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# Educational Equality among Social Classes: A Prerequisite for Social Reconstruction in Nigeria Multi-Ethnic Society

Donald Bette Enu (Ph.D.)<sup>1</sup>, Gimba Joseph (Ph.D.)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Science Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State.  
Email: bette2004@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> General Studies Department, Taraba State College of Agriculture, Jalingo. Email: Gimba4peace@yahoo.com

## Abstract

Education is and will continue to be a major determinant of social mobility in Nigeria with a deep attachment to paper qualifications. It determines social class and breaks barriers of all kind of divides in the society. Education largely and increasingly determines an individual's job choice and income. It has more impact than any other factor, possibly excepting wealth, on whether one participates in politics, what one believes politically, and how much political influence one has. Social change and for multi-ethnic society to strive for meaningful and sustained development of the society, educational administrators, planners and all necessary institutions saddle with responsibilities of designing the curriculum in Nigeria are to brace themselves for a huge task of social reconstruction that will harmonized the ethnic divides and alley fears of inequality as a source of disharmony in the society. Education is the arena in which countries has sought to overcome racial domination and class hierarchy, reduce poverty, to turn immigrants into citizens, to turn children into responsible and active citizens, to create and maintain democracy, also demonstrates ways in which class biases are closely entwined with racial and ethnic challenges that reduce progress and development in Nigeria among ethnic groups as a matter of fact, is the best solutions to all challenges in our society.

**Keywords:** Educational Equality, Social Class, Social Reconstruction, Multi-Ethnic Society

## Introduction

A major prerequisite for social reconstruction in Nigeria multi-ethnic society and social class is educational equality. The ideal of educational equality is fundamentally grounded in the egalitarian principle that social and institutional arrangements should be designed to give equal consideration to all. Educational institutions should, therefore, enact the value of equal concern to enhance social mobility in the society. Educational enterprise is a prerequisite for major human development. Strategically, it is at the centre of all that is there to impact positively on societies. Education helps people to get more out of life as it increases their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Education enables citizens both young and old to acquire knowledge, skills, habits, value, and attitude that will help them become useful members of the society and develop an appreciation of their cultural heritage, social class of others and create a synergy where possible to solve societal challenges.

Education is an important instrument of change in modern societies, with education, an individual or group of individuals can rise towards most valued position and rewards in the society. Education has become a Prerequisite for employment in any bureaucratic organization, without education one is likely to remain in the same

low position because most jobs in the present world require at least an ability to read and write. Without satisfactory formal education, well-paid jobs, good social services, and privileges are rare in modern societies.

Social justice, good governance, open government, community-driven development, and transparency are prerequisite towards making education equitable to Nigerian citizens. This is in support of the directive principles of government, as contained in the Nigerian constitution that government is to give education to all its citizens as a basic requirement of governance. It means that education is no longer a privilege of the preserved few but a compulsory provision by the government to all citizens.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society with over two hundred nationalities cut across the six geopolitical zones. Before the amalgamation of 1914, a string of dynastic states, including the earliest Hausa states, stretched across the sub-Saharan Savannah from the Western regions to Central Sudan. The most powerful of these states were the Kanem-Bornu Empire, the Kingdom of Nri, Kwararafa Kingdom and Arochukwu people of the Igbo, the Ife Kingdom under the Ooni of Ife, the Alaafins of Oyo, who once controlled a large number of other Yoruba and non-Yoruba city states Dirk (2004).

The emergence of social class is not new before the coming of the colonial masters, where farming, pasturing and hunting are the main occupations of the people, but it was exacerbated during and after the colonial era where white collar jobs were considered elitist because it warranted the acquiring of certain skills in reading, writing, and interpretation. Education for various reasons was a term to be very important as a symbol of social class and social mobility.

However, there have been various interventions and policies from the colonial and post-colonial era to provide education for all and to give the necessary infrastructures and manpower that will see to the needs of the people so that they can be of use to themselves and the society after acquiring the western education. From the UPE days, national rolling plans of the military regimes, to when the National Policy on Education was established and the recent developments of Education for All (EFA), Vision 20-20-20, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Today Nigeria is a nation-state with thirty-six states and a federal capital territory; these states have seven hundred and seventy-four local governments Areas. Being a religious state, Christianity, Islam and various traditional religions are widely practiced in all parts of the country. Despite the belief in religion, cultural practices are very popular among its citizens.

