

Secondunit: Subjects and branches of sociology

1. Subjects of sociology:

Identifying the specific subjects of sociology is a challenging task if not impossible because of the intertwined nature of society's components, relationships, interactions, systems' development, and other aspects that constitute society in its structure and characterize its development. The obvious dissensus among the founding as well as the contemporary sociologists to specify a finite number of subjects confirm this reality. On this reality, an attempt to enumerate the kind of subjects involved within sociology's research and study scope is as follows:

1.1 Society as a subject of sociology

Sociology views society as a unit of analysis that represents a complete entity in the aim of revealing the existing connections that connect social systems in the light of the different social patterns. Such studies can include society at least in two main sections; the first deals with **the existing internal variations between the different societies**, and **the second deals with all societies as human groups characterized by certain specific external characteristics**. In this case, we find sociology posing such questions as: Is there evidence of certain types of societies, such as major empires that can last for a certain time period? Do societies go through certain developmental stages? The previous is a type of social thinking and analysis from an evolutionary perspective that characterized a certain time period in the history of social thought. "**Ibn Khaldoun**" tackled the social development from **(nomadic to urban societies)** while "**Auguste Comte**" studied it from **(primitive societies to theological to Positivist)** as for Emile Durkheim the discussion was from **(traditional to contemporary societies)**

Nowadays, social studies' focus shifts more towards **the internal structure of society** by asking such new questions as: What are the internal inevitable issues that every society faces? What are the most common components of society? How do communities assign work responsibilities? What are the associative consequences of certain social systems? For example, to what extent does the industrial pattern of the economic life is in agreement with that of the extended family? (Inkeles, p. 54).

1.2 Social systems as a subject in sociology

Social systems are considered one of the most important subjects of sociology. According to **Abdul Razzaq Chalabi**, they are one of society's social organization patterns. Social systems are regarded as major modes organizing the human interaction, which is the basis of social relations. In addition to that, organizing the types of interaction oriented towards a specific purpose among the numerous purposes that direct human basic needs and branching out with specific names that uncover the nature and limits of the social activity (Chalabi, 2000, p. 79).

In this instance, providing a definition to social systems is worthwhile. In fact, they are a set of social rules, laws, and customs that may be codified or customary that clearly work to define individuals' behaviors and ethics and shape the patterns of their relationships and social interactions. Additionally, they contribute to the establishment of society's ideology, consolidate its system's foundations at the macro or micro level, and determine the patterns of relationships between members of the same community. (Al-Ghazawi et al., 2006, p. 209)

Some believe that social systems such as the family, school, and the political party constitute a more distinct subject for sociology as the ensemble forms society as whole. **Herbert Spencer** viewed social systems as the basics that perform the

functions of society that were grown out of customs and traditions. Each system consists of standards, customs, and expectations that are transmitted to the following generations. The systems are transmitted in the form of accumulating experiences that lead to the establishment of codified models of social systems that perform various functions in society (Abdul Hadi, 2009, p. 129).

“**Alex Inkeles**” delimited the basic social systems in: family and kinship system, the economic system, the political and legal system, the religious system, the educational and scientific system, the recreational and welfare system, and the collective and expressive system. (Inkeles, p. 50). The following is a precis to some basic social systems:

A. Family system

For many researchers, the family system is one of the most important social systems since family is the beginning of individual’s social life. The family represents the core unit that caters for the individual’s essential biological and human needs. For this reason, it truly is the starting nucleus of human society.

The family is known to be the group of individuals that are linked by blood and marriage all living in one dwelling. Under this label, positions and roles of each individual are precisely as well as its essential functions that are for the preservation of the human species are highlighting (Afifi, 2011, p. 60).

Throughout the human developmental history, the family has taken two basic forms. The first is **the extended family model** and the second is **the nuclear family model**. With regard to the first, it consists of the husband, the wife, their children, the grandparents, and other family members such as the uncle and aunt and sometimes even their wives who live and interact together within one place. As for the second form, it consists only of the husband, the wife and their children living under one roof.

The family has a number of fundamental functions: sexual function, reproductive function, socialization function and economic function.

