Social Class, Education and Life Opportunities in the UK

By

Insert Your Name

Presented to

Instructor’s Name, Course

Institution Name, Location

Date Due

**To writer: I like the essay, If possible put a sentence or two in the essay that have another viewpoint of social class, i.e. that capital doesn’t have anything to do with what education you get.** *Critically assess the relationship between social class, education and life opportunities in the UK. Is social class still the most important predictor of employment opportunities in 2016?*

**Introduction**

What is a social class? Here I suggest that you write about different “definitions” of social class. Talk short about how Marx and Weber defined class. How has class changed in the last years?

Class differences in the society influence almost all spheres of social life. The influence on the education sector in different countries across the world depicts the impact of social class in any society. The impact on the education sector prompts inequalities in the educational system based on social class and thus influences the access to life opportunities in a country. Social class remains an imminent policy issue in the UK due to its significantly high influence on the education sector and life opportunities. It remains the most significant predictor of educational access and achievement in the State. According to Savage et al. (2013), the UK records the highest social class gap that influences educational achievement and opportunities the most. While the government focuses on developing equality in education and to life opportunities, the challenge of the social class gap and its influence on the education sector remains a great issue of concern. The challenge continues to influence increasing socio-economic inequality that further impedes human development especially for people in the lower social class. Through an in-depth analysis of literature, this research outlines the relationship between social class, education and life opportunities in the UK.

**The relationship between Social Class, Education and Life Opportunities in the UK**

Class differences in the UK influence existence in the region by impacting significantly on most social aspects. According to Heath et al. (2013), social class has a direct influence on education and life opportunities. In the UK, the issue of class remains a critical issue that fuels political debates and concerns for the development of policies to alleviate the social class gap to minimize the inequalities it causes. The influence of social class on the education sector reveals the importance of immediate action in addressing the issue. Access to education and performance in schools in the UK is greatly predetermined by the social class of the student. According to Beider (2014), the social class of the parent determines what school the child attends and influences their academic success significantly. The best performing schools often attract students from the privileged social class while the less performing attract those from lower social class. The less privileged may access poor quality education or lack a chance in the schools of their choice all the same. The result of such inequalities in education as caused by the social class gap causes a general inequality in the access to life opportunities in the UK.

The UK has a widely spread social class that influences the education significantly and is directly connected to the inequality experienced in the education sector and in accessing life opportunities (Croxford & Raffe, 2014). Class differences occur in a wide range in the UK. For example, Savage et al. (2013) outline seven social classes in the region that include the elite social class, the established middle class, the technical middle class, new affluent workers, the traditional working class, the emergent service workers and the precariat. These different social classes influence the education sector and contribute directly towards educational inequality and inequality in access to life opportunities in the UK (Machin, et al., 2012). People from the different social classes have different socio-economic and cultural capital that influences their ability to access education and enjoy or benefit from the available social, economic, and political opportunities in the country. The analysis of the different social classes in relation to education and life opportunities creates an effective picture of the class issues in education and opportunity and thus makes certain the guided development of the relationship between social class, education and life opportunities.

Social class influences the access to education and life opportunities in the UK. People from the elite social class, the established middle class, and the technical middle class in the UK have impressive or high economic and cultural capital and a high social capital developed by the social contacts (Savage, et al., 2013). However, the influence of the capital possessed by the different social classes depends on the class, the highest being in the elite, the established and technical middle class respectively. Moreover, the new affluent workers, the existing working class, and the emergent service workers reveal moderately good capital, poor social contacts and status, and lower household income as compared to the aforementioned classes. For instance, while the class of new affluent workers maintains a good economic capital and a moderate mean score of social contact and a good emerging cultural capital, the traditional working class and the emergent service workers record moderately poor economic capital, reasonable house price and low emerging cultural capital. Moreover, the precariat class maintains a poor economic capital, poor housing, poor social contacts and cultural capital (Savage, et al., 2013). These aspects influence the life of the different social classes including access to quality education and life opportunities.

