

Study on Some Implicit Factors Sustaining the Social Stratification from the Perspective of Education

Li-Yu GUO^{a,*} and Cheng ZHANG^b

College of Geomatics, Xian University of Science & Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China

^a332781731@qq.com, (1963-), Male, Associate Prof., Study on Human Geography

^b2419797858@qq.com, (1993-), Female, Postgraduate, Study on Human Geography.

*Corresponding Author

Keywords: Perspective of Education, Implicit Factor, Modern Education System.

Abstract. Are the poor poorer and the rich richer? Or is the demarcation between the rich and the poor shrinking bit by bit? Constructing an equal and harmonious environment for the whole mankind is the ultimate goal for anyone especially for the governments all over the world, as proposed by the Chinese chairman Mr. Jin-ping XI. Grounded on relevant literatures, this paper discusses the influence of education on social stratus through qualitative argumentation. Based on all those implicit factors, it is explicit to propose that there is still a long way to go in the field of education-equality. Being open to all classes is an expression of stepping forward, but openness is only the very first step of education equality.

Argumentation

Plato once said that education is a tool to “identify those who are capable of philosophizing and helps to strengthen the characters of those who are capable” [1]. The statement shows the unfairness of education in early human history that is to say, people with high social position can be educated. Although started from the eighteenth century, with the awareness of democracy and equality became widely accepted, the education system was changing to be open and fair and was supposed to be sources of social mobility [2]. Arguments emerged when the gap between different social classes enlarged. According to French Professors Nathalie Chusseau, Joël Hellier (2013) “Inter-generational mobility is very low at both ends of the income and education spectrum”, similar things also showed in England that “mass higher education is less a network of more or less homogeneous activities than a series of concentric circles in which elite institutions remain at the center”[3]. Thus some potential but non-negligible factors including the poverty trap in the economy might lead to under-education trap, and the poor cultural environment makes it hard to become a versatile person. Today’s elite education system instead of promoting social mobility facially, actually sustain the social stratification.

Essentially speaking, the economic hierarchy obstruct the education equality and therefore cause a vicious cycle so called “under-education trap”. If we analyze today’s circumstances based on socio-economy, basically there are three classes: upper class, middle class and lower class[4]. The boundary of each class segment the social sectors which is determined by the unequal income and human capital distribution. To be more specific, the initial distribution of wealth determines each class’s human capital accumulation path and steady state of each social class. Which leads to the invariably clusters of upper class and trap in the lower class[5]. Under-education trap appeared when the expenditures of different levels education have large disparities. According to a survey, one of the main differences between elite and standard universities is the level of their expenditures per student [6]. The market orientation makes all things to be judged by money, high expenditures in university always mean high quality of education received. This facially reasonable rule seems unfair for children from the less advantaged socio-economic sectors. They may never afford such high education fee, and even for those “middle class” families, they also need to bear high pressure to save this vast sums. In developed countries, such as the USA, researches have showed that the average save for education for children from 13-17 years old occupies most of the saving in family

education and is around 3337 dollars, but for those low-income family, the average number drops to 1744 dollars, while for those high-income families, 5258 dollars is only the average (How American Saves for College, 2013). The high expenditure for elite education brings unprecedented pressure to middle-class families and makes it even impossible for those lower class.

However, for students from the rich family, they can easily get the better-quality education in the primary and secondary periods and as a result, their opportunities of getting into better colleges are much bigger.

Cultural references which stem from one's family, friends and environment is also an implicit factor that makes the social mobility hard to achieve. According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory that class fractions are determined by the combination of the varying degrees of social, economic, and cultural capital. Thus a famous hypothesis says "the greater the privileges individuals inherit at birth, the more they acquire throughout their initial education until they reach university"[3].

Therefore upper-class kids might have a strong advantage in elite universities' election activities which makes their social circle relatively stable, and inter-generational continued. For those in elite university children who from the lower class, Kaplan found that their social network is still much narrower than other alumni. Revealing that even there shows some mobility in university-level, the result can decrease obviously when it comes to elite society. "Low-income student join a community of wealth and confront a social geography that is unfamiliar to them." At the same time, however, they still need to take part-time or even full-time jobs to support themselves as well as saving for further education. All these social or economical factors influence low-income students that their representation in academic remained stagnant. Due to all those factors, we might see it is hard for low-income students to blend with higher class even though they get into elite universities.

