

BUREAUCRACY IN SOCIETY: THE INFLUENCE OF MISCONCEIVED VALUES AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN CURBING THE MENACE

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Abstract

Bureaucracy as a giant mechanism operated by Pygmies was seen as the distinctive form of organization found not just in government but in all spheres of modern society. It is the mass ranks of civil servants and public officials who are charged with the execution of government business. Based on this conceptualisation, every institution in Nigeria operates bureaucracy. The theory of bureaucracy behoves on its operators some sets of guiding principles, ethos or values for smooth practice. The non-adherence of institutions to bureaucratic ethos has resulted in the decay and erosion of bureaucratic values and invariably cherished societal values. As such, bureaucratic values have been misconceived and become the norms in Nigerian institutions. This, no doubt may not be unconnected to the slow pace of development in the country and the high prevalence of social ills in the society. To effectively do justice to this topic, the paper looks at the meaning, characteristics, functions and organization of bureaucracies, bureaucratic and misconceived bureaucratic values, practice of bureaucracy and the roles of Social Studies in curbing misconceived bureaucratic values in the society. The paper recommends among others that, value teaching (including bureaucratic values and misconceived bureaucratic values) should be made a life-long learning by building it into every programme in the various levels of the school system. Orientation programmes should be organised for staff of the various government institutions and agencies regularly to educate them on the ills of misconceived bureaucratic values in the society and its tendency to breed societal ills.

Key words: Bureaucracy, Bureaucratic Values, Misconceived Values And Misconceived Bureaucratic Values.

Introduction

Bureaucracy according to Heywood (2007:19) “is a giant mechanism operated by pygmies”. “It is the structure and set of regulations in place to control activity, usually in large organizations and government” (Arowolo 2010:1). The first use of the term ‘bureaucracy’ has been traced to 19th century France, when Vincent de Gournay was reported to have used it to refer to a form of government (rule by officials) which is considered an illness (bureaumania). The French word bureaucratic eventually emerged and became the German Bureaukrate (later bureaukratic), the Italian burocrazia, and the English bureaucracy (Erero 2005). The term bureaucracy suggests “inefficiency and pointless and time-consuming formalities, in short, red tape” (Heywood 2007:21). In the field of politics, Heywood sees bureaucracy as “the administrative machinery of the state; that is, the massed ranks of civil servants and public officials who are charged with the execution of government business” (22). “The complex nature and differentiated functions of government call for the need to have

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well-trained officials to manage the complexity and differentiation that characterize government's business" (Arowolo 2010:1). The author further points out that, 'bureaucracy has become inevitable in the handling of all the business activities of governments at both the level of implementation and formulation of policy- a situation which has strengthened bureaucracy and widened its sphere of operation.

Max Weber and his followers see bureaucracy "as a distinctive form of organization found not just in government but in all spheres of modern society" (Heywood 2007:23). Heywood (2007) asserts that the question of bureaucracy engenders deep political passions. In the modern period these have invariably been negative. Liberals criticize bureaucracy for its lack of openness and accountability. The Socialists, particularly the Marxists, condemn it as an instrument of class subordination; and the New Right, for its part, portrays bureaucrats as self-serving and inherently inefficient. The term bureaucracy has tended to assume very negative connotations such as red-tapism, inefficiency, irresponsiveness, abuse of power, insensitivity, 'buck passing', rigidity and inflexibility, excessive impersonality, over secretiveness, unwillingness to delegate, reluctance to exercise discretions, maladaptations, and inadequacies (Erero, 2005). Bureaucracy as a system of organization has become useful and indispensable in the running of society whether in its economic, political or social life. This paper reviews the meaning, characteristics, organization and function of bureaucracy in society.

