

The terms of the social mobility sociology essay



The term social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or sometimes the whole groups between different positions “ within the system of social stratification in any society” (Scott & Marshall, 1994, pp. 477). The level of social mobility in society is seen by many as a measure to establish whether a society or country is a meritocracy – a social system dictates that individuals’ progress in society just on the merit of their ability and endeavour, rather than social backgrounds, gender or race (Giddens, 2009). This essay will discuss that if Britain might be a meritocratic country. Within this essay, firstly comes to the introduction of the study of social mobility. Then, different arguments of mobility in UK will be mentioned in the second main part; finally a short conclusion will be given.

As been stated by Saunders (1995), Britain seems a remarkably meritocracy because privilege tends go to individuals who are able to achieve. According to his analyse, in 1972, only 15% person in the top class had been born there and more than 29% had been recruited from lower class. Also, 27% of children of working class parents had end up in middle and 16% of them had risen into the upper class (pp. 25). Later in the 1983, Payne carried out his research results suggesting that fluidity had increased still further – 58% of individuals had been socially mobile, the proportion of children from working class backgrounds reaching the top class had risen from 16% to 22%.

Accordingly, Saunders argued that long-range social mobility commonly exists in Britain. In his view, capability and endeavour is the only chip in occupational success, children in Britain have benefited from the improved chances of upward social mobility regardless of the social advantages or disadvantages attached (Giddens, 2009). Payne also suggests in 1987 that ”

is essentially a pessimistic view which leads the reader towards seeing British society as more closed and thereby more static than is necessary” (pp. 199). Thought it is unequal, Britain is still a fair society.

However, based on different research, analysis, and studies, there are still amount of sociologists who criticize the idea that Britain is meritocratic. For instance, by compared with the date of mobility of industrial countries, Blanden et al.(2005) pointed that intergenerational mobility fell sharply over time in UK, and one of the reason for that has been the increasing strong link between educational attainment and family income. As Marshall (1999) demonstrated, a high level of social mobility means that equality of opportunity for all citizens. Blau and Duncan (1967) also emphasized the importance of skill training and education on persons’ chances for more privilege. Individuals should to equip themselves with knowledge in order to be competent on a meritocratic society. Thus, the equality of education plays an important role in forming meritocracy. Whereas in Britain, children from well-off families seems to access education, especially higher education, and finish their degree better under more favorable conditions. Blenden et al. (2005, pp. 14) mentioned that with the inequality of income has risen, the gap between the educational attainment of the poorest and the richest has grown at the same time, which lead to an increase in persistence. Moreover, study by John Goldthorpe showed three theories of class structure in British: the closure thesis, the buffer zone thesis and the counterbalance thesis, which are each referred to the claims that the upper class are self-recruiting, movement is likely to occur within a similar level of occupational hierarchy and a little attention paid to the complicating factor of work-life mobility

(1987, pp. 43-55). That is to say, as Marshall (1988) mentioned that more room at the top do not mean that more true equality of opportunity offered there for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Those who have lower class backgrounds must show more merit than those from upper class. In short, therefore, there is less increasing in movement, and less move towards meritocracy.

To sum up, a meritocratic system is a social system where individuals can gain class position only by their own intelligence and endeavour. Though there are many sociologists try to indicate that individual merit is obviously a key factors in promoting one's class positions, class of origin and family backgrounds remained powerful influences (Scott & Marshall, 1994, pp. 477). Also by the report Blanden et al. published in 2005, Britain have the lowest mobility as well as American compare with other regions such as Northern Europe and Canada which are particularly mobile. So it is therefore difficult to make a conclusion that Britain is a perfect meritocratic society. To improve this situation, policies which to make sure education equality and financial support to children from poor families seems necessary.