Social Stratification Dynamics: Exploring the Structural Barriers to Education for Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigerian Society

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Abstract: Nigeria, a nation vast in cultural diversity, reckons with persistent challenges prejudicial to peaceful co-existence. This paper explores the intricate dynamics of social stratification in Nigeria, with particular reference to its impact on education and the resulting challenges to peaceful co-existence. The central problem addressed in this study is how social stratification, exacerbated by endemic corruption and economic disparities, creates structural barriers to equitable access to quality education, thereby perpetuating a cycle of inequality and hindering peaceful coexistence. To address the problem, the paper adopts a comprehensive methodology based on the systematic review and synthesis of knowledge and information from a wide range of sources – including academic research, reports from international organisations, insights from reputable news outlets and ground-level perspectives shared on personal blogs. The findings of the synthesis indicate that, despite Nigeria's oil wealth, the concentration of resources and power among the upper strata of society relegates those outside the strata to the lowest levels of the stratification system, while keeping those already at the lowest strata from rising. Corruption emerges as a key factor in these dynamics, inflating governance costs and leading to mismanagement of public resources. To navigate the challenging dynamics of social stratification and its impact on education for peaceful co-existence among Nigerians, the paper stresses the need to address educational inequalities through mandatory free education, scholarships, stepped-up anti-corruption efforts and improved infrastructure in underprovided communities.

Keywords: Social Stratification, Education, Dynamics. Peaceful Co-existence and Corruption.

Introduction

The observable dynamics in Nigeria position the country at the centre of any informed discourse on societies where social stratification shapes collective experiences for diverse populations. Social stratification is the allocation of individuals and groups according to hierarchical variations in income, power, status or prestige (Andersen, 2011). Although hierarchical variations can be based on gender, religion or ethnicity, the focus of the current research effort is on socio-economic inequalities, effectively leaving other aspects of the variations to other research efforts. In this regard, social stratification is a structural reality present in every society, even though it manifests variations in statistical expression and quantification across different societies. The United States of America, though the wealthiest nation in the world, is a structural quintessence of this phenomenon, with wealth increasingly concentrated in the possession of its richest nationals, while the middle class is regrettably caught up in progressive evaporation (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2022), which raises critical questions about social mobility and equity in access to opportunities, with implications for social cohesion and political stability.

The manifestation of social stratification on an international scale presents an even more complex and multifaceted reality. On this front, social stratification is increasingly concentrating the burden of poverty on certain segments of the earth's population (Griffiths et al., 2019). Such staggering hierarchical variations in resource distribution demonstrate the profound implications of social stratification for human welfare, social justice and international relations. The World Inequality Report corroborates this trend, documenting in 2018 that the top 1% of the global total had twice as much wealth as the 50% poorest individuals. This statistic not only demonstrates the extreme concentration of resources at the strata of the international system but also raises critical questions about the sustainability and ethical implications of such a system. These exemplify the phenomenon actually in operation: Global stratification. Global stratification defines the unequal distribution of wealth and resources of the world among its nations (Osipova, 2020), providing a framework for understanding the complex dynamics in the historical, economic and political factors that have shaped the direction of the current global order. Dikhanov's 2005 previous report for the United Nations Development Programme offers a striking conceptualising lens for global stratification: if the world existed as one country, three-fourths of its entire income would be owned by the richest 5th of the population. This analogy serves to crystallise the vast variations

in ownership of the economic resources that exist between nations, regions and socioeconomic groups on a global scale.

A well-structured approach to a fuller comprehension of the world as a significantly stratified system is to look at countries of the world on life expectancy in their ranked relations. Life expectancy is the average number of years that a person is expected to live, based on the year of their birth and other demographic factors such as gender and location (Dattaniet et al., 2023). The broader context of "life expectancy" defines the term as an estimate of the average age that members of a particular population group will be when they die. Variations in life expectancy across the international lines of geography are intricately intertwined with multiple factors such as access to healthcare, clean water, nutritious food, sanitation, education, and basic human rights. Political stability and the availability of reliable mortality and morbidity data are also vastly significant as generators of these outcomes. For instance, access to quality healthcare and proper sanitation are critical to preventing diseases and improving overall health outcomes, as demonstrated by studies on socio-economic determinants of health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Furthermore, education and information availability are powerful predictors of health and longevity, enabling populations to adopt healthier lifestyles and access necessary services. These elements, which fundamentally shape lived realities for populations worldwide, are often employed as key indicators in assessing and defining global stratification (Mbau et al., 2022). The unequal distribution of these resources and opportunities across countries forms the fulcrum on which global stratification balances – creating a world based on strata division of development, prosperity and human potential.

