



School Social Environment: Implications for Scaling-up Educational Intervention

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Abstract

The paper examines the sociological implications of scaling up educational interventions in the school social environment. Education is described in this context as much more than as more than acquiring a certificate or passing an examination. Beyond this scope, this paper stresses that a positive educational environments are necessary to facilitate adaptive student outcomes, including learning, motivation, social adjustment and achievement. The authors view the school as the second agent of socialization to the child after the family and it is established for its strategic role in the society. A glean at the school social environment is most likely to reveal a web or interconnectivity of social relationship that exist in the school as a result of social interaction in the school. The concept of scaling up is described as deliberate efforts to increase the impact of successfully tested pilot, demonstration or experimental projects to benefit more people and to foster policies and programmes development on a lasting basis. The paper identifies the necessary areas for scaling up to include teachers, classroom setting and peers group influence. It maintains that the implications of scaling up of intervention in the aforementioned areas are enormous. The paper concludes that, the rationale to increase the advocacy on developing optimum school social environment rests on the fact that every good policy could be truncated at the point of implementation. On the strength of these, the authors recommended among other things that, proper reorientation should be given to teachers to really understanding efficacy of creating or forming better imagery about themselves as well as putting up a win-win social understanding between the teachers and learners.

Keywords: Scaling up, Educational Intervention, School, Social Environment and School Social Environment.

Introduction

Education is the specialized training given in an organized manner with the basic aim of equipping the individual with the knowledge of reading, writing and calculation (Okeke, 2016). The acquisition of these enables one to achieve self-development and contribute effectively towards societal development. Education is more than acquiring a certificate or passing an examination. Developing positive social relationship, well-developed mind and good character are highly valued. This point synchronizes with the views of Ravitch (2010) who asserts that “the goal of education is not to produce higher test scores, but to educate children to become responsible people with well-developed minds and good character. Formal education is noted to taking place in the school. The social setting of the school is where children spend a good portion of their waking hours, exerts a powerful force as well as creating social rapport. The setting needs to entrench positive social environment. Positive educational environments are necessary to facilitate adaptive student outcomes, including learning, motivation, social adjustment, and



achievement. School is inherently a social place, and students go about their work in the presence of many peers. To understand students' success at school, therefore, actors in education sector must attend to their relationships with others at school and ways that the environment promotes different types of social interactions and relationships

The school is an organized or formal institution established for the purpose of transmitting formal education to societal members (Kemjika, 2002). It is the second agent of socialization to the child after the family but is distinct from other agents because it concerns itself with the intellectual development of the students. The school is established for its strategic role in the society. This point is collaborated by Okeke (2002) who maintains that, the strategic role of the school in every society especially in this modern scientific and technological period calls for proper understanding of the school. Tyler 1988 cited in Okeke (2002) stresses that, the sociology of the school must be studied in different perspectives for a proper understanding of all activities in school and their respective outcome. As earlier noted, the school is one of the agents of socialization with its own separate culture which is the creation of students as well as the preservation of the societal heritage.

Within the school environment, the administrators as well as the students from different socio-economic backgrounds require studies of different relationship existing between and among the identified groups. Both formal and informal interaction takes place in the school through structural classroom teaching, praises, ridicule and other features. Within the school, a lot of relationships exist; these include teacher – student and student - student relationships. The relationship in school is most time mutual with great symbolic interacting significance. This is because as a social institution, the school creates or presents congenial atmosphere for social interaction. At the primary level, pupils are given the opportunities to develop manipulative skill that will enable them function effectively in society through the inculcation of relevant social skills. Similarly, at the secondary school level, students are taught how to develop and project Nigerian culture, arts and language as well as the world's culture milieu. The role of the school as an agent of socialization and cultural transmission could be achieved through a number of indices such as the school factor, environment, climate organization, structure and policy.