The influence of the capital among the different social classes in the UK plays a significant role in influencing access to education and the enjoyment of life opportunities (David, 2009). There exists a close correlation between the education an individual attains and the ability to benefit from opportunities within the society. Even when the society may avail numerous opportunities, few people from the privileged social classes utilize the opportunities while those from lower social classes such as the proletariat experience a great challenge in acquiring quality education and making use of the available life opportunities. According to Stevenson and Willott (2007), people from the middle and above classes have access to quality education since they have the privilege of attending public independent schools or prestigious public schools. For instance, the class of the elite records the highest capital and thus attends the best schools in the UK. The acquisition of quality education from the schools and the chance for the continued pursuance of academic objectives and career goals without hindrances equips them with the skills and knowledge critical for tapping into and exploiting the existing high-quality opportunities in the society (Leathwood, 2004). As such, children from the elite social class of the UK access quality education which places them at an elevated ground for the identification and utilization of life opportunities in the society.

Moreover, the close interconnection and relationship between education and life opportunities in the UK and elsewhere can be seen from the analysis and comparison of the different social classes and class gaps in the society (Reay, 2006: Crawford, 2012). In the UK, the existing social class difference results to the inequalities experienced in the education system and the exploration of opportunities present. People from the different social classes have different preferences concerning what schools to attend and some are limited by various socio-economic factors thus the inability to attend schools of their preference (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). The best schools that offer quality education, most of which are independent public or private schools are expensive for people of lower social status. On the other hand, most state schools and private schools, which are cheaper and affordable by the lower class of individuals in the UK are criticized for offering low-quality education. This makes it difficult for people from the different social classes and with different educational backgrounds to compete effectively for the available opportunities. The issue continues to elevate socio-economic inequalities which further the educational inequalities through impoverished and lower social class generations (Hirsch, 2007).

The acquisition of education in different institutions of learning that offer different quality of education creates a distinction in the opportunities people from various social classes tap into and the career paths they follow. According to Leathwood and Archer (2004), the middle class in the UK attend state, private or independent schools depending on whether they are established, technical or lower middle class. Depending on the level of education they acquire and its quality, they pursue different career paths and make use of opportunities in white-collar and well-paying jobs. Opportunities in the fields of accountancy, architecture, survey, engineering, medicine, or information technology among others are of great interest (Savage, et al., 2013). While this is the case, the traditional working class and the precariat stand low chances of acquiring education and thus pursue lesser prestigious courses and opportunities in life such as unskilled labour or skilled industrial jobs. Moreover, the access to education is limited by their economic status, and thus, they end up having low-quality education. Such education leads them to the pursuance of lesser paying jobs and opportunities. In other cases, as Johnson and Kossykh (2008) assert, precariat and the lower middle class have insignificant educational achievement which cannot guarantee them meaningful employment and pay.

Apart from the quality of education as influenced by the institutions of learning, other factors such as poverty and class related concerns influence the educational achievements of individuals from different social classes. As Hirsch (2007) states, educational achievement and performance influences the chances of success in the society and play a major role in the identification of opportunities in the society. However, performance and achievement are influenced by multiple social factors other than the quality of education a school offers in alignment with its social appeal. According to Reay (2006), poverty impacts on student performance and affects academic achievement significantly. People from poor backgrounds experience numerous difficulties that limit learning efficiency and, therefore, make it nearly impossible for them to constantly pursue academic goals in the way as their counterparts from privileged backgrounds. As Hirsch (2007) asserts, low-income influences educational performance significantly and acts as a strong predictor of low educational performance. As such, people precariat and lower middle class and traditional working class experience difficulties in the identification of life opportunities and the pursuance of academic excellence and achievement.

