

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE **- M. N. SULE**

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CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Social change can be defined as the manifesting difference between what used to happen in a social organization and what is currently happening. In dealing with groups, associations and institutions and the complexes of these which constitute society, we can distinguish three main kinds of social structure; the economic structure, the cultural structure and the regulative structure. The economic structure is concerned with the means of life while cultural structural has to do with the intrinsic ends and values of society (that is, those institutions and associations, etc). The regulation or control of human relations is served by what may be called the regulative structure, which includes the machinery of law, the moral and religious codes as well as conventions and fashions.

These social structures, however, do not remain unaltered. In fact social structures everywhere undergo continuous change. In Nigeria, the changing economic and social role of women within the past decades serves as an excellent illustration of the fact that social change affects social institutions, social attitudes and social values. In the past, the traditional image of the woman has been that of a wife and mother and her sacred duty was to serve the man. The working woman was associated with promiscuity and indecorous behaviour. Thus, the education of the woman was considered unimportant since girls marry at very early ages and the patrilocal system of marriage and the 'welfare system' of the African kinship network did not normally pay back in full measure the investment in them during their childhood.

However, in the present day, Nigeria, the traditional role and image of the Nigerian woman is changing fast, although it is still at a much slower rate in the rural areas, which remain the strongholds of more conservative attitudes. This change is due largely to the various effects of modernization

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including education, growth of cities, migration and accelerated change of the country's economy from mere subsistence to industrialization. A woman's domestic role has changed, especially in the urban centres where she now significantly becomes involved in other economic activities outside the home to supplement the family income which has become too meagre to sustain the family. Women now engage in extensive trading, carrying their goods to distant places in order to get better patronage and profit.

Dimensions of Social Change

Chitamber (1973, p.32) outlined three major dimensions of social change. These are:

- i) Structural dimensions;
- ii) Cultural dimensions;
- iii) Interactional dimensions.

The structural dimensions of social change refer to changes in society that have to do with emerging new roles (for instance, that of the changing role of women in the Nigerian society), changes in class-structure, social institutions, modification or alteration of the channels of communication among roles as well as modification in the functions performed by various components of a society.

Similarly, certain changes emanate as a result of society's contact with other cultures as well as the abandonment of existing cultural practices. This usually entails the introduction of something new into a culture. Cultural change can be brought about by virtue of invention and discovery within society. On the other hand, interactional dimension focuses on changes in social interactions or relationships in society.

Interactional dimension of social change has further been described as composed of five major elements, namely:

- i) change of frequency;
- ii) change of social distance;
- iii) change of instrumentality;
- iv) change of directionality;
- v) change of forms.

In classifying social change, Otite and Ogionwo (1979) identified three types to include:

- i) Changes in social institutions;
- ii) Changes in values and attitudes;
- iii) Changes in personnel

Social institutional changes refer to changes that occur in a social institution as a result of re-organizations, modifications and improvements of the existing social institutions. Similarly, changes in values and attitudes which constitute the society's non-material culture are also important classification of social change, while changes in personnel which involve changes in social roles, social relationships and individual hierarchical social roles within given institutions are important variables of social change.

The Processes of Social Change

In considering the processes that social change assumes or are manifest in society, there are four identified methods;

1. Social diffusion or borrowing;
2. Invention;
3. Discovery;
4. Rejection of existing social practices

Social Diffusion or Borrowing

Diffusion is a concept in the physical sciences which implies the movement of substances from a region of higher concentration to that of a lower concentration until there is an equilibrium before the process ceases. As applied to this situation, social diffusion or borrowing refers to the filtration into a society of another society's social practices, ideas, artifacts and techniques which are eventually adopted. Most societies have survived in their periods of existence due to social diffusion. With all confidence, therefore, one can say that no society is free from social diffusion or borrowing. In fact, a great deal of any society's practices are borrowed from other societies.

Social diffusion or borrowing is important because it enables the society adopting the social practices of another society to effectively provide answers to its problems for which within its set-up, solutions were lacking.

