

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT-TEACHERS ROLE

Nehemiah Lamiri Nyako

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Federal College of Education (Technical),
Potiskum, Yobe State.*

Aliyu A. Fukumari

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Federal College of Education (Technical),
Potiskum, Yobe State.*

And

Ifeoma K. Obi

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Federal College of Education (Technical),
Potiskum, Yobe State.*

Abstract

Every person is part of the education enterprise it is vital to understand the statement “Equality of Educational opportunities” to see what it entails to the individual, society and the country at large, Nature is diverse and does not call for equality, but the human society needs it even though itself is very diverse. We teachers are challenged to this call, of which it is our ‘duty post’ we should clarify it and pursue it to the good of the generality, but it is imperative that we ourselves understand it.

Education is for experiencing the ‘good life’/, full life’ of both the individual and the society at large, whatever education offers has to be what the society values, and in Nigeria we have diverse societies meaning diverse values. Islamic education preceded western education in the Northern and western part of the country, but due to the industrial revolution, scientific development and modernization in short, resulted in western education getting the upper hand both in Nigeria and the diaspora, becoming the yard-stick of measuring national and international developments. This single event brought both happiness and resentment to nations and nationalities.

Nigeria society is not different as shown by Onwuka ('96), this simply means, the ultimate purpose of education is the raising of human beings in accordance with societal values, the National Policy on Education stated, "Education is the most important instrument of change in any society"...also "any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

As such no matter what the experience we cannot throw away the baby with the bathing water because no matter what, there is 'good' in it, there is bound to be pockets of resentment, but the crowd that clamour for it will be larger always. So it is vital that we in the education sector properly understand the phrase, "Equality of Educational opportunities and all that it suggests.

Education: Sociological Perspective

There is need to put into perspective how this paper views "equality of educational opportunity" it will discuss its argument from the functionalists view-the theory assumes that a certain degree of order and stability are essential for the survival of social systems, functionalism is therefore concerned with explaining the origin, maintenance of order and stability in society. Many functionalists see shared values as the key to this, value consensus because it integrates the various parts of a society, forming the basis of social unity or social solidarity since individuals will tend to identify and feel kinship with those who share the same values with them, values consensus provides the foundation for cooperation since common values produces common goals.

Talcot parson an American sociologist as cited in Haralanbos, (1983) said, "the main task of sociologist is to examine the institutionalization of patterns of values orientation in the social system" emphasis is therefore placed on the process of socialization (equality of Educational opportunities) whereby values are internalized and transmitted from one generation to the next. Socialization is one of the processes of education, thus this 'education and in particular the teaching of History, provides the link between the individual and society. If the history of a society is brought about alive to the child, he will come to see that he is a part of something bigger than himself, he will then develop a sense of commitment to the social group. This view can be illustrated by educational practice in the U.S.A. where a common educational curriculum has helped to instill shared norms and values into a population with diverse background. It has also provided a shared language and a common history for migrants from every country in the world.

The Concept “Equal”

To say that two persons or things are equal is to suggest that they are the same in one or all respects. Usually however, the category or categories in which they are the same is not specified and all other differences are ignored, leaving us with the bare generalization that the things being compared are the same or equal in all respects. Taking human beings for example, claims of equality are very often made on the supposition that there is something which all humans possess in common and which confers on them the status of equal treatment this explains all such classes of individuals like men, women, negroes, whites, etc. demanding for equal treatment. Looking at each other they find something common to themselves which confers on them the status of equality. Hobhouse (1922) made reference when he said:

There is something peculiar, to human beings and common to human beings without distinction of class, race or sex, which lies deeper than all differences between them. call it what we may, soul, reason, the abysmal capacity of suffering, or just human nature, it is something generic, of which there may be many specific, as well as quantitative differences, but which underlies and embraces them all.

We can see from the above statement that the demand for equality do not in any way acceptance of equality in any quantitative or descriptive sense. It is rather that something more quantitative in nature exists in all men which should command equal treatment. Those who appeal to this common element as a basis for equality then demand for absolute equality or inequality to all without distinction.

In life, however, the things that call for differences in treatment or equal treatment (education opportunities), are usually those that do not demand that “common element”. They are in most cases specific to certain human needs and conditions, for example, would we keep both male and female students in the same dormitory building? Simply because of their common element ‘student’? Thus while the principles of equality demands of us to treat individuals equally, or alike, we should also treat them differently when there are relevant grounds or differences between them. Benn et al as cited in Enoh, (1996) said, “The principle of equality of consideration, requires that, “none shall be held to have a claim for better treatment than another in advance of good grounds being produced”.

No other educational proposal confirms Jibril Aminu’s faith in the principles of equality of educational opportunity than his unflinching support for the idea of special programme of educating the “gifted” in society.

In all areas of endeavour, including literary works, we cannot hope to realize our potentials as a nation unless we make special effort to encourage the one percent or so among us that are gifted. Shakespear was obviously gifted. So was P.G. woodhouse. So have we in this country got many others now buried under the rubbles of a popular but ailing education system. (Enoh, 199:Page289).

This makes much sense; because most feelings of unfair treatment arise when men think that they have been unequally treated on an irrelevant ground and so once such a reason is offered to their satisfaction, all the claims for inequality treatment ceases. When the ground for unequal treatment are not convincing enough those unfairly treated are bound to see those favoured as belonging to the same class or possessing same attributes that should warrant the same treatment for better or worse(Enoh, 1996).

This line of argument, can also be advanced by those who possess the relevant quality or attributes in excess, when they are lumped or grouped together with those who have less and yet treated equally. Here, the feelings of indignation arises because those who possess a greater amount of the of the attribute feel justified to have more than to one who have less but who have been treated in the same degree with them. In both of the above instances, the principle of equality has been violated because, of unfair application of the relevant ground for making distinctions, resulting to ‘equals’ being treated unequally’ and ‘unequals are then treated’ equally’. It is for this reason that Aristotle said, “injustice arises when unequals are treated equally in the same way in which it does when equals are treated unequally (famous principle of distributive justice).

Instances of Violation of “Principles of Equality”

There is usually a watery classification of equality when people discuss the concept of equal educational opportunity; this shows that our concern in the concept is limited to the application of its meaning in the distribution of school chances, thereby gaining very little by way of seeing how the concept enters into the way we treat children/learners in our classrooms or how we relate with then out of the class. For at the back of all such treatments and responses is the demand on us to do so in a way that they feel that they are being equally treated. Once we relate to our learners as teachers, in a way that suggest any form of unequal treatment, numerous social and psychological consequences follow and both learning and their states of mind are adversely affected. Akinpelu, (1990) opined that Education is the key to individual and group advantages, acting not only to promote the good life and respectability, but helping also to tilt income distribution in favour of those who possess it, and frees people from

discrimination by others. At the national level it rest on the shoulder of the minister of education and how he relates with the various commissioners from the state ministries of education, will illicit the same volumes of social and psychological consequences.

Criterion of Equality

Relevance has always been assumed to be a necessary criterion for the term “equality”. But then, the very fact that we make reference to relevant grounds suggests that there are also irrelevant ones and what distinguishes them is of crucial importance in our understanding of equality, when, for instance, is a ground for action relevant and when is it irrelevant? Generally it is believed by many, that “they serve only to express their users’ approval and disapproval”. What we have to ask ourselves is. Are we then to allow the choice of relevant/irrelevant grounds to be on those who are assigned to distribute favours or responsibilities? What is the guarantee that when this is done what they take to be relevant will be seen by those to be affected by the measures as being really relevant? Relevant characteristics of equality will include:

- Same treatment should be meted to all who have the same human attributes.
- Different treatment should be meted to individuals where there are relevant grounds between them.
- For any ground to be seen as relevant it must either bear a certain relation to the human attribute being considered, or both the ground and the attribute must be causally related.

