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Teachers for Gender Equality in Nigeria: Myth or Reality?

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Abstract

The work is an attempt to critically analyse the issue of Gender Equality as it relates to Teaching Profession in Nigeria. The authors explicate teaching and the qualities a good teacher should possess irrespective of his/her sex. The work went further to explain that equality as a concept, defies all definitions and, despite its attractiveness as a socio-moral ideal, the concept is fraught with positive and negative arguments that seem to militate against its easy understanding. This implies that Teachers for Gender Equality is a Myth rather than Reality. Finally, some recommendations are given by the researchers to be followed in the Nigerian education in view of the fact that gender equality cannot be achieved among the teachers.

The issues of ‘Gender Equality and Gender Roles’ have become one of the hottest debates in the contemporary period. As much as possible, there have been researches bordering on how gender equality can be achieved in all aspects of life. Scholars have however, delved into such areas like: Gender Equality and Development, Obstacles to Gender Equality, Achieving Gender Equality in Education, Discrimination: An Impediment for Achieving Gender Equality in Nigeria, Gender Equality and Sustainable Political Development in Nigeria and so on. But what is in doubt and for which attempts must be made to address is the concept of Equality itself.

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This is imperative because Human Beings are simply born unequal and grow unequally. Nelson, Carlson & Palonsky (1996:429) in agreement with this, put it that “we have unequal mental and physical characteristics. We have unequal desires, needs and interests. This is a natural condition. Since we have inherent inequality of condition by endowment, we can’t change that by trying to manufacture equality of condition.”

However, the main focus of this discussion is, can there be gender equality among the teachers? If yes, how can it be achieved?, and if no, what should be the way forward? the paper tries to get a firm grip of this critical study by a proper analysis of the concepts involved.

The Teacher

No education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. The teacher occupies the centre stage of the quality and quantity in education. The teacher discovers, transmits, disseminates, appraises or administers in any teaching and learning process. A teacher by definition, can be regarded as a person who has acquired knowledge, skills, attitude and values in order to teach or impart same to the learners in the most acceptable manner. As Okeke (2004:50) puts it, “If we believe in the capacity of educational system to promote rapid and a directed social and economic change, we should be concerned with who teaches in Nigeria schools”. By implication, the teacher must be competent and must have relevant education in an established college or institution. He should be knowledgeable, confident, caring and sharing, fair to all students and well organized.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

A good teacher is like a candle, it consumes itself to lit the way for others. A good teacher should possess such vital qualities as:

1 Role Model

Modeling sound behaviour is an important aspect of teacher’s role. As a role model, the teacher becomes the window through which the learners will see their future. He leads by examples, through his thoughts and actions.

2 Subject Matter Mastery

A good teacher knows the subject and makes learning interesting. Edward, Leigha, and Abraham (2010:39) affirmed that “the worth of the teacher depend, to a large extent, on his knowledge of the subject matter he or she teaches”. Sound mastery of the subject matter is important because it enables the teacher teach intelligently, objectively and confidently. The mastery of subject matter also helps the teacher to achieve his specific educational objectives by enabling him assess accurately.

3 Open to Change

The largest room in the world is the room for knowledge. There should be accommodation for new ways, new ideas, new systems, and new approaches. A teacher should not put obstacle or rebuff new ideas. He should be open and willing to listen to others' ideas.

4 Inspiration

A good teacher motivates and inspires the learners by using appropriate teaching methods. He stimulates the learners and provides guidance so that the learners can be innovative. He changes the life of the learners by helping them to realize their potentials, helping them to grow, helping them to find their talents, skills and abilities. He has the capacity to mentor the students in removing the disconnection between the Ivory tower of theories and the practical problems of life. He remains a teacher whom the learners rely on during hard times. This helps strengthen teacher-student relationship leading to great results in the learning process.

5 Empathy

The job of teaching is centred on the development of the learner's mind and potentialities. They should not undermine the fact that aggression, negative attitudes and behaviours overt in some students have root cause. Human beings differ in intelligence, aptitude, interest and motivation. There are really scared learners who come through some bad experiences in life. A good teacher should have the ability to understand and resonate with their feelings and emotions, and to communicate on their level.

6 Positive Mental Attitude

Great teachers think more on the positive and a little less on the negative. They keep smile on their faces when things get tough; see the bright side of things and find positives in every negative situation. They neither mock nor underestimate the learners. They always think positive on the ability of the learners.

7 Respect for Learners

A good teacher must be democratic and must respect the integrity of the learners. He can do this by giving the learners the freedom to ask questions and raise doubts when necessary. In delivering the lesson, efforts should be made in such a way that he/she does not stifle critical thinking. Above all, he should employ an open-ended method, by allowing room for further development.

Gender

The issue of gender is always mistaken to mean relegation, domination, suppression and oppression of the women by the men. To some, it implies the

inferiority of the females vis-à-vis their male counterparts. These misconceptions are however, used in the perceived areas where the females feel they are not measuring up with the males.

But far from its misconceptions, the term gender can be used to describe the widely shared ideas and expectations, cultural values, attitudes, practices and characteristics concerning men and women. Gender is a social construct that prescribes the role of males and females. It is the social interpretation of what it means to be male or female. The concept is based on stereotype of male and female behaviour that are often associated with sex. It assigns roles to males and females.