Invention

Changes that occur in societies may be brought about by invention. Mezieobi (1992, p.106) says that invention does not connote the creation of

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an entirely original or basically new technique or idea. Rather, it refers to the process whereby the very significant aspects of the already existing social elements or practices are borrowed by one, two or more persons and combined in a way to effectively satisfy the needs of a particular society. Inventions do not imply only technical culture or technological gadgets or devices but may include new songs or patterns of singing, religious beliefs, games, etc.

Discovery

This process entails bringing to light, knowledge, principles, facts etc that were previously unknown to a particular society.

Discovery and invention are two related concepts. In point of fact they are dependent upon each other. Dressler (1969, p.154) illustrates the relationship between discovery and invention when he observed thus:

Invention of the microscope made possible the discovery of micro-organism ..., the discovery of x-rays led to the subsequent invention of devices of great current value in medical diagnosis and therapy.

Rejection of Existing Social Practices

The processes of social diffusion, invention and discovery often lead to the emergence of new social ideas and practices. These invariably lead to the disappearance of old ideas and practices.

Causes of Social Change

Causes of social change broadly fall into two types;

- i) ***Endogenous Causes***: These are causes that are inherent in the social system. For instance, situations pertaining to the exercise of authority in a particular society can lead to social change. This relates to the legitimate right to give command which always generates some opposition. There is virtually always some questions whether or not authority is being abused.

- ii) ***Exogenous Causes***: These are causes that may emanate from one social institution and tends to affect another social institution within the same society. Exogenous change can also be from another society.

Whether the causes of social change are endogenous or exogenous, change generally can assume two forms. These are guided or planned and unguided or unplanned social change. When there is a conscious effort to initiate, direct and control the course of social change, it is considered as a guided or planned change, while if without any conscious effort to introduce change, it is perceived as unguided or unplanned.

In Nigeria, quite a number of social changes have come about as a result of guided or planned changes. For instance, the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education which replaced the 7-5-2-3, the democratization system of government which replaced military rule, the government's recent poverty alleviation programme, the recently launched Universal Basic Education (UBE) etc. are planned efforts aimed at bringing about changes in the lives of the people of Nigeria. In these kinds of social change, adequate planning is required in order to maximally realize the gains of such efforts. For instance, there is the need to identify the problem that require solution (e.g. in the poverty alleviation programme, a large part of the Nigerian population lives below the poverty line), Secondly, there is the need to thoroughly study the implications of the problem on the people; thirdly, a consideration of a possible solution to the problem and lastly, an implementation of the decision agreed in solving the problem.

On the other hand, unguided or unplanned social change emanate from culture contact, diffusion or cultural borrowing. These changes which include modifications in ideologies, values and fashions are often gradual and hardly noticeable or perceptible.

Agencies of Social Change

In any modern society, the significant agents of social change are the institutions of the economy, education and government. These institutions have brought and are still bringing tremendous changes in various social set-ups across the world. Other agencies include religion, mass media, health and family.

Economy

The economic institution of any society appears to exert the strongest influence on the peoples likelihood for social change. For instance, economic activities, such as the growth of industries, improved industrial and agricultural practices, manufacture of products have indeed brought about changes in the values and beliefs of Nigerians. The ability of the Nigerian government to procure and use modern agricultural machineries has raised

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the level of food production where most farmers have moved from subsistence farming to the export of their products. Apparently, most farmers are no longer the peasant ones hitherto known as unable to provide for their daily needs. Standards of life have improved markedly and they can afford to send their children to high fee paying urban schools for quality education.

Education

Most people have strong faith in education as a vital tool by which changes can be brought about in our society. That is why the quest for modern education has caught up with virtually all members of society who believe that it is the most viable process for individual upward social mobility.

On the other hand, the educational sector as an important agent of social change is committed to the promotion of research and the search for new knowledge and the encouragement of people to think along new lines and question existing as well as established beliefs about man, his society and in this way, stimulate change in the society. Schools, therefore, have the responsibilities of modifying the nature of social change in such manner as to tailor it towards satisfying the social needs and demands of the people both now and in the future. Attitudes of people that are not in consonance with societal advancements can therefore be addressed and discovered in schools. These may include corruption, cheating, nepotism, nonchalance, lack of commitment, etc.