Issues in Education

i) Quota System (Nigerian Education System)

The issue of providing equal educational opportunity everywhere has been a perennial and unending issue. This is particularly so in Nigeria in view of its widespread linkage to the potentially explosive issue of unity which many see it’s wrong interpretation and application as being capable of gravely undermining. Interestingly “There is so much agreement on equality of opportunity as an ideal, there is so much disagreement about its application (Ennis, 1978).

Conscious of the relationship between particular interpretations and practical applications, individuals have come to accept particular interpretations of the principles which gives them an advantage with immense emotional flavor while opposing contrary views with almost the same passion. (Aminu, 1986:Page76).

ii) Principle of Educational Distribution

One logical outcome of all interpretations put forward on the issue of education and free education is the necessity for all to be educated through the rational means for

distributing school places. We all believe that all men, ought to be educated, yet we have to agree that innate differences ought also to define limits and opportunities. Thus the question of ‘who gets what’ cannot be avoided.

Awolowo a strong advocate of principle of educational distribution, is rooted in his socialist view, where he saw equal educational opportunity as shading the ideals of socialist as regarding ideal of justice, and equality which stipulated that the resources of nature belong to all citizens equally. Accordingly, only a distribution mechanism which sees every individual as equal to any other can best satisfy these ideals.

Awolowo’s main concern as regards equality of educational opportunity is with the differences associated with family background for he claims that as long as family differences are meritable, they must be compensated for in some ways as he was cited in Enoh, (1996). Thus, the existence of family inequalities implies that many potentially outstanding talent would remain forever buried, simply because one had been accidentally brought to this world by poor parents, while at the same time, a good deal of resources would be wasted on mediocre elements, simply because their parents are rich enough to afford the alchemist’s costly but fruitless venture of trying to transform lead into gold”.

To see equal educational opportunity from the above statement is to admit that intelligence in the population is equally distributed and what may significantly affect the greater advancement of individuals are factors which are traceable to the family, which is usually economic. However, although, no group can be seen to be more intelligent than others, some individuals across the different groups have higher endowment than others and their distribution is spread among the rich and poor alike. Awolowo said, “What those talents are, and how many they are, we do know until all men and women, boys and girls are given equal opportunity to develop.

Educational Imbalance and Its Threat to Unity

Education ideally is capable of promoting and achieving the goal of national unity and integration through even geographical distribution of schools, the improvement of economic/living standards of families, the teaching of history and culture of different ethnic groups, the introduction of boarding schools, the establishment of unity schools etc. but despite all efforts made by different governments it seen we are still far from our goal. There are suggestions from different quarters that national integration is not entirely and educational problems as such it cannot be solved alone by education. May be other social, political and economic issued combined with education can perform the magic. Education tried equalizing measures and this also brought in fierce reactions from different interest groups.

Educational Equalization

Professor Jibril Aminu opined that, "... its tendency to divide the polity into two warring camps". Even though, he remains fixed in his belief that this charge also applies to all sections, meaning that, just as educational equalization is likely to divide the polity, so also is the principles of equal opportunity when it ignores large segments of the population." A nation cannot achieve the greatness that comes through peace and harmony if any part, for whatever justifiable reasons, is seen to getting special treatment for too long. But it also cannot do so by ignoring the rights of others to equal opportunities for development".

The Basic idea behind educational equalization is in two parts, the first has to do with achieving the goal of national integration while the second is connected with the prospects of achieving expected balance between so-called advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

Quota system is another way of saying educational equalization, and the fact that this system of selection discriminates between groups shows that it is not a good solution to the issue at state because it only succeeded in reversing directions of such discrimination from disadvantaged group to advantaged group that Akinpelu as cited in Aminu (1996) said, reverse discrimination, like any other form of discrimination, is bad" as long as this measure is implemented, feelings of injustice by those presently desired will surely underscore our sense of National consciousness.

