



A CONSIDERATION OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IDEAS OF TALCOTT PARSONS (1902-1979) FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCIAL ORDER THROUGH A UNIVERSAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The work is a theoretically based exposition but predicated on the agitation for a universal education programme. The ideas of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) are based on the possibility of social order. As a functionalist, his ideas stemmed from the consensus view point demonstrated by adherence to shared values. The paper examines the principles of functionalism where social order is possible only where members of society see the commonness of social values and equally respect same. Generally, sociological studies are concerned with the enshrinement of order. Thus, the paper agitates for a universal education programme which can address the very many but similar global social problems.

INTRODUCTION

The need for order in society appears to be the most critical desire of human existence. Without it, no other activities can thrive meaningfully and thus no human survival will be possible.

as a social science discipline was a response to understand the reasons behind the escalating crime rate in Europe after the industrial revolution. The works of Auguste Comte' (1798-1857), the great French Philosopher can attest to this. All who came after him like Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) developed this idea further. However, the refinement of this discipline was provided by Talcott Parsons (1937), who developed it toward a better understanding. He indeed provided the impetus for the acceptance of this discipline while strictly basing his imaginations on the possibility of achieving order in society which was the prime motive of Auguste Comte for the understanding of human conduct in a social set-up.

Today, the entire global society is characterized by large scale social instability emanating from disorderliness. These have arisen from mere non-conformity to given set of norms that are accepted by a significant

society to forms of behaviour that are sanctioned by criminal law. Criminologists are often interested in techniques for measuring crime, trends in crime rates and policies aimed at reducing crime within communities while the sociology of deviance draws on criminological research but also investigates conduct which lies beyond the realm of criminal law.

It appears the trends in crime are assuming a universal dimension such as seen in the acts of terror, dishonesty, violence, homo-sexuality and lesbianism. It is thus imperative to appreciate the general apprehension of the whole world when one considers the hues and cries about the complex and escalating height of social disorder. The porosity of social boundaries by allowing the permeation of trends and events across world societies is in no little measure responsible for the diffusion of both positive and negative social values and norms. For instance, the emergence of the act of terror in sub-saharan Africa and in particular Nigeria can conveniently be explained by this school of thought. If global communities are experiencing similar challenges which appear to assume harmonious nature, then these problems and challenges equally require universal strategies or approaches to remediate or even eradicate.

The most potent approach for the tackling of human social problems cannot be far from those predicated on the system of education. Thus, this effort is geared towards applying the ideas of Talcott Parsons, a dominant theorist in American sociology in

agitating for a near absolute value universal education. Perhaps, the need for this effort may be further appreciated through the perception of Giddens (2006) that individuals are now more aware of their interconnectedness with others and are more likely to identify with global issues and processes than was the case in time past.

People are more susceptible to look globally as they increasingly perceive that social responsibility does not stop at national borders but extend them. Disasters and injustices facing people on the other side of the globe are not simply misfortunes that must be endured but legitimate grounds for action and intervention which require universal attention.

TALCOTT PARSONS AND THE QUESTION OF HOW SOCIAL ORDER IS POSSIBLE

Talcott Parsons began his work with the question of how social order is possible. He observed that social life is characterized by mutual advantage and peaceful cooperation rather than mutual hostility and destruction. Haralambo (2000) stated that a large part of Parson's sociology is concerned with explaining how this state of affairs is accomplished. Parsons (1951) was quick to consider the views of Thomas Hobbes, who was a seventeenth century English philosopher.

Hobbes' central view was on his discovery of the basis of social order. He thus, presented the profile of a human who is rational, self-directed and calculating. Humans form a

ordered social organisation with other humans through fear of the consequences where they fail.

The following features are derived from the views of Thomas Hobbes:

- Humanity is directed by passion and reason;
- Such passions and reasons are usually the drives for achieving satisfaction by individuals;
- Individual passions are never allowed free rein, else they would use any means at their disposal including force and fraud, to satisfy them;
- The fear of satisfying passions using force and fraud would otherwise result in the “war of all against all”;
- Thus, the fear of this outcome is generated by the most basic of human passions, which is “self preservation”;
- Guided by the desire for self-preservation, members of society agree to restrain their passions, give-up their liberty and enter into a social contract with other members;
- Members of society therefore submit to the authority of a ruler or government in return for protection against the aggression, force or fraud of others;
- This sovereign power guarantees the prevention of “war of all against all” while ensuring security and order in society.