Government

Government is an important agent of social change. The three arms of government: executive, legislative and judiciary as well as the three tiers of government: federal, state and local government, all make concerted efforts to bring about positive social change on the lives of the people. The recent experience in Nigeria of the return to democratic rule after so many years of military dictatorship was an effort fashioned out by government through a three-party system. Although, the agitation for democracy was initiated and championed by the civil society, the military nevertheless as a government in 1999 constituted the framework and later handed over in May, 1999.

Theories of Social Change

The following have been applied to explain the concept of social

change: evolutionism, cyclical theory, functional theory and, Marx's conflict theory.

i) **Evolutionism:** Evolutionism denotes a continuous process of change in which something in its current form retains the essential characteristics of its original form. This essentially implies that the current state of anything, society, organism and institution is the product of continuous change, of order and development directed towards a state of perfection. Evolutionary thought received tremendous currency through the works of Charles Darwin - a biologist. Evolutionism is common to both the natural and the social sciences. When used in the natural sciences, the term refers to the interaction between an organism and its environment in the process of change. According to the theory of biological evolution, the history of man progresses from the lower or simpler forms to a complex or higher forms. In general analysis, human history is said to have progressed from savagery through barbarism to modernization. Many scholars of evolutionary theory argue that the society passes through stages and sub-stages marked by different technological achievements as well as by modes of livelihood. These changes occurring in stages do so either rapidly or slowly with weaknesses that manifest while man can also be seen to be advancing on an evolutionary ladder without hitches (a perception of other scholars of social change).

ii) **Cyclical Theory of Social Change:** Scholars who subscribe to this theory of change perceive the development of society as a cyclical process. Three renowned scholars are widely identified with this theory. They are Spengler (1965), Toynbee (1962 & 1964) and Sorokin (1941). This theory views the society as a living organism which passes through an organic life cycle. Accordingly, the society is born, it grows from childhood to maturity, disintegrates and subsequently dies just as a living organism does. Cyclical theorists do not see change as leading to societal perfection but see society as experiencing a state of rising and falling, that is up and down. In view of this thinking, this theory is often referred to as the "rise and fall" theory of change.

In every society, there are challenges which must be successfully tackled for the survival and progress of the society. However, at some points, the society will eventually disintegrate and go into obscurity or oblivion. Simply put, change according to the cyclical theorists leads to extinction.

) **The Functional Theory of Change:** The functional theory of change has been credited to B. Malinowski and A. R. Radcliff-Brown who were

empiricists. The structure they constructed were derived from actually observed on-going relationships in society. Other theorists include Robert-Bales (1915), Talcott Parsons and Coser (1956).

The functional theorists of change perceive the society as an organic unit which has two functional requirements - the instrumental behaviour to accomplish goals and expressive behaviour to hold the group together.

One fundamental phenomenon in the analysis of the functional theory of change is that where a change that results in one segment of the society occurs, other segments of the society equally experience change. Where each part of a society is able to adjust adequately to changes emanating in the other parts of the society, the change is smooth, successful, resulting in the fulfilment of the societal functional requirements. However, where the other sectors of the society are unable to adjust to changes emanating from another sector of the society, it results in unsuccessful change and unfulfilled functional needs of the society. This gives rise to dissatisfactions and social disturbance which stimulates pressure for societal change.

iv) *Marx's Conflict Theory of Social Change*: Karl Marx's theory of economic determinism of change hinges most social change to economic factors. That the constant conflict between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers) over scarce economic resources produces social change. The underlying explanation for Marx's economic determination is that change occurring in the substructure (the economy) pervasively brings about changes in the superstructure (all other sectors of the society, such as family, government, education and religion). Social change is thus perceived to occur as a result of class struggle between the bourgeoisie, those who control the means of production and the proletariat, those who own their labour power. The proletariat are the oppressed or exploited members of society who constantly agitate for change in order to enhance their social positions while the bourgeoisie do all in their power to suppress such changes.

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Social change does not occur in a vacuum, but does so in relationship to other institutions of society. In the context of our discussion, social change is being examined as a tool for educational reformations and advancement. There is no social institution in whatever society that does not experience change in its bid for survival. In fact, where changes do not occur at all, such an institution will hardly experience progress.

In the light of these, the Nigerian educational sector during the pre

and the post independence era witnessed significant changes that can best be seen within the perspective of historical examinations.

The period prior to 1861 saw Nigerians practising various life patterns that spanned through all spheres of life including education. Educational practice was entirely indigenous while some parts of northern Nigeria engaged in Islamic education that arrived about the fourteenth century. Education at this time was more or less functional and prepared the younger ones for useful life in society.

Okon and Anderson (1982, p.23) asserted that the teaching methods used in indigenous education then were based on:

imitation, instruction, apprenticeship, story-telling, watching, observation, role-playing, discipline, games, recitation, memorization, proverbs, riddles and demonstration.

In indigenous traditional education, parents and other elders in the community were the teachers. In fact, community elders were accorded unlimited authority and absolute respect as far as child training was concerned. The content of education was relatively restricted to the provisions of the life-style of the members of each society. That is to say that there was no harmony in the educational practice of different societies.

However, Nigerians contact with Europeans and the Arabs witnessed tremendous changes in the socio-cultural life of our people. This is not in any way surprising as the educational institution, a veritable social sector for change, has also not been left out in witnessing change.

The emergence of formal or western system of education has not only relegated traditional education and cultural practices to the background; it has created a national education system for purposes of educational practice harmonization.

In spite of this effort, the system of education and its curriculum lacked the necessary impetus to convey Nigeria to an enviable height in social, economic and political excellence. Nigerians identified a number of loopholes in the system. Most arguments centered on the fact that the system was too bookish and white collar oriented. This argument can best be appreciated when viewed at the angle that the Europeans were more or less interested in training Nigerians for manpower in order to help them manage their investments in the country. So, the system produced grammarians who were more Europeans than Nigerians who lacked relevant functional skills to manipulate challenges within the Nigerian society. Education therefore, was not relevant to the social and economic needs of the people and the society at large.

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These incessant criticisms of the western type of education gave way for the fashioning of a national education policy which has been christened the 6-3-3-4 system. This system of education has its focus on functional, effective and actual life education.

The origin of Nigeria's present system of education can be traced to the National Curriculum Conference which was held by the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) now called NERDC i.e. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council. The conference was called to examine Nigeria's past educational goals and to identify new ones in line with our needs as a people. This conference focussed on all levels of education: primary, secondary and higher education. This development was a change in the educational institution where for the first time in Nigeria's history a planned conference was initiated to give direction to our system of education.

This conference was attended by a cross-section of Nigerians, from all professions. There were educators, teachers and school administrators, businessmen, traders, industrialists, farmers, civil servants, market women and technicians.

There were also many interested international organizations which sent observers to the conference. Two of these organizations were the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

As a result of this conference, the following achievements were recorded for Nigerian educational planning, policy making and practices:

- a) At the conference, participants evolved a national philosophy of education for Nigerians;
- b) Nigeria's educational objectives were reviewed at all levels;
- c) There was a critical re-appraisal of the role of science and technology in development;
- d) Recommendations were made for the administration of public education;
- e) A new structure of education was developed for Nigeria: It is the 6-3-3-4 system of education with six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary school and three years of senior secondary school, while four years is for university education;
- f) It was suggested that comprehensive schools be established;
- g) After the conference, the Federal and State ministries of education prepared a draft for a national policy on education. The National Policy on

Education was finally published as a Government White Paper in March 1977. It was later modified as a result of the 1979 constitution. The revised edition was published in 1981 and it is still being used today as an educational process document by Nigerian educators.

Generally, when one considers the range of subjects offered in schools in the past to the present, there is a significant difference. Before the advent of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, general school subjects offered were limited and reflective of the colonial government's needs.