Effects of Equality of Educational Opportunity on the Nigerian Society

1. It fosters the republican nature of Nigeria which stresses on equal rights and privileges, denouncing any form of discrimination among the citizens.
2. It calls for equality of schools, i.e. all schools of a particular level to have same status, adequate staffing, adequate financial strength, adequate facilities. This is because those who find themselves in better schools will have the greater likelihood of performing academically better thereby bound to enjoy all the advantages associated with such performance.
3. It calls for the provision of equal opportunities for employment of those with the same level of education or period of training.

Awolowo argues:

...that granted every Nigerian is given an opportunity to develop his talents, it is imperative that he should also be given an opportunity to employ those developed talents...To pursue one without the other is detrimental to the best interest of society. For one thing; the objectives of development will not be achieved; and for another a good deal of

wanton injustice and inequality would have been done to those who have been discriminated against in the process. (Enoh, 1996:Page88).

1. It maximizes the productivity of individual members across board, i.e. there is bound to be healthy competition of skills and talents from all sections of the country, this is in line with Awolowos' view as cited in Enoh, (1996) "...the more educated and healthy an individual is, the more productive he becomes as a member of society.

Effects of Equalization of Educational Opportunity

The issue of equality in Education can be looked at from four different perspectives, as absolute equality; equality of consideration; equal opportunity; and positive or reverse discrimination. At this point we will be more concerned with the last i.e. positive or reverse discrimination.

Reverse discrimination has been explained as a call to offset the effects of past acts of bias by giving opportunity in the opposite direction. A point to note here is, this ;proposal is in line with policies to achieve a degree of evenness between different parts of sections of a nation before one applies the principle of equal opportunity. In quality and stress in Nigerian education, Aminu acknowledges that, "Educational imbalance cannot be discussed meaningfully without reference to its root cause which is the historically determined disparity at the lower levels of education, ...some states had achieved U.P.E. de facto long ago and have achieved a very high transition rate from primary to secondary schools.

...Aminu attributes the educational disparities, between different sections of the country, to accidents of history and a pattern of educational distribution that was favourable to some areas than others. The problem with a skewed distribution pattern of educational institutions, particularly the Universities, is that they obey the natural law of history, in which such institutions become populated by the dominant group in which they are located. Invariably, disadvantaged states suffered a second disadvantage as selection, throughout the period in which such institutions were not found within their boundaries, did not favour them. All these taken together, amounts to some form of earlier discrimination which requires reversing. (Enoh, 1996:Page290).

Education (Reverse discrimination) is the key to individuals and group advantage, acting not only to promote the good life and respectability, but helping also to tilt income distribution in favour of those who possess it, and frees people from discrimination by others.

The above point to some extent is weak because no matter how one dress it, reverse discrimination is discrimination, and it is bad and should be stopped for the principle of fairness to apply to all the only consolation for this view is in the words of Aristotle in his principle of distributive justice, according to which injustice arises just as much from treating unequals, equally as it does from treating equals, unequally.

Is Equal Opportunity in Education Achievable in Nigeria?

This really is a difficult question that needs an answer. Philosophy of education doesn't normally provide definite answers that any one will agree, rather it speculates or prescribe solutions. This is what we intend to do now Marande (1964) disagreed that, There is more in the abstract known (beauty) than in the qualities (beautiful) attributed to the particular person, thing or condition. The ideal 'beauty' that is universal refers to qualities which surpasses all particular experiences". This analogy applies to the concept of equal and equality, meaning that in every society as a matter of fact, individuals may be equal in some respects and may also enjoy equal opportunity in some respects and they can never do so in all respects. And what may determine the degree of equality that can be enjoyed are the range of opportunities just as reducing them will close up the range. The reason why access to education in Nigeria has become such a big problem is that there are too many applicants competing for limited spaces. Akinpelu(1981) affirmed this situation:

...if there is no restriction or irrelevant discrimination in access to all educational provisions, if educational facilities are made available in all their varieties and in adequate qualities. If every pupil is provided for, and aided in such a way as to realize his learning potentials; if varieties of opportunities, performance and achievements are catered for in the educational provisions, if all significant handicaps; personal and environmental are removed so that each can attain his opportunities, performances and achievements that are then recognized in society, and rewarded not just fairly but humanly, then we would have achieved an acceptable and reasonable measure of equality of educational opportunity.

