

EXPLORATION OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE NIGERIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM IMAGE OF A STRATIFIED SOCIETY

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Abstract

The concept of class was propounded by Marx (1883) in Haralambos and, Holborns (2008) who employed it, in one of his theory to describe the degree of exploitation perpetrated by the ruling class, called the capitalist (Bourgeoisie) against the serf or laborers in the bid to maximize profit (Marx, 1883; Payne, 2006). This act is still evident in the Nigerian School system, in which the status and class determines the quality and quantity of learning made available to learners. The Nigerian school system has passed through series of changes and modification that has caused unequal access to education among the class strata. Thus, this paper would employ, historical antecedent, considering the concept of 'free education'. The present picture of our schools, in relation to the expected socialization roles of the schools, in producing desirable adult members of the society, and the reality, which would make meaningful contribution to societal development.

Key Words: Stratification, Bourgeoisie, Capitalism, Class, Status

Introduction

In the Nigerian context, the idea of school started during the colonial era, when it gained political recognition with the promulgation of the first ordinance on education in 1882 by the British Parliament, this was based on the British education act of 1884. This act led to the

setting up of many schools thereby leading to explosion in the growth and establishment of schools (Fafunwa, 2004). By 1918, as at the end of the World War 1, the number of unassisted school rose and by 1922, both the government assisted school were one hundred and ninety five (195), with a population of twenty eight (28,000) thousand while unassisted schools were two

thousand, four hundred and thirty two (2432) with population of one hundred and twenty two (122,000) thousand. This development gave equal access to all strata of the society, be it high, middle or low, because of the rush on the part of parents to enroll their children (Isyaku, 2002). This was complemented with the introduction of the free Primary school scheme in Western Nigeria in 1955, Before 1954, approximately 457,000 pupils were enrolled in fee-paying primary schools in the Western Region. By 1955, following the introduction of Universal Free Education, enrollment rose to 811,000 and continued its sharp increase, reaching about 1,100,000 pupils by 1960 (Obanya, 2002). The free education policy, if it had been properly implemented would have leveled-up the inequality that is presently noticeable. However, due to some problems that plagued the policy, like inadequate planning, population explosion, inadequate and poor facilities, and the self-centeredness of the ruling class in the bid to fraudulently acquire wealth that led to inadequate funding of educational system. This brought about the widening of the gap between the rich and poor as regards having access to education (Adejare, 2004). There appears persistency of this imbroglio despite the introduction of Universal Basic Education by successive administration which could not in any way ameliorate the educational bottleneck.

School as an Institution for Societal Development

The word school had been derived from the Greek word 'skole' which means 'leisure time' or 'recreational'. This spread across the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The school being formal in nature and structure, and regarded as society-in-miniature (Durkheim, 1961;

Haralambos & Holborns, 2008) has assumed very important place in the society, this importance could be expressed in the deliberate transmission of the societal cultural value to the younger ones in the society. In essence, school transmits both general values, which provide the necessary homogeneity for social survival, and specific skills which provide the diversity for social cooperation (Haralambos & Holborns, 2008). Schools perform both explicit and implicit functions: they transmit knowledge and skills, preserve cultural heritage, prepare learners for future occupations, teach vocational abilities and self-discipline, and promote equal access to rational knowledge. They also offer a structured social environment where students form associations and friendships, while serving a custodial role by caring for children during parents' working hours (Noah, 2006). At school pupils/students are made to understand the need to respect the school rules, learn to respect societal rules; and develops the habit of self-control and restraint simply because he should control and restrain himself (Durkheim, 1961; Haralambos & Holborns, 2008). Based on this role, the school the major institution through which development and building of individuals towards acquisition of societal values, set out principles and practice as well as the necessary skills needed for socio-economic development.

Stratification and the Concept of Class and Status

Status is derived from the Latin word 'sto' which means I stand; status is refers to as a social position which someone occupies within a social system. It can be ascribed, based on the peculiar characteristics with which an individual is born or into which one matures, for instance, race, ethnic group, sex, age, family background are elements

which may determine one's ascribed status. In ascribed status, there is no vertical mobility. The other form of status is achieved status. Here, one has control and the ability to effect a change, through some manipulative elements like knowledge, education, intelligence and hardworking. All of these are not inborn traits and thus, the possibility of vertical mobility because they are extrinsic products of human interaction in the society (Scott and Leonhardt, 2005).