Meaning and Characteristics of Bureaucracy

Different strands of usage of the term bureaucracy has emerged among scholars that an attempt to develop one acceptable definition will not be an easy task. Albrow (1970) identifies seven modern concepts of bureaucracy to be:

1. bureaucracy as rational organization
2. bureaucracy as organizational inefficiency
3. bureaucracy as rule by officials
4. bureaucracy as public administration
5. bureaucracy as administration by officials
6. bureaucracy as organization
7. bureaucracy as modern society. (p.72)

To Albrow, 'these contrasting concepts and usages reflect the fact that bureaucracy has been viewed differently by different academic disciplines. Students of government, for example, traditionally understood bureaucracy in a literal sense to mean 'rule by the bureau': that is, rule by appointed officials. When bureaucracy is perceived as 'rule by officials', as used in everyday language, 'it is seen as a pejorative term meaning pointless administrative routine, or red tape' (Heywood 2007). The author explains that, 'in Social Sciences, the concept of bureaucracy is used in a more specific and neutral sense, but refers to phenomena as different as rule by non-elected officials, the administrative machinery of government, and a rational mode of organization.

In the field of Sociology, Heywood (2007) asserts that bureaucracy has typically been understood as a particular type of organization, as a system of administration rather than a system of government. Bureaucracy in this sense can be found not only in democratic and authoritarian states but also in business corporations, trade unions, political parties and other organizations. Economists, on the other hand, sometimes view bureaucracy as specifically public organizations.

The academic study of bureaucracy has been dominated by the work of Max Weber. For Weber (1948) 'bureaucracy was an 'ideal type' of rule based on a system of rational rules, as opposed to either tradition or charisma. Weber identifies a set of principles that supposedly characterize bureaucratic organization. The most important of these according to Weber (1948) are:

- a) jurisdictional areas are fixed and officials are ordered by laws or rules.
- b) there is a firmly ordered hierarchy, which ensures that lower offices are supervised by specified higher ones within a chain of command.
- c) business is managed on the basis of written documents and a filing system.
- d) the authority of officials is impersonal and stems entirely from the post they hold, not from personal status.
- e) bureaucratic rules are strict enough to minimize the scope of personal discretion.
- f) appointment and advancement within a bureaucracy are based on professional criteria, such as training, expertise and administrative competence. (p.76)

The structuralist tendency sees bureaucracy as a social organization with certain characteristics without placing any value judgment on it. Hall (as cited in Erero 2005) selected six characteristics of bureaucracy held in common by scholars. These include:

1. A well-defined hierarchy of authority.
2. A division of labour based on functional specialization;
3. A system of rules covering the rights and duties of positional incumbents;
4. A system of procedures for dealing with work situations;
5. Impersonality of interpersonal relationships; and
6. Selection for employment and promotion based on technical competence. (p.72)

'The central feature of bureaucracy from the Weberian perspective is its rationality, because bureaucratization reflects the advance of a reliable, predictable and, above all, efficient means of social organization (Heywood 2007). Bureaucracy was nothing less than the characteristic form of organization found in modern society, as its expansion was irreversible. Not only was this a result of the technical superiority of bureaucracy over other forms of administration, but it was also a consequence of significant economic, political and cultural developments' (Heywood 2007).

Weber (1948) was also concerned with the whole problem of how power and authority is and ought to be distributed in society. Weber identifies three forms of power relationships - traditional/patrimonial, charismatic/personalistic, and legal/rational. For Weber, power is based on charisma and tradition, while they may be legitimate, that are hardly rational. The author therefore postulated that administrative arrangements based on such power bases would not only tend to be arbitrary and unstable but would ultimately tend to be inefficient. Turning to legal power relations, Weber posits that it was based on a set of rules accepted by both the rulers and the ruled. The ruler (selected or elected) therefore exercises power according to the limit, constraints, and latitudes set by legally sanctioned rules and regulations.

In Weber's view, bureaucratization was further stimulated by the pressures of democratization, which weakened ideas such as tradition, privilege and duty, and replaced them with a belief in open competition and meritocracy (Weber 1948). Weber believes that 'the process of 'rationalization' would ensure that all industrial societies, whether nominally capitalist or communist, would increasingly resemble each other as they adopted bureaucratic forms of administration.

Functions of Bureaucracies

Heywood (2007), notes that bureaucracies fulfil a single, but vital, function to execute and enforce the laws made by the legislature and the policies decided by the political executive. Heywood pointed out that 'while other functions of government such as representation, policy-making and interest articulation are carried out by a variety of institutions, policy implementation is solely the responsibility of civil servants, albeit working under their political masters. Moreover, the Weberian model of bureaucracies as rational and objective machines appears to divorce the administrative world from the political world' (Erero 2005). In this view, bureaucrats are seen simply as cogs in a machine, as reliable and efficient administrators operating within a fixed hierarchy. According to clearly defined rules which reality is very different (Heywood 2007). Despite their formal subordination and impartiality, bureaucrats exert considerable influence on the policy process, and thus fulfil a number of key functions in any political system. The most important of these functions according to Heywood (2007), are carrying out administration, offering policy advice, articulating and aggregating interests, and maintaining political stability.

