

PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

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CHAPTER 10

INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL SOCIAL CLASS, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT ON EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument for national development, social change and national integration. It is a system and a process, hence it is subject to the influence of a number of factors. These factors include; the parental social class of the learners, culture and environment. Each of these factors is here-examined, particularly as they determine the type, quality and access to education.

Parental Social Class

Social class is a level in society made up of people who consider themselves equal due to similarities in family background, level of education, occupation, race, and attitudes towards social issues. (Stalup, 1968). Arising from the forgoing definitions, sociologists stratified people in a given society into three classes: upper class, middle class and lower class. These classifications reflect the economic and social status, which the individual enjoys in his contemporary

society.

Social classes in many societies had developed from the rise of the merchant class, and the ownership of wealth in term of money as well as landed properties owners. It was the rise of capitalism and its inevitability in modern and ancient societies that really led to what is today known as social class; {upper class, middle class and lower class}. For example, there is a villager or petty trader and industrial worker or wholesale trader whose pay packet or profit making is more robust than the former. In this regards, the peasant or petty trader ordinarily finds himself in the lower class, while the industrial worker or wholesaler is classified as middle class. Influenced by socialist ideologies, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Lenin, Paulo Freire among others have also introduced certain terms to depict different social classes. They include bourgeoisie; proletariat, capitalist, feudalist, “the haves” the “have nots”, privileged, underprivileged, over privileged, oppressed, marginalized or “the marginados”, subjects, objects, patricians and plebeians.

Bourgeoisie, according to Karl Marx means the class of modern capitalist or owners of areas of production and employers of wage labour. Contrarily, the proletariat is a class of modern wage-labourers who have no means of production of their own, and are therefore, reduced to selling their labour- power in order to live.

On his part, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian scholar made reference to those denied opportunities and access to good education as oppressed. Such persons, he classified as the “marginados”, marginalized or

oppressed. He described those in this class as objects rather than subjects. According to Paulo Freire, the marginados have no knowledge of their rights in their society and so cannot agitate for such rights. He further described them as an object, which remain static in a position until they are moved.

Every family belongs to a "social class". Into these classes a child finds him or herself. In effect, each of the classes influence education in different ways. Emile Durkheim, a foremost, educationist who lived between 1858 and 1917 had maintained that there were as many kinds of education as there were social milieux (classes) in a given society. In our contemporary Nigerian society, the education of children of the "privileged" is different from those of "under privileged".

The nature of the education and care that the child receives in the early years of life is critical for his or her overall development and later life chances. Moreover, education and care of children is a basic human right and it is in the best interests of the child that it must be an overriding issue. Interestingly however, care of children by parents is essentially determined by the social class of the parents.

It is to be noted that social class differentials in life are quite evident at birth and state of health of the individual. These differentials show up in terms of wealth and education of the family into which the child is born; survivals of children at birth are relatively enhanced, the higher up the social class one goes.

Studies from different parts of the world suggest that a nutritional deficiency in children before and after

birth has adverse effects on their learning and social behaviour. Maduewesi (2005) asserted that malnourished children have been found to be restless, to lack concentration, are easily tired and weak, impatient and listless. This is of serious concern to early childhood education and educators.

The implication of the foregoing assertion is that, affordability of balanced and adequate nutrition is a function of finance. Finance in effect, differentiates the family into social classes. Unarguably, children from the lower social class caused by inadequate finances are vulnerable to malnourishment.

Equally significant are the parental interest and aspirations for their children in terms of education. Children whose parents are keenly interested in their education tend to do better in their educational pursuit. In this connection, parental interest in, and their educational goals for their children can hardly be distanced from the enabling environment they provide for their children.

As a result of classification of the society, training and education for specific vocations or areas of occupation have arisen. Today, young ones seeking to enter the universities or other tertiary institutions have preference for certain courses. In their opinion, these courses if successfully completed are expected to put them in distinguished vocations of human endeavour. This phenomenon has brought about over demand for admission spaces in the universities, and to these demands, the universities are responding.

