

Sociology of Education

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THE SCHOOL: A SOCIAL INSTITUTION AND BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATION

By

R.I.O. Edobor

Introduction

The school shares the social origin of man, the school is a social institution formally set up for preparing learners for their future, intellectual, professional as well as social roles in the society. The sociologist has great interest in the school because:

1. The School is the primary agent of education
2. It influences the social behaviour of the student in and out of the school.

Based on this background therefore, the following areas will be covered:

Socializing influences in the school i.e

- I. Teacher influence on learner
- ii. Learner influence on teacher
- iii. Teacher influence on fellow teachers
- iv. Learners influence on fellow learner

Peer group socialization in the school

The Nigerian school systems and socialization

- i. Nursery or preliminary school
- ii. Primary school
- iii. Secondary school
- iv. Tertiary institutions

The school as a bureaucratic organization

Socializing Influences in school

The following are some of the influences in school.

Teacher's influence on learners

The social power of a teacher is derived from three main sources:

- The social reinforcers at teachers disposal: praise, attention, physical proximity and resources desired by learners
- The way teachers use this power
- The content of teaching and availability of curricular activities (Morisson and McIntyres 1971).

A teacher who dispenses his power by delegating responsibilities tend to have a more pleasant social emotional classroom climate, greater student participation and interaction. All these can lead to better use of initiative and greater sense of responsibility.

Learner socializing with teachers

Learners help in the socialization of

teachers at all levels of the educational system. The effect influences his academic social behaviour in school. Academically, learners' response to teachers' method either reinforces his use of that method or makes him discard it. Socially, his interaction with learners may either teach him to be liberal, moderate or to appreciate that "familiarity breeds contempt". The teacher may realize that he has to be liberal, stern, firm and sympathetic all at a time.

Teacher socializing influence on fellow teachers

Senior teachers like principals, vice principals, heads of departments are usually models for other teachers in the performance of their duties in the schools. Leadership style also influences staff relationship. Teachers also pattern their social relationship with fellow students along the patterns practised by the senior teachers.

Learners influences fellow learners

The newly admitted learner observes the other learners and later begins to behave or act like them in learning and behaviour. This way he gets absorbed or socialized into the school life. The closest friends of the learner are normally his classmates or from his neighbourhood or children from family friends, later he can make

friends with distant people. These friendships exert a lot of influence on the learner. The peer group is the most fundamental of learners' influences.

Peer group socialization in the school

Peer groups are informal associations of young learners in school for reasons of personal interest to themselves and to their group; they are found at all levels of the educational system but they are mostly in secondary school at their adolescent age (Taiwo, 1988). The following are characteristics of the peer group:

- a) Peer group is informal and voluntary
- b) Members know themselves and have their own codes of conduct
- c) Peer group interest is usually concentrated on the welfare of members.
- d) Membership is usually shrouded in mystery. Secrecy is considered an asset, which is noted for anti-school or anti-family activities.
- e) If peer group opinion tallies with that of the authority then there is no clash but otherwise there is clash.
- f) When a member is punished for anti-school activities, he is seen as a hero by his peer group.

Members turn to one another for solace, the formation of peer group develops in members a spirit of unity, cooperation and team work (Espirit de corps).

The Nigerian School and Socialization

The Nigerian school system consists of pre primary, primary, secondary, tertiary. The learning that takes place in these schools is geared towards gainful employment and for social living. These schools are recognized by various levels of government and are set up by government, individuals, religious and business organizations.

The Nursery or Pre Primary School

The nursery school is established for children under the age of six. It is set up by both the government and entrepreneur but the federal government is responsible for the approved curriculum to be used. The level of education expands the social interaction of the child. It serves as an early index of character development. At this stage in a child's life, parents and teachers are able to identify the introvert, extrovert, the gregarious or isolated child. Many times character traits that could be problematic in future are detected and corrected. The nursery school lays foundation for attitude formation and future intellectual development. Children with nursery education are usually more prepared for primary schooling than those that do not have.

The Primary School

Local governments control primary schools but are financially supported by the federal government. It is free to every Nigerian

child including the handicapped. Private individuals and organizations also own primary schools, which are fees paying. The children are within the age of 6-11 yrs. At this level, children tend to react more to involuntary pressures of social inequality by associating with children of comparable family background to themselves. They begin to show social attitude and values which reflect those of their families and unless these are found to be negative and controlled, such attitudes and values could be carried onto adult life later.

