

EDUCATION FOR ALL: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

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Education for all in the Era of Globalisation: Right or Privilege?

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Abstract

In every human society, the importance of education cannot be quantified. When an individual is given education, such a person will most likely be useful to himself or herself and generally to the people around him or her. Thus, education for all is crucial for the development of every citizen of the nation. The essence of education for all is to allow everyone to have access to basic quality education which promotes the ability to read, write, and calculate, as well as development of essential life skills. This paper, therefore, reveals that education for all is not essentially for only some; it is the right of every Nigerian child. Consequently, it is recommended that education for all should be re-enforced and well implemented in order to reduce the rate of illiteracy among Nigerians. Other recommendations made in this paper include: need to re-emphasise and enforce education for all in all States in Africa and in particular Nigeria; need to improve access to education at all levels of education; and that both Federal and State Governments should increase budgetary allocation to education.

Keywords: *Education for all, Access, Right, Privilege, Globalisation.*

Introduction

In every given society, education plays a prominent role and is an inevitable instrument for the development of such society. Education makes human beings significantly different from lower beings (animals). Durkheim reflects on the concept of education and posits that education is essentially social in character. Further analysis of this thought reveals that, there are various types of education. There are differences in social/cultural needs, and no educational system is static but dynamic (Brookover and Gottlieb, 1964). To this end, the concept of education ~~has been classified~~ into three vis-à-vis, indigenous, non-formal and western education. The three types of education are essentially important for every individual irrespective of the ethnic group or tribe, in order to function well and be a useful member of the community or society (Fafunwa, 1982; Akinbote, Oduolowu and Lawal, 2001). Education is a vital organ in the society. Once an individual is deprived of education, such a person would not be able to contribute meaningfully to his/her society.

The Concept Education

The term 'education' has many definitions and descriptions. Cookey (1969) cited in Ukeje (1984) explained the term education in the following words:

Education is not an easy subject to define. Education in its everyday sense could mean formal training that is given in schools and institutions, that is, the acquisition of the ability to read, write and calculate. It could also mean the specialized training that is given on the job. In a wider sense, education could mean the training of the entire person to enable him not only to be able to read, write and calculate or to be proficient in a given job, but also to enable him to fit himself for living in a society. So, education could be treated as a very narrow subject relating to school and formal education or as a training covering the whole of life (p. 13).

The definition above clearly explains what education means and conspicuously narrates different categories of education in a given society. Therefore access to education is important to every Nigerian child.

Education for all (EFA)

The concept of education for all as used in this paper refers to the formal education that is offered in school setting. The concept Education for All (EFA) had been accepted and embarked on globally. The World Conference on Education for All was held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. It is important to note that the Jomtien declaration of Education for All comprises dignitaries and representatives of government, stakeholders, policy makers, International agencies, professional associations, and non-governmental organisations in the field of education including some 155 governments including Nigeria who signed a World Declaration for action so as to ensure quality basic education for children, youths, as well as adults (Torres, 2000). The essence of education for all was towards the development of human resources in all fields of endeavour. Although, it is noted that the Jomtien declaration of Education for All was not the first attempt; rather, various conferences had been put in place such as in Karachi and Addis Ababa in the early 1960s. Previous conferences such as those held in Bombay in 1952, Cairo in 1954 and Lima in 1956 revealed that such declaration of Education for All should be upheld. In view of all these conferences held, in 1990, statistics revealed that "over 100 million children are out-of-school and over 900 million are adult illiterates in the world" (Torres, 2000). The situation has not changed as it was reported in 2013 (NTA Channel 10) that there are 10.5 millions out of school children in Nigeria out of the 31 million out of school children in sub-Sahara Africa. It is noteworthy, however, that the Education for All programmes help to revitalise education reform movements in different countries.

It should be noted that school as one of the social institutions plays significant role in socialisation. Quality basic education of children, youths and adults call for widening access to education and fostering human right. In line with the concept of education for all, Arnot (2006) repositions education thus:

Education was represented as addressing and redressing social inequalities in the unfair distribution of life chances by the equalization of educational opportunity. Central to this project was the view that the education and culture it produced and transmitted were understood to be independent and autonomous features of society (p. 21).

The argument of Arnot (2006) reminds one that access or education for all is important and every member of the society should have access to education. In view of this, Torres (2000) in his proposal for education for all posits that:

Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to access educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning (p. 11).

