



Learn English Through
Stories.

U Series

Advanced Vocabulary

Adapted and modified by

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Education Systems by K S Sandhu

Banat is a freelance writer. Every week, he writes articles for The Daily Chronicle, a well-known newspaper. This week, his topic is Education: debates and issues.

He sits at his desk with a cup of coffee and opens his laptop. The editor wants around 500 words, so Banat starts thinking about the main question in education today: equality of opportunity.

He types the opening sentence: All education systems may ultimately be judged in terms of equality of opportunity. This idea appears again and again in debates about selective versus comprehensive schooling. In selective systems, children take an exam to enter the best schools. Supporters say it helps bright pupils from poor families rise up. Critics argue that elitism is built into the system – only a few get the chance, while most are left behind.

Banat remembers his own school, a large comprehensive. Classes had students of all abilities. Some teachers were excellent, but the school often struggled with discipline. A few pupils won places at top universities, but many left with low grades. In the same city, there was a selective grammar school. Its league table position was always near the top. Wealthy parents moved house to be in the catchment area or paid for private coaching. Did this create real equality, or did it widen the gap?

League tables, Banat writes, were introduced to raise standards. Schools and colleges are ranked by exam results. In theory, this pushes everyone to improve. In reality, however, league tables often perpetuate inequalities. Better-off families can push their children towards the highest-ranked institutions. Well-endowed schools attract the strongest pupils and get even better results. The public soon sees a two-tier system: successful schools at the top and struggling ones at the bottom.

Financial support can make things fairer. Scholarships and bursaries help less privileged youngsters afford tertiary education. Student loans let undergraduates pay tuition fees and living costs while studying. But even with these measures, few people believe true equality has been achieved. Debt worries many students, and some from disadvantaged backgrounds never even apply.

Some politicians and parents want to return to the three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic. Literacy and numeracy are basic skills no one can afford to be without. Banat agrees, but he wonders why curriculum reform happens so often. Many headteachers say changes are made for political reasons rather than good educational ones. They complain that constant new government guidelines distract them from teaching.

Lifelong education is another big issue today. With jobs changing fast, continuing education matters for everyone. Creating opportunities for mature students – adults returning to study – is now essential.

Banat also thinks about special needs education. It is expensive because classes must be small or even one-to-one. Without proper support, children with disabilities cannot learn effectively.

Finally, he adds a sentence about bullying. Children feel unhappy and cannot concentrate if there is constant threatening behaviour at school.

Banat checks the word count: 498. He reads the article again and adds one last thought:

Education should open doors for everyone. Until we close the gaps caused by money, background and unfair systems, equality of opportunity will remain more dream than reality.

He saves the file and sends it. Another article done – and perhaps it will start a few conversations.

2

Education: debates and issues

A Opportunity and equality

All education systems may ultimately be judged in terms of **equality of opportunity**¹. This is often referred to in the debates over **selective**² versus **comprehensive schooling**⁴. The main issue is whether everyone has the same opportunities for educational achievement or whether **elitism**⁵ of one sort or another is **inherent in**⁶ the system.

League tables⁷ for schools and colleges may actually help unintentionally to **perpetuate**⁸ inequalities, while claiming to promote the raising of standards. Inevitably, league tables divide educational institutions into good and bad, success and failure, resulting in a **two-tier system**⁹, or at least that is how the public **perceives**¹⁰ it. The ability of **better-off**¹¹ parents and **well-endowed**¹² schools to push children towards the institutions at the top of the league may, in the long term, have the effect of **depressing**¹³ opportunity for the **less well-off**¹⁴ or for children from home environments that do not provide the push and motivation to **excel**¹⁵.

Financial support of different kinds can help to make educational opportunity more equal. There are, for example, **scholarships**¹⁶ or **bursaries**¹⁷ that make it possible for less privileged youngsters to afford **tertiary**¹⁸ education. **Student loans**¹⁹ allow **undergraduates**²⁰ to pay for their **tuition fees**²¹ and living expenses while they are studying. But few would claim that real equality of opportunity has been achieved.

¹ when everyone has the same chances

² pupils are chosen for entry, usually for academic reasons, though, in the case of some private schools, parents' ability to pay school fees may be a factor in selection

³ everyone enters without exams and education is free, paid for by the government

⁴ education received at school

⁵ when you favour a small, privileged group

⁶ existing as a basic part of something

⁷ lists of schools or colleges, from the best down to the worst, based on exam results and, sometimes, other criteria

⁸ make something continue

⁹ a system with two separate levels, one of which is better than the other

¹⁰ sees, considers

¹¹ richer

¹² receiving a lot of money in grants, gifts from rich people, etc. [= **endowments**]

¹³ reducing

¹⁴ poorer

¹⁵ achieve an excellent standard

¹⁶ money given to pay for studies, usually provided on the basis of academic merit

¹⁷ money given to pay for studies, usually provided on the basis of need

¹⁸ education at university or college level

¹⁹ money that students can borrow from a bank while studying and then pay back once they are in work

²⁰ students doing a first degree [**postgraduates** = students doing a further degree]

²¹ money paid to receive teaching

B Other debates and issues

Some people think we should return to an emphasis on **the three Rs**, the traditional, basic skills. [reading, writing and arithmetic]

Literacy and **numeracy** are skills no one can afford to be without. [the ability to read] [the ability to count / do basic maths]

Curriculum reform is often done for political reasons rather than for good educational ones.