Organization of Bureaucracies

Heywood (2007), notes that organization of bureaucracies is important for two reasons. It influences the administrative efficiency of government, and affects the degree to which public accountability and political control can be achieved. Many states have therefore looked to rationalize their administrative machinery, to make them function effectively and bring about the needed transformations and development the societies desire. All state bureaucracies are in some way organized on the basis of purpose of function. This is achieved through the construction of departments, ministries and agencies charged with responsibility for particular policy areas, i.e. education, housing, defence, taxation and others (Heywood 2007). Some of these governments agencies include the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Power, Ministry of Agriculture, just to mention a few.

One area that needs to be mentioned in this discourse is the degree of centralization or decentralization within bureaucracies. The systems found in the communist regimes, such as China, are subject to strict party control and supervision at every level. These are amongst the most centralized bureaucratic systems in the world. While those found in the USA, Germany, France, India, United Kingdom and Nigeria are examples of decentralized bureaucracy. The emphasis here is on the degree of control by the political executives on the day to day running of bureaucracies. While it is higher in centralized bureaucracies it is lesser in decentralized ones. In the decentralized bureaucracies, internal self-control mechanisms of institutional ethos play the dominant checks. Operators of bureaucracies in any society are supposed to be regulated by the laws of the land, values of the society and by the ethos of the organizations/institutions in question. The next sections of the paper looks at values of society, bureaucratic values and misconceived bureaucratic values paripasu the societally expected values, norms and how observed anomaly can be controlled.

Bureaucratic and Misconceived Bureaucratic Values

First of all, values are the principles and standards of society. They are a society's judgment of what is desirable and important (African Leadership Forum 1993). Values are human preferences, likes and desires. Values can, therefore, be used to refer to the

quality of something in terms of its usefulness, desirability and worthwhileness. Values are also being defined as principles and standards that guide behaviour. Values are choices people make and act upon. The chosen value is, therefore, prized or cherished, affirmed and internalized by an individual or a group (Odia 2014). From this viewpoint, values influence action. In the same vein, the consequences of the actions or inaction in turn influence the values held by individuals and groups. Bureaucratic values are values that guide operators in bureaucratic organizations/ settings. It specifies the dos and don'ts for participants in institutions, departments and agencies of society. Bureaucratic values are the same thing as administrative ethics that are either present or absent in an institution, a worker, official or bureaucrat. It denotes a set of characteristics that is assumed to be present in a worker, or which may take different forms (Ajuogu in Ibietan & Joshual 2014). Thus, organizations are perceived as always ethical, differing only in the form that ethics are presented. Ibietan and Joshua (2014) see administrative ethics as involving the application of moral principles to the conduct of official responsibilities and duties. Ibietan et al, (2014) maintains that civil servants are expected to bring to bear in the discharge of their duties, certain ethical considerations especially where they are to make value judgment which may have a direct relationship with their professional standing' (Ibietan, et al, 2014). Some of these bureaucratic values that can be extracted from the features of bureaucracy by Weber (1948) and Albrow (1970) are hierarchy of authority, actions of officials ordered by rules, fixed jurisdictional areas, written documents and filing system guide actions, authority of officials impersonal, bureaucratic rules permit discretion of officials, appointments and promotions based on professional criteria, division of labour functional specialization of duties and work situations organized on a system of procedures.