Developed nations, characterised by robust economies, advanced infrastructure and strong social institutions, typically demonstrate the propensity to report higher life expectancies. This is essentially attributable to the comprehensive access their citizens enjoy to high-quality healthcare systems, clean water sources, nutritious diets, advanced sanitation facilities, superior educational opportunities, unrestricted information flow, protected human rights and political stability. Conversely, developing countries often reckon with significantly lower life expectancies – a reality to limited access to these vital resources and opportunities for their citizens. For example, in 2024, variations in life expectancies were recorded by Earthly Data (2024), ranging from 86.5 years in Monaco, Western Europe (the highest in the world), to 54.7 years in Nigeria, Western Africa (the lowest). Therefore, variations in life expectancy across countries and regions richly illuminate the reality of global stratification, revealing a world stratified according to countries with abundant resources and opportunities, and those struggling with scarcity and disadvantage

While the dynamics of social stratification in the international system are striking, they often reflect and can exacerbate the dynamics of the social reality within individual countries, particularly in nations positioned at the lower end of the international spectrum. The internal dynamics of stratification, shaped by both international forces and local dynamics, have profound implications for social cohesion and stability. Peaceful co-existence is about the ability of diverse groups of people to live together in reciprocal respect and harmony, despite their differences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). The challenges posed by social stratification to education for peaceful co-existence cover a vast spectrum of social realities; it perpetuates stereotypes, reinforces existing power

dynamics, and restricts access to opportunities for marginalised groups. As a result, education's transformative potential is compromised, failing to foster dialogue, mutual understanding, and tolerance – critical components of peaceful co-existence in diverse communities (Reimers, 2021).

Nigeria, a society characterised by a seemingly endless spectrum of cultural diversity, faces a unique set of challenges to equitable access to education for all its citizens, transcending the boundaries set by social stratification. These challenges have, over the decades, generated tensions and created an environment where peaceful co-existence has had a fraught history with reality. Unequal access to education, compounded by social stratification within Nigerian society, has contributed to the constraints on achieving peaceful co-existence among the diverse members of the population, a reality evident to informed and even nescient observers of socio-historical dynamics. This then constitutes the problem addressed in this paper. In view of the "fulcral" role of social stratification in shaping collective experiences, it is crucial to examine the existing knowledge on its implications for education, emphasising education's capacity to promote peaceful co-existence.

To address the problem, the paper employs a comprehensive methodology centred on the systematic review and synthesis of knowledge and information gleaned from a spectrum of sources – from peer-reviewed articles, policy analyses from international organisations, insights from respected news outlets to ground-level perspectives from personal blogs. This approach presents a holistic understanding of how educational inequalities, shaped by broader social stratification, potentially undermine peace and social harmony in Nigerian society

Social stratification: Looking at the dynamics in Nigerian society

Though social stratification is a global phenomenon, its operation in Nigeria as a significant generator of adverse effects on society stretches to stratospheric proportions. Nigeria ranks at the absolute bottom of the strata of life expectancy among countries of the world,with a striking 32-year gap between Monaco, the country with the highest life expectancy (86.5 years), and Nigeria (54.6 years), underscoring Nigeria's severe position within the global international stratification dynamics (Earthly Data, 2024). These variations in life expectancy between Nigeria and other countries are not just a matter of statistical variations; they reflect Nigeria's place in a global hierarchy shaped by unequal trade policies, foreign aid imbalances, and global health governance. The country's peripheral status within the international system, as outlined by world systems theory proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), positions Nigeria at the centre of a cycle where international social stratification reinforces internal socio-economic divides. In this context, the benefits of Nigeria's oil wealth are disproportionately concentrated among a small elite, often linked to political power, while the mass of the population remains impoverished. For example, global economic pressures, such as the Federal Government of Nigeria's acquiescence to the International Monetary Fund's insistence on subsidy removals for oil and electricity, further disempower the already the marginalised segments of the population, inequitably widening the gap between them and those at top strata of society (Oxfam, 2018). Additionally, the demand for currency devaluation imposed by international financial institutions has eroded purchasing power, disproportionately affecting lower-income households who spend a

larger portion of their income on basic necessities. This inflationary pressure, augmented by unequal trade agreements that favour foreign investors, limits economic opportunities for the majority while enriching the already wealthy elite.

