

ISSUES IN UTILIZATION OF EQUALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: IMPLICATION FOR PEACE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BY

DR S .O. ADENLE

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

AKOKA, LAGOS

E-mail: drsadenle @yahoo.com

Phone number: 08037194508

Abstract

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided that Government shall direct citizens at all levels. This paper therefore identified sources of such equalization of educational opportunities for achieving the objectives of peace education in Nigeria. It further examines the constraints for achieving the equality of the educational opportunities. Equalization of educational opportunities for any individual citizen implies providing for that individual fair level of privileges vis-à-vis those providing for his fellow citizen in respect of the following four dimensions of educational opportunities:

1. A fair play of privileges with respect to accessibility to the favourable circumstances created.
2. A fair level of privileges with respect to provision of favourable educational circumstances.
3. A fair level of privileges with respect to actual utilization of the available accessible circumstances.
4. And a fair level privileges with respect to the resultant end product of the nature.

Some constraints to the achievement of the equality of educational objectives are: conflicting ideologies, philosophy of life, discipline, home-school relations.

The paper viewed inequality in this regard as the unfairness in the levels of privileges with respect to any of the above four dimensions which distract significantly from the equality of the given education opportunities with its consequences on the peace education in Nigeria.

Introduction

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria declares this country as a “state based on the principles of democracy and social justice”. It further declares the country’s

social order as being “founded” on “ ideals of freedom, equality and justice”, in furtherance of which the social order “every citizen shall have equal rights, obligations and opportunities before the law”. Accordingly, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provides, with respect to the nation’s educational objectives that: *Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.*

Philosophy of Nigeria Education

The five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the second National Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education are the building of:

1. a free and democratic society;
2. a just and egalitarian society;
3. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. a great and dynamic economy;
5. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), Nigeria’s philosophy of education is based on “equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system. This means that in order to attain a free, just and egalitarian society, Nigeria wishes to create equal educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels.

However, we should carefully distinguish between political statements or statement of intent and actual existing social situation. There are several constraints in the effort to transcend from the above theoretical ideal to the practical accomplishment of results. The interest of the paper is to consider the utilization of equality of the educational opportunities for the achievement of peace education in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary to understand that effort at equalization of educational opportunities does not and cannot occur in a vacuum. It occurs in a real society or social context. An understanding of the nature of a society will help us to appreciate the possible nature of the constraint of this purpose; it is useful analytically to conceive of the society as an entity, an organic whole, or a social system with mutually inter-related parts. Thus, the different sectors of the society like the political institutions, the cultural, economic and social institution would influence each other; action on one would have repercussions on others. One major implication of this is that where there is no congruence between the goals of component subsystems of the larger social system, there is likely to be more conflict than where there is life between their objectives. It follows, for example, that greater success would be achieved in implementing an educational programme if the various social, political, economic and cultural institutions involved in it cooperate rather than oppose each other. In the light of this analytical perspective, this paper shall examine some major constraints

in the implementation of the programme of equalization of educational opportunities in Nigeria.

Education

In the context of this paper, education will be viewed in its wildest sense as a lifelong, cradle to grave process of enculturation, a life-long process of developing the individual capabilities through acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values both for their own benefit and for the benefit of the society. From the point of view of the writers, for example the educator or the education agency, this very broad concept of education can be said to embrace learning resulting from both the formalized and systematic efforts to inculcate behaviour patterns from the educationally informal circumstance. In other words, education embraces both formal and informal education. Formalized and the systematic educational efforts will be taken to include both in school education efforts channeled to all levels of educational institutions from primary to tertiary, and systematic efforts channeled to out-of-school or adult education programmes; literacy programmes, agricultural extension programmes, public health programmes, science and technology programmes, and the like. In the light of the above definitions, our consideration of all government's education efforts will for the purposes of this paper be taken to refer to both its formalized and its systematic educational efforts in resolving conflicts, establishing peace and its efforts in other directions that influence individual citizen's education.

Educational Opportunities

Opportunity has been defined as “a favourable or advantageous combination of circumstances”. In that light, educational opportunity can be seen as a combination of educational circumstances whereby the individual is enabled to engage in a process of developing his/her capabilities through acquisition of skills, attitudes and values both for his/her own benefit and for the benefit of his society.

Equalization of Educational Opportunities

It will be recalled that the educational objective contained in the constitution, as cited earlier in this paper, aims at “equal and adequate” educational opportunities at all levels. Adequacy implies ability to satisfy a given requirement. A quantity of food for example can be regarded as adequate if it satisfies the consumer's food requirement at the given time. Otherwise, it is inadequate. In the same way, educational opportunities can be said to be adequate if they satisfy the educational requirements of the consumers entitled to such opportunities. While it is not only legitimate but highly desirable for the country to

strive towards adequacy in its provision of educational opportunities for its citizens, it is doubtful if a developing country like Nigeria will ever have enough resources to achieve that adequacy level.

