Educational Opportunities and Dimensions in Rich and Poor Nations: Rethinking Global Access and the Inequity Question

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This paper presents some important facts about educational opportunities and students’ access worldwide. Specific facts and scenarios are exhibited and provided to compare education opportunities in rich and poor areas in developed and developing countries. Particularly, this paper surveys and compares forces on educational happening in Nigeria and United States. It argues that despite the much acclaimed democratization of access to education, glaring inequalities can be identified in the way educators and how our students are treated. In regards to quantities and quality of educational resources, education is not equally accessed by all students in our today’s world. This paper, therefore, recommends that human beings should be given equal access and opportunities to education at all levels; and should be treated with respect and dignity in spite of color, religion, or race wherever they find themselves. This becomes an imperative if mankind is to achieve success in the task of propelling students and Educators to greater achievements. As well, this paper recommends that cultural, institutional, and political powers should be deployed to bring about a more equitable world order.

Keywords: education opportunities, global access, academic performance, education equity, social inequality

Introduction

Educational systems and opportunities are in reality a basic core of culture and strong instruments of diplomacy and racial dignity. One simple fact is that education is a major instrument for the cultivation of cultural values, ideals, norms, and privileges. It is also a powerful tool of social acculturation and racial identity.

As a model of social stratification, culture and education are interwoven in the area of class and social status. University or tertiary education has become a major factor in redefining statuses and privileges in modern societies. Unfortunately, Global Access to educational opportunities is not structured in such a way that it is devoid of unfair treatment; thus the inequality question arises.

Culture provides criteria of evaluation what is deemed ugly or beautiful, moral or immoral, attractive or repulsive can be cognized through the binoculars of culture and tradition. This paper attempts to appraise factors such as student enrollments and assessment, teaching equipment, opportunities and pedagogical skills deployed towards ensuring students’ performance among rich and poor nations in the global community as well as within rich and poor segments in the same country.

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This paper surveys forces on educational happening in Nigeria and United States. It argues that despite the much acclaimed democratization of access to education, glaring inequalities in the way educators and student are treated, abounds everywhere. The paper therefore recommends that human beings should be treated with respect and dignity in spite of wherever they find themselves. This is because honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and fairness are values that binds us together as human beings. In the task to propel students and educators to greater achievements cultural, institutional, and political powers should be deployed to bring about a more equitable world order.

The paper concludes that one of the greatest challenges of the (21st) century is the cultural harmonization of human sensibilities. That is to say human beings, despite differences in terms of color, religion class, or status, can share and have something in common namely our common humanity.

**Education Opportunities in the United States**

In a document prepared by the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association, it is stated that

> The central propose of America education is the development of the ability to think. This is the central purpose to which the school must be oriented if it is to accomplish either its traditional task or those newly accentuated by recent changes in the world... In this context therefore the development of every student’s rational power must be recognized as centrally important.

It can be argued from the forgoing that the need to make the individual learner a better person for overall development of the larger society lies at the core of the American philosophy of education. However, the principle of equality and freedom must be respected by institutions and nations before the individual can become a better person for the larger society. The overall advantage to the global would be the harmonization of the dignity of the human race and a stable world order. During the formative years, events in the United States show that blacks are rated second class citizen and were denied access to certain public Schools and to certain positions. Racism and segregation also abound in the various schools colleges and university across the United States during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. This alone scared the African-American community for many years and is still the case in many cities and states. Minority students have less access to experienced teachers. Most minority students and English language learners are stuck in schools with the most new teachers. Seven percent of black students attend schools where as many as 20 percent of teachers fail to meet license and certification requirements. The US department of Education expansive survey on American public schools revealed troubling racial disparity on education. This critical report shows that racial disparities in school discipline policies are not only well-documented among older students, but actually begin during preschool.

No doubt such discrimination will negatively impact minority students’ academic performance which will affect their self-efficacy and motivation to learn. Moreover, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) from the 2011-12 school year revealed particular concern around discipline for our nation’s young men and boys of color, who are disproportionately affected by suspensions and zero-tolerance policies in schools. Suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to be suspended again. They are also more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and some of them become involved in the juvenile justice system.
Yet, who to blame for education inequality in America? We might argue that all related to the government funding. Why some states, cities, and school district have more funds available to them than others? Well, that’s, to great extent a very controversial. If we investigated how government’s funds allocated, then that’s half of the answer. The latest available data indicated that there is a huge disparity in funding gap across the nation and within states. The highest poverty districts receive about $1,200 less per student than the lowest poverty districts where majority of the minority population live. The differences are even larger—roughly $2,000 per student—among districts serving the most and the fewest students of color (Ushomrisky & Williams, 2015). Additionally, in terms of teacher’s qualification and pay; we find one in four school districts pay teachers in less-diverse high schools $5,000 more than teachers in schools with higher black and Latino student enrollment (Office of Civil Rights (OCR), 2014). Not to mention the racial tension between teachers and students in many classrooms at all levels across the United States.

How this is happening even though the new research shows the shortcomings of decades of legal and political moves to ensure equal rights to education. Also the Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling banned school segregation and affirmed the right to quality education for all children. The 1964 Civil Rights Act guaranteed equal access to education.

Education Opportunities in Nigeria

One of the major causes of poverty and underdevelopment in poorer countries is income inequality. In Nigeria the case is even more severe, the rich is getting richer paying, the poor peanuts to work for them, and the middle class is somewhat in between nonexistent and struggling to keep up while the poor is progressively deteriorating.