In a multi-ethnic society, education is a bridge builder, and it helps people to get out of life's many challenges as it increases the knowledge and understanding of the world around them; this has the capacity to effect changes in behaviours and enhance the desired reconstruction that will shape Nigeria. Utmost of the argument about equality in education is focused on how to equalize access to and participation within different levels of formal education for different social groups which will eliminate the divide among various ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). While balancing access and participation are key educational equality objectives, it desired a more all-inclusive and cohesive approach to the accomplishment of equality in education reconstruction and to make schools truly egalitarian institutions where the desired skills will be obtained for the good of the society and personal fulfillment.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Nigeria being a multi-ethnic society will need to do more than putting education in the first line change of the budget in order to serve its purposes. To achieve social reconstruction through educational equity is an impressive and important vision; this can be based on two issues that are quintessentially critical which are inclusion and fairness. Inclusion in the sense that all section of the social classes is carried along in all aspects of planning, execution, and evaluation, none is to be left behind as the new campaign slogan of SDGs, and there should be equitable in the distribution of educational opportunities and facilities. Educational equality indicates

that everyone should have the same opportunities in education. No one should be discriminated against because of social background, race, region, gender, religion or age (Robeyns, 2006).

The glossary of Education Reform, 2016 term equality as it encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programmes, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. It has been said that "equity is the process; equality is the outcome," given that equity – what is fair and just – may not, in the process of educating students, reflect strict equality what is applied, allocated or distributed equally. <http://edglossary.org/equity/>.

Equality is a concept of a long evolution in education. It refers to the way an educational good is distributed among the members of a population. One well-accepted typology of educational equality gives it four dimensions: equality of access (enrolment), equality of attainment (also called survival), equality of output (or learning achievement) and equality of outcome or returning to school (Farrell, 2003). Martinez, (2002) added the fifth dimension of equality of treatment (or access to a good quality of teachers, materials and overall educational experience).

Gustein (2005) argue that equality requires that public institutions, recognizing present and past inequities, contribute to rectifying the economic and social gaps that give rise to it. How these are handled and deal, with reducing the social disparity among social class thereby enhancing social reconstruction. This principle gives us a powerful reason to foster the talents of people who might develop the wealth and technology that can improve the lives of the severely cognitively disabled.

Social class has been used as a selective filter for various professions when sociologists talk of social class; they refer to a group of individuals who occupy a similar position in the economic system of production. Within that system, occupation is very important because it provides financial rewards stability and benefits like healthcare, good home, insurance of life and properties. <http://udel.edu/~marks/What%20social%20class.htm>.

Social reconstruction is a philosophy focused on Achieving social change. As a practice, it strives to achieve social justice and equity by altering the various social systems upon which society rests. It is based upon two major understanding; first, that society tends to develop systems that marginalize and oppress others and thus need to change, and second, that achieving this change requires both creating a system that serves as a change agent and is open to changing its own purposes and structures as the social contexts in which it exists evolve. [https://www.academia.edu/1957998/Social\\_Reconstruction\\_naturally](https://www.academia.edu/1957998/Social_Reconstruction_naturally).

A social reconstruction is an educational philosophy that emphasizes the educational institution as an environment for implementing social change and challenging social inequalities. The curriculum focuses on students experience and taking a social action on real problems, such as violence, hunger, international terrorism, inflation, and inequality.

[http://media.tcc.fl.edu/webcourses/ctl/Developing\\_Your\\_Teaching\\_Philosophy/Developing\\_Your\\_Teaching\\_Philosophy11.htm#](http://media.tcc.fl.edu/webcourses/ctl/Developing_Your_Teaching_Philosophy/Developing_Your_Teaching_Philosophy11.htm#)

Social reconstruction is a philosophy that emphasizes the addressing of social questions and a quest to create a better society and worldwide democracy. Reconstruction educators focus on a curriculum that highlights social reform as the aim of education. Paulo Fiere, George Counts, Oregon state. [edu/instruction/ed416/PP3.html](http://edu/instruction/ed416/PP3.html).

Most of the discussion about equality in education is focused on how to equalize access to and participation within different levels of formal education for different social groups. While equalizing access and participation are important, social reconstruction concepts like human rights, liberty, citizenship, social justice, patriotism and the likes must feature in the school curriculum if we need a more holistic and integrated approach to the achievement of equality in education if we are to make schools truly egalitarian institutions (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).