Equality

The concept of equality is very controversial and its interpretation and implementation has become a perennial problem from one nation of the world to another. As a complex concept, it requires much clarification so that the various shades of its meaning can be understood for easy application. For this reason, it has attracted the attention of not only philosophers but also sociologists, economists and other social science researchers. This might be as a result of its potentiality for social harmony when interpreted and adopted as a resource distribution criterion, hence, the search for its true meaning and a correct interpretation.

As a concept, equality has defied all definition, and despite its attractiveness as a socio-moral ideal, the concept is fraught with positive and negative arguments that would seem to militate against its easy understating. For instance the universal principle which states that “all men ought to be equally considered until a case is made for justifying that some particular differences between them warrant their being treated differently” indicates that there will always be difference (in terms of intelligence, height, weight, income, age and so on) among human beings to warrant a difference of treatment. The concept if not properly analysed and applied, could be mistaken and misleading. It is not an empirical fact, it is a mathematical concept. As Aminigo (1999:42) described it, “it is easy from its etymology to see that it belongs to the group of synonymous expressions such as ‘likeness’, ‘identicalness’, ‘sameness’, in quantity, degree, value and ability. Also, it generally connotes ‘impartiality’.

The upshot of the foregoing is that the concept of equality is a mere slogan, a rallying cry than a meaningful concept for which something practicable follows. The emphasis of course is not that slogans and ideologies are useless, they have emotional appeal and impact but are hardly translated into substantive programme of action.

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The reality of gender equality in the teaching profession is vague and more hollow than it is usually taken to be; that is, more of a myth and of slogan than a substantive prescription for action.

In the first place, people are neither born equal nor are they in any other respect and hence, their presumed equality cannot be a basis for according them equal treatment or equal right. Any midwife will readily confirm that the babies they help bring into this world are never equal, not even identical twins. Not even in mental, spiritual, emotional or moral sensitivities are all men equal.

Secondly, to say that one has equal right to any thing is not to say much about how much one ultimately gets from it. That I have a right to compete like any other person is no indication of capability to compete, nor will to succeed nor of the state of preparedness for competition, nor a guarantee of achievement.

Furthermore, the cry for equity of opportunity is invariably a call for restoration of balance, which action may inevitably involve what Akinpelu (2005:201) described as “preferential treatment, compensatory measure, positive discrimination, positive action or reverse discrimination”. However, in a state of previous disequilibrium, any attempt to equalize opportunities must inevitably create some fresh inequalities. The opponents (gender) of the reverse discrimination are however, quick to launch their counter attack and struggle becomes endless. In this process, the compensatory measure will not only violate the principle of equality which it sets out to achieve, but even deleterious to its beneficiaries.

Lastly, gender equality is a slogan that is better known for controversies that it has generated than for the solutions proffered or achieved. The slogan does not consider the difficulty of determining what can be meant by equality of results or achievement among the male and female teachers. The Mechanistic System Analysis Model of input-output is not so simple or so easily determined in education as the factory production model may suggest. How then can equality be determined in the teaching profession?

Conclusion

The researchers have critically examined the concept of gender equality, and have discovered that teachers for gender equality means practically nothing outside keeping an open door, ensuring ‘equal start’ and of equality of access to resources in education. In other words, there has been much myth, rhetoric and sloganeering surrounding it and that the substantive prescription for action in it is rather small. The paper has also shown that the concept in its theoretical formulation and practical implementation inevitably generates other feelings of inequality and discontentment

thus, only compounding rather than solving existing complaints. The last effort is at suggesting some policies which can achieve the same objectives of satisfaction of individual aspirations for personal growth and the maximization of social desiderata of peace, harmony and unity.

Way Forward

The purpose of analysis is to improve practice not simply to satisfy intellectual curiosity. All that have been said is an abstract theory and what is important is its practical application to the Nigerian situation. Thus, attempts are made to prescribe some measures to achieve the goals of common satisfaction of interests, social harmony and peace which the principle of equality vainly tried to achieve.

- i The first proposition is that merit should be the deciding factor in all areas of competition rather than gender equality as it is now.
- ii Those who have in the past been discriminated against, or who for historical or other cultural reasons have found themselves in a backward state, should actually be allowed to achieve equality through winning their places by merit rather than by concession or patronage.
- iii The disadvantaged should stimulate and rouse themselves to action in the spirit of self-reliance and transcend whatever constraints that may stand in their way of engaging in open and fair competition.
- iv Education should not be discriminatory. All citizens should be left to compete freely among themselves.
- v The equivalence between different levels of education in both formal and non-formal systems should be determined and established so that a person can walk from one sector to another.
- vi Both the primary and secondary systems should be flexible enough as to accommodate anybody who drops out for one reason or the other especially for the reason of early pregnancy.
- vii Finally, it should be noted that the promotion of excellence and equity at the same time is difficult, but worthy. Essentially, there are two major premises for this approach: one offers clear and open opportunity for all to achieve while the other sets standards for performance.

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