Culture

Culture has been defined in many ways. Jansen

(1972) defined 'Culture' as the practices of a people in relation to the way they bring up their young ones; their occupation, religions, social interaction, food, dress and language. Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Taylor, 1891) which ever way one adopts in ascribing meaning to culture, what appears most paramount is that; it is the total way of life of a people. In this regard, it is the values, which the people uphold that constitute their culture. They include; religion, art, language, dressing, beliefs, etc.

People are differentiated by their own culture. People are expected to transmit its culture from one generation to another. That is, culture is expected to be perpetuated amongst the owners of such culture; past, present and future.

Radcliffe-Brown examined culture from its functional point of view. According to him, culture was that integrating function or dimension in society, which provided it with equilibrium or, if it fails, with disequilibrium. He added that an integrated society, in which the culture contributed in a positive way towards the maintenance of its structure, was an eunomic one while a society, which was characterized by some forms of dysfunction and dis-equilibrium, was dysnomic.

It is important to note that the means of transmission of culture, or in more advanced societies, the general educational system will differ with each type of culture and with the mode of behaviour which any particular group may regard as desirable. In other

words, those values which a people wishes to perpetuate are the components of their culture, and education is a major vehicle for the perpetuation of such culture. Meduewesi (2005) affirmed that there is a unanimity in the perception of the role of the school as an avenue for cultural transmission.

Culture is not a static thing. It is dynamic. That is, it changes with the passage of time especially when the people are in contact with other people or societies. Culture is an active process, as a result, contact with other societies has severe implication on culture.. The development of the child in any society in the past, present and future is a function of its educational system and the contact such a system has made with others. Hence, in the statement of the aims and objectives of any educational system, its societal goals as well as those cultures it wishes to accept from other societies are reflected. It was this understanding, that is, the active process of culture, which is commonly termed enculturation and accultural that has led to the adoption of different educational approaches.

Every culture promotes or inhibits certain type of education. It seeks to promote those, which are perceived to be relevant to the development of its society. In Nigeria, it was observed that the culture of the Hausa/Fulani was obstinate to the western culture. As a result, there were difficulties in their embracing western education. Instead they opted for Arabic education at every given opportunity. Up till date, the Islamic legal system is preferred as curriculum content of legal education in universities located in northern Nigeria.

The issues of gender differences among children has placed the girl child in a disadvantaged position in some societies. In such societies, it is the girl who stays at home to make room for the boys to be educated. This is because of the archaic notion, which is strongly entrenched in their culture that, a girl education ends in a husband's home. (Maduewesi 2005). This factor has negative influence on the child's access to education. The negative influence exerted by the factor is noticeable when the population of the female in proportion to that of the male is considered.

A further influence of culture on education is the selection of the type of education or courses of study for male and female alike. Certain courses are reserved for the female, and some others exclusively for the male. Osadolor (2007) examined the factors limiting access to technical education in Edo State of Nigeria. It was found in his study, that there is general belief in the state that technical education is essentially for the men. He added that enrolment of the female in the technical vocational courses in the technical colleges was less than one percent.

Environmental Factors:

Factors of environment influencing education are: Climate, School location, School social life, Buildings, Seats and desks and Class size.

Climate:

Climate as used in this context is the widespread trend and people's attitudes towards educational practices in an area. In some places, people adhere strictly to approved educational system, while in some other areas, the guidelines are circumvented.

It has been observed that in some states of Nigeria where people cherish sharp practices, the rules governing educational practices are hardly adhered to. For example, in the operation of private schools, approvals are expected to be obtained. Before approvals are granted, certain requirements are expected to be fulfilled. Unfortunately however, as a result of the people's disregard for rules and regulations, unapproved private schools abound. Even some of the approved ones do not certify the stipulated guidelines. In the same vein, senior school certificate examinations are done in odd centers and in corrupt manners.