The progress that modern education system has already made can not be denied. Along with the growing of worker-class ever since World War Two, "education reformers and arguably even the public has perceived education as an equalizing institution that promotes equal opportunity through relative inter-generational mobility [7]. Democratization has been well infiltrated into our life, education system, since then, has been much more open than before [8]. Some famous sociologists gave the hypothesis which has been published in American Journal of Sociology, saying that "According to status attainment theory and the industrialization thesis, compulsory education should increase relative mobility. Compared to otherwise similar individuals, the occupation of those required to attend school should depend less on their father's occupation". The problem is, however, openness does not mean fairness. Elite universities open their door to students at all classes, but as we already argued before, it seems a kind of being impossible for a child with poor family condition influence to behave perfectly and have enough money to support high education expenditure. The under-education trap continued in this education system and this unfairness finally hinder social mobility.

Specifically speaking, China could be the typical example to testify the abovementioned research topic. Abreast with the reform and opening up policy, the College Entrance Examination (hereinafter abbreviated as CEE) had been restored in 1977, which had been terminated during the cultural revolution for a long time. Lots of people have regarded this CEE national examination as a golden opportunity to upgrade their social strata and change their fortune. At the earlier years after CEE's restoration, it was indeed genuine to conduct such a function: students from poor, rural and lower social strata have been assigned to work in stated owned enterprises, inclusive of government offices, business fields, higher education institutions after college education. As time went by, upgrading social strata through adopting higher education has become lesser and lesser malfunctioned especially with the wave of expansion of college students, as well as the merger and acquisition of universities since 1997 approximately. Previously, less than five among one hundred senior middle scholars had the opportunity to be admitted to the universities. However, after the expansion of college entrance candidates, almost all the senior middle scholars have the opportunity to go to college at different tiers if they like, since universities have been classified as top tier, first tier, second tier, even third tier according to the enrollment scores. To speak from the perspective of

economics, the rarer the quantity, the more valuable it becomes. It seems that this rule of thumb also applies to the phenomenon of higher education sphere in China. College graduates have lost the premium and advantages to upgrade their social strata and actually social stratification has the tendency to be stabilized as numerous scholars have proposed. Young people with better family background are definitely enjoying a much promising future as against those from ordinary and poor family background. The family affords their expenditures in extracurricular activities such as playing the musical instruments, developing personal hobbies, and of course going to good and expensive universities, even studying abroad. Whereas the latter even could not afford their college education tuitions, let alone to develop other personal hobbies. The fact is that such phenomenon has been lasting for some time and as a result, social stratification and polarization has been expanding substantially. The good news is that government has realized such social stratification and polarization, relevant strategies and tactics have been proposed to conduct justice and fairness in education as well as other areas of social life with the expectation of squeezing the gap between upper and lower social classes.

Conclusion and Future Research

Based on all those implicit factors, it is explicit to propose that there is still a long way to go in the field of education-equality. Being open to all classes is an expression of stepping forward, but openness is only the very first step of education equality. Understanding the potential effects that how elite education stabilizes the social stratification economically and culturally can help for later reformation more comprehensively. Considering all classes in our society will make education system better and finally arrived at what USECO put forward since 1998: “Equity of access to higher education should begin with the reinforcement”(World Declaration On Higher Education For The Twenty-first Century: Vision, 1998). Looking forward that the equity in education will make a better world in the future.

References

- [1] Dillon A. Education in Plato's Republic. Scu.edu. 2004.
- [2] Buisson-Fenet, H. Draelants H. School-Linking Processes: Describing and Explaining Their Role in the Social Closure of French Elite Education. Higher Education 66(2013), 39-57.
- [3] Williams G., Filippakou O. Higher Education and UK Elite Formation in the Twentieth Century. Higher Education, 59(2010), 1-20.
- [4] Kaplan E. J. (2010). Peer Social Networks among Low -Income Students at an Elite College. 2010.
- [5] Santos M. Human Capital and the Quality of Education in a Poverty Trap Model. SSRN Electronic Journal. 2009
- [6] Brezis, E. S., Hellier J. Social Mobility at the Top: Why are Elites Self-reproducing?
- [7] Rauscher E. Does Educational Equality Increase Mobility? Exploiting Nineteenth-Century U.S. Compulsory Schooling Laws. American Journal of Sociology, 121(2016), 1697-1761.
- [8] Information on http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm