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EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The role of education as an agent or instrument of social change is widely recognized today. Social change is common to all societies. It is permanent, in that, it is always happening, and yet it can happen so slowly that it is rarely ever noticed. At the same time, a few social movements and socio-political revolutions have been forceful enough to draw immediate global attention. This paper explores the definition of social change, the characteristics, processes, causes, consequences and its implications on Nigerian society. Social change may take place when human needs change, when the existing social system or social institutions fail to meet the existing human needs and when new materials suggest better ways of meeting human needs. Education can initiate social change by bringing about a change in outlook and attitude of man. This explains why contemporary world attention has focused on education as an instrument of social change on a particular society. It plays the role launching nations into the world of science and technology and with consequential hope of human advancement in terms living conditions and development of the environment. Social change takes place as a response to many types of changes that take place in the social and non social environment

Introduction

There are many unresolved problems in Nigeria, but the recent upsurge in corruption remains particularly troubling. The damages

done to the polity as a result of institutional corruption are astronomical. Corruption leads to (and includes) the slow movement of files in offices, police extortion, slow traffic on roads and highways, port congestion, queues at passport offices and gas stations, ghost workers, and election irregularities. As a result of the ongoing and deep impacts of widespread corruption, the issue is one that reoccurs regularly in most academic and informal discussions in Nigeria (Dike, 2012). Other issues threatening the well-being of Nigeria include drug abuse, the declining quality of education, environmental pollution/degradation, family problems (increased divorce and family abuse/struggle), gender discrimination, governmental abuse of power, limited energy supplies, poverty, racial discrimination, unemployment, and weakening social institutions such as religion (Oloolube, Onyekwere, Kpolovie and Agabi).

When people are deprived of their basic social rights, social problems arise, and the need for social change becomes both obvious and inevitable.

Concept of Social Change

Social change refers to an alteration in the social order of a society; social change may include changes in nature, social institutions, social behavior or social relations. Social change may refer to the notion of social progress or socio cultural evolution, the philosophical idea that society moves forward by dialectical or evolutionary means.

Social change is the significant alteration of social structures and cultural patterns through time. These structures or patterns are made up of an enduring network of social relationships in which interaction between people or groups has become constant. Social change can affect everything from education, population, politics, culture, law, and administration to the economy and international affairs. Social change often happens alongside other major changes such as industrialization. It is a process whereby the values, attitudes, or institutions of society (such as education, family, religion and industry) are modified and includes both natural processes and action programmes initiated by members of the affected community

(Ololube, 2011).

Characteristics of Social Change

Social change is continuous and permanent: Social change is a continuous process and is permanent in that it occurs all the time. Societies necessarily evolve and change with time. No society is static. At times social changes may not always be easily noticed. Such changes can slowly (over time) lead to the rise or fall of political systems or viewpoints, economic growth or recession, globalization or the democratization of a government.

Social changes have relationships: Social changes have relationships with/between sectors of the economy and society. Changes that take place in one sector of a society often affect other sectors. That is to say, social change has a transfer effect. For example, the establishment of a university in a rural area necessitates the building of other structures and infrastructures. Private investors become key players through investment in building private accommodations and other business. Over time such an area might become a semi-urban or urban area (though not without certain negative consequences as well).

Social changes have a rate: Social change is not uniform; it can be fast or slow and the rate of change in societies, institutions and organizations will vary. No one society, institution or organization can claim to have the same pace of development as any other. Likewise, growth or change in one sector of society does not mean the same rate of growth or change in other sectors. The economic sector, for example, might not experience the same pace of growth or change as the political or religious sector.

Processes of Social Change

While the view of social change as an ongoing process is not new, understanding this process remains important. Social change can occur via discovery, invention and/or diffusion.

Discovery: Scientific discoveries and technological advances are achieved through the expenditure of human and material resources. Once scientific discoveries are made, a modern society's usage of

these findings depends on their broad acceptance and changes in the individual behaviour of many members of the population. Consider how the transmission of bacteria and disease has been prevented by encouraging people to wash their hands, how scurvy has been virtually eliminated by getting everyone to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, and how tooth decay has been reduced by convincing people to brush their teeth daily with fluoride toothpaste. The success of these public health programmes depended not only on the original scientific discoveries but also on the widespread adoption of practices that applied the new knowledge (Wong, 2007).

Invention: Invention is usually defined as the discovery of new practices, tools, or concepts that most members of a society eventually accept. Invention often occurs today as a result of human capabilities. Invention involves unique and individual processes, each of which are complex, including theoretical and experimental studies, reflections, and constructive processes (intellectual operations, instrument manipulations and manufacturing processes). As a social phenomenon, invention is also a system and includes many types of actions, relations, processes and even institutions.

Diffusion: Diffusion is a theory of how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures or from group to group. It can also be seen as the process by which an idea or technological innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a society. The key elements in diffusion research are: innovation, types of communication channels, time or rate of adoption, and the social system that frames the innovation decision process. There are both positive and negative consequences when an individual or organization chooses to adopt a particular innovation.

