



Article

A Critical Review of the Compulsory Schooling Reform in England and its Lasting Implications for Today

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the implicit and explicit motivations behind the compulsory schooling reform in England as well as its unintended and long-term effects by analysing publicly available policy documents and key scholarly literature. The analysis indicates that even though the 19th century's schooling project appeared to focus on pursuing some explicit goals, such as creating more qualified and educated labour force and citizens with religious and moral values, in reality it hides several implicit targets, such as controlling the working-class and maintaining the class segregation. Moreover, this article points out the unintended effects of the compulsory schooling reform, including low attendance in schools, low quality of education, increasing demand for higher education and Church resistance, as well as its long-term effects existing in today's English education system, namely the continuing class segregation and evolving state and Church partnership.

Keywords: *Education reform; compulsory schooling; education policy; policy analysis*

Introduction

Until 1870, the provision of education in England was based on the voluntary system which was controlled by charity organisations, but mainly the Church of England and the British and Foreign School Society (Mitch, 2019). Eventually, the state intervention in education in the late 1800s aimed at rearing people according to several purposes which reflected the social, economic and political ideals of the state and the upper-classes. The 1870 Education Act introduced the compulsory schooling in England and Wales. Even though it did not bring a direct compulsion, it provided a basis for compulsory elementary education which gained strength with the 1876 Education Act and finally became directly compulsory for all children with the 1880 Education Act.

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In the 19th century, the schooling was the main focus rather than the education (Simon, 1965). It can be seen from the mentality of the policy makers that education, especially the elementary education targeted working–class children primarily to make them desired citizens and then to constitute a new labour force for industrial development. Curriculum was designed in such a way that training and disciplining this unruly class was a fundamental goal and did not include any imaginative critical approach that was the focal difference between schooling and education. This approach of schooling was obviously for maintaining the class division that almost all of state policies were relied on. As Simon (1965) states, “freedom, individuality, intellectual excitement and curiosity, these qualities found little scope in schools which served purely class ends; instead such qualities were fostered as would favour an unquestioning acceptance and defence of the status quo” (p.111).

The working–class who was presented as a problem, even a threat to “the internal peace” (Kay–Shuttleworth, 1862, p.61 in Grace, 1978, p.11) constituted an important part of education debates in England. Yet, the prevailing thought in that time, which was emphasized by Kay–Shuttleworth, was being shaped according to differences among social classes and groups, such as religious, economic, social and political concerns. In spite of these different approaches, it was the educational setting which was compromised by all as the best solution to the working–class problem (Pratt–Adams, Maguire and Burn, 2010). Looking at these requirements and conditions, it can easily be seen that ‘compulsory education’ was not just a rule approved by legislative body, but it had political, social, economic and historical backgrounds and would be best understood with an analysis of these factors.

In this article, we argue that even though compulsory schooling appeared to focus on pursuing some explicit goals, such as rearing more qualified and educated labour force and good persons in terms of religious and moral values, in reality, it hides several implicit targets, such as controlling the working–class and maintaining the class segregation. Thus, in this article, we seek to question and analyse the implicit and explicit motivations behind the compulsory schooling in terms of political, social and economic backgrounds. Next, we attempt to illustrate the unintended effects of the 19th century’s schooling project along with its long–term effects which still exist in the English education system today. The following research questions are specifically addressed:

- 1) What were the motivations behind the compulsory schooling reform in England?
- 2) What were the unintended effects of the compulsory schooling reform in England?
- 3) What are the long–term effects of the compulsory schooling reform in England?

