EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

This study reviewed Education and Social Justice as realized by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a vehicle through which quick economic transformation could be achieved as reported in the second National Development Plan. It is a wisest investment any nation can make because the progress and prosperity of any nation significantly lies on the quality of its school Curriculum. The principles of Social justice have been discussed. The policy on education says "not only is education the greatest force that could be used to bring about redress, it is also a greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its political, economic, sociological and human resources. This paper is intended to examine social justice in education as a frame work of seeing and acting aimed at resisting unfairness, and inequality while enhancing freedom and possibility for all. It pays primary attention to people policies, practices, Curricula and institutions may be used to liberate rather than oppress those least served by our decision making.

Key words: Education, Justice, Social Justice

Introduction

Generally, education is any process by which an individual gain knowledge or insight, or develops attitudes and skills. Macleans, (2004) observed that the process of education is that of cultural transmission through which the individual is assisted to develop his potentials to the maximum level when necessary. This is in accordance with the right reason to achieve perfection and self-fulfillment. Thus, education is a process of cultural transmission from generation to generation. By implication therefore, education is doing the function of human socialization by which the human person is made human through interaction with the environment. This enables him acquire values, traditions, norms and customs.

In his analysis of education as a tool for human resource development, Yesufu, (2000) said that it is the process by which knowledge and life experience, including the values (moral, cultural, economic etc) associated with them, are transmitted to or inculcated in individuals or groups, as well as the manner by which they may be harnessed and manage to achieve, promote, and advance societal objectives as perceived, determined, and or accepted from time to time. Here, education is seen as having the function of meeting the economic development needs and social welfare needs of the society. Through it, societal values are to be accomplished through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Such societal values are determined through National goals, which in the case of Nigeria are stated in the second national development plan (1974 - 1979) and adopted in the National Policy on Education (2004) with the aim of:

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

In line of the above objectives therefore, education should be given to all citizens at all levels free of charge. On the basis on this consideration therefore, education is regarded as a 'good thing" which

everybody need and should be given without consideration of any morally irrelevant variables of say gender, socio economic status, ethnicity, cultural affinity, religious or disability.

Social Justice

Social justice is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and social privileges. In western as well as in older Asian cultures, the concept of social justice has often referred to the process of ensuring that individuals fulfils their societal roles and receive what was their due from society. In the current global grassroots movements for social justice, the emphasis has been on the breaking of barriers for social mobility, the creation of safety and economic justice.

Social justice on the view of Macleans, (2004) assigns rights and duties in the institutions of the society, which enables people to receive the basic benefits and burdens of cooperation. The relevant institutions often include taxation, social insurance, public health, public school, public services, labor law and regulation of markets, to ensure fair distribution of wealth, and equal opportunity. However, it is important to note that it can be challenging to give an exact definition to social justice, the general idea is that institutions in society should allow equal opportunities to all people without engaging in discrimination.

Think of all the privileges and opportunities available to you on a daily basis. You get to attend school and receive an education. This then gives you skills you can use to get a job, where you then make money that you want to spend on buying a house. Don't these sounds like rights that everyone should have? When someone does not have the same access to these rights and privileges due to discrimination, this is a threat to social justice and is commonly called a social injustice. Social injustice occurs when a person, people, or group of people are treated unfairly, discriminated against, strictly based upon certain characteristics of the person or group of people. These characteristics include race, age, gender, religion and sexuality (Macleans, 2004).

Principles of Social Justice

Social justice principles refers to values that favours measures that aim at decreasing or eliminating inequality, promoting inclusiveness of diversity, and establishing environments that are supportive of all people. The social justice principles according to Zajda, (2006) include: equity, diversity and supportive environments.

Equity

Equity means that resources are allocated in accordance with the needs of individuals and populations with the desired goal of equality of outcome.

Diversity

Diversity refers to the difference that exists between individuals and people groups.

Supportive Environments

These are environments where "people like" work and play that protect people from threats to health and that increase their ability to make health promoting choices. The government looks to create supportive environments for all people, but also looks at the environments of particular people groups to determine if these might be reasons for poorer health outcomes. Rural and remote people are an example of people whose environment is not as supportive as other environments.

The social justice principles seek to recognize and address both the health outcomes, such as incidence and prevalence of disease, and death rates, and the factors that influence health, such as socio economic status, environment and cultural factors.

Education and social Justice

Social justice is concerned with the ways in which benefits and burdens are distributed among the

members of a society. This includes the fairness in which a society provides, protects and recognizes the means and qualities individuals require to both determine a conception of, and live a good life.