Dimensions aimed at minimizing inequalities should be cardinal to any development strategy for Nigeria. Sadly, however, the political connotations involved in this process is not in favor with most international communities and development agencies’ recommendation for poorer countries and this is understandable; international communities are not superior to the law of any country regardless of their good intentions. It is almost as though such recommendations shy away from conventional models that have worked for the western countries, which has also started to work for parts of Latin America.

Usually, recommendations offered and adopted by poorer countries including Nigeria are dictated from “outside”, that is, they are not modeled to address the problem of poverty and inequality in educational and economic terms. Rather, the overriding consideration is to be in tune with the blueprints authorized by the Washington consensus. Such recommendations fail to target inequality specifically in the area of educational opportunities and income earnings. There are a lot of factors responsible for widening the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria.

In a country such as Nigeria with a long history of corruption, poverty, and inequality, how can the state expect citizens to sacrifice themselves for a state that cares nothing about them? Most of the economic blueprints practiced in Nigeria such as the structural adjustment policy can work better in a more stable society and Nigeria is clearly not ready for this form of framework. Despite the IMF and World Banks suggestions that this will reduce poverty, it has been heavily criticized. Following the Washington Consensus and neo-liberalism approach, SAP is often recommended to poorer countries for selfish reasons; ensuring debt repayment. As a result, SAP
often propels poorer countries to spend less on education, healthcare, and overall development, while debt relief and economic growth at all cost gains priority.

Without a doubt, the poor need good health and food, to enable them participate in quality education and appropriate skills; which will in turn grant them the opportunity to participate in economic activities. However, debates about poverty reduction methodologies are often too pessimistic neglecting reality and fail to acknowledge the role of enabling the poor to fend for themselves by providing basic human needs. It has become broadly accepted that economic growth will not by itself induce development (Osmani, 2006) and that providing basic needs and amenities is vital to reducing inequality and poverty on the long run (Chambers, 1995). The advantage of the basic need approach hinges on the notion that investing in the basic needs of poor people will yield economic dividends overtime and has an equalizing effect which could over time lead to sustainable development. Yet nothing in our policies today is geared towards ensuring attainment of the basic needs for all. Instead, the government every now and then finds itself trying to frustrate the poor who are only trying to fend for themselves.

To improve access to quality education in Nigeria, we cannot avoid putting in place the requisite socioeconomic infrastructural facilities. In a slight divergence; Dubai and Lagos are commercial nerve centres in the United Arab Emirates and Nigeria respectively. Recently, while attending conference in Dubai, March 2015, I noticed the urge gap between infrastructural development levels in the two countries. Whereas it is fun to move from one location to another in Dubai, it is generally very frustrating to move about from one location to the other in a city like Lagos, Nigeria especially during peak hours. Moreover, Dubai has put in place policy measures that guarantee accesses to quality education for are nationals through deliberate government initiative. Nigeria has Lagos and Abuja has its major commercial and capital cities, but there is no comparison between Dubai and Abu-Dhabi. Infrastructural development is paramount in any development anywhere in the world. There is an urgent need in Nigeria to cut down excesses in running of government business, cut down wastes arising from individuals diverting government funds to private pockets. The fund accruable from these policy initiatives could then be ploughed back to provide quality education in Nigeria.

The key to development is education, this is an incontestable fact. “Education is the key to development,” said Tabitha. “It is important because when you are staying at home, you are not aware of anything. But good education will lead to a good future and help the nation’s development”.

Conclusion

Consideration should be given to the problem of educational inequality among races and nations of the world as a first step, there should be deliberate policy of free and compulsory primary education for all children in the world. Moreover, this policy should also be extended to children up to the age of fifteen to take care of their secondary educational needs. University education or Tertiary education should be free or partially free by augmenting government subsidies with a revolving student loan system repayable after graduation. Existing sixth form centres could become the nuclei of two year junior colleges providing intermediate terminal (professional, commercial, technical, and academic education for post-secondary student for intermediate man power development needs.
Color should not be associated with the mark of superiority or inferiority. Researches show that the dominant group of every society usually provides a justification that would make the subordinate group aspect its rule as legitimate. For instance, in colonial Africa, the imperial masters justify alien domination by emphasizing the benefit Africa would derive from contact with the superior culture of Western Europe. Consequently, the superiority of the civilization of Western Europe was central to all the colonial policies such as indirect rule, the policy of assimilation and the policy of paternalism. Again the apartheid policy of the Boers of Southern Africa was grounded in the Calvinist doctrine that recognizes racial inequality. In modern times, the situation in United States, France, Britain, and Germany is not too different. Religion to some extent has provided the enabling ideology for wide domination when the slaves were told that they must serve their masters loyally if they want to enter the kingdom of heaven. Interestingly enough, many of the Bishops at that time were slave owners. Our recommendation, therefore, will be the adoption of an affirmative action to ensure a fair educational and employment policy. Within this affirmative action ethnic minorities in the United State and Nigeria should not be denied access to a fair employment quota. On the social plane, equality should be given to all ethnic minorities to realize their true human identity.

Education will always be the key to prepare children and adults to be real leaders and followers in the task of nation building. And fairness distribution of educational opportunities is what strengthens the foundation of great nations and homogeneous world. Education must be geared towards global equality economic progress, national reconstruction, national unity and global integration.

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