Despite efforts of the Nigerian society to use education to instill desirable values (including bureaucratic values) in its citizens there is still the prevalence of misconceived values in institutions in the society. In institutions like ministries and agencies today, the strong desire for and pursuit of material things at the expense of acceptable professional ethics and practices seem to have become the current norm. There seems to be nothing wrong striving to build panelled houses and driving flashy cars by any means possible by many. Prevalent among many civil servants is the craze of enriching themselves with any position they are privileged to hold just to use them to secure the future of their immediate family and the ones yet unborn by flouting the institutional norms guiding such positions. It is also observed that most public institutions no longer respect bureaucratic rules as their guiding ethos and principles on which they were created. The value of impersonality has been thrown aside and most public offices have been personalized and run according to the dictate of those who occupy who hold positions to their own advantage and to the detriment of those that they serve (Aimiyekagbon, Iyamu & Okobia, 2019). Arowolo (2010) affirmed that officials not only personalize public offices but also personify them where the work ethics have been severely undermined by the get-rich-quick syndrome. Arowolo (2010) notes that it is not only government officials that are corrupt, but that corruption is made official in the country.

Many occupants of government offices tend to see their position as their own opportunity to amass wealth as and many citizens no longer care how people acquire their wealth in the society. Demanding for gratification before rendering service has become the order of the day. Many do not see anything wrong in delaying people's files/ cases till they pay something in cash or kind to facilitate it before treating them. The

general belief now is that the nature of our society cannot allow one run a public office without being personal (corrupt). The norm now is that, gaining access to a high cadre public offices are seen as the opportunity to amass wealth for oneself. So, one's family and cycle of friends do not want to hear that one could not make it. To them, one's access to any high cadre office is not only viewed as one's success alone but the success of family members, friends, ethnic groups, religion and region; so they do not expect one to fail. To such office occupants, bending rules in office to benefit them and those close to them is normal (Aimiyeagbon, et al, 2019).

Practice of Bureaucracy in Nigeria

In the view of Weber, the administrative system in a democracy is fashioned to execute the just and legal decisions of the ruler and must be a system of rules - rules specifying the relations between the ruler and the ruled and between office holders (Erero, 2005). These rules also prescribe in a rational way, the arrangement of offices (both longitudinal and latitudinal), the rights and duties of each office and office-holder and the recruitment process. In addition, and of much importance, the position of the office-holder cannot be sold or inherited. In a nutshell, the position cannot be privatized since 'the means of administration' do not belong to the office holder. The strict separation between private and official income as well as personal fortune is a specific characteristic of the legal/rational power relationship, thus conducive to impartiality, stability and efficiency among others (Erero 2005). Arowolo (2010:2) opines that:

The efficiency or otherwise of bureaucracy is a function of the environment in which it operates; and that, it explains why Nigeria's public bureaucracy is inefficient and corrupt. Also that, it is influenced by its environment which is overwhelmed with and characterized by lack of strict adherence to rules, ethics and standard norms that dictate the tone and tenor of moral conduct in public offices.

In Nigeria, this bureaucratic arrangement though present in letter and practice is largely unattainable due the high enormity in the personalization of office and the non-adherence to the other bureaucratic values or ethos listed in the preceding sections in the system. This personalization makes many officials corrupt in the course of their duty as civil or public servants.

Aluko (2002) notes that some persons in authority have abdicated their supervisory responsibilities and in the process, laws and regulations have been breached without censure. This incidence of lawlessness involving public servants (civil servants and politicians) on one hand and members of the public who are seeking public services on the other has introduced a lot of unethical practices into institutions, ministries and agencies in Nigeria. Among the civil servants, they no longer see themselves as servant to the public or masses they are employed to serve. The slogan now is that nothing goes for nothing: before services are rendered to the public, money or material things must swap hands for it. Hence, files often disappear and reappear at the mercy of civil servants – boss, clerks and messengers in offices. During recruitment into public offices, pecuniary interest such as ethnicity, religion, regional sentiment and godfather's connections take priority instead of merit and technical competence. In some institutions, advancement and promotion in the system depend on the connections of the staff, that is the various societies, secrete or otherwise he/ she belongs and not the additional qualifications and competency of the staff in question.

Another worrisome dimension of this problem is the situation where staff use their wives and children to fill vacant positions in the same institutions where they work thereby sacrificing merit on the altar of nepotism. These are areas of the school system seriously need to intervene so as to reposition the value system.