Class is best described in terms of occupational role and property ownership and control. The criteria by which we define occupation differ widely as regards their general desirability. Desirability is determined on how lucrative the salary of a job is. It attaches some prestige to the occupation which is otherwise called 'status'. Many a times, Sociologists group together occupations with similar overall level of desirability in order to establish a hierarchy of classes. The number and names given to these varies with the classification. Some are lower, middle and upper classes.

Connecting the above concept to the schooling system in Nigeria; it is obvious that the categories of classes are well represented in the school system. Children may come from a lower, middle or upper class parents, and these tend to reflect in the school culture, which subsequently or adversely affects the academic performance of students.

Many Sociologists argue that material factors play a part independently of culture, in determining levels of educational attainment. Sullivan (2001) makes this point in the above quotation; Bourdieu recognizes the importance of what he calls economic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); and (Reay, David; and Ball, 2005) show financial constraints can affect

students' progress in further and higher education.

The factor of the social environment that may affect a child includes the occupational status of his parent, the parent attitude towards their children schooling and the expectation they have for their children. These social environment indices indirectly stratified the school into the upper, lower and middle class in which children from these various classes has expected behaviours that are peculiar to the class which they belong.

Educational Achievement in the Lower Class

A child from a lower class is handicapped in that there are few facilities and amenities for him at home to fully prepare him or her for school. Such a child may suffer ill-health and even finds it difficult to make satisfactory adjustment at school (Daramola, 1994). Poor educational background may limits the chances of being gainfully employed and which in turn may affects the quality of life of the child after school. It is therefore, the joy of every parent regardless of the status to provide education within the limit of their capability.

Educational Achievement in the Middle Class

Noah (2006) postulated that presently the picture of an average student in the Nigerian school system is that of a middle class structure. It means that regardless of the parent socio-economic class, a child must put on school uniform, a sandal, a socks and provision must be made for notebooks and textbooks which at times are imposed on the parents before their children can be allowed to have a place in both the public and private schools.

This new culture does not take into consideration the socio-economic position of the parent at the

lower class who may not be capable enough to afford three square meals, let alone meeting the academic needs of their children. The middle class parent can afford to send their wards to Private school, though with a relatively affordable fee. Some may settle for the densely populated Public school and make provision for remedial teaching to supplement the academic deficiencies of the Public school over-population.

The upper class may send their wards abroad to be educated, but this rarely occurs among the middle class. However, it should be noted that this middle class picture is gradually fading away due to the massive and self-centred scramble (on the part of the upper class) to dubiously accumulate wealth at the expense of other classes which invariably widen the gap between the rich and poor in the Nigerian context.

Educational Achievement in Upper Class

A child from the upper class socio-economic background or parent has advantage over the child of a lower or middle class. The student from the upper class have unhindered access to sophisticated instructional facilities like internet, television, computer, games, textbooks, journals, magazines as at when needed. All these help to prepare the child for proper learning in school. It has been discovered that parents of upper socio-economic classes have more positive attitude toward their children schooling and also have high expectation and standard for their children (Feinstein, 2003).

Feinstein claimed that the main factor influencing educational attainment was the degree of parental interest and support. Class differences in parental support account for class differences in educational attainment. The present picture of upper class culture in the Nigerian school system reveals that due to population

explosion in the public school and the bid by parent to give their wards qualitative education, made most upper class parents preferred the high fee-paying Private school with a maximum average population of thirty to thirty-five students in a class, compared to the Public school of an average of over one hundred in a class.

However, this was not the case in the 60s and the late 70s. School nowadays whether Government approved or not was created or rather established due to population explosion in Public schools. This definitely has affected the quantity as well as the quality of the school system in Nigeria. Most upper class parents even preferred sending their children to study abroad, which thus, brings about educational inequality between the upper and other classes, thereby stratifying the school (Dubey, 1979). In essence, education or rather knowledge has been commoditized as opined by Rikowski (2005) that educational services are increasingly operating in markets and being transformed into commodities that could be bought only by the upper class people.

However, it is disturbing that the Nigerian school system is moving at a progression that in two decades from now, only the upper class and middle class parents may be able to send their wards to schools while the parents with low socio-economic status may not be able. This would be quite pathetic in society that is abundantly blessed with human and material resources.

Theoretical Framework

In the view of Althusser (1971) the school being part of the educational institution is refer to as the 'Ideological State Apparatus', which performs the functions of sustaining the capitalist system, by means other than the use of force. This means

that the school (based on class struggle in the area of access to qualitative education which in turn has stratified the school system), is seen as operating jointly with older societal institutions like law, politics, family religion and culture to disseminate the ruling class ideology, despite the incompatibility in value among these institutions. Marx in his concept of 'Hegemony' (Marx, 1883; Haralambos & Holborns, 2008) also throw more light on the function of school as a tool of 'Mechanical Class Reproduction', this was supported by (William, 1976; Boadfoot, 1979), that the school is used by the ruling class to legitimate and maintain their position to the disadvantage of the lower class people.

Althusser (1971) further argues that the education through the school system teaches aspect of the ruling class ideology which are class-maintenance, but these are cleverly concealed from both teachers and pupils, since they have been made to believe that schools are free from such and teachers respect the various identities of the students.

The justification of these theories reveals that it is not that the lower class are not aware of the exploitative tendencies of the ruling or upper class, but the curriculum of the school has been designed to suppress resistance and to help the upper class to maintain and sustain their status, to the disadvantage of the down-trodden lower class members.

However, Omokhodion (2002) assert that in Nigerian school system, these children who can survive even in the most difficult situation only manage to get through with their difficult schooling. Those who manage to pass their school examination and common entrance examination at the primary level in the face of all odds are the exceptional children. Because the children of the

upper class most time excel academically because of adequate educational provisions made by their parent through their material wealth.

These exceptional children from the lower class enjoy the positive sides of education by moving vertically to a much higher status, which improves their quality of life. The question to be raise here is that, what is the fate of the low intelligence children, from the lower socio-economic class whose parent could not make adequate educational provision for their needs?

Appraisal of the Study

The above question could be resolved by examining the present situation of our school system as reflected in the life of our youths in the society, which this paper describes as the 'By-product of class struggle of our school system'.

The mistakes of the school system, caused by class struggle are deviance and anti-social behavior that are evident in the Nigerian society. Academically frustrated students most especially from the lower-class parent constitute bad gangs in school, they become deviant in school. Often times, they are either drop-outs or the inability to pass the qualifying examinations gets them frustrated and hence, they become miscreants.

The picture is best reflected in our Bus-Stops and Motor Parks where you find able-body youth extorting money from helpless transporters, which is a menace in our society. The question that borders one's mind is that if these miscreants that are 'by-products' of class struggle of our school system are been stopped or denied access to this cheap-means-of-earning-income, that is, forcefully extorting money from transporters; then what happens? The possible answer is that the rate of crime would increase geometrically because they may have no other option than to

engage in robbery if they are not properly rehabilitated. This also, may threatening the security of our much esteemed society, which will take its toll by retarding the progress and development of the society, courtesy of class struggle.

In Nigerian of recent, every aspiring politician and political party includes free education as one of their agenda while campaigning in their bid to get into power. This policy has not really been well implemented as promised. The school system has been left in such a pathetic situation despite the economic buoyancy of Nigeria that the ruling class has capitalized upon to further widen the gap between the rich and poor.

Recommendations

- i. The concept of stratification cannot be ruled out in any existing society; but much could be done by government to make every individual a partaker and beneficial of educational largesse.
- ii. Since education is the bed-rock of socio-economic development of any nation, involvement of citizens towards attaining relevant knowledge that would enhance their contributions positively therefore, cannot be jettisoned.
- iii. It is the responsibility of relevant authorities to foster spirit of belongingness among members of the society; and as well make the environment more conducive for individuals/learners as regards access to quality education in both Private and, Public schools in order to bridge the gap between the 'Have' and, 'Have not'.
- iv. Thus, encouraging and giving way to some extent the principle of equality.

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