Equality and Education

Equality, on the other hand, has been defined as a condition of having equal privileges with others. Even if the available privileges are inadequate, the individual can be seen to get equality of treatment if he/she employs a fair level of those privileges in relation to other individuals concerned. Equality in this respect has thus to do with fairness in the distribution of the privileges.

Therefore while a government can easily be pardoned for inability to achieve a level of adequacy in its provision of given privileges for all its citizens, where such inability results from unavoidable scarcity of resources, it cannot easily be pardoned for inability to achieve a level of equality in its distribution of available privileges, where equality is a function of fairness in such distribution.

A government can therefore be seen to be equalizing educational opportunities for all citizens' favourable combinations of educational circumstances at a fair level in relation to the provision for the other citizens of the country. Whether that level is in the meantime adequate or inadequate is not the issue, as long as that government is genuinely striving towards the level of adequacy in its provision of those circumstances.

Quota System and Equalization of Educational Opportunities

Another dimension to the principle of equality of educational opportunities is the clear absence of uniform or equal facilities throughout Nigeria. In some parts of the country, only 30% of those qualified, able and willing to have secondary education have the opportunity to do so. Adenle (2005), for instance, declared that in 1999 school year, Lagos State had space for only 250,000 out of 300,000 applicants for entry into secondary school; in same year, Oyo State had space for 127,000 out of 190,000; Anambra State for 130,000 out of 260,000. In some other places, the facilities are available but the candidates do not exist. Another way of looking at the problem is that while in Kano State, less than 5% of primary school age children are in school; in Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ogun, Imo, Anambra, Edo, Ebonyi States, over 85% of such children are in school.

The Four Dimensions of Equality of Educational Opportunity

Earlier in this paper, an educational opportunity has been defined. In the same manner, Adenle (2007) intoned that a favourable combination of educational circumstances whereby the individual is enabled to engage in a process of developing his capabilities

through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values both for his own benefits and for the benefits of the society is an equality educational opportunity.

A vivid study of this definition reveals four dimensions corresponding more or less to the concept underlined in the definition. The first one concerns a favourable combination of educational circumstances has to be created; the second combination is that it has, to be made possible for the individual to avail himself/herself of the favourable circumstances created; thirdly, the individual has to actually engage in the process of utilizing those favourable circumstances, and fourthly, the process has to yield desired benefits to the individual and his/her society.

Equalization of such an opportunity for individual citizens implies, therefore, providing for the individual citizen a fair level privilege, vis-à-vis those provided for other fellow citizens in respect of each of the above four dimensions of the given educational opportunity, namely:

- a) a fair level of privileges with respect to provision of favourable educational circumstances;
- b) a fair level of privileges with respect to accessibility of the favourable circumstances created;
- c) a fair level of privileges with respect to actual utilizations of the available and accessible circumstances; and
- d) a fair level of privileges with respect to the resultant and product of the entire process.

The point to emphasise in this regard is the inequality, in the sense of unfairness, in levels of privileges with respect to any one of the above four dimensions distract significantly from the equality of the given educational opportunity.

Fairness in levels of privileges made available to the individual, vis-à-vis those made available to fellow- citizens with respect to the four dimensions of educational opportunities implies that in the allocation of such privileges, the individuals' needs and capabilities are taken into consideration that often involves unequal but proportionate allocations.

The Individual as the Focus

It will be noticed in the foregoing discussion that the individual citizen has all along remained the focus of the consideration of equality of educational opportunities. Therefore, in considering equalization of educational opportunities in Nigeria, the questions must need focus on the level of privileges available to the individual Nigerian

citizen wherever he/she may live in Nigeria, vis-à-vis the level of privileges available to other Nigerian citizens, wherever else they may live in Nigeria.

Ezeji (2004) rightly pointed out that because the individual Nigerian citizen very often gets his/her shares of the country's benefits and burdens as a member of a political sub-unit currently designated as "state", such individual is often made the focus of considerations of equality of educational opportunities. In this circumstance, consideration of the individual's level of privileges available to his fellow citizen in another state of the federation is often overlooked.

Distribution of Educational Facilities and Resources

The first dimension of educational opportunities concerns the creation, i.e the provision, of favourable education circumstances in the form of educational facilities and resources. With respect to formal education for example, such facilities and resources comprise the following:

- a. Physical facilities provided in the school, buildings, equipment, library, recreational and other facilities, transportation and the like;
- b. Curricular and extra-curricular programmes;
- c. Staffing (with emphasis on number and quality);
- d. Student-body characteristics (including socio-economy and ethnic mix).