However, the new system has its curricular content given a wider scope. Under the old system, a learner spent five years in the secondary school and choose a subject combination of either:

1. Liberal Arts
2. Science
3. Social Science.

The old school system had very few schools offering comprehensive education which allowed for the study of such subjects as technical and building and drawing, wood work and electricity/electronics, secretarial studies, accounting, book-keeping or business studies. However, the present system has the following secondary school subjects;

- a) Languages;
- b) Science and Technology;
- c) Social Studies;
- d) Vocational Studies;

Within the provision of the new system, changes that are expected entail primary schools to prepare learners for admission into secondary school. Another valid and vital aspect of primary education in the new system which is a drastic departure from the old system is the preparation for life for those who may not be able to go to secondary school. This level of education is expected to adequately prepare the child for the world of work and individual functionality in societal expectations. This philosophy is quite a laudable stand-point as it will help to prepare the large number of children who often do not make it to secondary schools after their primary education. If such children are not properly indoctrinated into basic accepted social standards for meaningful life in society, they may stand the risk of being social misfits. This must be accepted in view of the ages of these children who may not be in better positions to give account of their actions.

After primary education, children may graduate into the junior secondary education which is a level of preparation for senior secondary edu-

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cation. At this point, a student may learn a trade of his own or in a vocation school of his choice. This consideration was hitherto not available in the old system of education.

Senior secondary education is to prepare learners for higher education, either in Arts, Science, Social Science or Applied Science and Technology.

Higher education which is the last stage in the educational hierarchy in any given society seems to have received a lot of attention from the Nigerian government as compared to the other levels of education. In order to meet this need for higher education, federal and state governments have established more polytechnics, universities of agriculture and technology. It is government's strong conviction that the products of higher education are disposed enough to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's social, economic and political development.

Nigerian educational system is administered by the government at three main levels. At the federal government level, the highest officer appointed by the president is the minister of education. The minister is in charge of the Federal Ministry of Education which takes control of education at different levels.

The federal government is also in charge of the National Universities Commission, National Primary Education Board and the National Commission for Colleges of Education among others.

These are changes that were evolved from the old system which were necessitated by the loopholes detected in the old system.

Recently, the federal government, after realizing the problems that have plagued the Nigerian state on account of poverty, ignorance and unemployment among others as a result of the high rate of illiteracy, rekindled the spirit of the universal primary education (UPE) by launching its revised version called Universal Basic Education (UBE). This is an expected guided social change which is assumed will herald in better attitudes, skills and values to minimize those problems confronting the Nigerian state.

Every state of the federation has its ministry of education headed by a commissioner for education. Like the federal government, some states own universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, schools of agriculture etc. The state is fully responsible for secondary education, although there has been clamour that it should be taken over by the federal government. It has been suggested that, like the primary education commission, a similar commission be established to take care of secondary schools. These agitation have been informed by the state of neglect which have characterized the

style that most states have adopted in managing secondary schools. Whatever government's position is on these agitations, it has not been made known to Nigerians. Nigerians only believe that this development will bring in positive changes into the management of secondary education as is being currently witnessed in primary education. Local government that was given the administrative control of primary education has lost that privilege to the primary education commission.

Other areas where Nigerian education has witnessed changes in recent past include that of language. Part of the policy of the 6-3-3-4 system is that the students should be taught in his mother tongue in the early years of primary school. Later, he should learn another major Nigerian language, Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba. Nigeria has about 394 languages and most arguments therefore, are that choosing three out of the large number does not in any way represent our mother tongue. This certainly is a fundamental issue which has been an impediment in the full implementation of the aspect of the policy. However, some Federal Government Colleges have fully implemented this provision.

The use of mother tongue is certainly a good development for our educational system. This will provide a basis for the domestication of education in our society. Children shall see the relevance of the content of what they learn in close relationship with their local environment. Education shall then be perceived purely as an indigenous factor for social change.

As social change affects education, so does education affect social change. Since the concept of education has been broadly accepted as a vital tool for change in any given society, the discussion has only been properly directed to convey this position. There have been series of changes that have affected societal structures and organisations. The emergences of these changes in most cases are remotely related to developments and efforts in the educational sector. All universities and research institutes are engaged in efforts to unravel the mysteries of existence. The outcomes of these works have and will continue to direct the pace of development.

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