

# DIMENSIONS AND FACTORS OF SOCIAL MOBILITY IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

In the contemporary world, the acquisitions of formal education and skills with high market value have been found to be crucial in determining social mobility. Notwithstanding, several other factors apart from education operate in societies to limit or facilitate social mobility. Using functionalist theory, this paper explains the dimensions and pivotal role played by education and other diverse factors of social mobility during different political dispensations: pre-colonial, colonial, immediate post-independent, military dictatorship and post-military era, in Nigeria. The paper observes that social mobility is dynamic and subject to influence of social change, making it amenable to many factors (not education) in Nigeria, among which are political and ethnic affiliation, religion, wealth, gender, geopolitical considerations. The paper closes by asserting that social mobility, in Nigeria, is not only multi-dimensional but also multi-causal.

## Introduction

in the contemporary world, the acquisitions of formal education and skills with high market value have been found to be one of the routes for social mobility (Ekong, 1988). This indicates that inequalities in educational opportunities are crucial in determining social mobility. However, several other factors apart from education operate in societies to limit or facilitate social mobility.

This paper, looking at the dimensions and factors responsible for social mobility, attempts to demonstrate the significant role played by formal education as a factor of social mobility. Similarly, it explains how insufficient education might be to solely determine upward social mobility in contemporary Nigerian society.

## Operationalization of Concepts

*Social Mobility* means the movement of individuals and groups between different socioeconomic positions (Giddens, 2000). *Open class systems and dosed class systems* are used to indicate the degree of social mobility in any society. *An open system* implies that the position of each individual is influenced by the person's achieved status - a social position attained by a person hugely through his or her own *effort* (Schaefer, 2001). This system encourages competition among members of a society. *Closed system* allows for little or no possibility of moving up. Status acquisition is largely *ascriptive* in a closed system.

Mobility could be *vertical* or *horizontal*. By *Vertical Mobility*, we refer to movement *up* or *down* the socio-economic scale. Those who gain in property, income or status are said to be *upwardly mobile*, while those who move in the opposite direction are *downwardly mobile*. These types of mobility are common in a *class society*. On the contrary, *horizontal mobility* refers to movement within the same social class or within the same occupational group. This type of mobility is rampant in *caste societies* where movement between social strata is ritually prohibited.

One way of examining *Vertical Social Mobility* is to contrast *intergenerational mobility and intragenerational mobility*.

*Intragenerational mobility* involves changes in the socio-economic position of children relative to their parents. Thus, a driver whose father was a medical doctor illustrates downward intragenerational mobility while a university lecturer whose parents are both peasant farmers exemplifies upward intergenerational mobility.

*Intragenerational mobility* denotes changes in social position within a person's adult life (working life). A man who becomes a taxicab driver after his accounting firm goes bankrupt undergoes downward intergenerational mobility while a teacher's housemaid who eventually becomes headmistress of a school experiences upward intragenerational mobility.

## **Education**

From functionalist perspective, education is a system of social practices evolved around a valued function of the society - socialization - in which those who participate, the patterns of interaction, the means adopted and the manifest ends are all culturally specified and sanctioned (Ekong, 1988). Education performs the function of *differentiating* people in the society and of *validating* their social statuses. In most contemporary societies, the acquisition of formal education and possession of some certificates ensure entry of individuals into prestigious jobs. The higher the certificate, the more highly placed the individual within his profession, thus, the proliferation of professions and skills and the gradation of diplomas help to slot people into different categories. Education has therefore become a *source of class formation* as well as *social mobility*. It is pertinent to note that education could take on two forms: informal and formal (Arabic, western etc). However, the focus of this paper would be largely, education in the western sense.

## **History of Education in Nigeria**

Before 100 A.D. informal education held sway in almost all the communities now known as Nigeria. Transmission was largely oratory. Story method was used as medium of transmission. The earliest communities in Nigeria to read and write were those of the North through their early contact with Muslim Arabs. They learned how to read and write Arabic. In Borno, Arabic schools were established as early as 1100AD. At Sokoto and Kano areas, Arabic schools were established from about 1459 AD. With the spread of Islam to most regions of Northern Nigeria during and after the Fulani Jihad between 1804 and 1838, Arabic schools numbered over 6000. Presently the number has skyrocketed.