Ezeji (2005) opined that it hardly needs saying that any claim to equalizing educational opportunities for a country's citizens will be meaningless if the available educational facilities and resources are not so distributed with regard to number and quality, as to offer to each individual citizen for whom they should be intended. He suggested that, as far as possible, a fair level of privileges in relation to this fellow citizen anywhere in the country is needed. This consideration should guide the setting, staffing and distribution of training equipment to educational institutions by government.

Accessibility of the Available Facilities and Resources

The second dimension concerns accessibility of the facilities and resources. The accessibility must be such that ensures equality of levels of privileges enjoyed by individual citizens of the country wherever they live. This consideration should guide selection, administration and financing policies which must be such that do not give individual citizens unfair advantages over other citizens wherever they may live. In this regard, the undertaken contained in the country's National Policy on Education (2004) to the effect that educational and training facilities will be multiplied and made more diversified and flexible should be vigorously pursued.

Utilization of the Facilities and Resources

The third dimension of equalization of the educational opportunities concerns the individual citizen's utilization of the educational facilities and resources available and accessible. The degree of equality of the educational opportunities enjoyed by the citizens of the country is, of course, significantly affected by the extent to which they actually utilized the facilities and resources available and accessible. No government can justifiably afford to close its eyes to non-utilization or under-utilization of its educational facilities and resources by the citizens for whom they are intended. It is the consideration for accessibility of the available facilities and resources that lead countries that can economically afford to make education, in terms of school attendance, compulsory at given levels. Others employ various information media and administration strategies both to enhance utilization of their educational facilities and resources and to reduce school drop-out rates to the lowest possible minimum. The administrative strategies employed include: scholarships, bursaries, awards, remedial and distance learning programmes. In all the measures above, the guiding principle must be fairness in the allotment of the levels of privileges to individual citizens in relation to their fellow citizens.

Equalization and Peace Education

Peace education may be defined as the process of developing the skills, aptitude, attitude and behaviour and the process of acquiring the knowledge, the values and characteristics of living in harmony, non-violence with oneself with others and with the natural environment. Peace education has been described by Harris and John Synott (2006) as a series of teaching encounters that draw from people, their desire for peace, non-violent alternatives for managing conflicts, and skills for critical analysis of structural arrangement that produce and legitimate justice and inequality. Peace education can be seen on the basis of encouraging a commitment to peace and a settled disposition and enhancing the confidence of the individual as an individual agent of peace.

Student should be informed on the value of peaceful and just social structures and working to uphold or develop such social structures. They should be encouraged to love the world and imagine a peaceful future by caring for other students as enshrined in the democratic education of which the principle of equalization of education is an offshoot. Equalization of education opportunities rests on the philosophy of or the theory of peace education. James (2008) has suggested that the rationale for peace education might be located in virtue, ethics, consequential ethics, conservative political ethics, aesthetic and the ethic of care.

Equalization of educational opportunity could be traced to the spectrum of focal themes of peace education which include: international and national understanding, environmental responsibility, non-violent conflict resolution techniques, democracy,

tolerance of diversity, peaceful coexistence, and gender equality among others. Three variations are germane in peace education, they are: conflict resolution training, democracy education, and human rights education.

Some constraints to equalization of educational opportunities in Nigeria

The first constraint to the equalization of educational opportunities in Nigeria is that of 'conflicting ideologies', capitalism versus socialism. One fundamental constraint in the achievement of the goal of providing equality of educational opportunities (not to mention egalitarianism) is that the Nigerian society is fundamentally and manifestly of capitalist society which promotes the free enterprise ideal. Equalization opportunities (including educational opportunities) for all citizens are socialist philosophy tenable in society seeking to implement socialistic or communistic goals. Can capitalist Nigeria implement socialist goals of equality? Capitalism is rooted in and flourishes by inequality, so it is inconsistent with its philosophy to advocate the provision of equality whether in educational opportunities or in anything else. It may be argued that such a policy could be attempted in a mixed economy but even then, the problem here is the contradiction between the goals of the political sub-systems. The problem would have been resolved, or at least minimized, if there existed greater harmony between the capitalist and socialist.

