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Sociology as a Vital Instrument in Establishing Curriculum, Educational Objectives and Goals of Education

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Abstract

This survey examines the contribution of sociology to education. The researcher explores sociological foundation with respect to socio-cultural forces in society that influence education. Against this backdrop, education can be viewed to perform two functions. First, education is a socializing agent—a process that enables perpetuation of societal ideals from one generation to the next. Secondly, education is an embodiment of values, skills and practices that are required to revitalize society. Because of this inextricable relationship between sociological foundation and education, the former plays a key role in determining educational decisions, objectives and goals in the sense that it permeates all dimensions of education. Sociology therefore underpins education as its socio-cultural component. All the socio-cultural and undertones evident in education systems world-wide can only be properly explained through a thorough understanding of sociology as a discipline. This research therefore endeavors to unravel the link between sociological forces and education.

Keywords: *Sociology, curriculum, foundation, educational objectives, goals of education*

1. Introduction

The term sociology originates from Latin and Greek words 'socius', and 'logos' in that order, which are translated in English to mean society, and knowledge or word respectively (Wikipedia, on-line). Initial coining of the word 'sociology' was the brainchild of the French philosopher of Science, Auguste Comte (1798-1851). Apparently, he (Auguste Comte) found in sociology a type of synthetic science uniting all knowledge about human activity and so he went ahead and crowned it the 'Queen of the Sciences' (Barnard, Burgess and Kirby, 2004).

According to Barnard, Burgess and Kirby (2004), sociology is a discipline that involves systematic study of human society, human social interactions and human experiences as people form groups, communities and societies. Sociology is the discipline that expresses knowledge of the society with acute focus on human behavior, interactions and relationships. Sociology is therefore the mother and even cradle of all other disciplines. In fact, other disciplines pay homage to sociology. Education is indebted to sociology in the sense that the latter offers the former a chance to filter, balance and moderate diverse human behaviors, interactions and relationships in its repository. Sociology is linked to education because all educational programs are a portrayal of societal social processes and heritage.

1.1. The role of Sociology in Establishing Educational Curriculum

Sociological foundation is basically concerned with influences of the curriculum that emanate from the society. This is pegged on the notion that life in the society directly impacts the school system. Education or more specifically schools perform the role of guidance and preparation of the youthful generation for life in society. The youth who presumably possess diverse aspirations, dreams and visions about their careers and lives are first and foremost members of the society and must therefore in one way or the other subject to societal influences. This is to say that the society may partially determine the ideals that young people carry to school because right from the outset the youth are first exposed to life in the society before/as they attend school. In line with the foregoing, Shiundu and Omulando (1992) submit that education involves comprehensive exposure to opportunities and challenges in life with the aim to achieve an all-round preparation of the individual for challenges and roles awaiting him / her as a member of the immediate society. In this respect, education becomes a process that promotes human development for purposes of effective existence in the society.

The term curriculum is derived from Latin word 'currere' which means a race-course. Based on this understanding, curriculum is a set of various courses full of experiences that are meant for learners to go through or pursue as they mature into adults. Bishop (1985) corroborates the foregoing by defining curriculum as 'all experiences a learner undergoes under the guidance of the school'. In a nutshell, it can be said that curriculum is a race characterized by experiences and selected activities done in the society so that in the ultimate, the learner is enabled to effectively fit in the society.

Curriculum is influenced by four foundations namely; sociological, historical, psychological and philosophical foundations. Sociological foundation is key because basically it is concerned with the bigger social context—that is, society

that finds representation at a lower level and effectively so in the school. In curriculum planning and development, the curriculum specialist requires knowledge about society because this can reveal two things. First, the kind of knowledge, skills and proficiencies that the youth require in order to cope with tasks and roles in that society. Secondly, the problems and challenges that are prevalent in society that the curriculum should provide solutions to. Example of challenges of the contemporary society include; poverty, unemployment, disease and global warming to mention but a few. The intersection demonstrated in the preceding clearly shows how society is closely related to education.

1.2. Components of Culture as a Link Between Sociological Foundation and Curriculum

This section considers key components of culture that have permeated education since time immemorial. According to Hughes (2008) culture is perceived as the social heritage of a people expressed through material and non-material items. Material culture embraces physical artifacts or objects which include stone axes, paintings, hair styles, domed stadiums etc. Non-material culture on the other hand encompasses abstract creations such as values, beliefs, symbols, customs, norms and institutional arrangements that determine actions and behavior of a given group of people in society. Culture deals with the customs of a people. Furthermore, culture endeavors to provide meanings that empower people to interpret their experiences and influences their actions. On the other hand, society comprises people who practice the customs in question. Society therefore represents networks of social relationships that emerge and thrive among people. It is important to gain a deeper understanding of the key components of culture namely values, norms, symbols and language. They are examined below:

1.2.1. Values

Refer to broad ideas concerning what is desirable, right and good as held by majority of members of the society. Values are fundamental beliefs that underpin a community or society providing general principles for human behavior (Sherman and Wood, 1982). Values present the criteria to use to evaluate people, objects or even events on their relative merit, worth, beauty or even morality. The curriculum designer shows up at that point when these values get formalized as principles for life worthy of incorporation into the curriculum where they are enforced through the school system.

