

Education for a Productive Society in the 21st Century Nigeria: The Relevance of Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined education for a productive society in the 21st century Nigeria and how the application of social justice in education could be relevant for a productive society. The paper observed that investment in education leads to higher productivity, increased innovation, boost in economic growth, reduction of poverty, increase of skilled workforce, and low reliance on social welfare programmes because of individual's active participation in the community and society at large. The paper further gathered that a productive society is one in which the members actively contribute to the creation of goods and services, utilize their skills and resources efficiently for a high level of output in economic growth and overall well-being of the society. The paper realized that social justice is a kind of principle that focuses on the concepts of fairness, equity and accessibility of public welfare services provided by the government for her citizens to explore and develop the society. Also, the paper discussed the concepts of education, education for a productive society, social justice, and the relevance of social justice in education for a productive society. Finally, the paper made a conclusion and suggested among others, that there should be commitment and sincerity of purpose when dealing with issues in education, there should be inclusive classrooms and encouragement of critical thinking, educators should create transformative learning environments that promote equity, empathy, and social change as well as abhorrence of every practices of social injustice in education by educators and stakeholders in education.

Keywords: Education, productive society, social justice and relevance of social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Education as an instrument par excellence brokers development through research. Hence, Kalusi (2010) defined education as involving all aspects of the society from the material conditions to the cognitive and psychological states of the individuals with a view to promoting knowledge and understating. It is a deliberate process of inculcating individuals into social life through the transmission of knowledge, acquisition of relevant skills and moulding of character by accepting a value system through formal and informal social agencies to enhance the survival skills of individuals in the society and promote development.

The purposes of education is to equip individuals for gainful employment and to increase the productivity of the society. Nwafor (2016) interpreted the social aim of education as inevitably concerned with giving of direction to social reconstruction to solve social needs. One of the basis of Nigeria philosophy of education is for education to maximize the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society (FRN, 2014).

Ajienka (2019) wrote that university is a societal think-tank that provides solutions to the problems of the society. According to him, the first mission of the university was teaching, but later research was included and today, the emphasis is on entrepreneurship to utilize the knowledge generated from research into business ideas.

Productive society means a society which its principal objective is to provide facilities for the operation of a productive society. A productive society is also one in which the members actively contribute to the creation of

goods and services, utilize their skills and resource efficiently for a high level of output in economic growth and overall well-being of the society.

Social justice is the foundation for national stability and global propensity. It is also a political and philosophical theory that focuses on the concepts of fairness in relation between individuals in the society and equal access to wealth opportunities and social privileges in a society. Uyanga and Eman (2016) observed that social justice involves putting structures in place through which individuals can key in to achieve their innate potentials for development and productive society. Dell' Angelo (2014) described social justice as recognizing and assisting in the development of each individual's inherent strength and ability to effect positive change.

Corporate Finance Institute Team (2015) narrated that the concept of social justice first arose in the 19th century during the industrial revolution in Europe because of wide disparities in wealth and social standing perpetuated by the social structures of the period. Social justice at the time focused on issues of distribution of capital, property and wealth because of the extreme level of inequality and prevalent economic distress.

According to the narrative, social justice today has shifted towards a stronger emphasis on human rights and improving the lives of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups that were discriminated against in the society on the basis of such factors as sex, age, wealth, ethnicity, heritage, social status, religion and others. Odiye, et al. (2021) observed that social justice at the earlier time centred around wealth and property, but in this globalized world, it involves areas like environment, race, gender, education, distribution of opportunities and privileges as they apply to individuals within the society.

From an educational perspective, social justice is both a goal and process. Its goal is the equitable participation of people from all social identical groups in a society. On the other hand, the process of achieving social justice should be democratic and participatory as well as respectful of human diversity and group differences.

Social justice in education is a diverse and plural concept that faces tension when issues about inequality are discussed and implemented in the society (Elkma, 2017). This implies that social justice in education can be characterized as a dedication to addressing social, cultural, economic and educational injustices imposed on individuals as a result of differences in power, economic resources and privileges. Toubiana (2014) argued that social justice-focused educational system would strive to bring about productive society.

The foregoing are practical indications of the recognition and capability of education in transformation and development of the society. Regretably, the situation is different in Nigeria as education is still struggling to actualize a productive society, even in this 21st century because of social injustices practiced in education sector. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to discuss the relevance of social justice in bringing about a productive society in Nigeria in this 21st century.

Concept of Education

Education as a lifelong journey is broad and controversial, and has been meaningfully defined and explained differently based on scholars' perspectives. Based on this assertion, Okachiku – Agbaraeke (2023) perceived education as a lifelong process that takes place anywhere and at anytime with the use of different methods, but with the sole aim of shaping individuals responsibly to enable them contribute meaningfully to the growth of the society. Whereas, Obani (1996:5) in Alikor (2014) expresses that education improves the development of any society, leading to a strong nation.

FRN (2004) described education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. In this recognition, Nwafor and Nwogu (2014) agreed that what people acquire from education naturally increases their intellectual power and capability and leads them to material and spiritual fulfillment. In this regard, Anderson, et al. (2001) sociologically viewed education as a process by which the individual acquires many physical and social capabilities demanded of him by the group into which he is born and within which he must function.

