



Social Stratification as indisputably existing in human societies: Implications for the child's education in Nigeria

Bright Okanezi¹, Doris Ijeoma Duru²

^{1,2} Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper focused on the existence of social stratification in society and its implications for the child's education in Nigeria. Social stratification entails that societal members are hierarchically categorized into layers hence there is the upper class, middle class and lower class. This conspicuous existence of structured inequality has bearing on the allocation of rewards, privileges and resources. The inequitable distribution of resources to all societal members is a source of concern. It becomes more glaring when its implications for the education of the child is given a thought. Indeed the study found out that those of upper class are more educated, know the value of education and provide all incentives needed for the child to succeed in his educational endeavours and such encouragement yields positive results. Conversely, the lower class are poor and mostly illiterates and as such do not provide such incentives needed to boost the child's educational endeavours. This ultimately impacts negatively on the child's education. To this end, it was recommended among other things that the government should make social insurance more robust and expand its mandate objectives; the free education policy of the government should be implemented to the letter; Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropists should establish quality schools and make it tuition fee free for children from lower class.

Keywords: social stratification, Nigerian society, Child's education

Introduction

Inequality has its manifestation in almost everything that nature has made, for instance, it is said that the fingers are not equal even if they were born the same day. Even among other animals such as goat, fowl etc. some become taller or become larger in size as they continue in their process of growth. This inequality is also seen in human society. Thus among human beings, there are people who are wealthier than others, more educated, more powerful, healthier etc. This depicts that societal members are categorized. This is in line with Macionis (1994:150) ^[8] who defined social stratification as "a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy." Making further explanation on social stratification, Abercrombie, Hill & Turner (2000) ^[1] posit that:

Social differences become social stratification when people are ranked hierarchically along some dimension of inequality. Members of the various layers or strata tend to have common life-chances or lifestyles and may display an awareness of common identity, and these characteristics further distinguish them from other strata (p. 346-347)

Stratification is a term borrowed from geology which describes the arrangement of rocks in layers. Sociologists considered human beings in society to be arranged in the same manner. Thus the society is made up of the poor and the rich, the lower class and the upper class. This is supported by Hughes and Kroehler (2008) ^[6] as they posit that:

Social stratification is the term sociologist apply to the ranking or grading of individuals and groups into

hierarchical layers, represents structured inequality in the allocation of rewards, privileges and resources. Some individuals, by virtue of their roles or group memberships, are advantaged, while others are disadvantaged (p.176).

The excerpt above touches on the core of this discourse which is that there are the advantaged and disadvantaged members by virtue of their roles. No wonder Parsons (1954:69) defined social stratification as "the differential ranking of human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects".

A little ponder over Parson's definition of social stratification above, one is poised to juxtapose the education of the child from the wealthy (advantaged or upper class) with the education of the child from poor (disadvantaged or lower class). This emanates from the fact that people often argue at both formal and informal setting that children from the rich or high socio-economic background are on a par with children from a poor or low socio-economic background with regards to educational achievement.

The nexus in the course of informal arguments over the education of the child from a wealthy background and that of poor background endeared the researchers to this treatise. To this end, this paper would consider the fundamental principles involved in social stratification; forms and basis of social stratification; as well as social stratification and its implications for the education of the child in Nigeria.

Fundamental principles involved in social stratification

Macionis (1994) ^[8] posits that social stratification involves four fundamental principles which include:

1. Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not

simply a function of individual differences. Social stratification involves how society distributes what it produces. Technologically simple hunting and gathering societies produced so little that people were more or less equal in social standing. In industrial societies, complex technology allows bountiful production, but resources may be distributed quite unequally to people regardless of their individual abilities. Children born into wealthy families are more likely than those born into poverty to enjoy health, to become academic achievers, to succeed in their life's work, and to live well into old age. Neither rich nor poor children are responsible for creating social stratification, yet this system shapes the lives of them all.

2. Although variable in form, social stratification is universal. Social stratification is found everywhere. Yet its character and intensity are highly variable. Social stratification in the world's agrarian societies tends to be more rigid than that common to industrial nations. Some differences also distinguish systems of social inequality among today's industrial societies.
3. Social stratification persists over generations. Because social stratification is linked to the family, children assume the social position of their parents. The concept of social mobility refers to a change of position in a stratification system. But in industrial societies like the United States, and especially in agrarian societies, most people spend their lives at about the same social position, passing their standing on to their children.
4. Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief. Any system of social stratification defines some kinds of inequality as fair. Just as stratification itself varies around the world, so do its legitimizing beliefs. Within a society, people with the most social privileges express the strongest support for their society's system of social inequality while those with fewer resources are more likely to seek change (p.150-151).