1.2.2. Norms

These are social rules that specify appropriate and inappropriate behavior in particular situations. Norms go beyond moral rules to provide standards by which we judge others and make almost spontaneous decisions on how to interact with them. Because they tend to be more subjective in nature, norms tend to be exemplified through human behavior within the confines of the outside world beyond the school (Hughes (2008). Norms may pose a challenge to the curriculum designer because of the varied contextual interpretation that characterizes them. Attempt to thoroughly understand norms reveal existence of other miniscule offshoots namely; mores, laws, and folkways- their detailed discussion is however beyond the purview of this paper.

1.2.3. Symbols

Refer to acts or objects that are socially acceptable as representing other things based on the shared understanding among a given group of people. The society is replete with various features of everyday life that possess very important symbolic content. They include objects which may act as a semblance of a peoples' philosophy of life or belief system. A good example here can be the flag of a country which acts as an embodiment of a peoples' heritage. Secondly there are events- these are exemplified by musical performances and other cultural displays. Thirdly, we have displayed whose examples include paintings and striking works of art. Symbols definitely play a key role in fostering a nation's identity, hence it is not unusual that nations have embraced and ultimately incorporated some of them in school curriculum.

1.2.4. Language

It is a socially structured system of words and sentences that carry specific and sometimes arbitrary meanings among its users. Language is the principal vehicle by which people create culture and transmit it from generation to generation. Through language people in the society communicate ideas, information, attitudes and emotions (Hughes, 2008). It is important to note that all over the world, language that is spoken and /or co-opted in a given society definitely becomes one of the major concerns during curriculum design because it is through widely acceptable language that effective curriculum delivery in schools can be realized.

1.3. Levels of Relationship between Sociological Foundations and Curriculum

In the realm of sociological foundation, the curriculum designer focuses on cultural values, societal needs and learner backgrounds. These three elements constitute the three levels of relationship that exist between sociological foundation and curriculum. They are examined below under the following headings:

1.3.1. Purposes of the Curriculum

This is the level in which the school acts an agency of society performs three pronged roles of transmission, transformation and facilitation of societal fundamentals. They are expressed in that order as follows.

- The school assists to transmit and preserve cultural heritage especially those aspects that are pertinent and unique to a given society. This relationship is further explored by Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) who reiterate that

the primary task of society's education system is transmission of beliefs, values and norms to the next generation. Culture is therefore embodied in education system's operations.

- Education performs a transformative role in the sense that where a given culture or an aspect of that culture becomes repugnant or retrogressive, education becomes the best means to reconstruct such practices. An example of such practice is female genital mutilation among certain communities especially in the tropical world. In recent times, this practice has undergone tremendous transformation through educating the people concerning its debilitating effects upon the girl-child and entire communities.
- Education is instrumental in empowering individuals in society so that they are able to determine and achieve their goals and, in the end, realize their full potential (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992).

1.3.2. Societal Pressures Influencing the Curriculum

Pressures in the society may be exerted upon education through formal or/and informal channels. Formal channel comprises documented complaints or sentiments directed towards the school system. These expressions in most cases do influence curriculum development at the school level. On the other hand, informal complaints that emanate from gossip and rumor about current practice in the school system can lead to redress of certain identified areas like teaching strategies for example. As a result, teachers would have to adopt more appropriate teaching approaches.

1.3.3. Attributes of Learners Experiencing the Curriculum

The society plays host to a variety of schools that are not uniformly endowed in terms of resources, facilities and even neighborhoods. In like manner, learners who attend these schools also come from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The obvious case that schools comprise learners from various backgrounds is echoed by Stenhouse (1988) who suggests the submits that bird's eye view, this scenario might trigger a discourse to the effect that perhaps there is need to formulate differentiated approaches in curriculum design and implementation in attempt to appeal to these institutional and human variations. Against this backdrop questions abound that probably beg for answers from curriculum specialists which include for example; whether learners from urban and rural backgrounds should be differentiated due to their dissimilar exposures which might be reflected in their response to curriculum; or again how would a uniform curriculum be expected to adequately facilitate the realization of differentiated aspirations of learners? These questions are among many others that are naturally a major concern of the curriculum designer.

2. Sociology as Key in Determining Educational Objectives

Educational objectives are viewed as proximate targets intended to be achieved at the end of a given course. They are descriptive statements of the desired learning outcomes in education. Basically, objectives are derived from educational goals. They fall into two categories, that is, general and specific objectives. While general objectives may be broader and geared to guide the intentions of an entire educational program specific objectives are more confined to immediate tasks within classroom environment. The latter are formulated in specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time oriented (SMART) terms to direct teaching and learning processes during specific classroom sessions.

Curriculum is a sociological engagement in the sense that it aspires to impact society by propagating its cultural ideals as well as providing adequate response and solutions to its (society) challenges and problems. To ignore sociological foundations therefore is to create a void in the socio-cultural dimension of education. In paying attention to sociological aspects, curriculum planners will be able to accomplish the following roles:

- Consider fundamental and progressive cultural aspects that merit inclusion in school curriculum.
- Suggest appropriate content and learning experiences that correspond to diverse learner backgrounds to facilitate realization of individual aspirations as well as those of those of the society.
- Provide relevant content and learning activities for the intended educational program based on societal needs.
- Provide adequate learner demographics for effective structuring of educational programs.