This stark inequality is further corroborated by international reports. In a report released during the annual International Monetary Fund and World Bank meeting in 2018 in Bali, Indonesia, Nigeria ranked last at 157 "among 157 countries in terms of their commitment to reducing inequality" (Abba, 2018, para. 5). The report, titled "Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2018 (CRI)", characterised Nigeria as the least country in relation to social spending, labour rights and taxation policies. In alignment with these findings, Oxfam – an international confederation comprising 20 organisations across more than 90 countries dedicated to combating poverty and promoting social justice – found that the richest individual in Nigeria was sufficient in power to earn approximately 8,000 times more than the average annual expenditure of the poorest 10% of Nigerians, merely from their existing wealth.

The scale of social stratification in Nigeria becomes even more apparent when looking at broader wealth distribution. Ekeruche (2017) highlighted the extreme levels of inequality in Nigeria, noting that the combined wealth of the country's five richest individuals was approximately $29.9 billion in 2018 – an amount sufficient to ameliorate extreme poverty for 87 million Nigerians for one year. This wealth concentration is not just a matter of economic stratification, but a potential source of social unrest, as noted by Matthew Page, a former top Nigeria expert in the U.S. intelligence community. Quoted in The Guardian of London, Page warned, "Income inequality is one of Nigeria's most serious but least talked about challenges. It is this disparity between the rich and poor, more than poverty itself, that generates anti-government sentiment and could fuel civil unrest down the road" (Akinwotu & Olukoya, 2017, para. 5).

The paradox of Nigeria's economic situation lies in its increasing affluence coupled with growing poverty. As the country becomes more affluent, a majority of its population becomes increasingly economically disaffiliated from society, while the privileged few disproportionately amass greater wealth. As the affluent continue to accumulate wealth, the economic conditions for the impoverished majority worsen, creating a cycle of poverty that entrenches social stratification (Ekeruche, 2017). The consequences of this stratification extend beyond economic metrics, manifesting in various societal crises – from terrorism and banditry to kidnapping, secessionist movements, and calls for the "restructuring" of the country.

The severity of Nigeria's poverty situation rendered the country at the centre of international attention in 2018 when reports, including one released by Adebayo (2018) for the CNN, indicated that Nigeria had surpassed India as the country with the largest number of people living in abject poverty. This shift was based on World Poverty Clock projections compiled by the Brookings Institute, which indicated that out of 643 million people worldwide living in extreme poverty, two-thirds were in Africa, with Nigeria leading the count. The gravity of this situation was further confirmed in 2020 when the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released the "2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria" report. Based on data from the Nigerian Living Standards Surveys conducted in 2018-2019, with assistance from the World Bank, the report showed that 40% of Nigeria's population – approximately 83 million people – were living below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira ($381.75) per year (World Bank, 2020). This data effectively placed Nigeria as the world's poverty capital.

In many societies including Nigeria, social stratification is not only determined by structural forces linked to education, occupation, income and prestige but can also rely on endemic corruption as a factor in its determination (Deretić, 2013). Social stratification is also entrenched when few individuals accumulate more resources than others, which occurs due to corrupt practices. For instance, unscrupulous individuals may appropriate public resources to themselves, giving them an unfair advantage over others who do not have access to such opportunities (Franses & de Groot, 2015). Corruption refers to the abuse of power or the misuse of public resources for private benefit. The impact of corruption on social stratification is multifaceted and far-reaching. Research studies demonstrate a distinctive correlation between widespread corruption and elevated levels of class differentials (Deretić, 2013). When public officials engage in activities linked to embezzlement of funds from national coffers or receipts of kickbacks from contractors seeking contracts, public goods like education and healthcare become increasingly "stratified" (World Bank, 2016). Consequently, these resources become more accessible to corrupt actors at the top strata of society, while everyday citizens in the lower strata are increasingly deprived of access. Such dynamics not only perpetuate inequality but systematically construct the social stratification terrain, allowing a select few to control resources and wealth at the expense of the broader population