Western education, in Nigeria, started as far back as 1842 when the first set of missionaries landed in Badagry. The objective of education then, was to produce those who could read Bible and interpret English Language for the propagation of Christianity. Also, the political aim of British education was to produce indigenous people to fill the posts reserved for Africans in discharging imperial order (Adeyanju, 1992). To this end, the period between 1842 and 1882 has been described as an era of exclusive Missionary Education in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974). After this period, the Colonial administration started to show interest in the establishment of schools, if not for anything else, to meet the needs generated by the new economic realities of the day. *The new status-class* created by the products of these schools might be the factor that inspired the involvement of communities, individuals and religious organizations in the expansion of education in Nigeria, especially in the immediate post-independence period. Consequently, there was leap in the number of applicants into these schools.

The situation portrayed above was accentuated during *the Depression Period* when Colonial government had to *train some Nigerians to fill the posts created by the expansion* of British colonial involvement in Nigeria. During this period under consideration, the literary tradition and the *University degree* became indelible *symbols of prestige* in Nigeria. Put more succinctly, they became, in sociological parlance, *status symbols*.

The first generation of clerks in southern Nigeria was transformed into the first generation of African elites either as senior clerks or commissioned agents of European trading companies. It was this position or status acquired by these people that enabled them to encourage and sponsor their children to pursue higher education abroad (Mohammed & Alkasum, 1987). It must be emphasized however that during the colonial period, technical education which could give the nation a new technological base and create new occupational roles was underplayed. The period between 1970 and 2000 witnessed rapid development in the establishment of various tertiary institutions in the country. The resultant effect is that applicants now outnumber the available places in these institutions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In order to explain the *relationship* between factors of social mobility and stratification. *Functionalist view of stratification* is adopted for this study. This offers explanations for the existence and necessity of social stratification for the effective operation of the society. It also explains that the most valued attributes, qualities and possessions by the people define upward social mobility in different societies (Oladeji and Olabode, 2004).

## Functionalist View

Functionalists maintain that a differential system of rewards and punishments is necessary for efficient operation of society (Schaefer, 2001). In their view, Davis and Moore (1945), society must distribute its members among variety of social positions. It must not only make sure that these *positions are filled* but also see that they are *staffed by* people with the *appropriate talents and abilities*. Rewards, including money and prestige, according to the functionalists, are based on the importance of a position and the relative scarcity of qualified personnel.

Davis and Moore (1945) argued further that *stratification is universal* and that social inequality is necessary for people to be motivated to fill functionally important positions. Similarly, they posited that society must use some types of reward to motivate people to enter unpleasant or dangerous jobs as well as jobs that require a long training period. For instance, Engineers, Medical doctors, Pilots are highly valued and rewarded because of the long period of training involved. Critics say, “even if stratification is inevitable, functionalists’ explanation for differential reward does not explain the wide disparity between the rich and the poor. For instance, garbage collection is considered important in most societies; yet, garbage collectors are rewarded less than some other less important occupations. Can we then say that the garbage collector is really any less important to the survival of the society than advertising executives? Despite the lower pay and prestige of the garbage collectors, they actually may be more important to the survival of the society. Even in cases where it could be said that one position serves more important function for the society, greater rewards do not necessarily accrue to the more important position. Medical Doctors may be much more important to the society than star footballers are, but medical doctors have far less prestige and income than star footballers. Another criticism against functionalism is that on many occasions, there really are no scarcity of people capable of filling high-level positions rather many people are prevented from obtaining the training they need to achieve prestigious positions even though they have the ability. For instance about 1,000,000 candidates applied to Nigerian Universities through JAMB in year 2002 and only 100,000 were offered admissions

## Review of Literature

It is necessary to review some literature, which would illuminate our understanding of the dimensions and factors of social mobility in Nigeria.

Hobbs and Blank (1975) identify a number of factors that do affect incidence of social mobility in developed societies among which occupation and education are paramount. They believe that occupation shapes one's life style because the reputation that an occupation has in the eyes of the populace determines an individual's social status. The *bureaucratization* of modern society makes vast majority of the people to aspire to have *educational prerequisites* and those without these prerequisites are almost always ineligible for positions in the bureaucratic sector. As succinctly put by Boltomore (1966), educational attainment determines one's chance of being recruited and being promoted.