The second constraint is the existence of "a class society". For our purpose, Adekunle (2007) regarded 'class' as a layer made up of people who considered themselves equals by the virtue of similarities in their family background, level of education, occupation, attitude toward social issues or overall philosophy of life. We can conveniently assume for the purpose of analysis that there are two major classes in Nigeria society, namely: the rich elite class and the poor class. Let us regard the rich elite class as the highly educated (i.e. with post secondary education) while the poor classes, the illiterate or semi-illiterate. The third major obstacle in the equalization of educational opportunities is the discrepancy in the provision of infrastructural facilities. The rural-urban differences in our society are very striking. As one leaves Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Enugu, Port-Harcourt, Onitsha, Aba, Kaduna, Abuja, or the university campus to the village, the re-entry shock is enormous. One would be faced with the stark reality of shoddy if not shady schools with unqualified staffs, and hopelessly inadequate facilities, poor roads, inadequate water supply, poor lightening, non-availability of good shops and library, lack of recreational facilities, etc. Above all, lack of money is often wrongly blamed for these. The basic problem is the political ideology and therefore planning strategies in a capitalist society. Without orientation of ideology, a more deliberate disposal of industries, commercial centre, amenities, recreational facilities, more formal and, above all, non-formal learning opportunities will continue to be a mirage which will continue to elude the politicians and policy makers. If there are no attractive conditions for agriculture, industries, schools,

commercial institutions, recreation etc. the rural to urban migration would continue. There would be tendency for balanced development to be difficult and equalization of the educational opportunities would be impossible because educational institutions or agencies cannot be provided in isolation from these other amenities. Educational opportunities do not exist in vacuum. We need supporting agencies or institutions to help in their provision. We need professionally qualified teachers to make such opportunities really meaningful. Shortage of teaching staff in our society is a major obstacle to overcome if we are going to have greater opportunities for education. The fourth constraint is an attitudinal one. Even assuming that the provision of educational institutions (which is difficult anyway) has been made, we have got to understand that availability (mere existence) of these institutions does not guarantee their accessibility to all citizens. How many people freely use their local community schools, technical schools, university library for their individual or group learning or research activities in the evening? How many people freely use them to achieve their learning activities during the holidays? Even when these institutions or learning centres have been made freely accessible to all (which is far from being the case) there is no guarantee that there will be equal utilization of the educational opportunities offered because of the differential internalized norms and values indicated earlier. True differential orientations resulting from socialization in a class society would certainly lead to unequal utilization of facilities, the degree being determined by one's perception of the value of the educational content or merit of what is being offered.

Peace Education as a Democratic Education

Peace education programmes centred on Democracy focus on the political processes associated with the conflict resolution and postulates that; with increase in democratic participation; the likelihood of society resolving conflict through violence and war decreases. At the same time, a Democratic society needs commitment of citizens who accept inevitability of conflict as well as the necessity of tolerance.

The programme of equalization of educational opportunities attempts to foster a conflict positive orientation in the community by training students to view conflict as a platform for creativity and growth.

Approaches of the democratic type of education are rested in the training of the participants in the skills of critical thinking, debates and coalition building, and promote the values of freedom of speech, individuality, tolerance of diversity, compromise and conventions objection. The aim is to produce responsible citizens who will hold the government accountable to the standards of peace, primarily through adversarial processes. Activities are structured to have students assume the role of citizen that choose, make decisions, take positions, argue positions and respect the opinions of others.

The concept of equality of educational opportunity emanated from the ideals of political democracy and democratic education which is a major ingredient of peace education. Democracy is the government of the people for the people and by the people. It is essentially egalitarian democratic education in which everyone is looked upon as equally entitled to the kind of education in which equal opportunity is afforded to all. The implication here is that democratic education parented universal education. With political democracy, it can be argued that the fortunes of democratic society depend upon free and equal opportunity for all the children of the people to develop themselves to the fullest capacity. Equality of educational opportunity therefore implies that all the children of all the people have free and equal opportunity to develop themselves to their fullest capacity. Equal access to education implies that equal educational opportunities can only be obtained if:

- i. We have a complete state system of schools.
- ii. If education is free and universal.

All these issues have a long term implication for entrenchment of peace education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Important factor for the achievement of equality of educational opportunities is the necessity for country to have total control education. Not all the states of the federation have actively introduced the universal and compulsory educational system. Universal free and compulsory education is an essential pre requisite if equalization of educational opportunities are to be achieved.

It is important to note that equalization of educational opportunities is an acceptable ideal under political democracy of peace education. It is also a cardinal principle of democratic education which is one of the variations of peace education, it is hereby suggested that the four major conditions earlier discussed in this paper must be met for the attainment of equalization of educational opportunities, namely: free, universal and compulsory education, as well as national control of education. Nigeria has so far attained a system of universal education, but her system of education is yet to be free and compulsory nationwide, and the states of the federation are yet to fully organize and sponsor national system of education that will stamp out the illiteracy in the south and the almangeries in the northern part.

There are other socio-religious, socio-political and socio-economic factors that militate against the attainment of equality of educational opportunities in the country. Perhaps, the problems are enormous and the prospects far outweigh within the foreseeable future.

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