Decades-running corruption in Nigeria, as noted by Iordye and Jato (2022), has circumscribed the potential of the country as a great nation. Consequent upon this, public trust now resembles a dwindling body of water, subject to the tropical sun of rapid evaporation. Outcomes from democratic and nation-building projects have been compromised, and the wheels of economic development are being clogged, fuelling income inequality between the few rich and the poor mass of the population – a reality of direct relevance to the conceptual insights surrounding social stratification. Corruption affects the structures of political power by allowing political leaders to indulge in corrupt practices with impunity while silencing oppositions through intimidation tactics, censorship or even violence (Da Silva, 2022). Entrenched in their positions within the power structures, the corrupt political actors and operators create policies that benefit themselves and their associates at the expense of the well-being of the broader society (Grodeland, 2010; Hamilton, 2010). Thus, corruption widens the gap between the rich and poor in society (Yeo et al., 2022). The extent of this corruption and its impact on governance costs were highlighted in Oxfam's 2017 report. It was revealed that persistent prevalent corruption and the overwhelming power of a political class whose occupants were unmoored from the daily struggles of the average Nigerian had conspired to propel the cost of governance to soaring heights, metaphorically surpassing the altitude of aeroplanes in the sky. This evaluation was further substantiated by a report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2018), authored by Matthew Page. The report exposed how Nigerian federal legislators leveraged their oversight powers to solicit kickbacks from federal parastatals, received excessive salaries, allowances, and other benefits – amounting to $540,000 per lawmaker in 2017. These legislative practices, which many Nigerians view as akin to corruption, extend beyond personal enrichment. According to the report, senators and members of the lower federal parliament also engaged in the habit of padding the

national budget with constituency projects and using legislation to establish new, often unnecessary or duplicative, government bodies. These new entities, as per the report, often became vassals of their political godfathers, who expected them to provide contracts and appointments to their supporters. The legislative branch in Nigeria, as the report continues, is empowered to act as a check on executive power, approve and adjust budgetary expenditures, confirm key appointments, and undertake rigorous oversight of government activities. Instead of functioning as anticorruption watchdogs, however, legislators often monetise their constitutional roles, enriching themselves and building up their campaign war chests

The prevalence of corruption and nepotism in the operation of Nigeria's economy is further evidenced by the observation that those at the top strata of society use their power to advance their own economic interests rather than promote the well-being of Nigerian society as a whole (Udo & Udo, 2023). This sobering reality is captured in the words of Martínez (2023), who professionally observes:

> "The highest tier of Nigerian society is made up of wealthy politicians, businessmen, and the educated elite. These people, however, make up only a tiny portion of the Nigerian population. Many Nigerians today suffer under great poverty. The lower classes tend have little chance of breaking from the vicious cycle of poverty. Poor education, lack of opportunities, ill health, corrupt politicians, and lack of even small amounts of wealth for investment all work to keep the lower classes in their place" (para. 61).

Peaceful co-existence: Looking at the dynamics in Nigerian society

Nigeria is a geo-political agglomeration of over 213 million people from a diverse spectrum of over 250 ethnic groups, numerous languages, an array of religions and a multiplicity of cultures. This agglomeration, a historical child of British colonial administration, laid the groundwork for many of the constraints to peaceful living that dog the country today. When Nigeria achieved independence from Britain in 1960 and transitioned to a federal republic with three constituent states in 1963, the structure served to enflame regional and ethnic tension, ultimately resulting in a bloody coup led by predominately south-eastern military officers in 1966 and a countercoup later that year masterminded by northern officers (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024). The civil war (1967-1970) ensuing from this pronouncement resulted in more than a million deaths, many arising from starvation. While the war strengthened the Nigerian state and national identity, it also left a legacy of deep-seated mistrust towards the predominantly Igbo population of the south-east, which still prevails (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024). On the other hand, members of the Igbo ethnicity have long felt marginalised and disaffiliated from the operation of society in Nigeria. This sense of exclusion, not helped by historical grievances and political underrepresentation, has fuelled a persistent desire for a country independent from Nigeria (Nsoedo, 2019). In recent years, this discontent has materialised in the rise of groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which has vehemently pursued the course of secession from Nigeria. This sense of marginalisation, economic neglect, and political disenfranchisement complicates peaceful co-existence between the Igbo people of the southeast and those from the rest of the country.