Sociology provides educators with perspectives/theories whose implications on education cannot be ignored. The theories fall into three categories namely; functional theory, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism (on-line). They are discussed below.

2.1. Sociological Perspectives on Education

This section examines sociological theories that impact greatly upon education. They include:

2.1.1. Functional Theory

This theory considers the main roles of education in society to include socialization; integration; placement; and social and cultural innovation. They are discussed briefly as follows:

2.1.1.1. Socialization

This is a process that involves acculturation of children. Weeks (1980) submits that through socialization, learners accept and revere culture of society into which they are born or to which they migrate. Apart from family, media, peer group and religious organizations being socializing agents, the school is has proved effective in transmitting to the young the beliefs, language and heritage of the society. Socialization is therefore not only a binding force among a given group of people but also a process that ensures continuity of society. Socialization provides for individual differences hence the existence of myriad societal roles and positions that each person is expected to play-this also becomes a reflection of one's

personality. As indicated earlier, educational programs are designed in a way that each individual learner finds their space of action in addition to the newly emerging individualized teaching and learning devices and methodologies in our schools.

2.1.1.2. Social Integration

Involves a series of processes to enable one to become an active part of the larger society. Through education individuals are made to pay allegiance to a common set of cherished beliefs and values. In other words, an individual function in the interest of others and as part of the bigger whole.

2.1.1.3. Social Placement

This is the process whereby education places learners into various categories in which they are perceived to belong as predicated by their cognitive achievements. This happens through tracking and execution of standardized tests. Learners may be categorized as achievers or under-achievers depending on their academic performance. Based on these attainments whose, learners are presumably prepared for their future career paths. In my view this perhaps, could be one of the most faulted functions of the school under the above theory because it seems to assume the underlying factors that influence academic performances leading to rushed decisions on what is best for the learner.

2.1.1.4. Social and Cultural Innovation

Education plays a role in identifying and promoting innovative ventures society. Discoveries which are made by scientists or even artistic productions that marvel us in society require proper education and training. Hence curriculum specialists are tasked to shape the curriculum accordingly bearing in mind relevant school programs that would promote such ventures.

Other functions of the school that the above theory stipulates include institutionalization of child-care programs, peer relationships and problem-solving strategies. Curriculum planners are tasked to make provisions for the foregoing during selection of key curriculum components such as content, methodologies and strategies among others.

2.1.2 Conflict Theory

This theory presents a critique of the functions of education in the society. It faults education for entrenching social inequality in society by reinforcing ingrained biases among schooling populace. For example, the theory castigates the school for condoning the 'hidden' curriculum in its programs as a way to maintain the status quo – a course that the school champions by exposing learners to certain choice books and societal values that underpin social disparities in society. Other issues of variance that are tackled by conflict theory include differentiated school environments which the theory argues is indeed a reflection of the many existing inequalities in society engineered by education.

2.1.3. Symbolic interactionism

Studies in here focus on learner interactions at school and their implications upon the larger society where learners are subsequently expected to perform various roles as adults or otherwise. The contention here is that for example during play time at school girls tend to perform more passive games unlike more aggressive and competitive plays that boys do. Hence the argument that, on the basis of social interactions developed while at school, roles of these learners in the larger society are somewhat taking shape.

3. Sociology as an Instrument in Establishing Educational Goals

Goals are broad statements of educational intent. From a sociological standpoint, they are derived from the identified areas of crucial need in the society. Goals are basic to curriculum planning. They fall into various categories ranging from ultimate, mediate to proximate goals with respect to their closeness to aims on one hand, and objectives on the other. National educational goals are usually contained in policy documents which often originate as blueprints of proceedings of relevant international agreements but contextualized by national government for effective actualization. For example, The United Nations Millennium Declaration summit in New York in the year 2000 birthed eight (8) universal Millennium Development Goals (MDGs-on-line). Education is a key area as captured by these goals.

3.1. Goals of Education

- Achieve universal primary education-this goal calls for expansion of basic education and making it to be all inclusive. The goal entails provision of free and compulsory elementary education for all populations regardless of age, race, gender etc. The goal covers main sectors from early child-hood, primary and secondary education components.
- Promotion of gender equality by the year 2015-this goal advocates for an equal number of boys and girls in education. However, as regards certain parts of Africa, prevalence of inhibitions such as early marriages and moralism among girls and boys respectively has impeded speedy realization of this goal.

4. Conclusion

This paper has made effort to underscore the role of sociological foundation in shaping curriculum decisions, educational objectives and educational goals. Basic sociological theories such as functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionist approach together with other fundamental social aspects that underpin education have also been explored. The social purposes of the curriculum, societal pressures and diverse learner backgrounds are identified as key

players in shaping educational thinking all over the world. Finally, it is noteworthy that sociology points to society those areas that need the intervention of school curriculum.

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