The interconnection between social class, education and life opportunities is undeniable. Children from different social classes have different experiences that influence their learning processes and performance differently (Beider, 2014). For instance, children from low-income families (low social classes) experience a lack of control over the learning process and often feel anxious and less confident about school. This results from multiple challenges closely linked to their social class. For instance, precariat, the economically weak social class depicts low household income and negligible savings and thus record numerous challenges (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2004). The class is deprived of basic needs and other essentials for enhanced learning and thus the performance and academic achievement of precariat students is greatly affected. Therefore, they record low academic achievement which translates to lesser life opportunities upon completion. In consideration of this view then, the UK precariat stands lesser chances for benefitting from life opportunities. On the other hand, children from higher social classes may experience challenges but benefit from various privileges that come with the statuses. In an instance, housing, hunger, poverty, and lack do not influence their lives and thus, the comfort and the control they have over their education gives them an advantage over those from poor backgrounds (Hirsch, 2007).

The continued lack of opportunity among individuals from low social classes due to the lack of sufficient skills and low qualifications causes child poverty and denies the children a chance to benefit from the life opportunities the society offers. The challenge of social class, especially where people are from a low social class translates to generational poverty (Hirsch, 2007). As parents lack opportunities for socio-economic development and advancement due to socio-economic circumstances, they expose their children to poor quality education or their children achieve poor qualifications. The achievement of poor or low qualifications in education and the lack of skills causes the transmission of poverty to immediate generations. The result is a society crippled by poverty, hunger, disease and the lack of opportunities that it can exploit. The case depicts the close relationship between education, social class and life opportunities. The UK faces a great challenge in developing the society especially targeting the precariat, the traditional working class and the lower and middle middle class. The identification and implementation of measures or strategies that minimize the social class gap by bridging the gap between the wealthy and the poor will play a critical role in alleviating social inequalities and educational inequalities while creating a chance for every citizen to exploit and benefit from the available opportunities (Raffe & Croxford, 2015: Hope, 2010).

Moreover, the close relationship between education, social class and life opportunities in the UK can be outlined by investigating the influence of the social class on the achievement of quality education among the elite class, the established middle class and the technical middle class (Savage, et al., 2013). These classes enjoy numerous privileges that come with the high economic and cultural capital and the various aspects that enhance livelihood. For instance, while housing and food remain a significant challenge for the precariat, people from these social classes have comfortable housing and sufficient food supply (Heath, et al., 2013). As such, they have sufficient supply of the basic needs and what would be luxurious to the precariat. As such, children or students from these social classes learn in efficient environments and have control over their learning processes. Additionally, they remain confident throughout the process and thus record impressive academic performance and achievement. The achievement translates to numerous life opportunities. These opportunities require individuals equipped with the necessary levels of skill and knowledge thus making it only feasible for children from elite or proper childhood (Hirsch, 2007).

The elite, the established middle class and the technical middle class have high economic capital and social capital and thus pursue different academic goals. Considering this then children from the backgrounds record impressive academic performance and achievement, which results to enhanced chances for improvement and success (Feinstein, 2004). The children face limited challenges in the course of learning and thus remain focused on education and the achievement of the set goals and objectives. Moreover, they have role models to emulate and focus on high-end careers and professional development (Waller, et al., 2014). For instance, children from elite social class may pursue their dreams without the challenges that precariat children face. As such, they end up achieving high qualification and great academic achievement (East, et al., 2014). These achievements, according to Savage et al. (2013), allows them to exploit opportunities present in the society to become chief executive officers, directors in IT and marketing sectors, barristers, functional managers/directors, dental practitioners, financial managers or judges among other existing opportunities. It remains difficult for children from low social status to achieve these achievements and thus, it is clear that education, social class and life opportunities in the UK work hand in hand (Jackson, 2013). Moreover, children from established middle class, technical middle class, and those from new affluent worker families follow suit in the achievement of high academic success and skill development. Therefore, they attain critical skills and benefit from essential opportunities that offer a chance for socio-economic development.