Hobbs and Blank (1975) also found that educational attainment is positively related to the individual's occupation, income, reputation, power and influence in the society. However, they recognized the fact that the *family background* of an individual may be closely linked to one's access to privileges, power and prestige. They noted that social mobility could also be ensured by personal achievements. As an illustration, they stated that the prestige, privilege and high status that the military generals, artists, scientists and politicians enjoy might not necessarily accrue from their incomes, occupation, educational attainment and family background but through personal achievements.

The conclusions of Hobbs and Blank (1975) are in disagreement with the findings of some scholars. For instance, Abrahamson (1976) stated that *educational attainment is determined* to a large extent *by family background, personal talents and efforts of the individual* concerned, and therefore these variables are *related to social mobility*, though probably remotely.

In another dimension, Wosley (1978) noted that the significance of education as a factor of *social mobility* increases with dramatic changes in the *occupational structure of a community* because the new occupational opportunities are available only to those who possess the necessary educational qualifications. But he opined that in the extreme case, *if everybody in a society were a graduate*.

educational qualifications would be of little help in getting a job and *a person's prospect of social mobility would depend* as it were in the past, *on his family background, his personality and his luck.*

The significance of the findings of Hobbs and Blank (1975); Abrahamson (1975); and Wosley (1978) is that they all demonstrate that *social mobility is not only multidimensional* but also *multi-causal*. These findings also confirm the position of Dahredorf (1959) that many other factors aside from ownership and non-ownership of means of production determine the structure of classes in a given society.

### **Dimensions and Factors of Social Mobility Across Dispensations in Nigeria Factors of Social Mobility in Pre-Colonial Society**

The *basic principle* of African indigenous education for an African child in pre-colonial societies was *self-development*. The child is given every opportunity to do things by himself under the direction and protection of the adult. Through series of initiation ceremonies an individual was made to understand the *norms governing the goals* of the society as well as *means of achieving them*.

In most pre-colonial societies, the youths were encouraged to *acquire possessions (wealth) through hard work, courage and determination*. They were not to engage in acts that violate norms of the society. To them, *these were paths to greatness, fame and honour in the society and consequently the symbols of high status*. Also, among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the "OSU" or the ritually separated members of the society were held as social outcast, irrespective of their achievements in the society (Ezeanu, 1967). Under Oyo Empire, slaves (individuals owned by others and treated as properties) were found in many settings. Irrespective of the positions occupied by these slaves, they were excluded from political positions and the military (Ekong, 1988). Family background, wealth, strength, military prowess were some of the factors instrumental to social mobility during this dispensation.

### **Factors of Social Mobility in Colonial Nigeria**

As earlier noted, the advent of colonialists brought a new dimension to social mobility in Nigeria. Education became the most important factor of mobility (Awe, 1989). The main aim of the British education was to produce indigenous people to fill the posts reserved for Africans in discharging imperial orders. It could be seen, just as the functionalists theorized, that the roles are created in societies to perform certain functions, that the urgency to meet the needs generated by the new economic realities of the day made the colonial administration to show interest in the establishment of more schools.

However, the lifestyles of the products of early missionary and colonial government schools made both parents and pupils, according to Fafunwa (1974), to perceive education as "a means of social emancipation and an avenue for economic improvement. The main principle of this type of education was to supply men for employment, in government. This position supports the views of the functionalists that education is a factor of upward *social mobility*. This opinion shows that the economic well being of the few educated Nigerians, long before independence, created the impression of "bread and butter" education in the minds of parents, guardians and pupils alike.

Furthermore, considering the factors of social mobility in Nigeria during the colonial period, it could be seen that the *promotion of free trade policy* and the accompanying *British intervention in the internal affairs of Nigerians* ushered in a new era which saw the *multiplication of new and specialized statuses and the growth of the Civil Service*. Coupled with these developments, the reorganization and *Nigerianization of the Civil Service*, which followed attainment of independence in 1960, *created more opportunities of upward social mobility* for the educated Nigerians (Imoagene, 1976).