Conclusions

Within the context of this discourse, we can all see the intricacies of trying to quantify and qualify the term equal educational opportunity. We can only remind ourselves that the concept equality is never a finished one. It is not one that can ever be completed and as such, should best be viewed as a process, the attainment of which will require continuous processes of negotiations and adjustments. Because there is no country in the world where it has been attained completely, but this willingness and open mindedness displayed by all concerned especially those responsible for designing

and implementing educational policies and programmes. Clearly portray our determination in bringing about equal educational opportunity to all.

This paper will conclude with the saying of professor Jibril Aminu as cited in Enoh (1996)

. If we want to use Education, whether as an amorphous preoccupation, or as a well articulated policy for purposes of national development especially for evolving into a modern industrial state-there are rules governing the game...we can all sit down together and plan starting from scratch if necessary...All we need do, in fact, may be to take a series of bold decisions that will hurt some of us, but benefit the rest of us, including posterity.

Recommendations

Base on all that was discussed afore, we can profer some general recommendations that will help us in the educational enterprise make better educational statements as we discuss or teach educational ideas:

1. Government at the National, State and Local levels should recognize the importance of philosophy of education as a course and profession, and in-cooperate it's members into the bodies that draft final government policies on educational matters or programmes, because of their ability based on the training they received to sift through all statements/concepts that are sometimes used loosely in policies and programmes.
2. Institutions that produce qualified teachers should sit-up and not relent in bringing in more ideas and strategies on how to train better and efficient teachers. In other words we classroom teachers should always be in the position where we can thoroughly discuss and interpret educational issues, statements concept and ideals, such that both our students and the ministries of education will be able to easily grasp the meaning of things that are formulated and even those done.

References

- Akinpelu, J. A. (1981). *An introduction to philosophy of Education*. London: Macmillan publishers.
- Akinpelu, J. A. (1990). Equality of Educational opportunity Revised' *Nigerian Journal of Educational philosophy*. VI.15 .12.
- Aminu, J. (1986). *Quality and stress in Nigerian Education*. Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri and Northern Nigerian publishing company.
- Benn, S.I. & Peters, R. S. (1959). *Social principles and the democratic state*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Coleman, (1973). The concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity In J. Raynor & J. Harden(ed) (1970) *Equality and city schools. Readings in urban Education*, VI. 2. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ennis, R.H. (1978). Equality of Educational Opportunity In K.A. Strike & K. Egan (ed) (1975) *Ethics in Educational Policy*. London: R.K.P.
- Enoh, A. O. (1996). *Main currents in Nigerian Educational thought*. Jos Midland press Ltd.
- Obafemi, A. (1968). *The peoples' Republic*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Obafemi, A. (1981). *Path to Nigerian greatness*. Enugu: Forth Dimension publishers.
- Haralambos, M. (1983). *Sociology Themes and perspectives*, University Tutorial press Ltd. 842 Xeovil Read, slough, SL 14JQ. P. 175 -179.
- Hobhouse, L.T. (1922). *Elements of social justice*, London: Allen unwin.
- Loius, K. (1980). 'Discrimination and Reverse Discrimination' In J. Feinbery & H. Gross (ed) *Philosophy of law*. Belmont California: wadsworth publishing company.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One Dimensional. Man studies in the ideology of Advanced Industrial society*, New York.

Onwuka, U. (1996). *Curriculum development for Africa*: Ibadan Africana publishers Ltd.

Prise, K. (1973). "On Educational relevance and irrelevance", In J. F. Doyle (ed) (1975). *Educational judgments: Papers in the philosophy of Education*. London: Roughledge & Kegan Paul