In school, social development is built through experience, association and initiation of adult behaviours and those of the peer group (Ganagana, 2013). For instance, the family provides the social model for the child. If a child behavior is overtly approved as regards to social interaction, the child is likely to retain that behaviour, but what social behaviour is criticized or given a negative appraisal, he would likely abandon it. This implies that, an individual is born into a social world which primarily centers in the family and it is continues through school and other approved agents of socialization. School environment is the immediate surroundings of the school which is the combination of natural and artificial conditions. The school environment contributes in no small measures to the well-being, maturity and understanding of learning opportunities. The school environment means so much to the existing and functionality of the school. Okeke (2016) stresses that school environment encourages peer group formation because it has a positive correlation with school achievement. If a peer group is found uncompetitive and non-academically challenging, the child's educational achievement could be hampered.



Another significance social indices in school environment is the availability of the quantity and quality of teachers in the school. Teachers are known to have great influence on the academic performance of learners (Okeke, 2016). Similarly, classroom also serves as a schools social environment. To sociologists, the classroom contains a number of peer groups of different statuses, some of which originate and are maintained quite independently of the formal organization of the classroom. Tentatively, in the school system, it appears the school social environment is not producing the expected result. According to Okeke (2016), the physical environment of the school could be motivation or depriving depending on the extent to which different provisions meant for successful teaching and learning are available. This is the thrust of the paper which examines scaling up of educational intervention with emphasis on the school social environment as well as the sociological implications.

Some theorists had made postulations which extol the necessity of social conditions of school. Vygotsky (1978) believes that higher mental functioning are socially formed and culturally transmitted. Vygotsky posits that the instructional message gradually moves from teacher-student dialogue to inner speech where it organizes the student's thought and becomes an internal mental function. Similarly, Dewey (1938) maintains that "teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced" as such, it is the duty of the teacher to know how to "utilize the surroundings, physical and social, in order to extract from them all that they have to contribute" to building up worthwhile educational experiences. Dewey states that "all human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication. Dewey says: "The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process. Therefore, sociologists stress the need to consider more social aspects of schooling such as the relationship that teachers build with their students than the test score.

Concept Clarification

The School Social Environment

The school social environment is a web or interconnectivity of social relationship that exist in school as a result of social interaction in school. According to Ross and Nisbett 1991 in Garcia and Cohen (2009) social environments can be viewed as tension systems consisting of forces in a dynamic state of interaction that remains relatively stable over time .The school social environment is an environment that is full of trust and social bonding. It could be described as a setting that is characterized with freedom from abuse and violence, a climate of care trust and respect, social support and mental health promotion, opportunities for physical and recreation and opportunities for monitoring and role model (Ziba, and Daudi, n.d). The school social environment is very important for students to make reasonable educational achievements. In school environment there are a number of forces that can help or hinder academic performance.

To bring about change in an environment, some aspects of social environment need to be kept in mind. First, the complex interactions among forces, individual forces can impede or amplify one another (Garris, 2016). Social approval from peers, for



example, can facilitate school achievement in a context where such approval is tied to academic success. On the other hand, social approval can restrain school achievement in contexts where peers disapprove of academic success or where their approval can be more readily won in some other domain such as sports. When a student, especially an adolescent, attends a school in which his teachers and peers are friendly and helpful, in such social environment. Garris (2016) asserts that adolescents will tend to succeed not only academically but also psychologically and socially. Forming bonds with other positive role models, such as coaches and older students, can also lead to the development of a positive academic identity. Hence, Okeke (2016) conceives school environment as both man-made and natural conditions and provisions that are physically present as well as their consequent arrangements all of which are meant to contribute towards achieving the set school's objective. The author further stresses the social arrangement of individuals (learners, teaching and non-teaching staff) within the school system.

Scaling up Educational Intervention

Scaling up refers to the successful spread and diffusion of innovation to another context in a sustainable manner. Scaling-up is the practice of introducing proven interventions into new settings with the goal of producing similarly positive effects in larger, more diverse populations. It is deliberate efforts to increase the impact of successfully tested pilot, demonstration or experimental projects to benefit more people and to foster policy and programme development on a lasting basis" (ExpandNet/WHO 2010). Scaling up of education intervention refers to the idea of expanding programmes to reach more beneficiaries. Some practitioners and scholars use the concept interchangeably with 'transferability' and educational 'borrowing' and 'lending' (Rappleye, 2012).