Causes/Sources of Social Change

Wejnert (2002) outlined some of the causes of social change as follows:

Materialistic perspectives: According to Marxism, economic production and economic classes form the basic anatomy of society and everything else arises in relationship to them. Materialistic perspectives include the cultural lag theory with its technological

causes of change. Material culture (technology) changes more quickly than nonmaterial culture (values, ideas, norms, ideologies), and so there is a period of maladjustment (a lag time) during which nonmaterial culture is still adapting to new material conditions.

Technology causes change in three ways:

1. Increases alternatives available to society and creates new opportunities;
2. Alters interaction patterns among people and changes the structure of human groups; and
3. Creates new problems that propel change.

Idealistic perspectives: These perspectives include values, beliefs and ideologies, both religious and secular, that have a decisive impact on shaping social change. For example, with respect to Protestantism, Marx argued that the values of Protestantism, especially Calvinism, produced a cultural ethic, which sanctified work and worldly achievement, encouraged frugality and discouraged consumption.

Cultural ideas, values, and ideologies that have broadly shaped the directions of social change in the modern world include freedom and self-determination, material growth and security, and nationalism. Capitalism represents not only a type of economic system but also an ideology, a connected set of values and ideas emphasizing the positive benefits of pursuing one's private economic interests, competition and free market economies.

Ideas and values can cause change or can act as barriers to change. They can be barriers at one time and promote change at another. Culture can cause change by legitimizing a desired direction of change (for example, promoting further equality and democracy), providing a basis for the social solidarity necessary to promote change (integrative mechanisms), neutralizing conflicting strains found in society (for example, mobilizing forces during war), and highlighting contradictions and problems (for example, US cultural value of equality of opportunity have highlighted racism and sexism) (Wilma van der Veen, 2006).

Agents of Social Change

There are many avenues or agents through which social changes take place in Nigeria. Some of these agents are:

Education: Education whether formal or informal, traditional or western is central to development and a key to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth. Countries that integrate education into their national economic strategy and development benefit greatly and are more responsive to national socioeconomic needs and changes.

Government: Government is the machinery or agency through which a political unit exercises its authority, and controls and administers public policies. Government directs the actions of its citizens and can initiate social change and reform for the good of the society

Mass media: Mass media is a communication medium intended for a large audience. It may take the form of broadcast media, as in the case of television and radio, or print media, such as newspapers and magazines. Internet media can also attain mass media status and host mass media outlets. Globally, mass media is a huge industry. Many people, policymakers, manufacturers, industrialists, and entrepreneurs around the world rely on mass media for advertisement as it is through mass media that information is disseminated to people.

Religion: Historically, religion has been among the most powerful agents for changing human attitude and behavior. Religion has traditionally defined what it means to be human, and it has defined the nature of our goals and relationship. Religion serves several functions for society, these include (a) giving meaning and purpose to life (b) rein-enforcing social unity and stability (c) serving as an agent of social control of behavior (d) promoting physical well-being and (e) motivating people to work for positive social change.

Communication: Communication is a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast range of skills in intra-personal and

interpersonal processing. Use of these processes is developmental and transfers to all areas of life: government, e-commerce, home, school, community, and work. Effective communication is a window to basic literacy and academic excellence. It is through communication that partnerships and cooperations occur in every sector of the national economy. Today communication is increasingly defined by new communication devices (or the means of communication) including the telephone, email, postal services, radio, television, newspapers, and computers. All of these have individually and collectively lead to social changes.

Economy: The goods produced in the country and the services rendered are passed on to consumers through trade and commerce. The strategic commercial plan of a country provides the framework for strengthening existing relationships and for developing new ones among bureaus and with external partners. Success in commerce and trade programmes in the changing technological world and global economy depend increasingly on this type of collaboration, as well as on alliances with business and industry. These processes have great influence on the life of citizens and their relationship with the internal economy and can lead to significant social changes.

Industrialization: This is the large-scale introduction of manufacturing, advanced technical enterprises, and other productive economic activity into an area, society, country etc. It is the period of social and economic change that transforms a human group from an agrarian society into an industrial one. It is a part of a wider modernization process, where social change and economy development are closely related with technological innovation, particularly with the development of large-scale energy and metallurgy production.

Natural Resources: According to the CIA World Factbook, Nigerian natural resources include oil, natural gas, petroleum, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, niobium, lead, zinc and arable land. Its agro-based resources include cocoa, cassava, palm trees, rice, fish, sugar cane, and raffia palm. These products are internally and externally consumed. Money realised from the sale of these products is used in the provision of infrastructure and other necessities of life, which help

to improve and change the living conditions of citizens. Changes in demands or supplies of natural resources can result in significant social changes, particularly for those who rely most directly on those resources.

Education as an Instrument of Social Change

The role of education as an agent or instrument of social change and social development is widely recognized today. When the existing social system or network of social institutions fails to meet existing human needs and when new materials suggest better ways of meeting these needs, social change make take place. Accordingly, social change occurs as a response to many types of changes that take place in the social and non-social environment (Sociology Guide, 2012).

The realisation of a country's aspirations involves changes in the knowledge, skills, interests, and values of its citizens as a whole. This is basic to every programme of social and economic betterment and education is often the only instrument that can reach all affected people. It is a difficult instrument, however, whose effective use requires strength of will, dedicated work and sacrifices.

