

**EDUCATION AND THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY IN SOCIETY
(EXAMINING MAX HORKHEIMER'S THEORY OF EDUCATION IN THE
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CONTEXT)**

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Received: 10 – 03 – 2025

Accepted: 15 – 04 – 2025

Published: 19 – 04 – 2025

Abstract

Education and the influence of ideology in society, according to Max Horkheimer, suggest that education is always linked to broader social structures, where schools and other educational institutions tend to reinforce the dominant ideology—often associated with capitalism and power relations in society. It also explains how dominant ideologies (such as capitalism, patriarchy, or racialism) are institutionalized within social institutions, including education. In the context of education, this means that curricula, teaching methods, and the structure of educational institutions tend to uphold values and ideologies that support the interests of the ruling class, rather than offering more critical or alternative perspectives. The objective of this research is to examine education and the influence of ideology through Max Horkheimer's theory. This study employs a qualitative literature review approach. The author emphasizes an analysis based on qualitative literature research, focusing particularly on Max Horkheimer's theories. The research findings include: The Application of Max Horkheimer's Theory in Understanding the Influence of Ideology in Education, Education from Horkheimer's Perspective, The Influence of Ideology in Contemporary Education, and Horkheimer's Theory in the Context of Contemporary Society.

Keywords: Education, Ideology, Society, and Max Horkheimer's Theory

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of modern societal progress. However, education is often understood not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as an instrument that shapes social, political, and economic values. As Moh. Roqib (2019) states, "Education is a process of knowledge transformation toward improvement, empowerment, and the refinement of all human potential." In this sense, education does not only contribute to individual development but also serves as a medium

that can either reinforce or challenge existing power structures in society.

According to Horkheimer, education is always intertwined with broader social structures, where schools and other educational institutions tend to reinforce the dominant ideology—often linked to capitalism and power relations in society. For Horkheimer, education frequently functions as a tool to mold individuals into being "educated" in a way that supports the status quo, rather than encouraging them to think critically and challenge social injustices.

Horkheimer, along with his colleagues at the Frankfurt School, developed the concept of ideological hegemony to explain how dominant ideologies (such as capitalism, patriarchy, or racialism) are institutionalized within social institutions, including education. In the context of education, this means that curricula, teaching methods, and the structure of educational institutions tend to uphold values and ideologies that serve the interests of the ruling class, rather than providing more critical or alternative perspectives.

In an increasingly interconnected global society, education is no longer confined to local teaching and learning processes but is also shaped by broader global dynamics, such as global capitalism, technological advancements, and social movements. At the same time, issues like educational inequality, the commodification of education, and the role of education in reinforcing social injustices have gained significant attention. Education is often used as a tool to maintain the stability of existing social structures, where those in power can reinforce their position by controlling access to knowledge and information.

The Lack of Space for Critical Thinking Education frequently emphasizes the passive acceptance of knowledge rather than teaching students to think critically about prevailing ideologies and the social systems that influence their lives. This aligns with Horkheimer's critique that enlightenment—which was meant to liberate humanity through rationality—has instead been used as a tool for control and oppression.

Based on this background, the researcher aims to examine Education and

the Influence of Ideology in Society through Max Horkheimer's theoretical framework, focusing on education within contemporary social contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this journal, which is written by the researcher, it will be studied using the type of Qualitative Literature study research. The author emphasizes more on the theories of Max Horkheimer who explain Education in Contemporary Social Contexts. This qualitative research approach aims to explore the meaning, experience, view, or perception of individuals or groups in a given situation. This qualitative literature review research approach allows the author to deeply analyze relevant theories and gain a deeper understanding of the social phenomena that will be discussed in this journal.

In this connection, literature is not only relevant to research topics, but also in the form of other written documents. Therefore, the method used in this study is qualitative descriptive research (Ley J. Moleong, 2000). These documents can be articles, research reports, journals, newspapers, notes, and other written materials relevant to the research focus. So, the definition of literature here is broader than just textbooks.

Descriptive research is research that aims to determine the development of certain physical facilities or the frequency of the occurrence of certain aspects of a certain social phenomenon, and to describe certain phenomena in detail (Suryana, 2001).

The descriptive method is used because the data collected is qualitative (thinking), namely about the criticism of one-dimensional human consumerism in Max Horkheimer's view. The descriptive research

method of philosophical thought produced by philosophers is in the form of studying, describing, and explaining the essential characteristics, philosophical thought systems, system elements and the relationship between the elements of the system (Kaelam, 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Application of Max Horkheimer's Theory to Understand the Influence of Ideology in Education.