**Conclusion**

Class differences continue to form a critical issue in the UK and call for the implementation of immediate and effective measures for addressing the concern. The differences and majorly the existing social class gap in the society continues to enhance the present inequalities in the social, economic and political spheres. Children from less privileged communities and families experience numerous hardships in their education and thus record low success and academic achievement. While this is the case, children from the elite social class and other high profile classes such as the upper middle, the technical and new emergent worker classes record impressive success and academic achievement. The close relationship between education, social class and life opportunities ensures that the rich access and exploit the opportunities while the poor continually transmit poverty through generations due to the inability to tap into the present opportunities. The government of the UK must work towards the reduction of the social class gap to give every citizen the chance to pursue and benefit from the opportunities in existence.

**Bibliography**

Beider, H., 2014. Whiteness, Class and Grassroots Perspectives on Social Change and Difference. *The Political Quarterly,* 85(3), p. 333–339.

Chan, T. W. & Goldthorpe, J. H., 2004. Is There a Status Order in Contemporary British Society? Evidence from the Occupational Structure of Friendship. *European Sociological Review,* 20(5), pp. 383-401.

Clegg, N., 2011. *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility,* London: Cabinet Office - HM Government.

Crawford, C., 2012. Socio-economic gaps in HE participation: how have they changed over time?. *Institute for Fiscal Studies,* pp. 1-28.

Croxford, L. & Raffe, D., 2014. Social Class, Ethnicity and Access to Higher Education in the Four Countries of the UK: 1996-2010.. *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 33(1), pp. 77-95.

David, M. E., 2009. Social Diversity and Democracy in Higher Education in the 21st Century: Towards a Feminist Critique. *Higher Education Policy,* 22(1), pp. 61-79.

East, L., Stokes, R. & Walker, M., 2014. Universities, the Public Good and Professional Education in the UK. *Studies In Higher Education,* 39(9), pp. 1617-1633.

Feinstein, L., 2004. 'Mobility in Pupils' Cognitive Attainment During School Life. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy,* 20(2), pp. 213-229.

Heath, A., Savage, M. & Senior, N., 2013. Social Classs - The Role of Class in Shaping Social Attitudes. *British Social Attitudes,* Volume 30, pp. 173 - 199.

Hirsch, D., 2007. *Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage,* The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Hope, C., 2010. *Wealth gap in Britain is wider than ever.* [Online]   
Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/7080374/Wealth-gap-in-Britain-is-wider-than-ever.html  
[Accessed 13 February 2016].

Jackson, M., 2013. The Squeezed Middle: An Exploration of Creativity, Conformity and Social Class on the Academic Achievement of Undergraduate Students within a UK Art School. *International Journal of Art & Design Education,* 32(3), pp. 345-351.

Johnson, P. & Kossykh, Y., 2008. *Early years, Life Chances and Equality: A Literature Review,* London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Leathwood, C., 2004. A Critique of Institutional Inequalities in Higher Education: (Or an Alternative to Hypocrisy for Higher Educational Policy). *Theory and Research in Education,* 2(1), pp. 31-48.

Leathwood, C. & Archer, L., 2004. Social Class and Educational Inequalities: The Local and the Global. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society,* 12(1), pp. 5 - 14.

Machin, S., McNally, S. & Wyness, G., 2012. Education across the UK Nations: Performance, Inequality and Evidence. Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series. *Program on Education Policy and Governanance, Harvard university,* 12(8).

Raffe, D. & Croxford, L., 2015. The Iron Law of Hierarchy? Institutional Differentiation in UK Higher Education. *Studies In Higher Education ,* 40(9), pp. 1625-1640.

Reay, D., 2006. The Zombie Stalking English Schools: Social Class and Educational Inequality. *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 54(3), p. 288 –307.

Savage, M. et al., 2013. A New Model of Social Class: Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology,* 0(0), pp. 1-32.

Stevenson, J. & Willott, J. T., 2007. The Aspiration and Access to Higher Education of Teenage Refugees in the UK Compare. *A Journal of Comparative Education,* 37(5), pp. 671-687.

Waller, R., Harrison, N., Hatt, S. & Chudry, F., 2014. Undergraduates’ memories of school-based work experience and the role of social class in placement choices in the UK. *Journal of Education & Work,* 27(3), pp. 323-349.