Education is a fundamental method of social progress and reform. Social reformers have stressed the importance of education as the single most important instrument and medium for bringing about change in society. It is a process which enables individuals to effectively participate in the activities of society and to make positive contributions to the progress of society. Education is of great help to people in identifying their limitations and weaknesses or gaps in knowledge and then helping them to remedy those gaps. Modern educational institutions do not place much emphasis on transmitting a way of life to the students. While traditional education may have been suited to an unchanging or more static society, education today aims to impart knowledge (Ololube, 2011).

Education can initiate social change by bringing about a change in the outlook and attitude of humanity. It can bring about a change in the pattern of social relationships which can then cause further social changes. Education has been quite helpful in improving the quality of

life of people. Despite its acknowledged role in social change, education is both conservative and progressive as it does, intentionally or otherwise, transmit the culture of one generation to the next.

Influences of Social Change on Education

There are several key factors that have contributed to the rapid social change experienced since the late 20th century in Nigeria. This section will explore a number of these factors.

Labour Force: Over the past three decades, the labour market in Nigeria has undergone drastic alterations. The mid-1980s marked a rapid increase in unemployment for people of all ages which led many who had not previously graduated from school to pursue government training schemes. This, in turn, led to a fundamental restructuring of the labour market. Shifts in the labour market in Nigeria have meant that young people (in general) have lost traditional sources of employment while young women have gained certain new opportunities, often as sex workers. These labour force alterations have influenced the transition from school to employment for young people and will continue to impact the transition into independent and mature adulthood. Without a doubt, the most far reaching implication of the changing labour market has been delayed economic independence as unemployment remains significant, especially for those without a high school, college or university diploma (Walker, 2010).

Education Policy: It takes committed political leadership to accomplish positive educational change. Nigeria has witnessed on-going political change over the last century, which has undoubtedly altered the education system. There has been, for example, the shift from regions to states, which has had implications for educational development (Dike, 2008). The free education enjoyed in the Western part of Nigeria under the UPN in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was not initially available to those in other parts of the country. In many ways, the policy of education massification has only made matters worse as many no longer exert effort in their academic pursuits believing that they will be promoted even if they do not grasp or complete their school work. Despite a number of positive changes, politicians

continue to use the education systems as a tool for rewarding their political loyalists, appointing them to coveted positions thereby undermining the integrity and value of the whole system.

Parental Responsibilities: In present day Nigeria, parents have largely failed in their duties and responsibilities to their children and wards in terms of guiding them to become active and productive citizens. Parental duties are often forsaken in pursuit of money, wealth and materialism. In some cases, peer groups have taken over the duties and responsibilities of parents with mixed results. Outside the family, peers provide adolescents with a source of support and information which can prove both positive and negative for a young person, depending on the nature of the information and how they choose to use it. Peers, for example, are often responsible for introducing risky behaviour to their friends, including drugs, alcohol and sex.

Social Values: Changes in societal values have led to the modification of school curriculum. For example, the increase in the number of people infected with the HIV/AIDS and other health related diseases had changed educational content. Nigeria presently bears about 8% of the global HIV/AIDS burden with another 5.8% threatened by an exponential growth of the epidemic. As a result, sex and sexuality education have been a concern in schools for some time now.

Culture: Culture (norm, beliefs, tradition and values) influences education attitudes and programmes. There is still the belief among some in Nigerian society that the girl child should not go school at the expense of the boy child. Most Nigerian families continue to attach more value to male children and as a result send them to school. Girl children are often given out for early marriages.

Events and Cycles: Educational calendars and programmes (curriculum, resumption dates and closing dates) are constantly altered as a result of festive periods and traditional rites and practices.

Industrial and Technological Revolutions: The industrial revolution has altered the academic landscape globally. It has given rise to automation and other mechanical means of mass production. The technological revolution (computers) has also had an immense

impact on education. As technology continues to develop at an increasingly rapid rate, jobs in certain sectors become scarce as computers take over the functions of workers. Likewise, technologically operated learning tools have major implications for teaching and learning (Ololube, 2011).

Conclusions and Recommendations

While social change is often viewed as a positive phenomenon, social change may in fact have negative side effects or consequences that undermine or eliminate existing (positive) ways of life. Positive social changes in Nigeria (in general) have been hampered by corporate corruption and an unwillingness to prosecute offenders. According to Dike (n.d), while there are laws in place to fight corruption in Nigeria (including those laws that have been crafted by international organisations), the political will to fight corruption is still lacking.

Nigeria cannot be seen as secure and free until the human rights of every citizen are respected and protected by the government. More importantly, Nigeria cannot be considered secure if the majority of Nigerian citizens lack the basic conditions necessary for a worthy existence. Nigeria cannot be considered secure if millions of people go hungry, do not have a roof over their heads, and are jobless, uneducated and/or sick indefinitely (Morrison in Dike, [n.d]). For positive and effective social change to take place in Nigeria, Nigeria must recognize good governance, transparency, accountability and the rule of law as the keys to such social change.

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