

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MOBILITY: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Social mobility is the movement of individuals or group of persons from one social position to another. This paper focuses on the concept of social mobility in our society. Different definition of social mobility was highlighted and conclusion drawn that education is an important tool in enhancing the social mobility of individuals in our society which in turn will increase societal development in every ramification. With recommendations, amongst which; illiterate parents should strive to educate their children to enable them climb the social ladder.

Keywords: Social, Mobility, Social Mobility.

Introduction

Social mobility is the movement of individuals from one stratum to another. It could be up, down or even horizontal in nature. Dienye, (2004) sees it from the angle of vertical and horizontal. It is vertical mobility when an individual moves from a lower to a more prestigious stratum, while it is horizontal when an individual moves within the same stratum.

Morish in Okujagu, (1993) defines social mobility as the movement of individuals from one social position to another". Such a movement may be up or down between classes in social hierarchy or stratification. He identified three types of social mobility as:

The vertical, which is a movement from a lower scale to a higher one and vice versa. It is upward when, for instance, the son of a poor man studies law and becomes the chief judge, or a girl from a poor family marries into a rich family. It is downwards when the daughter of a king elopes with a man in the lower class in the name of love. In most cases, if the family breadwinner dies or is struck by misfortune, the family will move downward.

Horizontal or Physical Mobility is represented by mere shifts in occupation without a change in status. For example, the Registrar of College of Arts & Science becomes the Registrar of the University of Port Harcourt.

Geographic Mobility, occurs when there is a change in place or location of residence for example, from rural to urban. Social Mobility is the movement of an individual or group from one social status to another Tisehler, (2002).

The extent of social mobility may come about because of changing one's occupation, marrying into a certain family and so on. Movement that involves a change of status with a corresponding change in social class is known as horizontal mobility. For example Gabriella Zia started her career as an attorney. Within fifteen (15) years, she made a number of horizontal career moves, none of which appreciably changed her position in the social hierarchy. She became a financial planner, a stockbroker, a newspaper columnist, an author of a number of successful books on financial planning and finally a college professor. Although each of these career moves was extremely important to Zia, from a sociological point of view, they are perceived as involving little or no change in prestige, power or wealth and hence, provide little mobility. Movement up or down in the hierarchy resulting in a change in social class is known as vertical mobility that is, a change in social status that occurs over two or more generations.

The Kennedy family offers a prime example of this type of vertical mobility. Patrick J. Kennedy, the grandfather of John F. Kennedy, started life in relative poverty. He had to borrow money from family members to buy a Boston saloon. His son, Joseph Kennedy, became an enormously wealthy - and often unscrupulous- business tycoon. John F. Kennedy achieved the pinnacle of success and respectability in this culture by becoming president of the United States.

Another type of vertical mobility is intergenerational mobility, which is a change in social status that occurs during the lifetime of an individual. Some examples that come to mind about persons that have experienced upward intergenerational mobility are Steven P. Jobs and Stephen G. Wozniak stated Apple computer on approximately \$1,200 in Job's garage. William Gates made hundreds of millions of dollars while still in his 20s, as head of Microsoft Corporation. Usually a person's rank in the stratification hierarchy is consistent and comparatively easy to identify. However, many people do not fit neatly into one social category; their situations are e.g. of status inconsistency, situations in which people rank differently (higher or lower) on certain stratification characteristics.

The Concept of Social Mobility

Social mobility is seen as the movement of persons, families or groups from one social class to another, this movement could be up and down or across the social ladder as explained above. A person who acquires educational skills is supposed to move upward in terms of promotions. Sills (1957) in Elekwa (2013:110), maintained, that individuals who acquire different skills are placed differently in their various fields of study and are given promotions according to their levels of education. When an individual is demoted instead of being promoted, that person is said to have moved down the social ladder and that is what Otite (1979) in Elekwa (2013:109) refers to as downward social mobility. Across social mobility could also be seen as when an individual moves to another area of work maintaining

the same status or level of position in his service. This could be seen when an individual is transferred from one station to another still in the same company.

Otite and Ogionwo, (1979) sees social mobility as comprised peoples movement from one social institution to another including their social positions at any point in time. Through education, an individual may move from one social position to another. For example, a middle class worker who acquires enough education may be promoted to a managerial level while his counterpart without enough education as him will still be at a lower grade. Individuals are mainly selected and given social positions on the basis of attributes over which they have for example, technical skills, performance in examination, hard work and difference to authority. In traditional societies, the criterion for social mobility and selection is mainly ascriptive, whereas in industrial societies, the criterion for social mobility and selection is partly the ascriptive but mostly achievement.

Musgrave (1972), refers to social mobility as the term used by socialists to refer to the fluidity of the class structure reveals that the class structure is not static, rather there is a kind of movement from one social status to another. Ottaway, (1962) in Elekwa (2013) sees social mobility as the movement of an individual from one status to another. In ordinary usage, social mobility has favourably come to connote the improvement of upward mobility. An individual may also move to a lower status which is downward or move to a different status that is approximately equal to his old one, this type is called horizontal mobility.

Conclusion

In a democratic setting (society) therefore one of the identities is the relative ease with which an individual can increase his prestige and the extent to which social mobility is possible on the basics of personal qualities achievements, self-acquired possession and authority. Thus social mobility in a nutshell is basically the movement of persons from one social position to another. Education is the bed rock of every society and very important in enhancing persons social mobility in the society. Thereby increasing societal development in every ramification.

Recommendations

- Since education influences workers and persons social mobility, government should provide enough learning opportunities for our children to be well educated for better societal development.
- Illiterate parents should strive to educate their children to enable them climb the social ladder.
- Government and more meaning individuals should establish enough scholarship schemes to encourage children from poor families get enough education to enhance their vertical social mobility in the society.

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