This complex history of ethnic tensions, political upheavals, and civil conflict has profoundly shaped Nigeria's national identity and the relationships between its diverse ethnic groups, as it has continued to influence dynamics in the country's social and political landscape, particularly regarding how Nigerians perceive their national and ethnic identities. For many Nigerians, the concept of national citizenship often plays a subordinate role to more deeply ingrained ethnic affiliations. The average Nigerian primarily identifies with their ethnic group – be it Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Tiv or any of the numerous other ethnicities that the nation is composed of (Iordye & Jato, 2023). The sentiments Nigerians share with their ethnic compatriots are often more tangible and robust than those they hold about Nigeria as a country (Kargbo, 2017). This prioritisation of ethnic identity over national citizenship undermines peaceful coexistence by fostering divisions and competition among groups, leading to distrust and conflict that threaten social harmony and stability.

Environmental factors are significant in the generation of communal crises in Nigeria, which considerably complicate peaceful coexistence among its diverse population. Nearly every geo-political zone of the country reckons with challenges arising from environmental dynamics. In the North Central region, desertification, made worse by poor land management, has manifested in intense competition for shrinking green spaces between farmers and cattle herders, with elevated levels conflicts over grazing and farming land (Folorunso & Folorunso, 2022). This rivalry is exacerbated by limited fertile land and the depletion of resources. In the Southeast, gully erosion is destroying farmland and ancestral properties, further aggravated by improper agricultural practices and unchecked mining activities (Folorunso & Folorunso, 2022). The resulting loss of arable land reduces food production, drives rural-urban migration, and fuels regional discontent, especially among those advocating for secession. The South-South faces some of the most severe environmental issues due to the region's economic importance. Gas flaring, oil spills, and river dredging have polluted water, rendered farmland infertile and displaced entire communities, heightening tensions between local populations and the government. In the Southwest, poor urban planning has led to water erosion, coastal degradation, and loss of life and property (Folorunso & Folorunso, 2022). The unchecked spread of land grabbing, driven by a lack of transparent legal processes, exacerbates communal tensions. These environmental crises, deeply rooted in local conditions, continue to fuel conflicts across the country, further complicating efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Though the Nigerian constitution pre-supposes that every Nigerian has the freedom to practise religion of his or her choice, religious tensions, in vast measures, have shaped the dynamics of peaceful coexistence in the country. Nigeria is split almost evenly between a predominantly Muslim north and a mainly Christian south, with conflicts often breaking out along religious lines. Boko Haram's insurgency in the northeast, which began in 2009, has been an exemplar in factoring these dynamics. Boko Haram's violent campaign for an Islamic state has destabilised the region, exacerbating the existing divide between Christians and Muslims (Okibe, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2015). Instances of religious tensions flaring up include the violent clashes between Christians and Muslims in cities like Jos, which have led to significant loss of life and property.

As explained in the previous section, economic disparities arising from social stratification, which is deeply entrenched in the

corruption of the political class unmoored from the impoverished realities of everyday Nigerians, also significantly influence the dynamics of peaceful coexistence. This disconnect can lead to critical effects: decline in trust in governance, the mobilisation of grievances, and heightened competition for resources, creating a complex environment prejudicial to the potential for a harmonious society in Nigeria

Despite these challenges, Nigeria has made significant strides in promoting peaceful coexistence, exemplified by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program established in 1973, which aims to foster national unity by deploying young graduates to serve in states other than their own. This initiative has acted as for bridge cultural divides and served to promote understanding among Nigeria's youth. Additionally, the country's vibrant cultural life, characterised by festivals, music and dance, serves as a unifying force, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging. Inter-ethnic marriages and friendships further contribute to bridging ethnic and cultural divides, enhancing mutual understanding (Chukwu, 2021). However, colonial legacies and contemporary issues highlighted in the forgoing continue to threaten this peaceful coexistence: Ethnic mistrust and identity crisis (Iordye & Jato, 2023), environmentally generated communal crises (Folorunso & Folorunso, 2022), religious tensions (Okibe, 2022), and economic disparities arising from social stratification rooted in public corruption (Deretić, 2013; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018; Iordye & Jato, 2022; Udo & Udo, 2023).