Forms and basic of social stratification

In human history, three clearly identifiable forms of social stratification exist. They include the castes system, system of estate, and social classes.

The caste system

A caste system is an arrangement of the status or social position of individuals by birth. In the caste model of social stratification, a person's position in the system is ascribed. A person's birth certificate tells all about career opportunities, lifestyle, prestige and privileges that the individual can aspire to. In many societies where the caste system is being practised, categorization of people is based on common ancestry, religion, occupation or mode of entry into the society (Ifeanacho 2012:227) [7]. In other words, a pure caste system is not only usually rooted in the religious order of the given society but also usually characterized by a hierarchy of rigidly hereditary, endogamous and occupational groupings. Since positions in a caste system are unalterable, mobility between castes is barred by ritual distances. Marriage is confined within castes. Intercaste relationship is carefully defined and limited or prohibited. The Hindu system of India is a classic example of a known caste system.

The Hindu system is rooted in Hinduism and all Hindus belong to one of four main groups marked out by colour. They were in this order or sequence: Kshatriyas (a warrior

group), the Brahmins (a priestly group), the Vaishyas (trading and manufacturing people), and the Sudras (servants and slaves). However, later on, the Brahmins replaced the Kshatriyas in the prime position (Mitchell, 1968) [9]. Outside these four main castes are several "outcasts" who are among the least privilege and in the least esteemed occupations. Barreman, as cited in Horton and Hunt (1980) [5], posits that the caste system in which people are confined to their ancestral occupation and statuses present the most extreme form of social stratification.

The system of estates

Estates refer to the system of stratification (commonly found in Feudal Europe) in which rights and obligations (duties) are defined and sanctioned by manmade laws. The estate system was a fundamental hierarchical arrangement of people in feudal societies. The main estates in Medieval Europe comprised the king, Lords and Commons. Divisions into clergy, nobility and commons were not clearly defined. Meanwhile, in Sweden until 1966 there were divisions into Nobles, Clergy, Citizens and peasants.

Estates model as practised under feudalism was based on a system of hereditary relationship to the land. The major means of production was land. One's estate depended on ownership of land for agricultural purposes. Landowners were the lords while the rest of the society comprised the landless serfs, tenants, peasant cultivators and the slaves who were regarded as "property with life in it" (Mitchell 1968) [9].

In the system of Estate, social mobility was possible. It rarely occurs even if it is not prohibited by law. The upward movement was occasionally considered but the downward movement was never considered. Hereditary transmission of social position was the rule and social mobility, though possible within the legal definition of a given system was difficult and limited (Ogionwo, 1979) [12].

The class model

The concept class is shrouded in ambiguity. However, Okoh (2004:74) [10] views that "it refers to the aggregate of persons with similar income from similar sources and similar socio-political status. It allows social mobility, it has no rigid boundaries." Another definition of class was put forward by Anderson and Taylor (as cited in Ifeanacho 2012) [7] as they posit that:

Social class (or class) is the social structural position groups hold relative to the economic, social, political and cultural sources of society. Class determines the access different people have to these resources and puts groups in different positions of privilege and disadvantage (p. 232).

Class is used to refer to a group that is neither caste nor estate. Classes are also not as rigid or closed as castes and estates. The class system has belief in legal and political equality hence everybody is free to aspire to any level or improve his status in life.

Indeed, the structure of society is no longer what it used to be especially in Europe. The categorization of society into classes which were static in structure is now out of place. In support of the above, Haralambos and Holborn (2000) [4] posit that:

Where there was once classes, whose members had consciousness of any kind, a common way of life; there is now an unbroken continuum of occupational statuses which command varying degrees of prestige and economic reward. Consequently, the structures of modern societies are characterized by a hierarchy of individuals and not a hierarchy of social groups or classes (p. 24).

Making further explications on the excerpt above, there is a sharp stratification of society into two camps or groups of people namely those who owned the instruments or means of production regarded as the bourgeoisie and those who do not own anything except their labour power regarded as proletariats meaning the exploited class (Marx as cited in Okujagu 1990:36) ^[11]. The above idea of Marx was further pondered over by another scholar, Max Weber. Weber introduced the dimensions of income, status and power to the issue of social classes.