Method

This article adopted a qualitative document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009) and critically examined the publicly available policy documents (i.e. 1870, 1876, 1880, 1944 Education Acts, 1874 Factory Act, Education Reform Act 1988) and key scholarly literature concerning the compulsory schooling reform in England. The analysis process involved reading and interpretation of the contents of the documents, which subsequently led to the identification of themes with regard to each research question. In line with Totto’s (2012) stance that achieving a clear understanding of the history and social context of the policy is an important component of the policy analysis process, this article first examines the motivations behind the compulsory schooling reform by taking into consideration economic, political, social and historical contexts with the purpose of illustrating how this schooling project got on to the policy agenda. With regard to this, our analysis identified five themes, namely *industrialism*, *German influence*, *religious and moral degradation*, *class segregation* and *controlling*. Next, this article looks into the unintended outcomes of the compulsory schooling reform with the purpose of understanding its impact, and identified four themes, including *the Church resistance*, *demand for higher education*, *low quality of*

education and low attendance. Finally, it examines the long-term effects of the compulsory schooling reform in order to understand its lasting implications for today’s English education system. In relation to this, our analysis identified two themes, namely *continuing class segregation* and *state and Church partnership*.

Results

Motivations behind the compulsory schooling reform

Industrialism

In the 19th century, there was a considerable change in economic policies and production of goods because of the Industrial Revolution⁴. While before the Industrial Revolution, the economic welfare was predicated on agriculture, with that revolution a machine-based industry gained a great deal of importance. Consequently, there had arisen a need for technically trained workforce. Yet, the mechanised industrial conditions which required upper skills were extremely difficult for poor people who had been working in agriculture before they immigrated to industrialized cities (Middleton, 1970) and had not taken any elementary education. The reason why these people did not get any elementary education was because of the inadequacy of voluntary system. The number of Church schools and other charitable organisations’ efforts to provide elementary schools was not sufficient and generally served to upper- and middle-class children.

Thus, both to employ skilled workforce in the new workplaces (i.e. factories) and to be successful in the international industrial competition, elementary schooling was introduced to the working-class people with the 1870 Act. William Edward Forster, the Vice-President of the Committee on Education, explains the aims of the Act as following:

“Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity. It is no use trying to give technical teaching to our artisans without elementary education; uneducated labourers and many of our labourers are utterly uneducated—are, for the most part, unskilled labourers, and if we leave our workfolk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will be overmatched in the competition of the world” (Middleton 1970, p.167).

Hall (1977) also emphasizes the importance of education in terms of industrial need as stating that “trade, capital investment, technical innovation, expansion – the essential ingredients of industrial progress—could not forever be sustained on the backs of an unskilled and illiterate workforce” (p.9).

Nevertheless, there were some implicit targets. Wells (1934, p.93 in Simon, 1965, p.97), for instance, stated that this act “was not an act for a common universal education, it was an act to educate the lower classes for employment on lower class lines”. That is to say, elementary schooling which was presented as a response to industrial need and designed for urban working-class is a way of justifying the economic regime and the disseminating of goods between social classes. In order to protect the existent socio-economic balance of society, and to prevent the working-class from demanding more opportunities, the content of education and job of teachers were confined to nurture “a disciplined and functionally literate and numerate workforce” (Grace, 1978, p.20). Simon (1965) also adds that elementary education was accepted by employers as a tool “which would discipline the wild young ostriches and make them co-operative and accustom them to sober thought” (p.359). Consequently, education of mass population was just understood in a minimum level; it was just about gaining “some

⁴ The Industrial Revolution occurred in the late 1800s and continued in the 1900s in Great Britain and expanded to other countries. There had been considerable shifts in agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. In sum, a machine-based industry replaced with the manual working conditions.

form of minimal literacy to sustain the growth and expansion of capital” (Maguire and Pratt–Adams, 2009, p.9) and disciplining this unruly class people to make them more obedient.

German influence

In the 1870s, Germany was seen as the rival of England particularly in terms of economy. It was believed that the industrial achievement in this country was due to their education system that captured many English politicians and educationalists’ attention. For instance, A. J. Mundella (Vice–President of the Committee of Council 1880–85) stated that “If they wanted to see good education from top to bottom ... let them go to Saxony” (Betts, 1995, p.23). In 1918, Lloyd George also emphasized the importance of German education system, saying: “The most formidable institution we were fighting in Germany was not the General Staff... but the schools of Germany. They were our most formidable opponents in war” (Manchester Guardian, 1918, p.6 in Betts, 1995, p.32).

