

Gender and Educational Achievement

You must be able to:

- Describe the patterns of achievement based on gender
- Explain the improvements in girls' educational achievement
- Explain the reasons for boys' educational underachievement.

Patterns of Educational Achievement

- Traditionally, boys got better results at A Level than girls.
 - Towards the end of the 1980s, this gender gap in achievement began to narrow.
 - By the early 2000s, girls were doing better than boys at both GCSE and A Level.
 - However, results at A Level in 2014 suggest that the gender gap has started to narrow again following the introduction of end-of-course examinations.
- Differences in subject choice remain. Girls are more likely to choose subjects such as English and Art and Design at A Level and boys are more likely to choose physics and maths.
- This affects students' choices within higher education and their future careers.
- Some sociologists link this to the **gendered curriculum**: some subjects (including high status subjects such as maths and science) are associated with masculinity and others (such as languages and humanities) are associated with femininity.
- Not all students who are male, working class or from a minority ethnic background underachieve. For example, boys from schools in very affluent areas generally perform better than boys and girls from schools in very deprived areas.

Bear in mind that most GCSEs and A Levels no longer include coursework assessment.

Key Point

Sociologists argue that gender, class and ethnicity combine to influence a person's educational achievement.

Explanations for the Improvements in Girls' Achievements

- Feminism has changed attitudes towards gender roles. In the past, males were usually expected to be breadwinners while females were expected to be homemakers. Today, girls are more focused on paid employment and financial independence, and see educational success as a route to these.
- Laws such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equality Act (2010) have made gender discrimination in education illegal.
- Many schools have introduced equal opportunities policies to address inequality and change classroom practices.
- The National Curriculum provides girls and boys with equal access to the same subjects. Students can no longer opt out of subjects such as science at GCSE.
- Some feminists, however, argue that the educational system remains patriarchal. For example, girls still experience sexism in schools and men are still more likely than women to become secondary school heads.

Think about how the idea of breadwinner and homemaker roles links to functionalist accounts of the nuclear family.



Females see educational success as a route to a career and financial independence.

Reasons for Boys' Underachievement

- Although achievement levels for males are increasing overall, male students appear to be underperforming compared to female students.
- One explanation focuses on the feminisation of primary schooling. The majority of primary school teachers are female and there are not enough male teachers to act as role models to reduce macho or 'laddish' behaviour among boys.
- A related view is that schools have become too 'girl friendly' or biased towards females. Boys are forced to learn in ways that do not suit them. This includes an emphasis on verbal skills, coursework and a non-competitive environment rather than on practical skills.
- Some sociologists argue that boys and men are experiencing a **crisis of masculinity**. Males see their traditional masculine identity as under threat and believe they no longer have a clear-cut role in society. This can impact on boys' self-esteem and motivation at school.
- Some students (particularly males) may experience peer pressure to conform to the norms of an 'urban' or 'street' culture that does not value education.
- 'Laddish' cultures may emphasise that it is 'uncool' to work hard. This peer culture may encourage anti-learning attitudes and affect the progress of particular boys (and girls) in some schools. However, among schools in middle-class neighbourhoods, boys may not see education as 'uncool'. They may achieve status among their peers by displaying academic abilities.
- Some teachers may have lower expectations of male students who they tend to see as lacking in motivation. This labelling may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Key Point

Some commentators see the concern with male underachievement in education as part of a **moral panic** fuelled by the media.

Reasons for Gender Differences in Subject Choice

Type of factor	Explanation
Home-based	Gender socialisation within the home; e.g. if boys have more experience of science-related toys outside school, this could encourage them to see science as a 'male' subject.
School-based	Gender stereotyping in textbooks, teacher attitudes to gender, the gendered curriculum and socialisation in schools.

Quick Test

1. Identify one reason for the improvement in girls' educational achievements.
2. A moral panic usually involves a media-fuelled over-reaction to a social group. True or false?
3. Identify one reason why girls and boys tend to choose different subjects at A Level.

Key Words

gendered curriculum
crisis of masculinity
moral panic

Perspectives on the Counter-School Culture

You must be able to:

- Explain Willis's ideas on the counter-school culture
- Criticise Willis's account.