Max Horkheimer, a leading figure in the Critical Theory school of the Frankfurt Institute, offers an invaluable perspective in understanding the role of ideology in various aspects of social life, including education. Horkheimer's theory focuses on the dominant ideology in society serving to maintain the status quo and existing power structures, with an emphasis on the importance of critical thinking in overcoming institutionalized social injustice. Horkheimer stated that ideology is a collection of ideas that function to maintain the continuity of existing social structures, especially in the form of class domination and oppression. In his view, ideology serves not only to explain social reality, but also to preserve conditions that benefit the dominant groups in society.

Horkheimer also highlights that ideology often works unconsciously, influencing individuals and groups in such a way that they accept existing social conditions, even if they can be detrimental to them. For him, ideology is a way to manipulate consciousness and mislead people's understanding, so that they are not aware of the injustices and inequality that exist in the social and political system.

Overall, ideology according to Horkheimer serves as a tool to maintain power, inhibit social change, and create social injustice by influencing the way people perceive their world.

In *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, Horkheimer's view of enlightenment, which should be the means of liberating man, often strengthens the power that exists in society. This can be attributed to education that instead reinforces dominant ideologies rather than liberating individuals.

Education as an Ideological Tool that examines education, according to Horkheimer, not only serves to transfer knowledge, but also teaches values that reinforce dominant ideologies, such as capitalism, patriarchy, or state ideology. Horkheimer's view of the role of education in society. According to him, education does not only serve to transfer knowledge to individuals, but also to teach and instill values that reinforce prevailing dominant ideologies, such as capitalism (an economic system that prioritizes competition and profit), patriarchy (a social system that places men more dominant than women), or state ideology (values taught and controlled by the state). Thus, education can strengthen and maintain existing social systems, which often benefit certain groups more and maintain existing power structures.

Horkheimer's theory of education, contained in the concept of the Dialectic of the Enlightenment, describes education, which is supposed to serve as a means of liberation, and can instead be used to strengthen existing power. By highlighting the interplay between education and dominant ideologies, Horkheimer invites us to be more critical in understanding how education is applied in society and to

continue to strive to create spaces where critical thinking and individual liberation can flourish, rather than being further reinforced by dominant forces.

2. Education in Horkheimer's Perspective

In the view of Max Horkheimer, who is part of the school of Critical Theory, education is considered one of the essential instruments for maintaining or changing existing social structures. Along with other members of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer criticized the education system in capitalist societies for serving to reinforce existing power, rather than to liberate individuals or encourage more just social change.

Here are some of the main things related to education from Horkheimer's perspective::

a. Education as a Tool to Maintain the Status Quo

Horkheimer considers that education in capitalist societies is often used to maintain the existing social system. In this case, education serves not only to disseminate knowledge, but also to instill values and norms that support the power of the dominant group. Formal education often forms a way of thinking that adapts individuals to social conditions without fostering much critical awareness of existing injustices or inequality.

b. Education and Liberation

Horkheimer argues that education often contains an element of oppression, as it focuses more on the reproduction of knowledge that benefits the dominant group than on raising critical awareness of broader social structures. The education received by individuals tends to form a passive perspective, which makes them more accepting of existing

social conditions without questioning the injustices or inequality that occur

Although Horkheimer criticized the existing education system, he also saw the potential for education to function differently. According to him, education should be a means of liberation. Critical and reflective education must be able to liberate individuals from uncritical thinking and lead them to think freely, understand injustices in society, and seek to change them. Therefore, education according to Horkheimer must be directed to build a critical awareness of unjust social structures.

c. Education as a Means of Social Change

Horkheimer believed that critical education can give individuals the ability to see and assess social injustice. Education that fosters critical awareness can be a tool for more radical social change, which can replace unjust social structures with more egalitarian systems. Thus, education is not only about academic knowledge, but also the development of the ability to see and change broader social conditions.

3. The Influence of Ideology in Contemporary Education

Ideology has a huge influence in contemporary education, as ideology determines how education is structured, the material taught, and who controls the education system. The prevailing ideology in society is often reflected in educational policies, curriculum, and views on the goals of education itself. Here are some of the ways ideology influences contemporary education:

a. Value and Norm Formation

Ideology plays an important role in determining the values and norms taught in education. Often, education is influenced by the dominant ideology in society, which serves to reinforce existing power structures. For example, in capitalist societies, education tends to place more emphasis on values such as individualism, competition, and the free market, which prepare students for the workforce by prioritizing technical skills over the ability to analyze social injustices.

b. A Curriculum That Suits Specific Interests

The educational curriculum is often influenced by dominant ideologies. In countries with specific ideologies, such as nationalism or capitalism, the curriculum can be focused on teaching

d. Social Gap and Access to Education

Ideology also affects access to education. In societies that support capitalism or the free market, education can be a tool to exacerbate social and economic inequalities. Access to quality education often depends on the social, economic, and political status of individuals, which benefits those in dominant positions. This further exacerbates the education gap and reinforces the cycle of inequality.