On the one hand, there were some oppositions to the German influence. They claimed that people in Germany were more obedient than England so the regular attendance to schools in Germany was the sign of this characteristic. They did not need to be ordered for attending schools. Moreover, direct compulsion is against the independent characteristic of English people. Consequently, some politicians stated that compulsory education would not be successfully employed in this country (Betts, 1995). On the other hand, it became undeniable that the German success on the industrial area was not only related to the technical education, but mainly to the universal elementary education. In sum, in England, because of the concern about being able to compete equally with other industrialised countries, especially with Germany (Simon, 1965), an advanced elementary schooling was seen a vital necessity for England. Thus, the attention was paid to the German education system, viewed mainly successful until the First World War.

Religious and moral degradation

Johnson (1976) argues that the main incentive behind schooling was religious: it mainly worked “by implanting into the children’s mind the knowledge of divine law and of its systems of police and by shaping him with the sheer habitual weight of the order of the schoolroom” (p.48). Kay–Shuttleworth, an influential politician, further emphasizes the requirement for a national education system which was expected to rear “a loyal, intelligent, and Christian population” (1873, p.194 in Simon, 1965, p.357). A need was also present to ameliorate the society in terms of moral view. Stedman Jones (1971) claims that in the 19th century, the problem with the working–class people was not about poverty, unemployment or overcrowding, “but pauperism and the demoralisation of the working–class” (p.243). Trevelyan (1870 in Stedman Jones, 1971) also adds that increasing crime rates and pauperism damaged the social structure of the country.

The charity efforts were regarded as the main reason behind this demoralisation due to being “the indiscriminate of alms–giver” which “has demoralized the clergy and pauperised the yet honest poor” (Stedman Jones, 1971, p.247). Moreover, the demoralisation of the poor was related with the class segregation even in the partial means. When the middle–classes moved away to the different parts of cities for avoiding the poor, the system that was based on the balance between rich and poor became ineffective and led to pauperism (*ibid*). In this out of controlled system, paupers began to exploit the charities, that is begging rather than working. Consequently, this situation led to an idleness, even vicious riots, briefly, demoralisation and deterioration of the social control.

Education as a mechanism had appeared with the claim that the amelioration of the moral and cultural degradation would reshape society in a more desired way. Grace (1978) claims that a civilizational movement could be realized through religious education, because religion was accepted to

“enable the poor to govern and repress the workings of their passion; it would render them patient, humble and moral and would relieve their present lot by the prospect of a bright eternity” (p.18). Johnson (1970) also supports aforementioned claims by arguing that the aim of the school was “to raise a new race of working people – respectful, cheerful, hard-working, loyal, pacific and religious” (p.24). Consequently, elementary schooling was viewed as generating a new character and a moral view by eliminating vicious or anarchical behaviours of the working-class children (Simon, 1965).

Class segregation

The distinctive feature of education in the 19th century was the class division. Middleton (1970) convincingly argues that the class division in the British society was a common belief and also enjoyed a wide influence upon the national education system. He claims that there were three main groups in this country; aristocratic classes; middle-classes that were mainly constituted of by the professions, the merchants and the technicians; remaining were labourers. Working-class was in general excluded from society and had worked in harsh conditions without safety measures. The fragmentation and isolation had been also observed in living areas. As stated above, while working-class people had been pushed to slums and poor areas to live, upper- and middle-class moved to rural and suburbs because of the fear of contamination with poor (Maguire, Wooldridge and Pratt-Adams, 2006). However, there was a tendency towards employing working-class people in the new industrial system due to lower costs, reflecting a paradox of attitudes towards the working-class.

Furthermore, this segregation was influential on the education system and had been supported explicitly through education acts. Maguire and Pratt-Adams (2009) claim that “what we see at the inception of state schooling is a policy of segregated classed provision in the towns and cities of the rapidly urbanizing 19th century” (p.62). For instance, the Clarendon Commission examined the public schools which introduced an education for upper-class children between 1861 and 1864. The Taunton Commission was interested in private-grammar and endowed schools serving for middle-class between 1864 and 1868. Finally, the Newcastle Commission focused its attention on the working-classes and aimed at giving elementary education to all people between 1858 and 1861. According to Middleton (1970), while ‘higher’ and ‘secondary’ education was required for upper-class, it was just elementary schooling considered for working-class. He also states that because of placing people into different classes, the negotiations between 1867 and 1870 on putting a better education system for all classes into practice had failed.

Simon (1965) argues that the 1870 Act, which introduced School Boards, reinforced the isolated form of schooling particularly for working-class. It was because these boards were established particularly in poor areas and took over the responsibility of management of schooling and instructing new state schools for working-class (Ball, 2008). Although, there was a limited allowance for talented poor children for passing to the secondary education through scholarship exams, the real purpose was just providing elementary schooling for this class and preventing them from demanding more education.

Finally, as Middleton (1970) claims, the educational struggles in the late 19th century, such as employing “the voluntary societies, the Factory Acts, the Industrial School Acts or the Poor Law were all tied to the past as part of a system based on class segregation and exploitation” (p.172). As a consequence, the elementary schooling project started with the 1870 Education Act was an aim of maintaining class segregation rather than the ‘reformation of society’.

Controlling

Working-class appeared as a concern needed to be dealt with and a risk for the other social groups (Pratt-Adams et al., 2010) and hence required to be controlled. When looking at the controlling issue in terms of

control, the intention behind the 1870 Education Act can clearly be seen here: the education system aimed at producing “an orderly, civil, obedient population, with sufficient education to understand a command” (Tawney, 1924, p.22). Also, Johnson (1970) states that “the early Victorian obsession with the education of the poor is best understood as a concern about authority, about power, about the assertion (or the re-assertion?) of control” (p.24).

The main point requiring a control and regulation was fear about working-class. As stated before, there was a sharp isolation in the 19th century between working-class and middle-class. Middle-class families had some fears due to the probability of contamination with working-class. So, they searched some ‘good’ schools in separated zones, accelerating the segregation among classes especially in terms of education (Maguire et al., 2006). As a consequence, Green (1990, p.248 in Reay, 2006, p.293) argues that the influence of the middle-class on the education of working-class actually “was rather a way of ensuring that the subordinate class would acquiesce in their own class aspirations”, that is, controlling this unruly class would remove their anxieties and fears.

The main incentives behind the middle-class fear and controlling the working-class idea were urban problems which emerged related to the industrial developments in the 19th century. Ball (2008) states that in the 19th century, the purpose of the education was to integrate the urban working-class to the society as well as to meet the demands of middle-class. This was mainly because of massive migration movements in the country. Since industrialisation and competitiveness had taken a crucial role in the economic agenda, the need for labour force rapidly increased. Consequently, many people moved to the industrialised cities, such as London, to be employed (Stedman-Jones, 1971).

This new working-class was considered as a main source of social, cultural and political problems. According to Maguire et al. (2006), the first problem arose as linked to this shift was housing. Due to a lack of space, this working-class had accommodated in poor areas, such as slums. Furthermore, shortages of main resources, such as sanitation, health services, unemployment and good provision of education, were also present. Consequently, urban became a centre of chaos, social anarchy, immorality as well as of crimes, racism and so on. So, compulsory education for all was considered as “an essential device of social control, providing a normative base legitimating the differentiated system (mainstream version) or a mystification constructed by dominant elites to legitimize their power (critical version)” (Boli et al., 1985, p.151–2).

