

## Reasons of educational inequality in UK

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### Abstract:

The issue of educational inequality is commonly characterized by the gap in academic opportunities available to different groups of people, which can be influenced by family history, environment, identity, gender, and other factors. In modern Britain, a developed country, the issue of educational inequality is still a headache for the local government and a source of dissatisfaction for the local people. The UK is one of the most geographically unequal countries in the developed world' (Children's Commissioner for England, 2021), data in 2019, by the age of 16, only 24.7% of disadvantages pupils achieved grade 5 or above in English and math GCSEs, while 50.3% of their peers who come from more affluent family.

**Keywords:** UK, Education, Inequality, World

The issue of educational inequality is commonly characterized by the gap in academic opportunities available to different groups of people, which can be influenced by family history, environment, identity, gender, and other factors. In modern Britain, a developed country, the issue of educational inequality is still a headache for the local government and a source of dissatisfaction for the local people. The UK is one of the most geographically unequal countries in the developed world' (Children's Commissioner for England, 2021), data in 2019, by the age of 16, only 24.7% of disadvantages pupils achieved grade 5 or above in English and math GCSEs, while 50.3% of their peers who come from more affluent family (Department for Education, 2022). Same in 2019, the proportion of students achieving at least grade 4 in English and Math GCSEs was 75% in London, compared to 67% in the North East (Social Mobility Commission, 2019). In this essay, I will examine the impact of educational inequality on the UK and identify several reasons why it is important to focus on these causes. Furthermore, in the last paragraph, a summary of recommendations to address educational disparities and offer suggestions will be provided.

The socioeconomic inequality is undoubtedly the fundamental cause and most important factor that drives educational inequality. To put it simply, socioeconomic inequality means the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities due to their socioeconomic status, which is tightly linked to the learning experiences of children and teenagers from different families with different socioeconomic backgrounds. As Professor Becky Francis, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation, notes, "Poverty creates barriers to learning that are often insurmountable without targeted intervention and support" (Francis, 2020). It's easy to notice that poorer students

would always gain fewer resources from their parents than richer students. For example, while poorer students spend their school time in state schools, the middle class and the bourgeoisie usually choose to send their children to private schools, which invest nearly three times the cost of state school's tuition (£15,200 vs. £5,600 per year). British students in private schools obviously receive better education services, use better equipment, have access to better learning resources, can experience more things that state school students cannot see, and are also able to access more opportunities, such as participating in competitions, which further enhances their competitiveness. The data effectively confirms the hypothesis that students in private schools perform better. In 2019, 48.6% of pupils at private schools achieved a grade 7 or above in their GCSEs, compared to 18.9% of pupils at state-funded schools (Independent Schools Council, 2019). In the same year, 57.2% of A-level results from private schools were A or A\*, compared to a 24.1% rate of the same grade in state schools (A-level result 2019 JCQ).

The regional disparities also contribute significantly to educational inequality in the UK. Students in different areas of the UK show distinct performance differences in their grades. For instance, according to the IFS, schools in wealthy areas receive an average of £6,240 per student per year, while schools in poorer areas receive an average of £5,450 per student per year. As a result of that, schools in affluent regions provide nearly 20 percent more in value and facilities compared to schools in economically challenged areas. Therefore, students who belong to schools in affluent areas are given far better opportunities in education, facilitated with enhanced facilities that will assist them in learning more and gaining more knowledge. They will also see success in their professional lives. In