B. Political system

Rooted in the human nature, conflict is an inevitable reality that has existed and continues to exist since the beginning of the creation. Because of that, controversies and disputes are always present. Accordingly, human society is in need of a certain force or authority that imposes obedience on individuals. Such an opinion is advocated by the scholar Ibn Khaldoun, as he states: “Human beings, by human nature, need in every gathering a controller and a ruler to protect one from the other”.

The political system as concept signifies the distribution of power, authority and influence within society and the ways in which the distribution is organized and controlled. The emergence of political authority represented by the state is considered a relatively recent social phenomenon as it appeared with the appearance of city and urbanism. In addition to that, it was also the result of society’s increase in size and complexity and the kind of constituting structures and relationships.

Perhaps the state's primary function as a social organization is to provide security and protection from external and internal threats. The state is characterized by the possession of an armed force in order to practice the necessary deterrence and ensure society’s security and stability that is exercised through the enactment of legislations and constitutions.

C. Economic system

The economic system as a concept refers to the organized procedures and measures according to which the processes of production, distribution and consumption of products and services take place by society’s members within a

specific social frame. The economic system is also known as the set of rules and controlling patterns that is followed by society in the use of resources to achieve its goals in priority setting and decision making with regard to economic products.

The economic ideas of Ibn Khaldoun, in his introduction, are considered a valuable contribution to the understanding of economic matters and events from a social perspective, which are dealt with in economic sociology. The economic system, in his view, is based on a set of structural elements: (Chalabi, 2000, p. 82).

- **Human work:** Products' value essentially stems from the work that goes into their production, and the gain is the value of human works.
- **Work and wealth values:** The collection of gold and silver is the purpose of the work. In this scope, Ibn Khaldounis found recognizing the relationship between the value of work and the wealth of nations. In other words, the wealth in the shape of precious metals such as gold and silver is the end goal of the work.
- **Work, supply, and demand values:** Work follows the law of supply and demand especially in the cities where the work is highly valued due to the considerable need for luxurious products and services. Numerous people and their pride in their luxurious needed services made expensive the work of artisans, workers, and craftsmen.

D. Religious system

The religious system is one of the fundamental systems in society's social life either primitive or civilized. Among the social systems, religion is considered the most important as it focuses on the relationship between the creator and the created. The occurring difference between religion and the other aspects of social life is beliefs and applications related in the sense of being embodied in unobservable deities.

Man's religious thinking - regardless of the thinking type – seeks to search for certainty in nature, to understand the reasons behind man's existence, and to uncover the mysteries surrounding his life and environment. Man has been influenced by the conditions of social and natural life and became subject to a number of holy symbols. Symbols that he considers the source of his livelihood and which blessings he seeks through offerings in return for protection from natural dangers and the evils of his kind.

The system defines religion as “representing a group of doctrinal phenomena and worships that give meaning to human life and organize human behavior toward the supernatural world. The belief is shared by a group of individuals who form a cohesive unit”.

Since the beginning of the creation, the religious system has undergone evolutionary stages that are summarized as follows:

- The pagan stage (idol worshiping).
- The stage of sanctifying the natural aspects (metaphysics).
- The stage of divine religions influence (non-Islamic).
- The stage of monotheism (Islamic religion).

Accordingly, religion performs multiple functions at the individual and social levels, the most important of which are:

- The individual has a sense of security, reassurance, and stability.
- The individual determines his identity and group affiliation through values and beliefs acceptance and rituals' practice.
- Religion provides a factor of self-control and organization of the social relations constituting the social structure.

E. Educational system

The educational system is defined as a set of rules, regulations, and procedures that are interconnected and adopted by a country to direct the educational matters and conduct its affairs. The educational system is set in an effort to advance the general values and principles of the nation in line with the educational policies that reflect philosophy in its various intellectual, social and political forms.

The educational system aims at both individual and group identity refinement to achieve successful, direct, or indirect socialization. Thus, it provides the individual with the ability to adapt to the surrounding social environment. In addition, it aims at providing the individual with basic skills based on the methods and mechanisms used in the school field. The target basic skills come as an effort to provide students with the full ability to perform well when practicing the various life activities. The educational system is always keen on raising the educational levels and improving its quality by relying on a series of procedures followed and linked to the placed curricula. The educational system also works on the serious activation of the educational role through educational innovations and reforms introduced over time. Technology is also an important parameter because, when included, it adds a tangible improvement to the educational quality.