Systemic dynamics: social stratification, education and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria

Nigeria, a geo-political society composed of a vast diversity of ethno-linguistic and cultural nationalities, along with a multiplicity of religious orientations, reckons with the constant challenge of maintaining peaceful coexistence among its citizens (Eze, 2016; Nwogu, 2013). While Nigerians share a rich cultural heritage and aspirations for a prosperous nation, simmering and subterranean tensions often threaten to unravel this complex social configuration (Iordye & Jato, 2023). At the centre of these challenges lies social stratification – earlier defined as the unequal distribution of wealth, power and social status – which creates profound implications for national unity and social cohesion.

This social stratification manifests most visibly in the realm of economic dynamics. The accumulation of wealth at the top strata of society in Nigeria has manifested in a small class of elite Nigerians controlling vast proportions of the nation's resources, concentrating the burden of poverty on the overwhelming majority of the population who struggle to meet basic needs (Oxfam, 2024; Oxfam International, 2015; Wallis, 2014). These socio-economic variations generate resentment and frustration among the underprivileged, who feel systematically excluded from society and its socio-economic operations (Global Credit Rating Agency, 2022; World Bank, 2022). The ensuing sense of "us vs. them" not only inflicts constraints on the development of a unifying national identity but also complicates collective national aspirations. Scholars argue that social stratification can generate fragmented identities, where individuals identify more with their socio-economic realities than with their nationality, thereby complicating collective national aspirations (Rohwerder, 2016; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997).

While economic stratification of society characterises the operation of affairs in Nigeria, the political dynamics further

exacerbate this socio-economic reality. The concentration of power at the top strata of society has often fuelled the politicisation of ethnic identities, a reality that politicians often exploit for electoral gain (Emeka, 2024; Abdulai, 2023; Ikre, 2023; Weber et al., 2016). This unscrupulous practice has bred marginalisation, power struggles and intolerance, ultimately undermining national unity and mutual understanding. The legacy of colonialism, alongside post-independence conflicts, has entrenched a deep-seated mistrust and competition for resources among various groups understanding (Emeka, 2024). Scholars have noted how political actors exploit existing ethnic cleavages, further entrenching a system of "identity politics", where ethnic affiliations take precedence over a shared national identity (Alabi, 2023; Green, 2020). This focus on tribalism over national unity creates an environment where cooperation is stymied and collective progress impeded.

The interplay of dynamics between economic and political power not only reinforce social stratification but also breed corruption. The intertwining dynamics of power and wealth further provide fertile ground for monumental corruption among politicians and public office holders (Amundsen, 1999). Those in power often leverage their positions to illegally convert public resources for personal gain, impoverishing critical sectors such as education, which serves as the bedrock of a just and equitable society. This corruption perpetuates a vicious cycle of inequality, where access to quality education often becomes a jurisdictional privilege for the wealthy. This structural inequity in education not only acts against individual potential but also restricts social mobility, thereby reinforcing the existing social stratification (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2010)

Education, a potential equaliser of opportunities for individuals in society, instead becomes a glass in the sun reflecting these deep-seated inequalities. The education system in Nigeria, as elsewhere, often reflects and perpetuates social stratification system. Variations in access to quality education based on socio-economic background serve to entrench this social system (Nsirim-Worlu, 2020). For instance, the children of the elite often enjoy superior educational opportunities, securing coveted spots in prestigious institutions and maintaining their privileged status (Chetty et al., 2014). In contrast, children from underprivileged backgrounds are left with restricted options as they struggle to break the cycle of poverty (Birabil & Tete, 2020; Ademowo & Adeyemi, 2018, Tooley & Dixon, 2005). The resultant educational variations compound existing inequalities, leading to fierce competition for scarce resources, which in turn fuels feelings of insecurity and resentment among the marginalised segments of society (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; Blanden & Machin, 2008).

The issue of educational stratification extends beyond mere stratified access to encompass the very content of education itself. Beyond access, the curriculum content within educational institutions can exhibit biases favouring the dominant culture and values with effects prejudicial to the histories and perspectives of the marginalised groups. Research findings demonstrate that educational systems often emphasise the narratives, aspirations and values of dominant social groups, while pushing to the background the narratives, aspirations, perspectives and values of the marginalised members of society. This fosters feelings of alienation and exclusion among disadvantaged groups (Banks, 2015). This lack of inclusivity erodes their sense of belonging and participation in the operational narrative of society. Such exclusion

not only inflicts constraints on individual development but also stifles creativity and innovation, essential ingredients for national progress (Gay, 2018). Additionally, discriminatory practices in educational institutions, such as the prevalence of favouritism in admissions and resource allocation towards students from higher socio-economic backgrounds or specific ethnicities, concretise the existing structures of the stratification system and further strain the fabric of social cohesion (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018).

