

THE CHALLENGE AND THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

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Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen. To achieve this goal, the National Policy on Education recommends that the secondary school should have a core curriculum designed to broaden pupil's knowledge and outlook. The core curriculum is the group of subjects that every pupil must take in addition to his or her specialties. In the Junior Secondary School, the core subjects include; Mathematics, English Language, Nigerian Languages (2) Science, Social Studies Art and Music, Practical Agriculture, Religious and Moral Instructions, Physical Education and Pre-vocational subjects (2) In the Senior Secondary School, the core subjects include English Language, one Nigerian Language; Mathematics, one of the following alternative subjects - Physics, Chemistry and Biology; one of Literature in English, History and Geography and Agricultural Science or a vocational subject. This paper is concerned with the absence of Sociology in the secondary education curriculum in Nigeria.

Introduction

The foundation of any society or nation is the education of its citizens. "Education in Nigeria is a huge government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation. It is an instrument per excellence for effective national development" (NPE, 1981).

The data for this paper was collected through review of relevant literature and sample survey of four hundred and ninety-five 400 level social science students of University of Benin, between February and June, 2002.

Historical Antecedents of the National Policy on Education

Prior to 1973, the education system of Nigeria suffered from contradiction, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practices in the different parts of the federation. For instance, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in Western and Eastern Regions in 1955 and 1957 respectively. Consequently, the development of the country was uneven and disorderly.

In 1973, the government summoned a seminar of distinguished educational experts under the chairmanship of Chief Adebo, former Permanent Representative of Nigeria at the United Nations and the then chairman of the National Universities Commission. The mandate of the seminar was to deliberate on all aspects of a National Policy on Education with a view to making recommendations that would remove the existing contradictions, ambiguities and lack of uniformity in educational practices in the different parts of Nigeria. Consequently, the National Policy on Education that we have today is based on the recommendations of the seminar, modified in its passage through the various organs of government which examined the recommendations as well as by the passage of time, which made some recommendations either obsolete, having been overtaken by events or no longer acceptable in the light of changed circumstances. (NPE, 1981).

Secondary School Education

According to the National Policy on Education (1981:16), the broad aims of secondary education within our overall national objectives should be;

1. Preparation for useful living within the society; and
2. Preparation for higher education.

The National Policy on Education has a set of seven important specific objectives for secondary school education. The objectives are:

- a) Providing an increasing number of primary school pupils with the opportunities for higher

- education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex, or social, religious and ethnic background.
- b) Diversifying its curriculum to cater for the difference in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course.
- c) Equipping students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.
- d) Developing and projecting Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage.
- e) Raising a generation of people who can think for themselves respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims and live as good citizens.
- f) Fostering Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
- g) Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life.

In 1998 the National Policy on Education was reviewed. Most of the goals of secondary education were reworded and additional goals added thereby increasing the number of specified objectives to eight. The specific objectives according to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) are:

- i. To provide all primary school learners with the opportunity for education of higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- ii. To offer diversified curriculum to cater for the difference in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- iii. To provide manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- iv. To develop and promote Nigerian Languages, Arts and Culture in the context of the world's cultural heritage;
- v. To inspire its students with a desire for self empowerment and achievement of excellence;
- vi. To foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- vii. To raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the view and teachings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- viii. To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

To achieve this goal, the National Policy on Education recommends that the secondary school have a core curriculum designed to broaden pupil's knowledge and outlook.

In the Junior Secondary School, the core subjects include; Mathematics, English Language Nigerian Languages (2) Science, Social Studies, Art and Music, Practical Agriculture, Religious and Moral Instructions, Physical Education and pre-vocational subjects (2). In the Senior Secondary School, the core subjects, include; English Language, one Nigerian Languages; Mathematics, one of the following alternative subjects - Physics, Chemistry and Biology; Agricultural Science or a vocational subject and one of Literature in English, History and Geography. Unfortunately, Sociology is not listed as a core course. It is not even an elective course.

Why Is Sociology Important At The Secondary School Level?

Sociology is the study of group life. As a social science, it combines scientific and humanistic perspective in the study of urban and rural life, family patterns and relationships, social change, inter-group relations, social class environment, technology and communication, health care and illness, social movement, community responses to disasters and pressing contemporary social issues.

Sociology offers valuable preparation for students planning careers in the wide variety of fields, including social research, journalism, public relations, criminology. Demography, social psychology, public administration, counseling, gerontology, education, rehabilitation, social work, and useful background for those planning to enter law, business, medicine, politics, priesthood, community planning and architecture. Sociology provides a rich fund of knowledge that pertains to

each of these fields.

The most immediate benefits of knowledge of sociology are the acquisition of a new perspective from which to look at one's own life. Many of the most perplexing and distressing problems individuals face are problems of social relationships and social position. To be able to view those problems through the relatively clear and unemotional perspective to sociology can often be helpful. Knowledge of sociology enables the individual to step outside the social network of his own life and to gain self-understanding and social insight.

C. Wright Mills (1956) suggest some of the wider benefits of sociological knowledge.

According to him, sociology assists members of the society to see clearly where their society is and what it can become. Society is a human creation but without sociological knowledge people may not realize what they have created and thus may be unable to alter society when it no longer serves their needs or achieves their goals.

Although sociology can provide useful information of those who are responsible for social and political leadership, perhaps even more evaluating their society and in developing an agenda for change. Who are the ordinary people? They are not university graduates. They are most likely those who could not proceed beyond the primary or secondary school education.

According to Percell, C. H. (1990), sociology explores society and how it operates. It broadens social insights and fosters critical thinking. It encourages the individual to think actively about the issues facing the contemporary society. And by so doing, the individual learns to make more informed choices. According to Levine, J. F. (1999), "sociology is an excellent liberal arts major that will help prepare students for the challenge of the century ahead".

The findings of the study done by Ibobor S. O. (2002) among four hundred and ninety-five 400 Level Social Science Students of University of Benin, between February - June 2002 indicates that if one takes a sociology course then one would be less ethnocentric and more culturally relative. In the study, four hundred and ninety-five students were interviewed on their level of ethnocentrism. " It was observed that of the 174 students, who took sociology course, 124 (71%) had low ethnocentric scores. This compares with 215 (78%) of the 312 students who did not take a sociology course that had high ethnocentric scores. This indicates that sociology course have been found effective in reducing ethnocentrism or ethnicity and can be a veritable instrument for raising a generation of Nigerians who can think for themselves and respect the views and feelings of others not a generation who have no respect for lives, property and dignity of labour. From the foregoing, it cannot be over-emphasized that sociological knowledge's fundamental and crucial to human life. It fulfills the broad aims of the secondary education, that is, preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. If sociological knowledge should wait until a person is 18 years old and above then, it is not that important to have. The basis should be taught early in the educational process. Consequently, the lack of presence of sociological knowledge in Nigerian secondary education has serious implication for the achievement of the National Policy on Education, especially when we consider the fact that most people do not go beyond the secondary school level. National and State politicians, policy makers, ward counselors, local government chairmen, and even the electorates who have very little exposure to sociological knowledge can hardly craft an agenda for change in their own communities,

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, this paper makes the following recommendations:

1. The Federal Government should set up a committee on sociology in the Elementary and Secondary Schools to look into the challenge of introducing sociology into Elementary and Secondary Schools curriculum.
2. National Policy on Education should reviewed with a view to including sociology in the secondary school curriculum as a core course.

This will give the National; Policy on Education a better future in terms of achieving the goals of the secondary school education in Nigeria.

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