Unintended effects of the compulsory schooling reform

The Church resistance

In the 1840s and 1850s, there was a tendency towards denigrating the religious instruction. It is believed that “working-class children have been treated like raw material, which each sect claims the right to work up after its own design” (Simon, 1974, p.343). Simon (1974) also expresses that religious content in the curriculum was an obstacle of achievement and make students ignorant; the secular education seemed to be the solution of this problem. The secular education idea was also emphasized in the 18760s and 1870s by politicians, educationists and trade unionists. For instance, in 1868, a famous trade union leader Applegarth explained the aims of their trade union in terms of education: “do something towards securing what the working-class have so long desired, namely a national, compulsory and unsectarian system of education” (Humphrey, 1914, p.195 in Simon, 1974, p.361).

After a long process of industrial revolution, a national compulsory education system which was predicted to rear enlightened as well as qualified citizens was strongly recommended. As a consequence, with the building of School Boards by the 1870 Education Act, the compulsory status of catechism and

religious instruction of one specific sect was removed from the curriculum and the decision of giving religious education was left to the School Boards (Simon, 1974).

Although, the status of the Church schools had been protected and the grant they obtained from the state had been increased, there was still a resistance from the Church towards the elementary education system. In particular, the established Church was opposed to these new ‘secular’ developments by claiming that irreligion might be included into society. While there were some conservatives supporting the claims of the Church, reality was that the state had taken the control of education from the Church (Taylor, 1984).

The other point which led to the Church’s resistance was the rivalry between board schools and Church schools. With the establishment of board schools after 1870, the Church had struggled to hinder the expansion of these schools and opened a considerable number of Church schools to compete with the board schools in order to protect its power (Lawson and Silver, 1973). However, board schools, which had no relation with the Church and obtained the grants directly from the education department, appeared to overcome the denominational schools and became dominant in the education system (Eaglesham, 1957). As a consequence, this situation has consolidated the resistance of Church to the state.

Demand for higher education

“Education is the modern arena of two aspects of status group competition: in the first, groups compete for education because it facilitates occupational and social success; in the second, groups compete to use education for their own purposes, knowing that dominant groups can structure educational curricula to secure the hegemony of their own cultural values” (Boli et al., 1985, p.153).

In England, the second option was stronger than the first one. As mentioned earlier, elementary schools were founded for working–class people to maintain the upper–class’s hegemony in the society through educating these poor people according to desires of elites. However, over–education was a possible consequence, as Maguire and Pratt–Adams (2009) stated, “the campaign to set these schools up and support them through taxation was itself a hotly contested process as there were middle–class concerns about ‘over–educating’ those who were expected to maintain a subordinate place in society” (p.63). Consequently, the over education of working–class people had not been expected, even feared due to possibility of damaging the socio–economic superiority of the middle–class.

Nevertheless, while working–class people observed the socio–economic opportunities of education, they began to search the ways of higher education, which was completely an unintentional desire of the Victorian Age education system. It was because “the provision of schooling of any sort and however rudimentary was simultaneously (and unintentionally) a lever for raising expectations for more and better education and for further social reform” (Maguire and Pratt–Adams, 2009, p.63). In this scope, during the 20th century, the struggles of trade unions, socialists and of a number of philanthropists continued for a better quality of education.

Low quality of education

The education system in the 19th century targeted to ameliorate the failure of working–class in contrast to improve their personalities and to reform the education system. Consequently, education in this term was concerned with the quantity rather than quality (Playfair, 1871, p.44 in Silver, 1983, p.87). For instance, while boys were aimed just to learn some definite branches of trade like tailoring, girls were taught domestic related tasks, such as cleaning. This was also valid for the denominational schools which were accused of relying on “narrow range of subjects, low standards and lower proficiency” (Morley, 1873, p.18 in Silver, 1983, p.87).