This paper will adopt principled framework theory; this framework employs a version of liberal egalitarianism and draws primarily on the capability approach, as developed by (Sen, 1992, p. 44 and Nussbaum, 2000, p. 90). According to the capability approach, social and institutional arrangements should enact the value of equal concern by aiming at equalizing people's 'capability to function,' i.e., their real opportunities for well-being and living good lives. It is through the concepts of capabilities and real opportunities for functioning that they can value 'beings' and 'doings,' such as being educated or having a rewarding job. The capability approach helps substantially in conceptualizing educational equality by focusing on the fundamental functioning promoted by education, that are essential prerequisites for equal participation in society. On this view, educational equality consists of equal effective opportunities and access to this basic functioning. This framework aims at providing a justified answer to the specific demand of equality in education for social reconstruction in Nigeria multi-ethnic society. Education, both in terms of formal schooling and informal learning, is central to the capability approach. The approach emphasizes specifically the contribution that the capability to be educated makes for the formation and expansion of other capabilities. In Sen's account, equality has to be sought primarily in these basic capabilities, which constitute areas of specific concern for egalitarians. The capability to be educated is therefore of specific interest for egalitarians. The distinctive contribution of the approach is in identifying education as essential to well-being and among the primary concerns of equality.

Two fundamental and interrelated considerations follow. The first concerns the essential role of education both in the sense of meeting a basic need to educate and for the promotion and expansion of other capabilities. As Nussbaum argues, the exercise of certain functioning, like that of play and imagination, is particularly important during childhood in order to form the future mature capability (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 90). In this first facet, therefore, being educated responds to some essential basic needs of human beings, this, if unmet, can cause substantial harm.

Education promotes the achievement of performance that is constitutive of one's well-being, while also providing the resources for the enactment of important aspects of educational agency, thus enhancing individuals' effectiveness in his endeavour in the society. Given the complex interrelation of individuals with the society they inhabit, forms of civic and economic participation play an important role in determining one's well-being, while providing the basic structure for the exercise of effective participation.

### **Social Structure, Class Delineation in Nigeria before Colonialism**

Nigeria was a communal society before the advent of colonialism to its shores (Aluko, 2002). The family institution was closely knit and was organised on kinship and lineage systems. Marriage was more on the basis of polygamy as most Nigerian societies were patriarchal in nature and thus the male gender had the pre-eminence in matters of lineage and authority in the family and political structures. Politically, Nigeria was organised with an absolute monarchy in the North, a monarchical constitutional system in the West and a representative and village democracy in the East. The social class of that period in the three areas looked almost alike with an exception to the political structure in the East. They all had a paramount ruler at the apex of the class structure or chiefs, followed by commoners and then at the lowest rung of the social ladder were the slaves. It was only the Igbo social class structure that had a caste system at the bottom of the social ladder. However, the pre-colonial political structures in place were effective and efficient. Aluko (2002) shared this view when he contended that it was the effective political administration in place in Nigeria that prompted the British colonialists to make use of these political structures through the indirect rule system, where local chieftains were used to administer their territories on behalf of the colonial overlords.

Economically, the Nigerian society, like every other pre-colonial African society, was known for 3 main occupations namely: hunting and gathering, pastoralist and agriculture including fishing and horticultural activities (Aluko, 2002). As Ola-Aluko argues, most goods and services produced at this time were also consumed by the respective families. The family group was a workgroup and also participated in economic activities fused with its traditional reproductive activities and regulated by familial values. In the area of religion, the Nigerian society before colonialism was deeply rooted in polytheism. The Nigerian religious institution was a picture of a syncretism belief system that revered different deities and gods. The people believed these deities

would protect them from harm or destruction and also give them prosperity, Ola-Aluko (2002). Education was largely informal and was carried out in the family and the community with dire punishments meted out on anti-social behaviours exhibited by children, youths or young adults and citizens. Besides, education was carried out by parents, certain social institutions like age-grade groups, the family, tribal/lineage associations and others. And educational activities were done more or less within the household. There was no separation of the school from home (Aluko, 2002).

