

EPISODE

Future of Education

SUB CATEGORY

Social

TITLE

Progress ladder: Raising social mobility

EXCERPT

Education enables people to have greater freedom and social mobility in changing and improving their lives, climbing up the social ladder and it can be a panacea to social challenges, like the lack of tolerance. Despite the vast impacts that education has on societies, many have addressed concerns such as income inequality and a disenfranchised society which could have a risk of causing social division.

CONTENT

To address the aforementioned social problems, education is needed to create equal opportunities for all. Over the years, social mobility has been achieved by giving students broad access to tertiary education. They are able to acquire a higher skills set and seek higher-paying jobs. As such, families who did well are able to pass down the privileges to their children, through enrichment and tuition classes. Their children will have a head start as compared to their peers.

This creates a problem of social stratification. Despite the strong and enhanced support being given to those at the lower rungs of society, these opportunities are often limited due to their social classes and income levels. This deprives them of having a chance of moving up the economic ladder, worsening income inequality. The Gini coefficient which measures the level of income inequality, from zero to one, with zero being the most equal, shows that Singapore has a relatively high Gini coefficient of 0.36 and a wide income inequality gap. Hence, education is important in ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in life if they are willing to work hard.

Opening doors through literacy development

Education is important as it affects the access to job opportunities. Given that children born in privileged families have an unfair advantage in gaining better jobs, they would naturally earn higher wages and have a higher social class. In order to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to succeed in life, education is an important tool required. Education qualifications are one of the major determinants for university admissions and job offers. If people have equal opportunity to gain education and skills, this goes a long way to promoting equal opportunities in the labour market. Thus, the role of education is to create the equalisation of opportunities, allowing individuals to overcome any disadvantages they may have from their family background and achieve excellence in the future.

Determinant for social mobility

Education qualifications also determine the social way of life. The result-oriented educational approach gave rise to the grade-obsessed society that is overly-focused on academics. It is no wonder that parents are investing heavily on enrichment and tuition classes to ensure that their children are ranked among the top in their schools. Indeed the fuel to the tuition trend is the competition and anxiety that parents feel from the education system through high stakes examinations, such as the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). According to the national Household Expenditure Survey released in 2014, it adds

up to a staggering \$1.1 billion a year spent on tuition. It can be seen that tuition has become an educational arms race that shows no sign of slowing down and is a cycle that needs to be broken. This is especially so for affluent households that are more able to afford to invest substantial amounts on enrichment classes, widening the social chasm. The unequal opportunities pose a threat to the society and there is a higher risk of a disenfranchised society occurring. Thus, the difference in the level of educational qualifications have detrimental effects on the society and create social divisions if left unmanaged.

Education: The solution to poverty?

Education has the power to reduce the poverty level. According to the Global Partnership Organisation, 420 million people would be lifted out of poverty with a secondary education, thus reducing the number of poor worldwide by more than half. Through this, individuals are able to gain knowledge and raise their skills set. It also cultivates competent workers who can seek higher-paying jobs and increase their standard of living. Consequently, they will reduce their reliance on the government such as welfare schemes. Thus, education is proven to be an effective tool in eradicating poverty.

In short, education is able to provide individuals with an equal access to opportunities and eliminate poverty. Despite concerns such as the problem of inequality and a disenfranchised society, governments have introduced education policies that will spearhead the management of social inequality. Yet, it is impossible to solely rely on the government as a joint cooperation by the students, parents and educators are needed to realise this aim of greater social mobility.