He also distinguished three dimensions of society namely the economic order represented by class; the social order represented by status; and the political order, represented by the party. Each dimension has a corresponding stratification symbol. The economic is symbolized by income and goods and services which an individual possesses, the social is represented by status (the prestige and honour he enjoys), and the political is represented by the power he exercises. This social structure into three categories became the basis on which Weber developed schemes composed of "Upper", "middle" and "lower" classes or strata with their variations (Weber as cited in Okujagu 1990) ^[11].

Social stratification and its implications for education of the child

Social stratification depicts inequality. This no doubt brings to the fore, the idea or knowledge that children or learners in the school come from various situations of life which automatically put some at advantages over others. In other words, while some children have a favourable social background, others come from deprived homes. This affects the child's education in the following ways:

Age of starting school: Those who belong to the upper class encourage their children to start school at a very early age. In fact, as early as two years old the child is sent to pre-nursery and nursery schools. Here, the child begins to get acquainted with transitional process of home to school. He also starts learning important rudiments of school in this age which in turn becomes a solid foundation for primary and post-primary education. With this approach, the child from the upper class is well prepared for school, his psyche is keyed into education or schooling and such orientation invariably make him have a better chance of succeeding in studies and other academic tasks. Conversely, the child from parents of lower class often does not attend nursery schools. They remain ignorant of the lessons or topics taught in the pre-nursery and nursery schools. Since knowledge available in reinforces, they lack those basic available knowledge nursery schools that would have reinforced for their better performance. Moreso, lower class parents claim that the children of two years old are too young to go to school and sending them to school at that age amounts to a waste of resources. Unfortunately, this idea and action are at the child's detriment.

Provision of Books and other Materials: Educational

activities require a lot of materials such as books, school fees or tuition fees, computer etc which are capital intensive. Upper-class parents not only know the value of education but also have the wealth to provide all the texts as well as other school needs of their ward. Even as toddlers, at home, computer toys are provided for the child to interact with. This makes children from an upper-class background to perform brilliantly. On the other hand, children from the lower class background are often sent away from school due to late payment of school fees. Within such days or weeks, the child is missing a lot of lessons which may no longer be taught again because the academic calendar does not wait for anybody. Also, the child from such a poor background may not be able to buy all the necessary or recommended texts. This also impacts negatively on the child's education. The issue of providing a computer for the lower class is like a luxury. The parents would not want to hear such a request because they cannot afford it irrespective of how it affects the child's studies.

Quality and quantity of education a child receives: Social stratification affects the quality as well as quantity of education the child receives. For quality education, it is indisputable that upper-class parents send their children to pre-nursery and nursery private primary school, private secondary schools, federal government (unity) schools, private universities and some send their children abroad for tertiary level of education. These are schools that have qualified teachers and virtually all equipment adequately provided. In such schools, electricity is provided, a library equipped with latest books, laboratory well equipped as well as information and communication technology centres (ICTCs). Such schools are quite expensive hence only upper-class parents can afford to send their children there. Also, in terms of quantity of education, the children of the upper class move from nursery to primary, secondary and thence to university.

On the other hand lower class hardly acquire pre-nursery education. They attend Public Primary Schools, Community Secondary Schools, Technical or Vocational School, College of Education, State Polytechnic. Moreover, those public primary schools and community secondary schools are ill-equipped in terms of staff and school facilities or infrastructure. In some community secondary schools, one may find the principal, vice principal and three or four teachers. In some schools, teachers are lacking in core subjects like Mathematics, English Language and Computer Science. Also, most of the community secondary schools neither have library nor science laboratories. These adversely affect the education of children enrolled in such schools. Giving credence to the above, Aluko, *et al.* (2019) ^[2] lament thus:

The state of libraries in many public universities in Nigeria has not only affected research and learning in the institutions but also their global ranking, investigations by. The Punch has revealed. Findings by our correspondents in some public universities across the country showed that many of them were stocked with outdated books, lack e-learning facilities and conducive environment for learning and research. Due to expanding student population without commensurate funding seating capacity of most of these libraries can only take less than 10 percent of the students (p.2).

Educational motivation/encouragement

The educational motivation of the child from home goes a long way to help the child excel in academics. Unfortunately, social stratification in society makes students have unequal motivation. For instance, upper-class parents check their children's school work and assignments and help by teaching them the topics they find difficult to understand. They also engage part-time teachers to teach their wards. Besides, the upper-class parents sometimes allow their children to go on holidays to places where they get more exposure to real life situations especially the things that concern what they study in school. All these enhance the children's performance in school. On the other hand, the children of the lower class do not have these opportunities hence it impacts negatively on their academic performance.