In contrast to the afore-stated, *social status is both achieved and ascribed* in some parts of Nigeria, for instance, among the Kanuri people of North eastern part of Nigeria, birth into a particular descent group *limits social mobility* and this explains why high status people in Bornu State, which was in the past characterized by feudal social relations, are from high status background and hence *occupational mobility is only possible through clientage system* (Cohen, 1966). Cohen concluded that due to the feudal heritage of the people under consideration, the influence of education as a factor of upward mobility is limited to a very small percentage of the population. Its significance is only visible at the elite level, for those who take up jobs in government and large private companies. However, it appears that *wealth seems to be more important to social mobility than educational attainment among the Dorno people* because it is perceived to be able to influence the probability of an individual being socially mobile because

it could be used to create dependent relations which in turn ensure the support of many people thereby enhancing one's privileges, prestige and power in the community.

### Factors of Social Mobility in the Immediate Post-Independent Nigeria

The period immediately after the independence witnessed rapid economic growth and technological advancement, following the massive exploration of petroleum. There were changes in the value system of Nigerians. It is our opinion that attention shifted to acquisition of wealth. This meant that what educational attainment lost in relation to upward social mobility, the acquisition of wealth gained. The educated Nigerians that benefited from the indigenization policy became rich overnight, because of sensitive positions they were holding, such as Special Advisers, Permanent Secretaries, Policy Formulators etc. Thus *wealth became status symbol* in Nigeria. They were able to afford the best facilities in the society. Through their wealth they were able to determine who control the affairs of their society, perpetuate their advantages and pass them on to their offspring, making sure that they have the best available education which consequently offered (hem the best available jobs available. To some extent, Dahrendorfs (1959) postulation- a modification of Marx's conflict theory- that the most powerful group in the society gain status and power at the expense of the lower class was witnessed at this period. The gap between the lower and the upper classes became widened. So, a combination of wealth and education determined social mobility during this era.

### Factors of Social Mobility in the Era of Military Dictatorship 1966-1999

The period between 1966 and 1999 (most especially 1984 -1999) witnessed prolonged military occupation of the country. This period witnessed *recession in the economy* of the country, which resulted in retrenchment in various sectors of the economy. Education became less fashionable as other considerations and factors gained prominence as determinants of upward mobility. Ethnicity, 'god fatherism' geo-political considerations and religion became wheels upon which people rose up on the ladder of stratification.

The Table below gives illustration of the position above:

**Table 1: Federal Parastatals, Agency or Organ's Chief Executives**

| S/No. | Parastatals/Agency                               | Chief Executive               | Geographical Area | Religion     |
|-------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1.    | Nigerian Ports                                   | Alh. Wali Ahmed               | North             | Islam.       |
| 2.    | N. N. P. C                                       | Alh. Dalhatu Bayero           | North             | Islam        |
| 3.    | Nig. Security Printing & Minting Co.             | Alh. Baffa                    | North             | Islam        |
| 4.    | N.T. A   | Patrick Ityohen               | North             | Christianity |
| 5.    | N. F. A  | Alh. Aminu Sanni Toro         | North             | Islam        |
| 6.    | Nigerian Permanent Rep. To UN                    | Alh. (Prof.) Ibrahim Ganibari | North             | Islam        |
| 7.    | Chief Justice of the Federation.                 | Alh. (Justice) Mohammed Uwais | North             | Islam        |
| 8.    | Secretary to the Federal Government              | Alh. Gidado Idris             | North             | Islam        |
| 9.    | Inspector Gen. of National University Commission | Alh. Ibrahim Comassie         | North             | Islam        |
| 10.   | Custom Service                                   | Alh. (Prof.) Munzali Jubril   | North             | Islam        |
| 11.   | P.T. F   | Alh. A. A. Mustapha           | North             | Islam        |
| 12.   | National Directorate of Employment               | General Muhammed Buhari (Rtd) | North             | Islam        |
| 13.   | Nigerian Ambassador to U. S. A                   | Alh. Baba Gana Zanna          | North             | Islam        |
| 14.   | Immigration                                      | Alh. (Dr.) Hassan Adamu       | North             | Islam        |
| 15.   |  | Alh. Sahabi Dange             | North             | Islam        |

As at April, 1999.

- Adapted from a seminar paper delivered at the Polytechnic, Ibadan. "Restructuring: The way out of Imminent Disintegration of Nigerian federation". By M.O. Oladeji April 1999.