[changes to what is covered in the national **syllabus** = plan of what is to be studied]

Nowadays, **lifelong/continuing education** is an issue, and creating opportunities for **mature students** is important. [education for all ages] [adult students older than the average student]

Special needs education is expensive because class sizes need to be small or **one-to-one**. [education for children who cannot learn in the normal way, because they have some disability] [one teacher and one pupil, not a group]

Children are unhappy at school if there is a lot of **bullying**. [threatening behaviour]

Some headteachers complain that getting to grips with constant new government **guidelines** on what schools should be doing is a **distraction** from what they ought to be focusing on. [advice (often official) on how something should be done] [takes attention away]

Language help

Notice how compound adjectives like *well-off*, *well-endowed*, *high-achieving*, *badly-performing* can be used in comparative and superlative forms, e.g. **better-off**, **best-endowed**, **higher-achieving**, **worst-performing**.

Exercises

2.1 Complete the collocations by filling in the missing words according to the meaning given in brackets.

- 1 tables (lists of schools from best to worst)
- 2 education (entry to schools is decided by exam results)
- 3 equality of (when everyone has the same chances)
- 4 inequalities (make inequalities continue)
- 5 education (at university or college level)

2.2 Rewrite these sentences so they are more formal by using words and phrases from the opposite page instead of the underlined words. Make any other changes that are necessary.

- 1 Inequality is built into the education system.
- 2 Giving access only to privileged groups is bad for the country in the long term.
- 3 Education where everyone gets into the same type of school without exams is a basic political ideal in many countries.
- 4 A system where there are two levels of schools reduces the opportunities for children from poorer families and favours those from richer families.
- 5 Some private schools have lots of wealth and receive gifts of money, and this means they can have better resources.
- 6 All parents want their children to achieve the best possible results at school.
- 7 Emphasis on the three Rs is considered by parents to be the key to success.
- 8 The government is increasing its provision for education that young people can enter after finishing secondary school.

2.3 Correct these statements about words or expressions from the opposite page. Correct each of them twice – once by changing the definition and once by changing the word being defined.

- 1 One-to-one education is another way of saying continuing education.
One-to-one education means a situation where there is one teacher and one student.
Lifelong education is another way of saying continuing education.
- 2 Numeracy refers to the ability to read.
- 3 A student who is doing a doctorate is an undergraduate.
- 4 Excelling is when a pupil uses frightening or threatening behaviour towards another child who is smaller or less powerful in some way.
- 5 Tertiary education is the stage that follows primary education.
- 6 Comprehensive schools choose the best students to study there.
- 7 Guidelines list schools from good to bad according to their exam results.

2.4 Complete each sentence with a word from the opposite page.

- 1 Matt won a because of his excellent academic record.
- 2 Zara's parents said that starting a rock band with her friends would be too much of a from her studies.
- 3 The report contains some interesting on how best to prepare for exams.
- 4 There were two students in my class at university, but most of us were just 19.
- 5 Katia wouldn't have been able to go to university if her grandparents hadn't paid her tuition for her.
- 6 Most undergraduates need to take out a student to cover their costs while they study for a degree.
- 7 Primary schools usually spend a lot of time on the Rs.
- 8 At university I was lucky enough to have a lot of tutorials, just me and the tutor!

Answers

Unit 2

- 2.1**
- 1 league tables
 - 2 selective education
 - 3 equality of opportunity
 - 4 perpetuate inequalities
 - 5 tertiary education
- 2.2**
- 1 Inequality is **inherent in** the education system.
 - 2 **Elitism** is bad for the country in the long term.
 - 3 **Comprehensive education** is a basic political ideal in many countries.
 - 4 A **two-tier system** of schools **depresses** the opportunities for children from **less well-off** families and favours those from **better-off** families.
 - 5 Some private schools **are well-endowed / have endowments**, and this means they can have better resources.
 - 6 All parents want their children to **excel** at school.
 - 7 Emphasis on the three Rs is **perceived** by parents to be the key to success.
 - 8 The government is increasing its provision for **tertiary education**.
- 2.3**
- 2 Literacy refers to the ability to read.
Numeracy refers to the ability to count and do maths.
 - 3 A student who is doing a doctorate is a postgraduate.
A student who is doing a first degree is an undergraduate.
 - 4 Bullying is when a pupil uses frightening or threatening behaviour towards another child who is smaller or less powerful in some way.
Excelling is when a student does exceptionally well.
 - 5 Secondary education is the stage that follows primary education.
Tertiary education is the stage that follows secondary education.
 - 6 Selective schools choose the best students to study there.
Comprehensive schools take all students regardless of their academic ability.
 - 7 League tables list schools from good to bad according to their exam results.
Guidelines offer advice on how to do something.
- 2.4**
- 1 scholarship
 - 2 distraction
 - 3 guidelines
 - 4 mature
 - 5 fees
 - 6 loan
 - 7 three
 - 8 one-to-one