The following summarizes the functions of the educational system:
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- The educational system contributes to the individual's growth and identity preservation as it continuously links the features of its local and foreign cultures without causing any disintegration, change, or dissolution of one into the other. As a result, the dimensions of his interaction and adaptation would increase while preserving the features of his identity.

- The educational system plays an effective role in the organization of social life as it provides the required stability and security for individuals by fighting social issues before escalation.
- The educational system meets all of society's economic needs, especially trained manpower, modern technology and digitization.

1.3 Social relations as a subject of sociology

Social systems are considered complex modes of social relationships. The family, for example, is a social system that consists of a network of multiple relationships, including the relationships between husband and wife, between parents and their children, between siblings, and even those between grandparents and their grandchildren. All these relationships can be studied and their common characteristics can be traced, such as, those related to the group size or relationship type as control or submission...etc.

Accordingly, social relations can **be defined** as: the interchangeable ties and influences between individuals within a society that form as a result of their gathering, feelings exchange, contact with each other, and their interaction in the crucible of society. Examples of these relations include friendship, family ties, kinship, work collegiality ...etc.

Max Weber was seriously committed to the idea that sociology is primarily based on the study of social relations and actions. Developing also a set of categories to describe and analyze them, which constituted also a significant part of the writings of Georg Simmel and Talcott Parsons. In addition to that, it recently took a wide space and spread in empirical research focusing mainly on the study of small groups and in industrial research (Inkeles, p. 56).

Social relationships can be classified into:

- Primary and secondary social relationships.

- Long-term and temporary (short-term) social relationships.
- Direct and indirect social relations.
- Internal and external social relations.
- Positive and negative social relationships
- Horizontal and vertical relationships.

1.4 Social processes as a subject of sociology

Wherever human groups are located, they do not live in isolation from one another. Multiple communication means ensure their communication and result in them influencing and affecting each other. From this, interactive relationships are born making them an integrated unit. Social relationships exist between individuals when they take into considerations the actors' actions to direct their own behavior. Consequently, the behavior direction becomes interchangeable ensuring continuous and lasting relationships. Among the most important social processes there are:

A. Compliance

Compliance means doing what one has to do, such as a student performing his homework, or a car driver stopping at an intersection until he is allowed to continue driving by either the traffic light or the police officer. In these examples among others, the situation is clear and precisely defined in the governing rules, and the force that ensures the support of compliance. In this regard, social scientists are foundstarting from an all known and accepted issue that is compliance with the social role and the performance of the associated tasks, which also depends on the concept of sanctions (Inkeles, p. 152).

B. Deviation

Deviation arises when one deviates from socially accepted standards resulting from an act that society feels strongly about to the extent that it adopts

certain sanctions in order to prevent or control this deviant behavior. For instance, speeding on a public roadway in violation of the traffic laws is considered a deviation. In the United States of America, sociologists have studied various issues related to crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, and addiction, as they are social deviations that violate the norms.

C. Cooperation

Cooperation is when the individual is in need of another either to help complete a certain work or make the work more proficient. Cooperation is a relationship where two or more individuals work to achieve a specific goal. In most cases, the two parties are not equal and there are differences between the two. Cooperation is of a number of types: the spontaneous, traditional, and directed or contractual cooperation.

D. Competition

There exists a similarity between cooperation and competition in that both processes are common, goal-oriented. Yet, the process of competition requires that one party reaches the goal before the other, so a victor can be named by the end. Competition is not the opposite of cooperation, but it includes some degrees of it because the competitors must cooperate in playing according to the governing laws of the game, such is the case in football or students competing to rank first.

E. Conflict

In the competition process, competitors try to achieve the same goal according to the conventional laws. Competitors engage in winning without harming their counterpart, however, when they do not respect their engagement, the competition turns into conflict. In such manner, conflict becomes the opposing and destructive process of the counterpart in order to reach the end

goals. Conflict can be found in all existing social systems between management and workers, between criminals and police officers, between colleagues...etc. Indeed, within the social structures, conflict can be regarded as a destructive process.

2. Branches of sociology

After sociology became independent from philosophy and had its own subjects and broadened horizons, sociologists viewed that within a science there should be branches. Each branch was concerned with a specific aspect of social life. Thus, there was general sociology with a number of other social sciences as its branches. The following gives familiarization with the most important branches of sociology.

