

CHALLENGES FACING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SOCIALLY STRATIFIED SOCIETIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIOLOGISTS OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to examine teaching and learning in the context of Socially stratified societies vis-à-vis challenges for sociologists of education. This was done by first attempting a brief theoretical framework with a view to having a sociological base for the paper. Conceptual clarification of teaching and learning, and socially stratified societies was done. The paper also highlighted on the nature of teaching and learning in stratified societies, showing the various predicaments faced by the teachers and students in these types of societies. The challenges or implications of the problems of teaching and learning in stratified societies for Sociologists of Education were also viewed. Among, the paper recommendations is that, the provision of education should be distributed primarily on an equal basis regardless of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of individual in any society of Nigeria, to minimize school content strata and stratification in access to basic schooling.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are social phenomena, a universal practice that take place in societies of the world. Where-ever human-beings interact, teaching and learning takes place as a social obligation, with keen importance to individual parents, children, teachers and the society. The channels in which social, cultural and political ideologies are transmitted and passed to the younger ones through adult in societies are the channels of teaching and learning. By implication, the process of teaching and learning provides ingredients for general socialization, social integration and adaptation. Despite the importance attached to these social phenomena, yet exist social structures that

either limit or narrow the chances to attaining education or enhance access to it. Societies strategize the values and methods of providing education for the individual. Thus, this is based on status, wealth and power, to Armstong (2001) the complex diversity of societies, like that of Nigeria, is evident from varieties of religious, ethnic, social, political and economic groups. These variations extend to various divisions of families, which led itself to stratification. Teaching and learning in socially stratified societies features the ability of individual groups to their special identities while at the same time, acknowledging the rights of other groups to preserve theirs. The social predicament facing teaching and learning presently in Nigeria clearly promotes extreme stratification in all facets of societies. Mahuta (2007) argues that, stratification in societies does not only exist in economic or political sphere, it also manifests in the educational system, and making class based schools to be inevitable. Since no society lives on an equal ground of social equity and equality, the gains and values of societies are achievers; while many others are 'losers; these affect Seriously the structures of societies, in respect of schools, and thereby creating class schools, knowledge fragmentation and stratification in certificates. The effect of these factors is on all the systems and sub-systems of social setting.

Theoretical Framework

Theories, sociological theories and theories of sociology of education are abstract in nature and full of dynamisms. A theory is an attempt to explain social factors, such as events, social forces, behaviour and ideologies. Theory seeks to explain the reality of social phenomena based on facts and tentative positive conclusion of social factors. Sociological theory is a range of abstract though, a general approach to the study of social actors, social facts and acts in societies. The variations of these perceptions lead to competitive atmosphere among different sociological schools of thought. In the view of Ogunbameru and Rotimi (2006), theories mean laws or principles which explain the conditions, among which might be human thought, or observable behaviour. In addition, otite and Ogionwo (2006) posit that, theory is a set of information, research findings which is to make clear an abstract thought by means of identifying and justifying the truth. The law of theory is to explain factors and make complicated things or happenings to be clear.

Stratification is a universal factor and it can be social, political and economic phenomena, to this background, all societies maintain social inequality among members, depending on its values. Dahrendrof cited in Schaefer (2005), the history of every society is that of struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. Thus stratification under capitalism implies that, the dominant class manipulates the proletariat.

Furthermore, Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008, p. 26) the Marxists contend that: They regard stratification as a divisive rather than an integrative structure. They see it as a mechanism whereby some exploit others. Rather than as a furthering collective goals.

Inequalities, differentiation and stratification have been deeply rooted and successfully ameliorated through the education process of various societies therefore, there is no single method or pedagogy of teaching and learning. From the foregoing, it can be seen clearly that the theoretical framework for this paper is the conflict perspective of sociology of education. As different classes, ethnic and gender have different level of educational attainment and access to schools. To this background, Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008) posit that, these categories of people in societies use different classes, such as the socio-economic grouping (SEG). The effects of social stratification on the educational life chances of children cannot be overemphasized. However, this process is a dynamic one because it changes, as such is flexible.

The Concept of Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, skill and information. These concepts are dynamic in nature, as they are social processes that deal with human beings in the social context of life. In all the stages of teaching, the primary aim is to help the individual learner to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes and to have a change of behaviour. This depends on the nature and logic of the teaching contents. Bellingham (2007) posits that teaching is the process of helping pupils to acquire knowledge of various kinds which are useful to the survival of man and society. It is the learning of skills and attitudes by means of planned instructional pedagogies. Aggarwal (2006) elucidates that, teaching involves some aspects, such as the Teacher, students learning process, learning situation, the learning material and contents. This means that teaching can be described as an interactive process, technically based on scientific strategies with enormous impact not only on the economic, political life of the society but also on its educational system. Because teaching deals with acquisition of knowledge during which older persons influence the younger individuals in society while in school, Onwuka in Onuforo (2007, pp. 8 – 9) sees teaching as: The various activities undertaken by a more experienced and knowledgeable person in order to enable others learn.