Employment and promotions in most government establishments as well as private sectors followed a trend similar to what is reflected in the table above. During this dispensation, the educational system in the public sector became incessantly disorganized, thereby making it practically impossible to be within the reach of the low - class people, whereas, the upper - class people could afford to train their children in best private schools abroad and at home. This in

turn positioned their siblings for the few available jobs in the system.

### **Factors of Social Mobility in the Present Day Nigeria**

With the wind of freedom, which blew across Nigeria on May 29, 1999, so many *political and appointment opportunities and privileges* were opened to Nigerians. As the military personnel took the back stage, political gladiators came to the forefront and are saddled with the control of affairs of the nation, making many positions opened up to be filled up by people to perform certain functions in line with functionalist perspective. Since social mobility is dynamic and subject to influence of social change, many factors now account for upward social mobility in Nigeria. Among other things, *gender, political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, wealth and education* are crucial in determining the movement of an individual up or down the *stratification ladder*.

*Gender* is increasingly becoming a vital issue in mobility, right from the time the drums of "Women Liberation", "Better Life For Rural Women", Family Support Programme" have been sounding, women have started using gender as a launching pad for social mobility. Titi Ajannaku (Former Presidential Adviser on Women Affairs); Mrs. Dupe Onalaja (Former Minister of State for Solid Minerals); Mrs. Florence Icheen (Former Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly). Dr. (Mrs.) Okonjo Iweala (Minister for Finance), Dr. (Mrs.) Florence Akunyili (NAFDAC boss); Chief (Mrs.) Erelu Obada (Deputy Governor of Osun State) to mention just a few, are people who have benefited from gender factor to move up the stratification ladder. We now see women taking up strategic positions in various aspects of the economy. Gender is fast becoming a basis for conflict to fill positions that can assure upward mobility as postulated by modern conflict theorists.

Furthermore, apart from educational qualification, it is observed that many people are upwardly mobile through political affiliation. Getting employment or contract is based on *political patronage* in Nigeria of today. Also, political appointments whether at the Federal or State levels are highly influenced by political patronage, *ethnic considerations* and *wealth*. For someone to get to the top depends on whom he knows and the political association he belongs.

Notwithstanding, education has now become a common leveler, of which anyone aspiring to move up the ladder of stratification might need some other qualifications to do so. On the other hand, many appointments in Nigeria, be it traditional, religious, political etc would require minimum level of education.

### **Recommendations**

It is suggested that education should be given priority in the issue of appointments and promotions in the nation sequel to its positive contributory role to the overall development of the nation. This will enable the right people to occupy the right positions. In addition, it will enhance the ascendancy of achieved status over ascribed status. This is in line with the constitutional provision of the nation that "discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited". (1999 Constitution of Nigeria). Ultimately, it will facilitate and promote national integration.

Furthermore, it is recommended that acquisition of wealth should always be investigated before its possessors are accorded recognition in the society. All ill-gotten wealth should be confiscated by the state and culprits brought to book. This will go a long way to debar mediocre and fraudsters from climbing up the ladder of stratification. Consequently, hard work, diligence discipline would be encouraged in the polity. A situation where chieftaincy titles are awarded indiscriminately to unscrupulous individuals is unacceptable.

### **Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated that Western education became a significant factor for social mobility during the colonial period in most parts of the country. This was found to be due to the fact that *most functionally important roles* introduced by the colonial masters could only be *filled* by individuals who *acquired special skills* through Western education. Also, the retrenchment of some white officials and the *Nigerianization policy* before and after the attainment of political independence *provided opportunities for social mobility* for the educated Nigerians.

However, with *changes in the social structure of the society*, consequent upon new

*cultural values, indigenization exercise, expansion of educational opportunities, military incursion into the corridors of power, democracy, ethnicism etc. the significance of formal education as a factor of social mobility may have dwindled. It appears that other factors and considerations share or even take the enviable position of educational attainment in defining the probability that an individual would enjoy the proceeds of upward social mobility. These factors may include ethnicity, wealth, religion, geo-political considerations, economic situation, sexual discrimination, class discrimination, political affiliation, re - organization of existing and society's social structure. With this we tend to align with the findings of Hobbs and Blanks (1975); Wosley (1978); and Abrahamson (1975) that social mobility is not only multi-dimensional but also multi-causal.*

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