

THE PLACE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE NIGERIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM: IMPLICATION FOR GROUP LIFE

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Abstract

For any society to exist, it has to fulfil its functional prerequisites. These include adaptation, goal attainment, integration and coping with the demands of the society's members. The society in itself does not exist and cannot do anything: it is after all no more than a collection of individuals. Therefore it is necessary to persuade the members to act in certain ways, which will enable society to fulfil its needs and ensure its continuation. Culture performs this task by emphasizing certain values, which guide members to act in a particular way and this ensures that the functional prerequisites are carried out. While doing this, every member of the society must understand that they are mutually related and interdependent.

Introduction

A society comprises particular social interactions that are based on division of labour, are mutually directed to other selves, and are founded on a law of comparative advantage. In his Division of Labour, Durkheim explained how the basis of social solidarity changed as societies developed from primitive to modern complex ones. In traditional societies there is a mechanical form of social solidarity, which lays great stress on the importance of the group. Here individuality is disapproved of and conformity is stressed; shared values and shared actions underlie the sense of solidarity.

In advance industrial societies, however, this form of solidarity no longer prevails and is replaced by organic solidarity. Complex societies are here characterized by individuality and social diversity, but each individual needs the other (whether they realize it or not) making individuals mutually dependent. This solidarity is maintained even in a changing society.

As relevant to the purpose of nature and the society, each of us does what lies within our abilities, temperament and interest as adjusted to those of others. Because of this, Ezewu (1983) categorically stated that since every society is a group of people interacting with one another, the concept of interaction is of great importance to the educational sociologist. Social interaction is the process by which we act and react to those around us.

Many apparently trivial aspects of our day-to-day behaviour turn out on close examination to be complete and important aspects of social interaction. Our day-to-day routines are filled with interaction with others, through which process we learn a great deal about ourselves as social beings and about social life itself as well as learn how to act creatively in order to shape reality.

According to Haralambos and Heald (1980) the major function of education is the transmission of society's norms and values. Societies can survive only if there exist among members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in, the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands. Without these essential similarities, co-operation, social solidarity and therefore social life itself would be impossible. To become attached to the society, the child must feel in it something that is real, alive and powerful, which dominates the person and to which he owes the best part of himself. Education, and in particular, the teaching of sociology provides this link between the individual and the society.

Features of Social Interaction

Ezewu (1983) is of the opinion that for social interaction to be effective in any, social system it should consist of the following interrelated features:

- Interrelation should be purposeful in the sense that it should be directed towards the attainment of a goal clearly recognized and accepted by each of the interacting members.
- It should be interpersonal in the sense that on the part of its members there is a conscious awareness of the existence of each other.

- It should be reflective in the sense that it involves a critical appraisal of the situation that happens to arise; an individual can develop within himself an awareness of the consequences of belonging to a group that can affect, influence or alter his attitude to himself and to others.
- Interaction can be historical in the sense that every individual develops to a greater or lesser degree the awareness of a recent or more remote past, which, when consciously experienced, affects individual interaction in the present.

Social interaction requires numerous forms of nonverbal communication.

To a very large extent, effective interaction in any social setting must have the following elements:

To facilitate interaction in any group or society, every participating member must have to communicate with one another. This is crucial to social life. The communication must be in a language understood by all or by other signs understood by members of the group. Sometimes non-verbal media such as facial expressions, gestures or nodding the head may be used.

Again, some form of competition is necessary and is ever present in a social group. In a social system for instance, students compete through class work and in inter house athletic competitions. This is a kind of competition that may have both positive or negative results. When a student competes and succeeds, it creates his desire to achieve higher; but when he falls, he may be frustrated. Whichever way it goes, the fact remains that competition is necessary as long as it remains healthy in any society.

Another element in social interaction is conflict. Studies have shown that when two or more people interact, their relationship cannot be expected to be cordial all the time. Some form of disagreement may occur, but also a possibility of resolving them.

Lastly, for interaction to be meaningful in any social system, the members of the system must participate fully, may not necessarily be equally and each member must accommodate the other's shortcomings.

Interaction in a Typical Nigerian School System

The school as a social system has a number of statuses clearly defined, which people possessing clearly specified qualifications are expected to occupy. The status of a secondary school principal is considered in this case. The status of the principal is not permanently attached to one particular individual. Any qualified person promoted or appointed to the post occupies it at a given time. The occupier of the post is therefore expected to behave in a specific way in his interaction with others in the system. Every person in the system expects him to behave in a certain way towards him or her. Such expectation is called status obligation. Similarly, he, the principal expects that others in the system too should behave in a particular way towards him. This is called status-right. Arising from these relationships, students expect that the principal should, because of his status protect them or meet their needs at school. It is therefore obligatory for him to do so. While he does this, he legitimately expects that the students should respect his office.