The Secondary School

This level of education is owned both by the government and private entrepreneur. Children between the ages of 11 yrs to 16 or 17 years attend the secondary schools. There are different secondary schools such as, the conventional secondary schools, grade two teachers colleges, technical and vocational colleges. All these schools get their products (students) from primary schools. The Nigerian schools operate the American 6-3-3-4 system of education which is 6 years primary, 3 years junior secondary, 3 years senior secondary and 4 years university. The first half of secondary education does not pay fees but the second part does. The private schools are so expensive, even the once free missionary schools. With the 6-3-3-4 system of education being implemented, the secondary school component appears the most affected both in curriculum offering and structural

arrangement. These changes are significant in the lives of the learners. The secondary school has a greater sociological significance for learners than the other levels of education.

Socializing Influence of Secondary School for Learners

The following are some of the influences:

1. Life in secondary school in terms of intellectual attitude and social outlook formation is many times predictive of adult life.
2. The type of secondary school, which learners attend can influence their social roles during and after school.
3. The pattern of organization in the secondary school can also influence social life. When school authority is receptive to learners' ideas and opinions, it tends to encourage learners' participation in the social life of the school.
4. Apart from academic subject offerings, there are co-curricular activities like games, sports and other hobbies as well as membership of school clubs and societies.

The Tertiary Institution in Nigeria

The tertiary institutions consist of colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics, institutes of professional studies, universities. They run programmes such as National Diploma, National Certificates, Bachelors of Science or Arts, Masters and Ph.D. These institutions help one to specialize in one's

chosen course of study. The social life and socialization processes are more advanced than in secondary schools. They also admit both young and matured students into full time, part time, pre degree courses. This level of education has the nearest resemblance of life in the society. At this level students are freer, direct their lives and have a say in the affairs of government. In essence, students assume the role of custodians of public conscience. They feel free to criticize the academic and political social order and many times can resort to violence to drive home their point. Educational institutions at this level therefore help to consolidate students' intellectual and social abilities and interests and these are carried into social role-playing and role-taking in adulthood.

The School as a Bureaucratic Organization

First and foremost the term organization needs to be understood, followed by the term bureaucracy, then the school as a bureaucratic organization.

Organization is a formally established social unit, which is structured to render social, religious, cultural, health or other socially relevant services. Organization ranges from social clubs to a government parastatal or a multi-national corporation. These organizations are set up to achieve specific goals. The school has administrative and structural management which makes it an organization. The school as an organization came into prominence with greater

government interest, investment and participation at all levels except the nursery schools.

Max Weber, the proponent of bureaucracy believed that organizations are run in order to attain efficiency and the determinants of such efficiency are operating a system based on division of labour and involving specialization of clearly differentiated functions (Oloke, 2001). Therefore bureaucracy according to Swifty (2003) is a "rational arrangement of office providing certain means for administration and control of office holders' actions". The characteristics of bureaucracy are as follows:

1. It is an organization of official function bound by rules
2. A functionary has a specific area of competence with concomitant authority or sanctions to ensure efficiency.
3. Authority is on a hierarchy
4. There are rules guiding official conduct and there should be specialized training for the different categories of officers.
5. Factors of production belonging to the organizations are separated from those of officials. Therefore officials cannot take over organizational properties at will.
6. The function is both a career and a profession to the functionary. He therefore gets promoted as merited and his devotion to duty is contract that he must fulfill.
7. Bureaucracy is regarded as an organizational mechanism founded on

discipline (Oloko 1988).

From the above explanation of organization and bureaucracy, it is now easier to explain the school as a bureaucratic organization. In understanding the school as a bureaucratic organization we must not fail to know that the school is unique in itself because though it has all the characteristics described above, there is one unique feature, which other organizations do not have. The fact that the school deals with human beings and not things makes it unique. The school processes people.

Summary

In this chapter we have discussed the school as a social unit and a formal agent of education and socialization. The various socializing influences in the school were also examined, particularly between students, peer group and teachers; the socializing effect of the different level of education was also examined and the school as bureaucratic organization was also looked at.

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