For scaling-up to succeed it must be guided, since it has become clear that leaving the process to chance is not having the intended impact. Although an approach may be considered a best practice for the field, the how of its implementation in any particular setting still requires exploration. Scaling-up also focuses both on expansion to benefit more people and on becoming institutionalized in policies and programmes. Scale-up research examines factors that influence the effectiveness of interventions as they are brought to scale across settings. It defines the goals of scale-up research with respect to broader efforts to enhance the quality of educational research and promote evidence-based education. The term 'scale' described as the holy grail of development. It is for issues of low enrolment, low educational quality, or whatever problem we may be working on and are able to apply it not just locally but nationally or even globally – that is, at scale of having success (Milat, King, Bauman, & Redman, 2013). The Education Partnership (TEP) Centre, has been working with ExpandNet to support Nigerian educationists to work systematically on scaling up successfully tested interventions to benefit more children and to foster educational improvements in a sustainable manner. ExpandNet is an informal network of global health and development professionals working to advance the science and practice of scale up, while TEP Centre is an organization focused on strengthening public-private partnerships in education (ExpandNet, 2016).



Suggested Areas for Scaling up of Educational interventions in Secondary Schools

There is explicit reference to teachers creating a social and intellectual environment with support, respect, and collaboration as central. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000) also explicitly addresses these social norms when they outline what teachers should strive to create in their class. These are the suggested areas for scaling up of educational intervention in secondary schools are:

1. Students should be encouraged to share their ideas and to seek clarification until they understand what they expected to understand. Learners usually have a “family” view of their own and of other cultures. So, when confronted with other perspectives, they often need to rethink their own viewpoints. It is often difficult for children to adjust to the idea that other families can function radically differently from their own and yet hold many of the same attitudes and beliefs and be equally nurturing and secure. Hence, students could be helped to seek clarification about certain social issues.
2. Teachers need to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect for students. When teachers build such an environment, students understand that it is acceptable to struggle with ideas, to make mistakes, and to be unsure. It is observed in school a situation where teachers seem to ignore or neglect their cardinal responsibilities of creating a social and intellectual environment with support, respect, and collaboration for students ensuring that the students derive mutual benefits as well as understanding.
3. Students should be encouraged to participate actively in trying to understand a particular concept in the classrooms. For example, teacher absenteeism witnessed in most school has grave implication on students’ social environment and relationship because of the gap created by teacher defaulter. Perceiving the teacher as supportive is also related positively to asking for help with school work when needed, use of self-regulated learning strategies, and a desire to comply with classroom rules. Perceived teacher support is related negatively to absenteeism and disruptiveness in the classroom (Ryan and Patrick, 2001). The classroom arguably is where the actual implementation of policies and programmes which concern educational development in any nation takes place. Jackson 1968 in Gablinske (2014) studied life in classrooms and determined that “there is a social intimacy in schools that is unmatched elsewhere in our society”. According to Jackson, the teacher is charged with managing the flow of the classroom dialogue. The term social environment can also refer to the way that a classroom environment influences or supports the interactions that occur among young children, teachers, and family members. It entails the quality of the relationships among and between staff and students in the school. At the same it reveals emotional well-being of students, which is influenced by relationships with families and the wider community. The classroom social environment is comprised of students’ perceptions about how they are encouraged to interact with and relate to others (classmates, the teacher), and encompasses dimensions of teacher support, promoting mutual respect, promoting student task-related interaction, and promoting performance goals (Patrick and Ryan, 2003). The



emphasis on the importance of the classroom social environment, including support, mutual respect, task-related interaction among students, and a lesser focus on competition among students, is apparent (Patrick and Ryan, 2003). Hence, the classroom is seen as an environment designed to develop the appropriate and necessary social and intellectual competencies of individuals of a particular developmental stage.