Parsons (1951) argued that Hobbes'

picture of people pursuing personal ends restrained only by sovereign power fails to provide an adequate explanation for social order. Thus, Parsons believed that only a commitment to common values provides a basis for order in society. The position of Talcott Parsons can be further buttressed by the illustration he provided which Haralambos (2000) stated thus: He examined transactions in the market place. That in a business transactions, the parties concerned form a contract and in order for the conduct of business to be orderly, it is essential that contracts be bound by a system of regulatory and normative rules. In Parson's view, fear of the consequences is insufficient to motivate people to obey the rules. Rather, a moral commitment is essential. Thus, rules governing business transactions must ultimately be derived from shared values which state what is just, right and proper. Order in the economic system is therefore based on a general agreement concerning morality. Another prominent functionalist, Durkheim (1970) agrees on the relevance of shared values but exemplified the concept in the context of social facts. According to him, society has a reality of its own over and above the individuals who comprise it. Members of society are constrained by “social facts” by ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him.

Though the appreciation of common values are perceived as essentials for ordered human societies, cultural diversities within broad social

conglomerations may indeed be major obstacles for shared values. Thus, values are components of culture that vary from society to society. Culture according to Hughes, Kroehler and Vander-Zanden (2002):

Provides guideposts for daily living, a blueprint or map for life's activities. These guideposts often differ from one society to another. The 'oughts' and 'must' of some societies are the "ought not" and "must not" of other societies. The "good" and "desirable" among these people are the "bad" and "undesirable" among those people. (P. 48)

However, it is not sufficient to be vehement in the conclusion that commonalities in different cultures cannot be found for a harmonious understanding of the global society. Cultural universals which speak of the patterned and recurrent aspects of life that appear in all known societies is indeed possible.

Hughes, Kroehler and Vanderzanden (2002) affirm that there are such common denominators or cultural constants, since all members of societies are confronted by similar problems. Culture represents an accumulation of solutions to the problems posed by human biology and the generalization of the human situation.

Infact, Murdock (1950) developed and reported a classification of cultural components that has eighty-eight (88) general categories of behaviour that are found among all

cultures. In this light, culture can assume a consistent and integrated whole. Where this understanding can be substantially held, a universal education programme that can address the question of social order within global context can be advocated for. Note that quite a lot of efforts at global initiative for education have been made such as those relating to the Milenium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) which indeed reflect global desires and commitments. The curriculum contents and strategie for achievements have not differed significantly in various countries. The slight variations have emerged from the differences in value-system orientations

THE NEED FOR A UNIVERSAL EDUCATION FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GLOBAL SOCIAL ORDER

If the possibility of achieving global social order is still the pre-occupation of sociological inquiry, then universal education should impeccably be considered as a conduit pipe for universal social stability. Though sociologists, according to Haralambos (2000), have debated the merits of having different types of curriculum in schools for various societies, some have supported the use of a single curriculum in schools. For instance, Lawton (1975) proposed a common culture, though he accepted the position that there were important sub-cultural differences between social groups but maintained that there were sufficient similarities to form a school curriculum based on a common culture. This position only

underscores the fact that human understanding and expectations are indeed based on similar actions, feelings and thinking. Thus, socio-cultural challenges which are emerging globally are apparently appearing to share very striking similarities in types and trends. It can be argued that a common global school curriculum can afford realistic solutions to the myriad of socio-cultural problems bedeviling the universal community.