Moughalu (2007) wrote that the reason for education is to promote economic and social development, employment, income distribution and self-reliance. To this end, the demand of education is to produce quality outputs who will speed up progress towards sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4) for education (sdg4education2020.org).

Amaele and Amaele (2010) posited that education involves the development of an individual morally, physically, mentally intellectually, socially and spiritually in such a way that the person will be of best to himself and the society he belongs. Abulencia (2023) saw education as that process where an individual acquires or imparts basic knowledge to another. It is also where a person develops skills essential to daily living, learns social norms, develops judgement and reasoning on how to discern right from wrong as well as navigate life and contribute to society at adult age.

The centre point of the various definitions and explanations of education is on the etymological explanations of education from the two Latin words “educare and “educere”. The Latin word “educare” refers to education as a process of moulding, forming or making an individual to acquire basic intellectual skills and moral competences to properly fit into his or her society. On the other hand, “educere” means to lead, guide and encourage the individual to develop his or her natural potentials and that of the society. According to Amaele (2017) the main interest of educare is the development of the society before that of the individual, whereas the first interest of educere is personal development before that of the society. But in all, he maintained that education should serve to the fullest, the interests of the individual and productive society.

Education for productive society

Akanni (2024) identified community development and civilization, impact on quality of life and talent development, understanding and rights, societal improvement and vulnerable population, job opportunities and economic growth, talents and career fulfillment, Economic benefits, social cohesion, reduction of poverty, improved health outcomes, empowerment and equality social progress and innovation as well as active citizenship and democracy as the ways education can be productive to the society.

Also, Uyanga and Eman (2016) stated that the numerous benefits of education to individuals for a productive society include:

1. Promotion of intellectual reasoning and enhancement of the rationality of men.
2. Guides men's interaction and conducts in civilized societies.
3. Makes men easier to govern, but difficult to enslave and colonize as it allows them to understand laws and know their rights.
4. Makes men to choose to live happier, more productive and fulfilled in a relatively comfortable and qualitative society.
5. Promotion of the inner desire for development by fostering the improvement of conditions of living.
6. Promotion of social and economic wellbeing of individuals and making them goal oriented and goal achieving in a highly competitive and diverse world (Uyanga, 2004).
7. When an individual and indeed members of the society are educated, there is a high tendency to translate these principles acquired into tangible elements that can bring about value reorientation and position the nation for positive development to take place.

Productive society in the 21st century Nigeria

Productive society means a society which its principal objective is to provide facilities for the operation of a productive society. It is also one in which the members actively contribute to the creation of goods and services, utilize their skills and resources efficiently for a high level of output in economic growth and overall well-being of the society.

In a productive society, individuals are equipped with knowledge and skills needed for the workforce to encourage economic growth, self-reliance, foster social inclusion, promote innovation, reduce poverty, and empower individuals to actively participate in the community and society at large. Misenga (2023) noted that a

productive society is one that is constantly engaged in discussions about the issues that face them with a direct physical confrontations of the issues where necessary.

Concept of Social Justice

The concept of social justice which is a construct that is regularly used in educational administration, philosophy and sociology is one of the contemporary issues of man and his society. Social justice has many contested definitions but limited consensus on its meaning across disciplines exists (Jost & Kay, 2010; Reisch, 2002). However, these definitions and descriptions cover vital conceptual components, such as a definite allocation system for social goods, a process to protect rights and concern with human's well-being (Bells & Adams, 2016; Blackwell, Kramer, Vaidynathan, Iyer & Kirschenboun, 2017; Toubiana, 2014). For this paper, social justice is used to refer to explicit consideration of concepts related to fairness, equality, participation, access to resources, human rights and equity in education.

Nwaokugha and Ndimele (2018) wrote that social justice in its simplest conception is any welfare policy put up by a state for the improvement of the quality of lives of the citizens of the state. Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2011) stated that social justice demands ethical considerations in policy formulation and implementation, resource use and distribution so much that intergenerational equality and fairness can be sustained between regions and generation.

Anagwo, et al. (2021) explained the concept of social justice as a public welfare philosophy where the government is expected to put up public welfare mechanisms that comprehensively cuts across health care, education, good road networks, pipe borne water, effective communication system, electricity, employment, housing, pension, human right issues, equality of opportunities, freedom of expression, worship and association as well as economic and political frameworks upon which citizens of the state can effectively explore to achieve their maximum potentials in the society with ease. Uyanga (2014) asserted that society thrives when common good of all override the personal interests of one or few individuals. The existence of relationships in the society is important, but for the relationships to succeed, it must be characterized to a very large extent by love, respect and dignity of the human person in pursuance of a common goal in a conducive atmosphere.

Hargraves (2021) noted that social justice is broadly understood as relating to ideas of fairness, equity and inclusion. United Nation (2017) defined social justice as giving people the opportunity to achieve their full potentials in society. It is more than a moral obligation and guarantees a peace-filled and successful existence in the world.