Proficiency in spoken and written English

The English language is the official language in Nigeria as well as the language of instruction in schools. Upper-class parents, therefore, encourage their wards to speak good English through various means. For instance, most of them are educated and so they teach their wards at home. They also encourage their children to be used to mass media gadgets such as radio, television, computer as well as newspapers, magazines and journals. All the above facilitate the child's spoken and written English at school and has a positive impact on performance in other subjects. The lower class counterparts do not have these provisions or opportunities and as such impacted negatively.

Access to educational opportunities

Gaining admission to the university is one thing and gaining admission to study one's course of choice is yet another thing. Some courses are regarded as lucrative hence gaining admission to study such desired courses is sometimes difficult. In support of the above, Maximum cited in Sam' Khusamat (2014:403) ^[14] asserts that "some social discrimination exists in access to certain professional courses". What this means is that when it is highly competitive, some measure of political favouritism may play out.

It is important to note that before the above stage of seeking admission into the university, upper-class parents encourage their children to study the lucrative courses. Obanya and Ezewu (as cited in Azikiwe (1991:33) ^[3] assert that more pupils from the high socio-economic status groups aspire to those highly rated professions in Nigeria such as the medical profession". Conversely, the children from the lower class are not encouraged or assisted. Azikiwe (1991) ^[3] elaborates on it thus:

There is little or no assistance from parents to children at home to encourage and motivate them to learn. Children from lower class work all day either on the farms, hawking or running errands. The low socio-economic parents do not care about the schools their children attend nor encourage them to go for prestigious professions because they are largely ignorant, semi-illiterate or stark illiterate (p.33-34).

Conclusion

Social stratification is a common characteristic of human society, Nigeria not an exception. Thus societal members

are categorized into the upper class, middle class and lower class. The upper-class members ensure that their ward starts school early enough, provide books and other materials needed in the school, ensure the child is given quality education as well as the quantity of education he aspires, and also encourage him by providing part-time teachers. All these impacts positively on the child's education. The lower class members are not only poor but most of them are illiterates and as such do not know the value of education. It is therefore not surprising that their children do not start school early enough, even when they enter school, they are often sent away from school for school fees drive. The children hardly get all the texts recommended and are not encouraged to aspire in education. These have a negative impact on children's education.

Recommendations

Considering the implications of social stratification on the education of the child especially the child from the lower class, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. The government should make the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (SITF) more robust and expand its objectives.
2. Parents should be given orientation on birth control.
3. Legislation should be made for societal members to bear only the number of children they can adequately cater for.
4. Government's free education policy should be implemented to the letter
5. The government should define the quality of schools and only schools that have the minimum standard should be allowed to operate
6. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and philanthropists should establish quality schools and make it tuition fee free for lower class children.

References

1. Abercrombie N, Hill S, Turner BS. The Penguin dictionary of sociology (4th ed). London: Penguin, 2000.
2. Aluko O, Youdeowei T, Nnachi E, Charles J, Bakam A, *et al.* State of public varsity libraries worrisome, says ASUU president. The Punch, 2019; 43(21,932):2.
3. Azikiwe U. Social stratification and education. In C. E. Okonkwo & J. C. Agada (Eds). Sociology of education for Nigeria. Ibadan: Totan Publishers, 1991.
4. Haralambos M, Holborn M. Sociology: Themes and perspectives (5th ed). London: Harper Collins, 2000.
5. Horton PB, Hunt CL. Sociology. London: McGraw-Hill, 1980.
6. Hughes M, Kroehler CJ. Sociology: The core (8th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
7. Ifeanacho M. Fundamentals of sociology. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2012.
8. Macionis JJ. Society: The basics (2nd ed). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994.
9. Mitchell GD. A new dictionary of sociology. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.
10. Okoh JD. Sociology of education for beginners. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2004.
11. Okujagu TN. Sociological perspectives in education (Unpublished lesson Note). Rivers State College of Education Port Harcourt, 1990.
12. Otite O, Ogiwo W. An introduction to sociological

- studies. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1979.
13. Parson T. Essays in sociological theory. New York: Macmillan, 1954.
 14. Sam' Khusamat AA. Sociology of education with focus on Nigerian societies. Kwara State, Nigeria: Bluescore Consulting and Publications, 2014.