The government attached a great importance to the attendance; in line with this, school boards were taking their grants at the end of the inspectorate according to the number of students. The Revised Code, which had been used between 1862 and 1890 as the inspectoral system evaluating schools with ‘payment by results’, was the first indicator of low quality. According to Simon (1965), it aimed at diminishing expenses made by government as well as increasing teachers’ endeavours. It can be said that schooling and the Revised Code influenced each other. The Revised Code concerned schools about just passing annually exams and focusing on a mechanical education approach, which did not produce any critical, sensitive and imaginative sense or shape the schooling project. As a result of this inspectorate system, “the only motive force in the system was the hope of external reward or the fear of external punishment” (Holmes, 1911, p.141–2 in Grace, 1978, p.26) for both teachers and students.

The second issue related to low quality was due to mechanical education system that also supported the idea of making working–class children more obedient, passive and docile persons. Consequently, a great deal of attention had been attached just to reading, writing and arithmetic in a drilling way. Also, the other subjects were taught in such way used “to make the child an inefficient calculating machine” (Holmes, 1911, p.123 in Simon, 1965, p.116). In sum, the inspectorate system, the importance of mechanic training and finally the perception of ‘good schooling’, which was defined as enabling to control and civilize working–class by training them in large classes and for short time are clear evidences of low quality in that term.

Low attendance

It is believed that the compulsory elementary education in the 19th century was not successful enough because of the low attendance at schools. This issue was present in most of the political discussions. In addressing this, there were considerable efforts to provide a regular attendance at schools through a number of acts (Nardinelli, 1980). For instance, with the 1874 Factory Act, the minimum labour age was raised to ten, with the 1876 Education Act, working hours were limited.

Despite of these struggles for attendance, generally it did not work due to several reasons. Negative attitudes of working–class parents were the first reason. Child labour was an essential source for factories as well as for families because of the fact that these children were contributing to the family budget. Thus, schools have been given importance unless there was no work for their children (Maguire et al., 2006). McCann (1969) claims that although, the factory acts forcing the working–class people to send their children to schools, child labour was still so prevalent and sometimes the absence of these children at schools were being ignored by school administrations. The second reason was the irregular migration of working–class families to different cities for seeking jobs which hindered the regular attendance of children as well as the attainment at schools (Johnson, 1970).

Silver (1983) blames the half time schooling as a reason of low attendance. He states that “even in the late 1850s and 1860s, the view was being constantly expressed that half time education was better than none” (*ibid*, p.39). While the 1870, 1876, and 1880 Education Acts had introduced an enactment of compulsory attendance and imposed sanctions to provide full time schooling, half time schooling system was still prevalent until 1918. He also claims that a delayed compulsory attendance was partly because of the negative attitudes of the upper–classes.

Long term effects of the compulsory schooling reform

Continuing class segregation

The today’s existing class division is acknowledged as an extension of the 19th century education system. For instance, there were some similarities which illustrated the class segregation not only in urbanisation

and industrialisation processes, but also in deindustrialisation. With the deindustrialisation, service sector gained an importance, but poor people still chose to move to big cities where they worked for low wages and in unskilled jobs. Probably related to the continuity of poverty in low classes, there is still housing problem, youth crime and disapproved behaviours of urban poor as in the 19th century (Maguire and Pratt-Adams, 2009). It is clear that with the increasing of the gap between poor and rich in the 20th century, this class division became stronger than in past (Reay, 2006).

As Reay (2006) claims, there are considerable evidences which illustrate that the middle-class is still dominant in the current education system. This class represents the authority of the system by running it (Ball, 2008). As Jones (2003) puts forward, majority of education policies in the 21st century have been “designed to allow more advantaged social groups differential access to particular forms of provision” (p.146). So far, this situation has helped the segregated structure maintain its existence in school provision. For instance, according to an Ofsted report, an urban primary school, historically expected to serve the working-class;

“is likely to have lower levels of attendance and higher rates of exclusions than a non-urban primary school. Urban primary schools may have to deal with higher proportions of children experiencing emotional and behavioural distress. In addition, urban primary schools may well have a higher than average turnover of teaching staff” (Ofsted, 2007, in Maguire and Pratt-Adams, 2009, p.61).