The excerpt above reveals the essence of education for all and in other words, this concept may be described as 'access' or 'open learning' taking into cognisance ability to read, write, oral expression as well as numeracy.

Education for All: Rights or Privileges?

At this junction, a preliminary sociological question is pertinent, "Is education for all a right or privilege?" Education for all, for instance, is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but then researches in sub-Sahara Africa reveal that quality basic education for youths and adults still remain a privilege. Kishore (2006) reveals that the Education for All (2000) assessment of UNESCO reported that more than 113 million children are yet to benefit and disappointedly, 880 million adults are unable to read and write, while gender discrimination remains high in the education system. These figures reveal that education for all has not been taken as human rights, rather a privilege. In other words, it connotes the negative idea that everybody cannot read and write or have access to western education. To reaffirm the argument in education for all, one of the key objectives of the Jomtien declaration for education for all cited in Kishore (2006) states that:

Education is a basic right for all African children, youth and adults, including those with disabilities, as recognised in the international instrument, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the child and the recommendations of Salamanca Conference (p. 173).

Akpovire (2006) right stated the significance of the right to education is recognised globally but there is need to make effective implementation in Africa, especially in Nigeria. Education for all ensures social justice, equality and perhaps reverse in gender discrimination.

In 2007, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) listed the following obligations in ensuring the right of access to education in every society:

1. provide free and compulsory primary education;
2. develop forms of education that are available and accessible to everyone and introduce measures to provide free education and financial assistance in cases of need;
3. provide higher education that is accessible on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
4. provide accessible educational and vocational information and guidance;
5. provide education on the basis of equal opportunity;
6. provide reasonable accommodation and support measures to ensure that children with disabilities have effective access to and receive education in a manner conducive to achieving the fullest possible social integration;
7. ensure an adequate standard of living for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development;

8. provide protection and assistance to ensure respect for the rights of children who are refugees or seeking asylum; and
9. provide protection from economic exploitation and work that interferes with education (p. 29).

These obligations in ensuring the right or access to education are pointers to the fact that education should be regarded as human rights at all levels with affordable price whereby the proletariat according to Karl Marx (1818-1883) will also enjoy education at all levels. For example, Higher Education Participation Rate (HEPR) of Nigeria is 8.1 per cent; this reveals that the (HEPR) of Nigeria is grossly low; the gap must be closed in order to meet that of a developed economy which is averagely 50 percent (Okebukola, 2008). To ensure or to close the gap, there is need for Nigeria to exert more effort in the implementation of Education for All at all levels by the year 2020 in line with the 20-2020 vision. It is disheartening to note that, while the Education for All should be completely affirmed, Caillods, Philips, Poisson and Talbot (2006) report that many countries still charge fees of different kinds at the primary level; sometimes legal and sometimes illegal, also families pay several fees in the name of uniform, pencil, pen, books, among others. This report shows that some schools in African countries cannot debunk this negative idea towards education.

To buttress the argument above, sometimes, parents in some States of the Federation are forced to bring tables, desks, chairs and so on for their children especially during new session of the academic year of secondary schools. The question is, is that part of 'Education for All'? It is, therefore, imperative to know that Education For All is one of the Millennium Development Goals and if such unpleasant attitude still occurs in our schools in Africa, especially in Nigeria; it means we are not ready to give education to all and that education still remains a privilege because not every parent can afford to bring the things that schools are requesting for. To buttress this point the United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural Organisation (2007) reiterates thus:

Education has been formally recognized as a human right since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948... These treaties establish an entitlement to free, compulsory primary education for all children; an obligation to develop secondary education, supported by measures to render it accessible to all children, as well as equitable access to higher education; and a responsibility to provide basic education for individuals who have not completed primary education (p.1).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 has clearly revealed that education at all levels should be mandatory and it is a right to provide education to all members in the society who will be able to read and write. The 1948 declaration of human rights denounced education as privilege; thus, the slogan among the elites especially those governing the people that everybody cannot have access to education is social injustice which Arnot (2006) described in the following words:

In the educational world, this division of what Karl Marx called the 'base and superstructure' was symbolized by the separation of analyses of the content of cultural forms (literacy analysis, the history of school subjects) from the transmission of culture through pedagogy. The implication of this division was that those involved in knowledge production were represented as isolate and privatized actors, alienated from their product and from the social context in which they created knowledge (p. 21).

Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that:

- (i) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all,

- (ii) Secondary education in its vocational secondary educational, shall be generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.
- (iii) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education. (UN, cited in Babarinde, 1998:54).

On the basis of this fundamental human rights, other bodies such as Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U.) and its agencies reiterated the position on education that:

education is a critical component in personal fulfilment and in individual and group social mobility, and thus... it is unfair that individuals can be denied access to education simply because their families are unable to pay fees. (Bray cited in Babarinde, 1998:55).

This means that education should be treated as a social product which must be given to all. A cursory look at the National Policy on Education (2004) Section 1 and subsection 1 stipulates the objectives of education as follows:

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; and
5. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Also, Section 1 subsection 5 further reveals the aims and objectives of Nigeria's education policy to include:

1. the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
2. the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
3. the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
4. the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) is the constitution of those in the field of education, so it is necessary to refer to this when discussing education for all. Looking at the aims and objectives of the NPE, are they well affirmed and implemented? How well do we implement education for all in Nigeria? Is Nigeria truly an egalitarian society? Why do we charge school fees at all levels especially in some parts of Nigeria to the detriment of the poor? Answers to these questions would require more extensive treatment than the authors can provide here. Nevertheless, it has been revealed that education for all has not been totally affirmed in the society. In view of this, Kester, Akinwande and Ghenro (2008) affirm that the principle of educational equality is accepted in all countries but it varies in some countries; while some countries had made substantial progress, in Nigeria, the reverse is the case; the promotion of educational opportunities especially among women and they physically challenged still remain a challenge.

Education for All and Globalisation

In the era of globalisation, education for all becomes legal rights of every child at any level. The phenomenon of globalisation is historical in context. It is not new; perhaps its driven force only helps to spread the phenomenon. But then, what is globalisation? The concept of 'globalisation' has different meanings to different people in various fields of specialisation. But globalisation can be viewed in a simple term as "the intensification of worldwide social relation with distant localities in such a way that local happenings are sharpened by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990). In a similar vein, it can be described as a process of growing interconnectedness of different parts of the world, resulting in complex forms of interactions and interdependency as well as increasing the acceptance of common values, beliefs and practices by people through the world (Offor, 2005; Adenugba, 2006).

The phenomenon of globalisation is sometimes misconstrued by some leaders, elites as well those in governance for selfish reasons, thereby creating more hardship for the society. Some key words in defining globalisation such as intensification of worldwide social relation with distant localities, interconnectedness of different parts of the world, increasing common values, beliefs and practices among others reveal that Education for All is a global phenomenon which leads to common values, beliefs, practices and interconnectedness of every society. To some leaders, many interpret the acceptability of globalisation in the field of education as a way of profit venture. Although some researchers also opine that globalisation lay emphasis on competitiveness and profitability – that anything in education which fails to enhance such competitiveness and comparative benefit of the multinational or across transnational corporations is not likely to attract much attention (Akpovire, 2006).

This assertion about globalisation may be true, but some of the features of globalisation should be disregarded in some African countries especially in Nigeria; if eventually we want education for all for our children at all levels. Every level of education should not be seen as a profit making venture with the intention of making immediate returns.

Recommendations for Improving Education for All

1. There is need to re-emphasise and enforce education for all through the governance in all states in Africa especially in Nigeria.
2. There is need to improve access to education at all levels of education.
3. The parents should be encouraged to affirm the essence of education for all.
4. The government, parents, and stakeholders should implement a Bill for an Act towards achieving Education for All in Nigeria.
5. At all levels, the Nigerian Government - Federal and State - should increase budget allocation for education and should not see education especially higher education as profit-oriented venture as is the case of some State Universities in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has stressed the need for Education for All, which is germane in fighting poverty and underdevelopment especially in Africa. The essence of education for all is to allow everyone to have access to basic quality education which promotes the ability to read, write, and calculate, as well as develop essential life skills. This paper has therefore revealed that education for all is not essentially for only some; it is the right of every child in Nigeria. In Nigeria for instance, education for all which is one of the eight millennium development goals will reduce the rate of illiteracy; hence, it should be enforced in all states of Nigeria; education should be noted as a right and both the poor and rich and both male and female should have access to education. Charging of outrageous school fees should be re-addressed so that the children of the poor will be able to have access to education.

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