It is an activity designed by an experienced person to Educate and inform a less privileged person who makes Himself available for learning. It involves exerting some Influence over a person so as to help him change his

Beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

The concept of learning to the layman is rather simple, because the conclusion is getting to know something one does not know. Perhaps, learning is more than that, as it includes, receiving information, is the process of learning human behaviour, it is an activity of problem solving, a way to build human thinking rationally, and to be creative as well as to synthesize what has been learnt. To Farant (2004) the process of learning centres on acquiring information, retain attitudes, mastering skills, having knowledge, understanding, skill and capabilities that cannot be attributed to inherent behaviour. Learning is a dynamic process: it involves interaction between two or more people. During the process of learning many facts are learnt and these facts help the individual to adjust to certain behaviour. It is however clear, that learning cannot be precisely defined, it can be observed in a person's activities, attitude and behaviour. As Balogun (1981) succinctly puts it, learning generally is termed to be a relatively lasting change in performance or behaviour produced by internal or external forces or experiences.

Conceptualization of Socially Stratified Societies

Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the differences and distinct social groups which in societies are ranked above others in terms of valued material factors or prestige. Mahuta (2007) posits that, sociologists use the terms social stratification to mean the hierarchical arrangement of individual social classes, the strata are between two distinct groups and within groups of people in a society. In every society, people of both sexes, groups, differ in several ways by means of having more valuable resources than others. Schaefer (2005) maintains that the Marxist view of social stratification is the crucial determinant of social, economic and political inequalities, Stark (2004) elucidates that, social stratification is a state where society is made up of some members having more and others having less. However, sociologists are of the view that, it is a social phenomenon, an irresolvable conflict based on two inescapable facts. The varied undesirable consequences, those at the bottom line often suffer greatly, physically and emotionally. On the other hand, some patterns and degrees of stratification seem to be an unavoidable feature of social structure in social system. Societies have never lived on an egalitarian bases, though, people dreamed of it. It was based on this view that, Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008, p. 19) posits that:

a society in which all members are equal, such a society has never existed. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality. In particular. Power and

prestige are unequally distributed between individuals and social groups and in many societies there are many marked differences in the distribution of wealth.

Stratification consists of social groups and the emphasis is on the ways in which inequalities between groups are created, structured, maintained and persists over time. According to Stark (2004), Plato (427 – 347BC) saw only two classes as in eternal conflict. Aristotle acknowledged three classes in society, namely, a rapacious upper class, a service lower class, and a worthy middle class. Societies only survive based on these features of stratification, classification and social difference. Based on these reasons, Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008, p. 26) outlined some features of stratified societies as follows:

- the power of the ruling class comes from its ownership and control of the means of production (land, capital, labour, power, buildings and machinery)
- the ruling class exploits and oppresses the service class
- as a result, there is a basic conflict between the two classes.
- the various institutions of the society, such as the legal and political systems, are instruments of the ruling-class domination and serve to further its interests.
- only when the means of production are commonly owned will classes disappear, thereby bringing an end to the exploitation and oppression of some by others.

Thus, no human society ever lived on equal bases of social, economic and political distribution of chances, such as wealth, power or prestige. Society remains stratified and thus it persists and continues.

The Nature of Teaching and Learning in Socially Stratified Societies

Teaching and learning are the centre focus of educational institutions and no society exists without one pattern of education or the other. Education is the process where one learns the physical skills, acquires social norms and values. It is the process of receiving functional statement, Swift (1969) in Mahuta (2007) elucidates that, education in a broader sense is all that takes place in society which involves teaching and learning, and it can be deliberate teaching and learning. It is everybody's right and every individual is to participate fully in educational pursuits. If the value of education is recognized in societies and is designed to shape the individual for purposeful living, inhibition of educational life chances and limited access to education as a

consequence of stratification cannot be justified. The teacher who teaches the moral values represents the community in the school and classroom and is to uphold the values of the society. Transmitting these values should therefore, be regardless of wealth, status, and power. It is under these value variables that stratification is being promoted. However, in view of the nature of societies, teaching and learning are differentiated and stratified based on wealth, status and power, leading to class based schools, in form of private schools and public schools and the nature and quality of teaching in each differs, depending on the school facilities. Socio-economic status of the individual is the yardstick for measuring the school a child attends. As the society differs, access to schools and types of school to attend by individual child in society also differ, for the following reasons.