There are many statuses in the school system: Principal-Vice Principal-Teachers-Non Academic Staff, and the pupils. Legitimate rights and obligations are attached to each of these statuses. It is the mutual recognition of status rights and obligations that gives substance to social interaction.

Relationship within the School System

In general, the development of adequate theory which link interaction and inter personal relationship to group and organizational innovation is lacking. However, it was Roger who in 1992 tried to present a theory of creativity which he considered to be effective in this context. Roger's theory conceived creativity as being the emergence in action of a novel-relationship product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on one hand and the materials on the other. He stressed that the condition of creativity cannot be forced, rather he claimed that three inner conditions are necessary for constructive creativity. These according to him are 'openness' to experiences, an 'internal' lass' of evaluation and ability 'to my' with elements and concepts.

From this theory two general conditions for maximizing the emergence of constructive creativity were mapped out. These are psychological safety and psychological freedom. Psychological safety of the individuals interacting in a given group can be established through understanding of genuine empathy and an absence of external evaluation. The other which is the external summative evaluation is often regarded as threat and

therefore creates a need for defensiveness, which may result in a low degree of staff interaction. Psychological freedom implies a complete freedom symbolic expression. Here, the individual has complete freedom to think; feel, and be whatever he must inward within himself.

A preposition expressed in part by Roger and used in the interpersonal relationships that develop within, say, the entire school system has an impact upon the innovativeness of the members of the entire system. In this context it can be assumed, that a high degree of staff interaction and indeed a high degree of students interaction will generate a high degree of innovative practices.

From the discussion above, it is clear that leadership is a very salient factor in the development of an innovative group. If a leader is accommodating and understanding, if he permits and encourages free discussion and interaction, and if he places within the group, then there will be evidence of personality growth among the members of the group. This means that the group will function more effectively with greater activity and better spirit. The essential argument put forth in this paper is that if the leader of a group establishes conditions of psychological safety and freedom, the group will be more significantly novel, and the group will enjoy more effective and harmonious interpersonal relationship. On the other hand, Hilfiker (1970) stated that in a situation where a teacher is told that he has got to keep his ideas till he gets to a new school can never encourage any perspective creative or innovative teacher to experiment with new ideas or concepts for fear of reprisals.

People with useful and educative ideas should be given every possible encouragement to toy with them because it appears that schools require a flexibility of approach which allows the questioning traditional assumptions and practices with uncritically accepting half-baked notions dress up as innovations. This will imply that every principal of a school will try to bring about a situation in which there is less of intrigue, rancor and more of useful cooperation, interaction, which will lead to the realization of group goals.

Mothering can be achieved in education or learning/teaching if a conducive environment is not prepared for cordial interaction of the child, the teacher and the curriculum. The social interaction between the teacher and the pupils is affected by each other's attitude and expectations. Based on this premise, the study of social interactions is considered very central in all sociological studies including the study of sociology of education.

General Objectives of Social Interaction in the Nigerian School System

The principal contribution of the study of social interaction to the theory and practice of education is to draw attention to the fact that neither educational aims nor educational techniques can be conceived without a context; but rather that they are to a very large extent socially determined and directed. Therefore, the place of social interaction in the Nigerian school system can be summarized thus:

- I. It deepens our understanding of human relationship in the business of education and in the larger society by uncovering new truths about them.
- II. It equips the individual/teacher with insight into the daily life of people which enables him to appreciate their complexities where other unfamiliar with them see only the surface.
- III. Social interaction provides the teacher with the broad knowledge of society and its influence on the school and then not to take these influences for granted.
- IV. It provides opportunity for a better understanding of the relationship between school and society and their dependence of each other.
- V. It helps in the understanding of the various social forces that affect education. The forces include religious beliefs, economy, politics, class structure, norms and value of society.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Sociology involves social action and social interaction of people living in a group, community or society. For a successful living, man must depend on one another since he does not live in isolation. It is important to note that for any system both in the public and private to exist and operate effectively; members must show cohesion, participate and interact with one other, cooperate with one another and conform to the norms or standards of the group. It is this interdependence that moves the society and ensures orderly co-existence. It is important that sociology and sociology of education be included as a compulsory subject at all levels of education in Nigeria.

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