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Q5(e)

To what extent can education and skill development be an agent of social change? Critically analyze.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Social Change in Modern Society

Social Change in Modern Society: Sociological theories of social change; Development and dependency; Agents of social change; Education and social change; Science, technology and social change.

Core demand of the question

- **Show education and skill as agents of change:** Durkheim, Parsons, human capital, mobility
- **Critically show reproduction:** Bourdieu, Bowles-Gintis, caste and credential inflation
- Judge "to what extent" with Indian policy illustrations (RTE, Skill India) without slogan

Revision summary

Durkheim and Parsons treat schooling as moral and role socialisation, a force of change.

Human capital and capability approaches link skill to productivity and freedom.

Bourdieu and correspondence theorists show reproduction of class through the school.

Indian expansion of education has created new aspirations and some mobility.

Coaching, English, caste and credential inflation limit the equalising effect.

- **The extent is partial:** necessary for change, insufficient as a sole agent.

Introduction

Education and skill development are among the most trusted official levers of social change. They are supposed to spread knowledge, create a labour force, and open mobility. Emile Durkheim saw the school as a moral community for a differentiated society. Human-capital theory treated skill as investment. A critical analysis asks how far these processes actually transform structure, and how far they reproduce class, caste and gender under a language of merit.

Body

As agents of change

Schools socialise strangers into shared codes, which Parsons read as pattern maintenance and role allocation. Literacy and numeracy expand capability in Sen's sense. Technical skill can shift a household from farm labour to a trade or to urban services. In India, the expansion of IITs, medical colleges, IT services and, more unevenly, industrial training has created new middle-class fractions. The Right to Education Act and campaigns for girls' schooling have changed aspirations even where quality lags. Skill India and apprenticeship talk try to link education to employability. Social movements of oppressed groups have used degrees and English as weapons of status, not only as job tickets. In that limited but real sense, education is an agent of change.

Critical limits

- **Pierre Bourdieu showed cultural capital:** the school rewards the already cultured child and calls it talent. Bowles and Gintis linked schooling to workplace hierarchy. **Credential inflation** means more certificates chase the same scarce jobs. In India, coaching, English gates and unequal schools channel change toward those who already have resources. Caste in hiring and the steering of girls toward "safe" courses blunt mobility. Skill programmes that ignore demand produce certificates without change.

The extent is **partial and stratified**. Education changes some biographies. It rarely, by itself, equalises property or elite networks. Treating skill as a substitute for decent work is policy rhetoric, not a finding.

Flow diagram

Education and skill -> Change mobility capability
Education and skill -> Reproduction cultural capital
Change mobility capability -> RTE Skill India
Reproduction cultural capital -> Coaching English gates
Education and skill -> Partial stratified extent

Conclusion

Education and skill can be agents of social change through socialisation, capability and mobility. They also reproduce inequality through **cultural capital** and uneven provision. The extent in India is real for some groups and overstated when policy treats certificates as a solvent of class and caste.

Facts & figures

Cultural capital

Bourdieu: embodied tastes and school-relevant knowledge that the education system misreads as natural gift.

RTE 2009

Legal guarantee of elementary education that expanded access while quality and inclusion remain contested.

Credential inflation

Rising certificates required for the same jobs, which can stall mobility even as enrolment grows.