- the instruction of education functions differently based on society's preference, results in educational preferences, and the selection and placing of students based on social and economic status of family. Here, differences in school, performance and societal recognition are based on family status. The unequal education can result in reproduction, and re-strengthening of social inequality and stratification.
- Bowles and Gintis (1976) in Shepard and Greene (2001) maintain that, there is a correspondence between the social relationship of school teaching and learning and the social demand of labour or work force, skills and knowledge requested by the capitalist society. These factors resulted to division of subjects, grades, information and skills between the haves and the have-nots.
- the nature of knowledge acquired and school attended correlates with expected job and income, stratification is thereby justified right from the selection of school subjects and the value attached to the subjects in societies. The values are stratified between various subjects; there exist superior and inferior subjects in schools (Schaefer, 2005).
- in any socially stratified society, education must serve the interest of the powerful rather than the less powerful individual, in the classrooms laws, rules and regulations do favour children of the haves other than the have nots (Hurn, 1985).
- as the values of society are stratified so are the values and gains of schooling stratified between the privileged and less privileged in society. The school is a place that reinforces and re-justifies the existence of differentiation in society. This, the child learns right from childhood in school, within the neighborhood and community, either opportuned to be of the privileged or not (Hurn, 1985).

Education equality exists when schools produce the same results for the poor and the rich, the privileged and less privileged.

Shepard the Greene (2001) posits that, research has shown that even the schools with best and fair teachers often evaluate students on the basis of their social class and there racial and ethnic characteristics. It has also revealed that, the level at which social stratification manifests in schools results in the stratification of classes, results and teachers care. However, these factors affect child temperament, academic performance and even group association. Teaching and learning in wealthy areas are significantly better in terms of contents, contexts and nature of operation, than schools in economically disadvantaged areas. The students attending the wealthier schools excel in socially stratified societies and gain employment quicker and have more prestigious jobs than those from poor schools. Stratification in societies, affects teachers' students' relationship both in the classroom and outside.

Implications for Sociologists of Education

Education is the right of everyone, its pattern of distribution should therefore be just and fair to every citizen in any society. Sociologists of education are part of their societies, they therefore have knowledge of the education discrepancies that exist in society. The relationship between teachers, students and authorities in school is based on wealth, status, power, prestige and privileges. The effects of these attitudes make the school environment to remain a frustrating ground for the less privileged ones and places their efforts and abilities to be inferior and less privileged position.-

In the view of Meighan (2004), equal educational life chances or opportunities is impossible, achieving it may be unrealistic due to the economic structure of the society, which affects every aspect of education. Schooling in socially stratified societies, rural, urban, simple or complex societies has one aim, to prepare the young ones for adult life and transmission of culture to the younger generation. By implication, every child should be provided with the opportunity to attend school, and become a functional member of the society. Presently, the contents of the schools are stratified; the manner and kinds of schools in society have also been differentiated, leading to social challenges and competitions. Stratification in society leads to division into two sharp classes, namely: the school of the haves with their education structure and contents and that of the have-nots with inferior schooling nature and structures. However, this educational system or arrangement is a deliberate attempt by the ruling elites to make the less privileged remain completely subservient. In a capitalist society like Nigeria, it promotes class based schools.

Education is gaining knowledge, skill, receiving socialization and developing desirable attitude. These are essential to the community and the individual for growth and development. The delivery should therefore

not be stratified to the disadvantage of the less privileged. This therefore, means that for social solidity to be maintained, it must start by social equality through the process of teaching and learning. Stratification in schools will disorganize the promotion of social and cultural heritage. It has to stop, to justify and promote the essential ingredients that comprise the values of social heritage, which is meant for every citizen of the society. The contents of the Nation's schools have to be the same, to give every body the chance to view the future of the nation in one single direction of peace, equity and development. Sociologists of education should struggle for fairness in school structures, equal competitive grounds and should embark on innovations, through the process of social changes in the educational sector of the socially stratified societies. This will go a long way to promote general development and individual involvement in the pursuit of education.

Recommendations

Education is the right of everyone; therefore the provision of teaching and learning should be equated. Thus, class based schools, should be abolished and there should be uniform nature of schooling in Nigeria. This will help to justify quality, contents and structure of schooling and possibly improve the chances of the less privileged to excel in life.

Teachers who teach in various schools should receive armful reward, good payment to make them stay on their jobs. With this, sociologists of education should promote social justice by providing fair ground for learning

The Government should endeavour to provide social amenities to enrich every school in socially stratified society. Such as, portable drinking water, toilets, accessible roads to schools, and good school structure and teachers. The schools provided in the rural areas and those of urban areas should carry the same features and provide opportunity for every child to learn in his or her locality regardless of socio-economic status and location of school.

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