Social Studies and its Roles in Curbing Misconceived Bureaucratic Values

One of the reasons that Social Studies was introduced into the Nigerian education system is to help mould the behaviour of its members and address the societal ills plaguing its survival. Social Studies as a value laden discipline has the potential to build sound morals and integrity amongst members of a society. 'It has a responsibility by virtue of its philosophy, content and methodology to instill desirable values and ensure proper character building and training of Nigerian children (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council, 2007). Social Studies has the capacity to expose its learners to a wide variety of knowledge which enables learners to develop civic consciousness and other desirable attributes that will make them responsible, honest, patriotic, disciplined and unlearn misconceived values which have been recognized as the leading causes of the social ills plaguing the Nigerian society. The capacity of Social Studies to address these issues is very crucial to the lives of every individual and the survival of the society in general.

To this end, the goals of education in Nigeria with regard to value development for pre-primary, primary, junior secondary and post-basic education level according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) are stated as follows:

1. The development of the individual into a morally sound and patriotic citizen (Goals of Education in Nigeria);
2. Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity (Goals of Education in Nigeria):
3. Inculcate social and moral norms and values (Goals of Pre-primary Education);
4. Instil social, moral norms and values in the child (Goals of Primary Education);
5. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and of appreciating the dignity of labour (Goals of Junior Sec. Education);
6. Raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think independently and rationally, respect the views and feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour (Goals of Post Basic Education) (p.13).

These goals reflect the society's efforts and concern to use education as a medium to instill appropriate citizenship disposition in the hearts and minds of members through value teaching. Social Studies is saddled with the responsibility of helping the nation to realize these goals. The issue now is, how far has the discipline fared in this regard? The objective answer to this question is that, it has not been easy for Social Studies as a discipline to achieve these goals judging from the prevalence of misconceived values in the society. The role of Social Studies in achieving this task needs to be re-addressed.

The discipline therefore needs to intensify its effort and salvage the country from the mess of misconceived values' influence on the heart and minds of many Nigerians. The teaching and learning of Social Studies needs to demonstrate its capability and readiness as society's only hope among the disciplines to cure its social ills by stemming the trend of misconceived values in Nigeria. The subject needs to take some decisive steps to tackle this malady that is spreading fast like cancer. The discipline need to redefine the role of Social Studies teachers, their effectiveness and efficiency in the new

paradigm; that is their attitude and commitment to this new task. Social Studies teachers should double up their efforts to make students unlearn the misconceived bureaucratic values they learnt informally in school and outside school environment or to make them be able to reject misconceived bureaucratic values when projected to them, after leaving school. In addition, the right teaching pedagogy should be employed. Appropriate evaluation techniques to be used should stress more of affective domain of learning which should be thoroughly researched into and adopted. Evaluation techniques that measure attitudes should be given serious attention in Social Studies because placing too much emphasis on achievement or aptitude tests has not helped the Social Studies as a discipline to achieve its objectives in the area of imbibing societally cherished values, bureaucratic values and rejecting the misconceived ones.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that bureaucratic values have seriously been misconceived in Nigeria. It is also not contestable that these misconceived values have had serious negative impact on Nigerians by inculcating in them wrong values and making their contribution to national development abysmally poor. These misconceived bureaucratic values by operators of the system have made the institutions in Nigeria to fail. They are virtually not in existence; only in principles. The scenario in Nigeria is that the institutions and agencies work depending on who is occupying the mantle of leadership. If the person occupying the position of leadership is good and morally upright the institutions will be working, if not nothing happens. Thus, Dora Akunyili and the success story of NAFDAC (National Administration of Food, Drug and Control) should be encouraged. Therefore, instilling the right bureaucratic values in operators is the right step to resolving the problem of social ills in Nigeria.

Based on the issues raised in this paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. Value teaching (including bureaucratic values and misconceived bureaucratic values) should be made a life-long learning by building it into every programme in the various levels of the school system from primary to tertiary education.
2. Value teaching should be made a General Studies course in the Universities where values, bureaucratic values and misconceived bureaucratic values and how to unlearn them can be packaged as a programme for all students irrespective of the disciplines of the students.
3. Orientation programmes should be organised for staff of the various institutions and agencies regularly to educate them on the ills of misconceived bureaucratic values in the society and its tendency to breed societal ills.
4. School curriculum, especially Social Studies curriculum should be overhauled with new content from literature such as conceptual meaning of values, morals, ethics, societal values, bureaucratic values and misconceived bureaucratic values to address the influence of misconceived bureaucratic values on bureaucracy in the Nigerian society.

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