4. Rapport should be created or strengthened between teachers and students to make the school social environment conducive. Research has found positive associations between perceptions of teacher support and students' adaptive motivational beliefs and engagement behaviours rewarding. For example, when students view their teacher as supportive they report higher levels of interest, valuing, effort, and enjoyment in their schoolwork (Patrick and Ryan, 2003).
5. Teachers should be encouraged to give their best in terms of teachers – students interaction. Hence, scaling up educational intervention in teacher education could be panacea for optimum social relationship in school. For instance, Bruner (1977) Ibia (2011) and Gablinske (2014) maintain that the process of education requires that “schools must also contribute to the social and emotional development of the child if they are to fulfill their function of education. Hallinan (2008) avers that learning is a process that involves cognitive and social psychological dimensions, and both processes should be considered if academic achievement is to be maximized. Gablinske (2014) asserts that the establishment of social relationships can seriously impact effective teaching and accurate evaluation in a classroom. It is therefore, not sufficient for teachers to be able to gain knowledge about effective teacher-child interactions; they needed actual skills involving identification of effective interactions with a high degree of specificity in order to be most likely to transfer the coursework into changes in their practice.
6. Peer relationship in school should be scaled up by checking or monitoring to ensure that negative influences do not overwhelm positive ones. Notably, humans discover that others can share their feelings or attitudes or have quite different ones; this gives rise to peer influence. Peer influence on behavior gradually becomes more dominant. Harris (2002) and Rowe (1994) cited in Tope (2011) maintained that peer groups have an even stronger influence than that of parents, although that extreme position has been refuted by other researchers (Berk, 2005). The peer group serves as a barometer for children examining themselves and the feelings about self and family. The peer group also influences development of children's socializing skills. These early friendships help children learn how to negotiate and relate to others, including their siblings and other family

It is found that strong and quality peer associations are related to poor or good academic performance and successful school transition (Tope, 2011). Peer influence is one of the most frequently referred to form of negative peer influence it is particularly common because most adolescent are forced to spend large amount of time in fixed groups (schools and sub groups within them) regardless of their opinion of these groups. In addition to this, they lack the maturity to handle it (Tope, 2011). Students of all ages need social support to experience academic success, but adolescents are especially in need of direction. Because so much of a student's day is spent at school, middle schoolers use this as a venue in



which to figure out who they are outside of their family relationships. When students of any age avail themselves of positive peer relationships in an academic setting, such as peer tutoring programs, they can experience academic success (Okeke, 2016). Hence, scaling up is imminent in this direction and it should be tailored towards creating a conducive peer interacting setting among learners to facilitate proper understanding within them.

Sociological Implications of Scaling up in the School Social Environment

One of the greatest desires of sociologists and other social workers is the ability of different groups or groups of people to understand their symbols or representation in different settings. This is the hallmark of sociology of education which tries to ensure that school social environment is friendly for all. Therefore, the implication of scaling up of intervention in the aforementioned areas is enormous. Significantly, scaling up educational intervention in teacher education by ways of monitoring teacher irregularity and absenteeism and incorporating of global best practices into teacher education would not only stimulate academic consciousness but will also create mutual understanding between the teachers and the learners where most learners could see their teachers as friends. Again, up grading positive peer relationship will not only obliterate misunderstanding among peers but would also prepare a society where all effort is geared to creating social environment of love, cooperation and partnership.

Conclusion

To achieve the global goal for education which centers on Education For All (EFA), there is a compelling need to increase advocacy on the school social environment. The rationale to increase the advocacy on developing optimum school social environment rests on the fact that every good policy could be truncated at the point of implementation. Since, the school is where every lofty educational policy is implemented; effort should be geared towards creating cooperation and comradeship school environment for the plans to strive.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion reached, the following recommendations are raised

1. Proper reorientation should be given to teachers to really understanding efficacy of creating or forming better imagery about themselves as well as putting up a win-win social understanding between teachers and learners
2. Classroom holds so much for the school system, thus, the recommended ratio should be maintained to help create a robust rapport with the students.
3. Comradeship is needed and cherished in all sectors; hence, peer relationship should be checked to ensure that the positive impact is maintained while negative is wiped out.

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