Reay (2006) relates the maintenance of the segregation with the lacking of a strong social mobility. Jones (2003) also argues that unless there are some efforts to provide the equality of outcome and improve the conditions of poor, this inequality and division seems to continue. In sum, it is clear that the class segregation policy was an incentive of the compulsory schooling project in the 19th century and has successfully extended its influence to the today’s education system.

State and Church partnership

The state and Church partnership can be traced back to the 16th century to foundation of the Church of England (Morris, 2009). It has always been a cornerstone in education and until 1870, the provision of education was based on the voluntary system which mainly included church schools. After that year, the state has established “a dual system” in education (Grace, 2001). Thus, whilst Church schools had protected their place in education, there were new board schools that were established for working-class children (Curtis and Boulwood, 1960). Although, a competition between the Church and board schools had begun, Church schools were still important in England, and the state has always maintained its partnership with the Church, causing the current faith schools discussions.

With the 1944 Education Act, the partnership between the state and Church has been reinforced through ‘voluntary controlled’ and ‘voluntary aided’ levels for faith schools (Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving, 2005). Church schools have also maintained their influence in the Thatcher’s government term because of being useful for market economy, with New Labour’s decision to support all types of faith schools, and with the recent Conservative Party government’s introduction of new faith-based ‘free schools’ (Long and Bolton, 2018).

While the state has constantly supported the Church schools in education as a cornerstone, the other faith organisations began to claim the same rights given to church schools, such as state funding. After the New Labour’s allowance to the expansion of faith schools due to aim of promoting parental choice (Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005), there have been a great number of state funding proposals given by different faith groups, such as Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Greek for their faith schools.

However, this expansion of state-funded faith schools caused a number of controversies, such as claim of that these schools might lead to division rather than social cohesion (“No more faith schools”, 2019) that is, a threat to solidarity of this country or that they ignore children’s autonomy by inculcating them beliefs and practises. In sum, as Judge claims (2001), “the present arrangements are purely the result of unique historical circumstances and developments” (p.465) and the current problems, such as faith schools might be accepted as a result of the perennial state–Church partnership, which has been continuously shaped and re-negotiated following the compulsory schooling project of the 19th century.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine the motivations behind the compulsory schooling reform in England as well as its unintended and long-term effects. As stated above, the English compulsory schooling system was founded in the 19th century for meeting some political, economic and social requirements. This article highlights that although, economic competition emerged with the industrial revolution around the world seemed as a main requirement to educate skilled workforce, the main argument behind the compulsory elementary education in England was to maintain the longstanding class segregation and fulfill the desires of the running classes over the working-class people. Moreover, this article shows that the elementary education reform, enacted in the late 1800s, has a number of unintended effects along with the intended ones. Whilst it purposed several targets, such as a compulsory elementary schooling for all, the attendance in schools was lower than expected and the quality of education was not high due to the requirements of inspection system. Also, the demand of working-class for higher education was not an expected outcome.

Furthermore, as discussed above, the ideology adopted in the 19th century has been influencing the English education system in the 21st century. In particular, this article points out that the class division policy, which was an incentive of the compulsory schooling project, has extended its influence to the today’s education system in England. Also, the state and Church partnership in education, which was shaped and negotiated as a result of the compulsory schooling reform, still continues and leads to arguments about faith schools which are generally accepted as socially divisive. Overall, the policy enactments beginning with the 1870 Education Act eventually have founded a national education system in England in spite of its unexpected and unsuccessful outcomes, which should be kept in mind when developing and enacting future educational reforms by policy makers and educator.

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