The eco-chamber of these stratified realities of educational opportunities reverberates throughout Nigerian society, creating a feedback loop that reinforces social stratification. The consequences of this unequal educational terrain extend far beyond individual lives, generating fraught issues in the nation's stability and progress (Osagie, 2005). Limited educational opportunities for socio-economically marginalised groups translate into economic disadvantage, elevated rates of unemployment and underrepresentation in positions of power (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Theses constraints on upward mobility cultivate frustration and discontent, creating fertile ground for social unrest and violence (Gurr, 1970) and leading to a strained peaceful co-existence in a diverse nation like Nigeria (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017).

Conclusion

Nigeria faces the persistent challenge of maintaining peaceful coexistence among its citizens. Central to this challenge is the pervasive issue of social stratification, where wealth and power are concentrated at the top strata of society, rendering the vast majority of the citizens economically excluded from society. The concentration of wealth and power has bred resentment and frustration among the underprivileged majority, prevailing against the development of a unified national identity. This division is compounded by the politicisation of ethnic identities, manipulated by politicians for personal advantage, leading to marginalisation, power struggles and intolerance. The legacy of colonialism and post-independence conflicts further fuels mistrust, hindering the development of a cohesive sense of citizenship.

Moreover, the concentration of power has aided and abetted the participation of politicians in such corrupt practices as diverting public resources from education, the fulcrum for the equilibrium of a just society. This has perpetuated a vicious cycle of inequality, making quality education a privilege for the wealthy and driving social divisions. The education system itself reflects and perpetuates social stratification, with unequal access based on socio-economic backgrounds, biased curriculum content and discriminatory practices. The consequences of this unequal educational terrain are profound, impacting individual lives and the nation's stability. Limited opportunities for marginalised groups translate into economic disadvantage, unemployment and underrepresentation in structures of power, fostering discontent and social unrest. Without a determined focus on fostering tolerance and understanding through education, the development of a national consciousness and sense shared citizenship remains elusive, posing a significant challenge to peaceful coexistence among Nigerians.

Recommendations

The Nigerian Government in Collaboration with State Governments and Relevant Governmental Agencies:

- Implement mandatory and free education at the primary and secondary levels for all children across the nation.

- Establish targeted scholarship programmes for underprivileged students, prioritising education for children in rural communities.

- Decentralise educational management and empower local communities to participate in resource allocation and school governance.

- Invest in curriculum reform that reflects the diverse cultures and perspectives of Nigerian society, promoting tolerance and understanding.

- Address infrastructure inequalities by renovating and equipping schools, ensuring access to technology and digital literacy.

- Develop mentorship programmes and peer support networks to help students from marginalised communities navigate the challenges of the educational system.

- Implement stricter transparency measures in education funding and resource allocation, combating corruption and discriminatory practices.

- Integrate inter-cultural relations and exchange programmes into school activities, fostering interaction and understanding among children across different ethno-religious groups.

- Incorporate peace-building skills and civic responsibility training into the curriculum, empowering students to become agents of positive change.

- Equip students with media literacy and critical thinking skills to analyse information critically and challenge discriminatory narratives.

Civil Society Organisations and Community Leaders:

- Support grassroots peace-building initiatives that address local conflicts and build bridges between communities.

- Advocate for increased government investment in equitable education and hold officials accountable for implementing policy changes.

- Mobilise community resources and volunteers to provide educational support and mentorship to disadvantaged students.

- Collaborate with educational institutions to integrate local cultural knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum.

The Media and Private Sector:
- Promote positive narratives about social cohesion and inclusivity through responsible journalism and media campaigns.
- Invest in initiatives that bridge the digital divide and provide underserved communities with access to technology and educational resources.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to offer internship opportunities and career guidance to students from underprivileged backgrounds.

▪ Support research and development efforts aimed at improving the effectiveness of interventions addressing social stratification in education.

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