There are many methods that scholars use to evaluate the extent to which a society is just most of which seek to assess the quality of wellbeing of individuals in that society. For example, indicators used include: observance of/adherence to declarations of human rights, Gross National Happiness (GNH), S0cial progress index, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Better Life Index, Human Development Index and so on. Most of these involve measuring levels of one or more of the following indicators in relation to either, or both, the national average or the individual person: material wealth, income, employment, health, safety and security, education, equality and opportunities to exercise valued human capabilities (Zajda, 2006).

Role of Education in achieving Social Justice
Social justice education is concerned with the achieving equitable and quality education for all students. As prominent social justice education theorist, Bell (2007) puts it:
Social justice education is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justices include a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self determining (able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others).

Social justice would involve achieving the two aspects of anti-racism education, the curricular justice goal, which aims to deliver curricular justice to indigenous students and the wider responsibility goal, which aims to redress social disadvantage including, importantly, reducing racism (vigilante, 2007).

Important of Social Justice
Social justice is important for the welfare of society as a whole. Having social justice and responsibility leads to satisfaction and pleasure of life, as well as the respect and loyalty to the leaders. People who are treated unjustly eventually rebel and make the abuser pay dearly. This is also known as revolution, assassination etc. There is always a price to pay for social injustice and usually the longer it takes, the more this feeling endures, the worse and more desperate it gets. Eventually it descends into hatred against the ones who are perceived as having created the injustice, once you get down that path there is no turning back. Hatred doesn't know fear, compassion, good measure or any other temperance. Its only purpose is to destroy its objective even by the destruction of its enforcer.

As a leader its deal to be feared and respected but never hated, because someone who hates will destroy the prince even if it means his or her own death. This is because when you have someone willing to give their life to hurt you, they will accomplish it.

There are many examples of social injustice reaching very brutal, bloody and often terminal outcome for the one facilitating the injustice. French revolution of 1789, the October revolution of 1917, Revolution of Mao in China as well as hundreds more in history. Many of which resulted in the extermination of the leadership and their entire bloodline even as the mob faced firing lines with their bare chests. So social justice is important for the stability of a prosperous society (Zajda, 2006).

Problems of Social Justice in Education
Like in most other countries, the question of social justice in Nigeria is faced with a number of problems which make it impracticable. These problems include existence of socio-economic inequalities, our method of selection in colleges, the existence of special schools, urban-rural school inequalities in certain essential respects, demand for school fees, method of decentralization that makes responsibility for education a state rather than national affair and lastly certain deliberate government policies.

Socio-economic Inequalities

These are common phenomenon in every society. These inequalities in income and status among individuals in a given society make the whole idea of equalizing opportunity almost impracticable. This is because socio- economic differences do not only determine an individual's level of mental development but also determine access to any level of education in Nigeria.

For example, the tendency for wealthy parents to send their children to oversee universities is a very familiar one. When this happens, the child of such a higher class family' has inevitably had a favour in his educational advancement. To the lower class family child on the other hand who has the same level of innate intelligence like the oversea sponsored child, the inability of his parents to provide an alternative route places a limit to his level of educational attainment. The two individuals will in the end find themselves on different rungs of educational ladder. To them, there is no equality of educational opportunity.

The Existence of Special Schools

One of the obstacles to the realization of justice in education is the existence of special schools in the country. The special schools have various forms but have one common characteristic which is the very high demand for school fees. When fees become too high only those who can afford to maintain their children there do so. Also, since those schools have the most qualified staff, the level of teaching obtainable in such schools is usually superior to what obtains in our public schools. These superior staff further works to brighten their chances of success in public examinations for which children from public schools are also required to sit. This in turn resulted to permanent impediment to social justice in education.

Urban - Rural School Inequalities

Urban-rural variations in Nigeria do not only reflect individual social and economic inequalities but also in the distribution of certain essential facilities by the government. By and large, it is the urban areas that get the largest number of schools and colleges, and even when the rural areas also have the same number of schools, differences in quality often arise to the disadvantage of the rural areas. Clearly, these differences between urban and rural areas mean that an urban child is more likely to have a good school near his home and particularly at the primary level where it has been found that distance of school from home affects attendance, the rural child who may have to travel long distances for a school may have to absent himself from school more. This without doubt affects his level of academic performance and progression (Zajda, 2006).

Conclusion

Social justice is important because it promotes and works towards a society that celebrates diversity and equality. Having more equality and diversity in a society is good for society because it promotes opportunity, growth and social wellbeing. Social justice in education is concern with achieving equitable and quality education for all students. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Education is social justice because it is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education. It is a daily fight for social justice.

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