Willis and the Counter-School Culture

- Paul Willis (1977) carried out an ethnographic case study of 12 working-class boys in a single-sex secondary modern school on a council estate in the Midlands.
- He used several qualitative methods including observation and participant observation in the school, group discussions, informal interviews and diaries.
- Willis explored the **counter-school culture** of the 12 'lads' during their last 18 months at school.
- This culture involved resisting the school, its teachers and their authority. The lads focused on 'dossing' and 'having a laff'. They saw the more conformist boys at school (the 'ear'oles') as 'cissies'.
- The values of the counter-school culture stressed masculinity and toughness, not being a 'cissy', and being able to handle oneself.
- The 'lads' rejected the mental work involved in learning, which they viewed as unmanly. They saw manual work as real work for men and **white-collar work** as 'effeminate'.
- Willis followed the lads as they moved from school to work and observed them during their first six months in working-class jobs such as fitting tyres, laying carpets and working as plumbers' mates.
- He argues that the counter-school culture prepares them for working-class jobs and the shop-floor culture.
- Willis shows how working-class boys end up in working-class jobs in a capitalist economy. The boys' counter-school practices contribute towards them getting working-class jobs. In this way, the class structure is reproduced over time.

Key Thinker

Paul Willis (1977)



Willis found that smoking and drinking were important within the counter-school culture.



Key Point

Paul Willis (1977) is a key Marxist thinker in the sociology of education. It is important that you are familiar with his work on the counter-school culture and his methods of research.

Education and Capitalism

- Willis's ideas on the relationship between education and capitalism are different from those of Bowles and Gintis (who are also Marxists). Bowles and Gintis discuss the correspondence principle and highlight the way education and work correspond or fit together under capitalism (see pages 50–51). They see schools as turning working-class students into passive and conformist workers for capitalism.

- In Willis's view, however, education does not socialise the lads into becoming passive and docile workers for capitalism. The lads challenged authority figures at school on a daily basis.
- Willis emphasises the workings of the counter-school culture rather than the power of the education system in the socialisation process in explaining why working-class students end up in working-class jobs.



The counter-school culture may prepare working-class boys for working-class jobs.

Key Point

From a Marxist perspective, Willis sees the education system as serving capitalism. From an interactionist approach, he explores the interaction between teachers and students at school and how the boys make sense of their experiences of schooling.

Criticisms of Willis

- Feminists argue that Willis ignores the experiences of girls in schools and celebrates lad culture.
- Other critics argue that Willis does not explore the conformist boys' experiences of education or their views on the lads.
- Functionalists see education as teaching knowledge and skills and as linked to role allocation based on equality of opportunity and meritocracy.
- Given the small sample size, it is not possible to generalise from the findings.
- Willis's ideas may not be relevant today because there are far fewer manual working-class jobs available for school leavers.

You can draw on Willis's study when discussing school processes and anti-school sub-cultures (see pages 56–57).

Quick Test

1. Identify one way in which a counter-school culture might influence students' educational achievements.
2. Identify one difference between the views of Bowles and Gintis and those of Willis.
3. White-collar work involves skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual work and is performed by blue-collar workers. True or false?

Key Words

counter-school culture
white-collar work

The Marxist Perspective on Families

3 Describe the public sphere as outlined by Zaretsky.

[3]

Feminist and Other Critical Views on Families

4 Which term is used by sociologists to describe a family in which power is held by a woman? Shade **one** box only.

[1]

A Patriarchal family

B Matriarchal family

C Conventional family

D Same-sex family

Diff: _____

Changing Family and Household Structures

7 Describe one example of role conflict

[3]

Soc: _____

Marriage and Divorce

8 Describe the secularisation process.

[3]

T: _____
S: _____
C: _____

The Role of Education from a Functionalist Perspective

1 Describe **one** feature of a meritocratic society.

The Marxist Approach to Education

2 Describe **one** aspect of the hidden curriculum in schools.

Ethnicity and Educational Achievement

6 Describe the ethnocentric curriculum in education.

[3]

Gender and Educational Achievement

7 Identify and explain **one** reason for the improvements in girls' educational achievements over the last 40 years.

[4]

Perspectives on the Counter-School Culture

- 8 Identify and explain **one** way in which membership of a counter-school culture could influence students' educational achievements.

[4]