An examination of some of the socio-cultural problems across the world show that they diffuse from one part of the globe to another through human and technologically induced contacts. Cultural contact is obviously less different in the present advanced age of science and information technology. The world educational process has equally adopted very sound scientific and technological innovations. Research methods have assumed universal applications and findings have been widely and globally publicized for verifications, acceptance and usage. Knowledge sharing and collaborative researching are major strategies that are often used for the achievements of breakthroughs in learning. Thus, the unity of knowledge becomes glaring among different societies. Education therefore is a critical factor for the enshrinement of social order. Social values and norms are usually most effectively imbibed or inculcated in learners via a curriculum within an organized school system. Social order is necessary in all institutions of society and the most effective drive for this is the school system. Generally, universal

education can provide the following benefits:

- National borders no longer define our economic fates. Individuals from different societies who have received similar or harmonious education can compete with others throughout the world for the best jobs. Those who are successful can reap immense rewards while those who lack the skills that are in demand can find that their work has little value in the global labour market.
- With absolute universal education, it will be easier for individuals to move from one country to another to continue with schooling without experiencing sharp disparities in the learning or teaching processes.
- With universal education, it will be easier to establish universal standards where individuals can work toward the achievement of their status. This can guarantee suitable and fair condition for reaching the heights of social excellence.
- The conduct of learners in school can be measured against the yardstick of school rules. This can guarantee the achievement of individual good conduct when based on general global standards for social stability.
- Universal education can further enhance the maintenance of high academic standards in schools based on global expectations. Schools operate on meritocratic principles which can be applied globally without regard to ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, family background or class of origin.
- Universal skills acquired through education will provide the basis for fairness in the process of selection of

individuals for their future roles in society. Schools, by testing and evaluating students, match their talents, skills and capacities to the jobs for which they are best suited. The school is therefore seen as the major mechanism for role allocation. Job opportunities in international social institutions like the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations (UN) and World Bank can be accessed by all and sundry without inclination to favouring one side against another.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF A UNIVERSAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The following recommendations are made for the effective implementation of a universal education programme:

- A universal education curriculum is required for all levels of education. The curriculum structure ought to be derived from a popular and agreeable policy framework which must reflect the major but common cultural variables of all subsisting countries. However, cultural values that may not be reckoned with in terms of commonness to those of other countries can be left out but taken care of locally.
- Funding of education at all levels should be critically considered. The provision of physical and infrastructural facilities ought to be taken quite seriously. The universal education policy should contain minimum budget

allocations to all levels of education. Compliance to allocations and indeed implementations can be periodically checked. It may even be expedient to sanction countries that default as is the case where global or regional union place sanctions on countries that breach certain collective agreements. For instance, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a global institution fixed a benchmark of twenty-six percent (26% minimum annual budget. Unfortunately this has not been realized in Nigeria for several years.

- Access to education and especially basic education in developing countries is a blatant necessity. A significant population of children in third-world countries lack access to basic education. Most governments of these countries have done very little to ameliorate this situation. It is thus common place to find school age children roaming the streets and becoming very vulnerable while being easily recruited for criminality. Deviance is indeed prevalent among minors in most countries and the lack of common curtailment measure remains a major challenge even when the social attributes appear to be similar across countries.
- Where the league of nations come together for a universal education to achieve common goals, it is necessary for stronger nations to assist the weaker ones else the problems of one nation can affect the other.

CONCLUSION

Social order still remains the major impetus for socio-political and economic growth of societies and the entire global community. Whatever is the requirement for gaining it must therefore be vigorously pursued. The necessity for this is even more expedient against the backdrop of the escalating height of social vices in human societies. An examination of the characteristics and trends of these social vices shows that they are similarly oriented even in different countries of the world. The likely and apparent reasons for this is that the world has fastly become a "global village" occasioned by improved communication technology. This has resulted in bridging the human cultural disparities between different countries of the world. These developments have created the line of thinking and agitation for a universal education where curricular structure can substantially be manipulated for a global school programme.

However, as Troyna and Carrington (1940) argued, such an arrangement can neglect minority interest and aspirations while ignoring ethnic cultures.

To deal with the discontentment of Troyna and Carrington, Johnson (1991) stated that a universal education programme will define certain types of knowledge as worth acquiring while excluding other types. Where those other types do not make it in the universal curriculum, they can be dealt with locally but without prejudice to the universal education programme content. The basis for a universal

education programme will be to include major social values in its curriculum for a global social order.

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