### **Impact of Colonialism on the Nigerian Social Structure**

Colonialism succeeded in changing the face of the Nigerian social structure, replacing age-long practices, norms, and values with the mores and practices of the colonialists. Since the effect of the colonial enterprise was sweeping and invasive, it touched on the various strands of the lives and experiences of Nigerians, and other African societies.

The introduction of coins and monetization of business transaction and rewards: Before colonialism, trade and economic activities were carried out either as barter or with the use of earlier forms of money like cowries or ivories. Colonialism changed all that. The system, with the introduction of industrial capitalism into the African economic system, brought in the issue of money or coins. This also was to help the colonialists as they had to buy raw materials and goods from Africans to be shipped to their home countries to be used in their factories Aluko (2002).

Introduction of wage employment in place of communal work relations: Before colonialism, African people encouraged one another in communal social and worked relations where people exchanged goods as well as services. With the introduction of money, wage employment was introduced into the economic system, and the industrialisation of the economic system commenced. Introduction of a factory system: unlike the pre-colonial days, colonialism helped to introduce a factory system which thus began and deepened the era of wage employment, industrial capitalism, industrial relations and industrialisation (Fanon, 2001).

Introduction of formal education and school system: Africans had an existing informal educational structure before colonialism, but the colonial system required the integration of trained locals to run the British political and bureaucratic structures, thus the introduction of British education which just afforded Nigerians the ability to read, write and solve simple arithmetic. However, this laid a foundation for Nigeria's future educational system which is still mimetically of the British formal educational system. The legacies of the colonial education system include the adoption of English as the official and business language in Nigeria, the modeling of the country's educational system and structures after those of the British primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, among others (Dirks, 2004).

Introduction of urban centres: It was the colonialists that introduced the concept of Government Reserved Area (GRA) and city into the consciousness of the African people, Nigerians. These terms were not used by Nigerians before the advent of colonialism; and the effect of having urban centres led to rural-urban drift (Mamdani, 1976).

### **Class Formation in Nigeria**

In this paragraph, the authors contend that colonialism engendered class consciousness in Nigerians and helped to create a class structure that favoured the "New Man." By new man, it means, a reformed, pro-Western and educated Nigerian. By introducing Western education, the colonial administration, and system guaranteed that more rewards and social mobility would go to graduates of its educational institutions. Therefore, the products of these institutions who were employed into the colonial administration saw themselves as a special breed as they now spoke the language, ate the food, wore the clothes, lived in the houses and generally learned and lived the ways of the white man (Dirks, 2004).

Thus the class structure in Nigeria was restructured and redrawn along occupational and educational lines. This created the upper class, middle class, and lower class. The Upper class which included very wealthy Nigerians

and employers of labour has a middle class or petit bourgeoisie that worked for the upper class or managed their business and economic interests for them or consisted of white-collar workers. The lower class was made up of blue-collar, artisanal, and crafts-related workers, mostly unskilled and semi-skilled labour. In addition, since the social and work relations had changed from a communal system to a wage-related system, fortunate Nigerians who got employment with the colonialists were treated as a special class. This, of course, prompted fellow Nigerians, to desire to get into the British employment. Consequently, this led to the abandonment of the hitherto existing work relations of master-journeyman relationship for wage employment. And with education and wage employment came social mobility where people had to leave their villages for towns and cities where they could find employment and improve their status, personal economy and standard of living (Fanon, 2001).

This meant that most Nigerian families had to live away from home, especially with most of them moving to newly established urban centres that had electricity and a growing infrastructural network. With the urban drift and wage employment on the increase, a new class of Nigerians emerged who were educated, middle-class and were exposed to the ways of the white man. Colonialism generated a class system and class relations in Nigeria through the instrumentality of education and the introduction of industrial capitalism in the country. The situation still persists today in Nigerian cities where urban dwellers still see themselves as belonging to higher social order and having a higher social status than rural dwellers that have the least access to educational and employment opportunities. This also prompts rural dwellers to see nothing good in their rural residences and forces them to drift to urban centres in search of the "golden fleece." (Fanon, 2001).

Meanwhile, since the "better life" is effectuated by the acquisition of education, more Nigerians desired and still desire to acquire good education so they can get good jobs, experience higher social mobility and move or live in urban centres where they could have access to social amenities and infrastructure absent in the rural areas. Thus a class structure of the upper class, those who own and control the means of production; the middle class, those who work for the upper class and manage their wealth for them; and the lower class, made up of peasants, unskilled and semi-skilled, artisanal workers, has come to be representative of the work and social relations in Nigeria (Fraad, Resnic, & Wolff, 1994).