In the same environment, moral re-armament and discipline which were hitherto the functions of the schools are abandoned. There are environments where secret cultism among the adults are applauded and acknowledged for obvious reasons. In such places, the education system is influenced by cultism and hence schools in such places will become centers for recruiting school children as members into deadly cults. This is because, children do emulate the adult members of their societies.

The consequences of the forgoing is that the climate of an environment can inhibit the educational system from realizing its goals. In the same manner, it can de-rail the system to the extent that it could only generate undesirable products.

These days, many young Nigerians have preference for traveling to Europe and America in search of greener pastures. Also, in many mineral oil and gas producing communities, hostage taking, attack

on oil prospecting companies, vandalization of oil installations, bunkering are lucrative ventures. Since these practices constitute the trend in these places, education would not be a priority among the school age children and youths.

School Location:

Schools are supposed to be sited in serene environment. In such environment, noise is greatly minimized. Nowadays, schools are to be found in and around market places, motor parks, brothels, "Beer parlors", casino gaming centers and cinema or video clubs. Locating schools close to any of the above can have adverse effect in the moral development of the learners, and learning outcomes. Learners require environments, which are conducive for academic and recreational activities.

Location of schools in urban, rural, commercial, industrial and non commercial/industrial environment creates differences in terms of their impact on schools and the learners, within and out of their school precinct. It has been observed that students who attended schools in the rural areas appear sluggish when exposed to life in the urban areas.

Social Life:

Educational institutions are themselves social groups (micro societies). Sporting activities, Internet facilities, clubs of various types, field trips, excursions, canteen services, relationship among students and between students and teachers' influences determine the behavioral patterns of the learners. A school environment is expected to have all of the above, so that the school climate can be conducive for learning.

Buhus(2002) had stated that the social environment of a school can inhibit or facilitate students' preference for a particular school and hence the teaching- learning process. According to him, students can hate their school for poor performance in sports, being in a school where promises are broken by authorities, being constantly haunted by teachers for alleged misdemeanors which are unfounded or being in a school where fellow students bully on others.

School Buildings and Furnitures

The architectural design and lay out of the walkways drive ways and buildings in a school can influence learning to a large extent. Similarly, the availability or non availability of suitable furniture in the classes can affect student's desire to learn. Udeozor (2002), Okunbanjo (2005) and Idowu (2003) have asserted that a physical learning environment that fails to gratify learning tendencies can create frustrations and classification among learners. They opine that inadequacies in seats and desks provided, can adversely affect the learning process and disrupt learner's mental activities. Therefore, for learning to be effective, efforts should be made to provide attractive buildings large enough to accommodate all classes of students, seats and desks which are adjustable, comfortable and moveable for group discussions and group work when such needs arise (Okobiah, 2003).

Class Size:

Many public schools in urban settings in Nigeria lack enough classrooms. Incidentally, trends in enrolment shows that enrolment of students is on the increase in these schools. What is therefore noticeable

in the schools are intimidating class sizes as classrooms ordinarily built to accommodate 40 students now stock over a hundred students.

In Edo State of Nigeria, the handing over of the Immaculate Conception College to the Catholic Mission and the patterning of Edo College as a model school has shot up enrolment in the neighboring Niger College. Similar situation was glaring during the free education era in the states controlled by the defunct Unity Party of Nigeria. In these schools, students and pupils are to be sharing chairs, some standing, sitting on bare floor, on broken chairs, or on the window. The implication is that such class sizes repel teachers and hence bring about ineffective teaching, or no teaching at all. It also breeds indiscipline as it is difficult for the teacher to effectively control the students. Such environment could bring about students with such traits as disobedience, cheating, vandalism and absenteeism. It was in this regards, Okunbanjo (2005) noted that classrooms and their sizes that are characterized as supportive and friendly enable students feel more comfortable to interact with mates and teachers. It also enhances intellectual growth. Whereas, rejection contributes to students' decision to leave school, drop out of school, academic failure and poor self concept.

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