other instances, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has upheld that “in the north, a greater percentage of schools have problems with teacher recruitment: 20% have unfilled posts, compared to 14% in the south” (Lucas et al., 2023). Of necessity, with enhanced packages prevailing in the South, for instance, the majority of the teaching staff would wish to teach in a more comfortable part of the country where students would also prefer to migrate to. It also indicates that the northern regions, which are less affluent, have a worse teacher shortage compared to the South, making the situation for northern students even more difficult and disadvantaged. As expected, data from the Department for Education (DfE) showed that in 2019, the proportion of pupils achieving at least one grade 4 in mathematics and English GCSEs was 75% in London, compared to 67% in the North East (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024). Bosworth and Kersley (2015) reported, “Gender inequality is of course a global issue but indicators suggest that the UK is stalling comparative to other developed economies” (p. 2). In a developed country like the UK, which has held the very first place in the world regarding gender equalities, there are still inequalities between different genders concerning education. One of the most famous and constant examples is the stereotype that people usually have about what men and women “should” and “are good at” studying (Rae et al., 2017). The rationale behind this stereotype supposes that men are somehow biologically suited to study science, and women in turn have a predisposition and talent in the social sciences and art. In an environment filled with stereotypes, young students of both genders who are still in the learning phase are easily influenced by public opinion and societal expectations, thus leading to educational inequality. According to data from the DfE, boys are more likely to take STEM subjects, which include science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2023). In 2022, boys constituted 61% of A-level physics students. The same year, just 18% of computing A-level students were girls. In such a situation, the male student’s inclination towards humanities and social sciences and a female student’s liking for engineering and sciences may get marginalized, affecting their learning process and leading to educational inequality. The stereotype, manifested in the form of bias regarding the choice of subject may further reinforce the stereotype and lead to a vicious cycle. The last factor to be discussed in detail in this essay is ethnic inequality. In the UK, the issue of ethnic inequality has persisted for centuries and is also evident in educational outcomes. According to statistics from the DfE, from 2019 to 2020, Chinese students attained the highest average GCSE score at 67.6, while Gypsy/Roma students had the lowest average GCSE grade of 18.9, indicating a huge

performance difference in grades between different ethnic groups (Department for Education, 2023). The A-level results in 2020 also reflect this disparity: 76.1% of Chinese students achieved A\*-C, 74.4% of Indian students attained the same standard, while 70.2% of White British students, 61.2% of Bangladeshi students, and 52.9% of Black Caribbean students did the same. According to a 2021 report by the Education Policy Institute, “Black Caribbean students are 2.3 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school compared to their White British peers,” suggesting that students from ethnic groups such as Black Caribbean students have been subjected to unfair treatment in education. The causes of this educational inequality could stem from both internal cultural factors within the ethnic group and external societal influences in Britain.

Discussing the inter-ethnic group issue of educational inequality, it is closely linked to the first general factor mentioned in this essay, socioeconomic disparities. Research indicates that minorities are more likely to live in poverty, which could strongly affect the learning environment and the opportunities available to pupils in these families. Parents from different cultural backgrounds may also hold different perspectives on their children’s education, therefore placing varying levels of importance on academic achievement. For example, it is commonly understood that Chinese parents place great emphasis on their children’s academic performance, which is reflected in the high scores of Chinese students in the data above (Ng et al., 2007). It is also worth mentioning that linguistic barriers can impact the grades of minority students in the UK. Next, consider the impact of external societal factors on the academic performance of minority groups. Firstly, the attitudes of teachers can heavily influence students. If teachers hold biases against certain ethnic groups, minority students may feel ignored and marginalized in the classroom, directly affecting their willingness to learn and their academic outcomes. Additionally, social biases against minorities can decrease the interaction between minority students and the broader community, limiting their opportunities and potential for development.

Now, some of the possible remedies for educational inequality within the United Kingdom: first of all, it would be very effective to increase funding to schools and areas that are deprived. This policy would directly improve the quality of education in deprived areas and reduce the vast gap in teaching resources (Birchler & Michaelowa, 2016). Secondly, training for educators regarding racial equity and strengthening of the punishments for racist behavior are essential actions (Starck et al., 2020). Thirdly, engaging and encouraging parents to support the educational lives of children might also act as a contributing factor in changing things (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). More

than that, providing better support for students who have English as their second language along with curriculum expansion programs might also be helpful.

There might be concerns that increasing funding does not guarantee improved outcomes, given concerns about the effective use of resources. That means, throwing more and more money at it does not lead to better educational performance; there are important roles played by governance and local management. Evidence suggests, however, that in some way it can make a real difference if such targeted funding is strategically put into place to reduce class sizes, improve facilities, and provide additional support for pupils with special educational needs (Hyman, 2017; Mosteller, 1995).

In conclusion, this essay mainly discusses and expounds on four major factors that propel educational inequality in the UK. This implies that, generally speaking, students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds face more disadvantages in education compared to richer students. Moreover, the students living in the north have fewer resources compared to those living in the south; girls are more likely to be treated unfairly in science, while boys will be more likely to be at a disadvantage in case of social sciences; some minority students also experience more problems than others. The essay further examines what might cause these inequalities. It shows that the level of education is closely linked with the degree of development and civilization, and exists in interactive and dependent relationships. People in more developed areas and those with higher socioeconomic status usually attach more importance to the education of their offspring, and their better-educated offspring can more easily achieve higher socioeconomic status in the future, which perpetuates a new generation of gaps and triggers a new wave of inequality.

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