e. Technology-Based Education and Consumerism

In the era of globalization and digitalization, the ideology of consumerism also affects education. Education that is increasingly oriented towards the use of technology and digital tools risks emphasizing the skills

patriotism, preparing a ready-made workforce, or introducing market and competitive values. This can reduce attention to more critical social issues and limit critical thinking among students, who should be able to question and understand their social structure.

c. Control of Knowledge

Ideology also influences who determines what knowledge is considered valid in education. Powerful groups in society, such as political or economic elites, often control curricula and textbooks in schools. That way, they can direct education to better benefit their interests. For example, in a capitalist education system, it is likely that material that criticizes capitalism or the existing power structure will appear less frequently in the curriculum.

needed to enter an increasingly competitive and technology-based job market. In this regard, education emphasizes practical skills more than character development or the ability to think critically about broader social and political issues.

4. Horkheimer's Theory in the Contemporary Social Context

Within the contemporary social framework, Horkheimer's theories remain relevant and provide a deep understanding of how social and economic structures operate to sustain inequality and injustice. Here is a description of Horkheimer's theory in today's social context:

a. Critical Theory and Enlightenment Dialectics

Together with Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer developed the concept of

enlightenment dialectics, which criticized modern rationality. They argue that although the Enlightenment and rationality are supposed to bring progress and freedom, in reality, they are often used to reinforce power and dominance in capitalist societies. Technology, bureaucracy, and the free market economy, which are supposed to bring prosperity, often oppress and exploit the working class and marginalized groups.

In the contemporary social context, phenomena such as globalization, digitalization, and technological advances show how instrumental rationality (the use of science and technology for the purposes of social control and market domination) develops, often without taking into account the larger social impacts, such as economic inequality and a decline in the quality of life of large parts of society.

b. The Role of Ideology in Influencing Social Consciousness

Horkheimer emphasized that ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining the existing social structure. In contemporary capitalist societies, dominant ideologies often serve to mask social injustice and economic inequality. Ideologies such as the free market and meritocracy, while claiming to create equal opportunity, in fact reinforce inequality and leave many people trapped in a system that is very difficult to change. Today, the ideologies of consumerism, capitalism, and individualism greatly influence people's mindset and behavior.

The mass media, large corporations, and even the education system, often shape a worldview that creates inequality, by promoting greed and uncontrolled consumption, without considering their impact on social inequality.

c. Education as a Tool of Social Reproduction

Horkheimer criticized that education in capitalist societies more often served to reproduce existing social structures than to liberate individuals or promote social change. Education often teaches values that support the status quo, such as discipline, hard work, and individualism, without leaving room for criticism of unjust power structures. In the contemporary social context, the education system often exacerbates social inequalities. For example, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds gain better access to education, while the marginalized are often trapped in inadequate systems, exacerbating social inequities and slowing down just social change.

Consumerism, as a product of capitalism, serves to distract people from social injustice. In the contemporary world, consumption becomes a way to gain social status, which often leads to alienation, where individuals focus more on material achievement than on broader social life.

CONCLUSION

In Max Horkheimer's perspective, education cannot be seen as a neutral institution. Instead, education often serves to reproduce existing power structures and reinforce dominant ideologies that favor

inequality. However, education also has great potential to develop critical awareness and champion social liberation by enabling individuals to critique and challenge oppressive social structures. Therefore, education in Horkheimer's critical theory should focus on social transformations that encourage individuals to play an active role in creating a more just and egalitarian society. The curriculum and education system play an important role in reflecting and maintaining the dominant ideology in society.

Overall, ideology influences contemporary education in a variety of ways, from the formation of values and norms to the regulation of access to education. Education is often influenced by existing ideologies to maintain the prevailing social structure. However, education also has the potential to be a tool for more equitable social change, depending on how the ideology is applied in educational practice.

Horkheimer's theory in the contemporary social context provides a sharp critique of how dominant ideologies, capitalism, and technology shape existing social structures and reinforce inequality. Despite progress in some sectors, Horkheimer's theory reminds us to continue to criticize existing systems and look for ways to create more just social change, through education that builds critical awareness and strengthens social solidarity.

SUGGESTION

In completing this journal, of course, many parties are very helpful so that this journal can be completed, for all the help, input, criticism and suggestions that are very helpful to the researcher, thank you very much to:

-. Prof. Arlin Adam and Prof. Syamsul as the instructors of this course.

-. Rector THINKS Yapis Biak

_. Head of LP2M IISIP yapis Biak

-. S3 Sociology classmates of UNM Makassar

-. All parties who are willing to help researchers.

For everything that has been given, the researcher does not forget to thank him very much, may we all always be under the protection of God Almighty

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