2.1 Political sociology

Political sociology studies the political phenomenon within society and highlights the various influences that society exerts on political action. Then, it interprets political phenomena in their social, economic, cultural, historical and civilizational circumstances (Hamdaoui, 2015, p. 16).

Political sociology is based on several political subjects that are society related either by impacting it or impacted by it. Subjects, such as, power, authority, the state, extremism, violence, revolution, terrorism, political socialization, globalization, democracy, the elite, political participation, political development, ideologies, pressure groups, unions, constitutions, nature of the system of government, elections...etc.

Perhaps the most important issues that political sociology is concerned with are “political systems” and their study from a sociological point of view, such as democratic systems, dictatorship, monarchy, republic,...etc.

Political sociology is also concerned with the clarification of the kind of relationships the political system has with the social and economic structures. Moreover, extrapolating political participation from its various organizations and systems. Then, it goes to political change on the one hand and political conflict on the other.

2.2 Administrative sociology

Administrative sociology is the branch that studies the administrative systems on which rely the state, government, executive authority, or public services in their service performance, project management, and decision-making. Hence, administrative sociology studies administration as an inclusive space of employees, managers, and heads of administration who are united by various functional relationships within a hierarchical system either bureaucratic or democratic. All the previous executed in light of a sociological vision by focusing on the structure of administration, competencies, functions, and role in society on the one hand. On the other hand, it studies employees and their relationship with administration and society, and studies administrative authority and power on another hand.

Among the most important study issues that Administrative sociology deals with are: administration, public services, bureaucracy, administrative elites, centralized and decentralized administration, administrative authority, administrative division, decision-making, governance, administrative conflict, administrative services...etc.

2.3 Economic sociology

Economic sociology is concerned with the study of the economic phenomena in light of the economic approach by understanding and interpreting the forms of the economic activity. A science that studies the different economic activities of

production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Therefore, economic sociology is the study of the economic system in its various structures, forms, patterns, activities, cycles, functions and relationships, with special focus on the rational, purposive economic actions in their social contexts.

Smelser defines it in his book (**Sociology of Economic Life**) as the science that is based on applying sociology's reference frame and explanatory models to study and analyze modern economic activities that address the processes of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of scarce products and services (Hamdaoui, 2015, p. 57).

Accordingly, it can be said that economic phenomena assume a social character because they are linked to the desires, needs, incentives and activities of individuals. In addition to this fact, economy has always been in the service, cohesiveness, and harmony of society both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Next to all of the abovementioned, it is worthwhile to mention other subjects studied by economic sociology, for instance: economic capital, work and investment, economic competitiveness, dependency, economic globalization, economic crises, the relationship of the economy with social issues, sustainable economic development, the digital revolution, taxation impact on economy and society, demographic growth and its relationship to food and agricultural production,...etc

2.4 Educational sociology

The field of study in educational sociology is the phenomena related to education, educational institutions and their relationship with society, which means that the school reflects well, directly, and indirectly its social environment. In such a manner, Ahmed Ozi's definition of educational sociology can be presented as, "Educational sociology studies the forms of institutions' educational activities,

such as the activities of teachers, students, and administrators within the school. As it also describes the nature of the activities that take place between the school and other institutions, such as the family, the mosque, and the club. As it is also concerned with the economic and natural conditions in which these institutions exist and the conditions of their existence and interaction” (Hamdaoui, 2015, p. 104).

What should be noted here is that the school is not the only subject of this science; rather, it goes beyond to include the study of social relations within educational institutions. Besides that, the study of the institutions that carry out the function of educational and social upbringing and linking the whole to its social, economic and ideological function as well as clarifying the role of educational systems in social change.

Educational sociology concerns itself also with the study of the kind of existing relationships between scholastic phenomena, family, politics, and economy in order to reveal their social and political infiltrations into the educational system. The latter has long been subject to political and ideological trends. A kind of sociology that aims at reducing the responsibility of individuals, especially in the field of academic failure, so that society and its structures would bear that responsibility. At the same time, it emphasizes the role of the school in changing society, achieving sustainable human development, economic rehabilitation, developing society, achieving progress and prosperity, achieving democracy, equality, social justice, and eliminating illiteracy. Thus, education has become a major social project in a competitive field, especially in the era of globalization and information and digital revolution.