### **Patterns in educational equality in Nigeria**

Discussing educational equality among social class as a prerequisite for social reconstruction in a multi-ethnic like Nigeria is not simply about democratizing the wider set of relations within the society which schools and colleges operate, including relations between the state and service providers and between the state and educational participants. It is about developing an enabling particularly politics in which those who are affected by policy decisions have a say in all levels of educational planning and decision-making. It is not just about having a consultative role, consultations that can easily be ignored when the relevant party leaves the table. It is about listening, engagement and accountability in a participatory democratic context (Bake, 2004)

The efforts towards educational equality in the world have been for many years, though conditions are equal; Nigeria is not an exception, as a matter of fact, the third world countries conditions are appalling and economic inequality within countries is rising (Milanovic, 2013). This explains why one of the new SDGs is dedicated to reducing income inequality. Beyond this specific goal, the desire to 'leave no one behind' permeates the entire 2030 Agenda. The result is an unprecedented global commitment to monitoring progress using data disaggregated 'by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, and other characteristics relevant to national contexts' (United Nations, 2015).

In the case of education (SDG4), Target 4.5 focuses exclusively on the need to 'ensure equal access to all levels.' Education is a fundamental human right which countries have committed to uphold since they signed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Education is also a key driver for attaining most SDGs by 2030, whether these concern gender equality, healthy families, poverty reduction, sustainable consumption, resilient cities or peaceful societies. Yet for education to have a positive impact in advancing these goals, it is necessary first to ensure equality of opportunity for learning. Given that individuals have varying abilities and competences, it is unrealistic to expect equality of education outcomes (United Nations, 2017).

Working and learning are two components to social reconstruction when this is considered for a multi-ethnic society. In all societies, work plays a very important role not just in access to resources but also in shaping relations of status, power, and love, care and solidarity. Education as a potential source of personal development and lack of it is a potential burden. The objective is to ensure that everyone has engaging and satisfying learning – learning that develops themselves as people. And we should think in terms of the whole range of sites of learning, not just formal educational institutions (Alliyu and Lawal, 2002).

The National Policy on Education (NPE) first published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1995 and 1998, 2004 and 2006, provides for a 6-3-3-4 structure for the education sector. This translates into six years of primary schooling, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education. In a further review in 2013, an additional one year was included to make for the formal inclusion of pre-primary education into primary education. The subsequent first ten years are therefore treated as a continuum of 10-year basic schooling which is offered in a seamless manner. The basic education structure includes adult and non-formal education programmes, Almajiri education programmes and education for out-of-school children and youths. In Nigeria, education falls under the items on the concurrent legislative list meaning that both Federal and State governments can pass laws on it. However, basic and secondary education, as well as adult and non-formal education, is managed by States and Local Government Areas in Nigeria (EFA report, 2015).

The UBE programme is an expression of the desire of the Government of Nigeria to fight poverty and reinforce participatory democracy by raising the level of awareness and general education of the entire citizenry. The UBEC Law which was subsequently enacted in 2004 stipulates that “Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary age” (UBE Act 2004).

The high-level launch of the EFA campaign in 1999 injected a ripple of activities into the EFA environment giving it the impetus to identify and mobilize its stakeholders and review implementation strategies. There are institutions charged with the primary responsibility of delivering on Nigeria's EFA commitment. The institutions are the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) and the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC). There are other institutions whose services are also connected with the successful delivery of the EFA. These include the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), Nigerian Education and Research Development Council (NERDC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) with some Civil Society Organizations working on education (FME, 2013).

## Conclusion

The uniqueness of education in people's lives has been progressively acknowledged in today's globalised world. Education is irreplaceable for empowering individuals and for social transformation. It has a key role in organizing children for democratic citizenship and responsibilities of the future. It is also central to poverty eradication strategies and the achievements of the global commitments for sustainable developments. It is an essential structure for human developments. As the Human Development Reports 2012 mention, the growth in the Human Development Index is associated with growth in public spending on education. (UNDP, 2012). As such, a dominant place must be accorded to the right to education in development thinking for a better world of understanding.

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