Blake (2015) argued that it is important to deal with social justice lessons in institutions because classrooms are proven platforms for social transformations, providing spaces for championing and implementing novel innovations and ideas that lead to the development of the learners' critical thinking about their rights, roles and power to change for the better. Thus, Hossain (2018) advocated that the importance of arming children with the knowledge and lessons on social justice is for them to be equipped with the facets of the actual challenges of the world that lies ahead of them.

However, Amaele (2019); Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014); Maiyashi (2003); Olabanji and Alaka (2010); Oweh (2013); Udenka (2013) as well as Wey-Amaewhule and Amadi (2015) espoused that corruption, inadequate funding of education, diversion of education funds, over politicization of education, inadequate implementation of education policies, abuse of professionalism in education, and favoritism in appointment of educational personnel constitute social injustice in education.

It could be inferred from the narratives that social justice is a kind of natural principle that focuses on the concepts of fairness, equity and accessibility of public welfare services provided by the government for her citizens to explore and develop the society.

Relevance of Social Justice in Education

Wright (2008) captured many layers of social injustice and human rights abuse in Nigeria when he wrote that it is proper to say that Nigerian's political elites both civilians and military have failed the country. The failure of

the country in education sector is as a result of social injustices meted on education which can only be corrected through the practice of the principles of social justice which Gray Group International (2024), Corporate Finance Institute Team (2015) and Brandly (2010) listed thus: equality, fairness, respect for diversity, human rights, equity, participation, love, human dignity, solidarity, flourishing social spheres, reciprocity and need.

Gray Group International (2024) stated the numerous relevance of social justice in education to individual for productive social are as follows:

Incorporation of social justice principles into the educational system: This will create a more equitable and empowering learning environment with a holistic approach that values diversity, promotes inclusivity and challenges systemic inequalities.

Social justice improves students' engagement and performance: Social justice in education helps to create a sense of belonging because students are given the opportunity to participate and feel that their experiences and identities are valued and respected. Sense of belonging enhances students' engagement and improves their overall academic performance because students who feel valued and respected are likely to take ownership of their education and strive for excellence.

Social justice fosters empathy: Social justice in education fosters empathy by providing opportunities for students to understand and connect with different perspectives and life experiences that nurture the development of compassionate individuals who value diversity and are willing to take action to address social injustices locally and globally. Through social justice in education, students are exposed to a wide range of social issues and inequalities that exist in our society. They learn about the historical and contemporary struggles marginalized communities face in developing a deeper understanding of the complexities of social injustices. This knowledge cultivates empathy and compassion as students are encouraged to put themselves in the shoes of others and recognize their privileges.

Social justice fosters global citizenship: Social justice in education promotes global citizenship by encouraging students to think critically about global issues and their interconnectedness. By examining topics, such as poverty, discrimination and environmental sustainability, students are empowered to become agents of change in their local communities and beyond. They learn that their actions can significantly impact the world justly and equitably. Osaat and Anagwo (2018) asserted that social justice in education targets developing in the learners, the ability to think critically in the directions that can trigger off actions that add value and quality improvements in lives of others.

Integration of social justice into the curriculum: Social justice integrated into educational curriculum will ensure that it becomes an integral part of the learning experience rather than a separate entity. This approach allows students to develop a holistic understanding of the world as it equips them with the skills necessary to become active, engage citizens who contribute positively to their communities.

Policy play a role in social justice education: Policies and regulations play a crucial role in shaping social justice in education. Government and educational institutions must develop policies and regulations that promote equality, provide resources for marginalized communities and support educators in integrating social justice into their teaching practices.

Educating the young ones in the right direction: Anagwo, Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2021) asserted that teaching and educating children early in life on the rudiments of social justice and human rights will guarantee Nigeria of our collective dreams of taking the country to the rightful place among the comity of nations. This can be achieved through inclusion of teaching of equity and justice in the curriculum of early childhood which gives learners equal attention, equal protection, a sense of belonging and equal access to citizens of the nation. Social justice in education is relevant to individual students through the enhancement of their engagement and performance and contributes to the betterment of the society as a whole. Creating an inclusive and empowering learning environments can foster empathy, nurture global citizenship and inspire future generations to strive for a more equitable and just world.

CONCLUSION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the society by promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, fostering social inclusion, improving health outcomes, empowering individuals, driving innovations, and strengthening democratic values. On the other hand, social justice in education seeks to create a fair and inclusive society. Incorporating the principles of social justice into education will empower students, encourage educational sector, challenge systemic inequalities and foster a productive society for all.

Suggestions

1. There should be commitment and sincerity of purpose by educators and stakeholders in implementing issues on education beyond surface – level change.
2. There should be inclusive classroom and encouragement of critical thinking as well as open discussions in the process of social justice in education for productive society.
3. Educators should create transformative learning environments that promote equity, empathy and social change.
4. Educators should establish ground rules for respectful dialogues, active attention to students' contributions and provision of guidance when necessary. This will foster an environment where all voices are heard and valued with students empowered to be advocates for social justice.
5. Above all, stakeholders in education should abhor every practices of social injustices in education, especially education should be given full professional autonomy like law, medicine, engineering and accountancy to enhance productive society.

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