Social Justice in Education and Celebration of Workforce Diversity: Evidence from Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Social justice in education is a very diverse and plural concept and faces many tensions when issues concerning inequality are discussed and implemented in the educational sector of any society. It is defined as an obligation to challenge political, social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals under the differential distribution of political, economic resources and privileges. Educational inequality is the disproportionate distribution of educational resources including experienced and qualified teachers, school funding, technologies, and books to socially excluded cities and communities. These facts are very much prevalent in Nigeria today. The objectives of this study are to identify the different patterns of social injustices in the educational workforce and to expose the challenges that mitigate the implementation of social justice in both educational and organizational workforce diversity. The paper adopts the methodology of documentary analysis of current issues in the surveyed literature which enhances critical thinking and contextual analysis of issues. It concludes that the teaching of social justice in education especially in today's Nigeria is germane to both educational and organizational workforce diversity. This is because of the observed apparent cases of cronyism, tribal alliances, ethnocentric jingoism, and agitations for self-determination. The paper recommends that there is an urgent need to reform the educational sector in the country at all levels through a higher budgetary allocation to the sector to meet the UNESCO global standards. Doing this would go a long way in bridging the gap in political, social, and economic inequalities among the geographical regions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Justice, Education, Workforce Diversity, Enugu State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

When factors like gender, wealth, color, and race determine a person's educational privileges, social injustice is rightly spelled. Social justice at its primordial essence showcases the fair distribution of opportunities and privileges as they apply to individuals within the society. In pre-modern times, social justice-centered around wealth and property. In this globalized world, it involves areas like the environment, race, gender, and education. When students are not exposed to a level of education that is at par with that which the more privileged students are given, it forms a poor academic foundation that could adversely affect their income level and other privileges open to well-educated individuals. Their ability to earn average incomes is punctured which in turn affects adversely good housing, access to quality health care, and safety. When an educational system lacks the commitment to provide equitable distribution of privileges and opportunities, there is an adverse consequence on the society both culturally and economically.

From an educational perspective, social justice is both a goal and a process. Its goal is the equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The process for achieving the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, something that everyone can realize by his or her activity. Again for achieving social justice, the process should be respectful of human diversity and group differences. United Nations (2017) defines social justice as follows: giving people the opportunity to achieve their full potential in society. It reiterates that social justice is an underlying principle that guarantees a peace-filled and successful coexistence in the world. It is more than a moral obligation. Social justice is the foundation for national stability and global prosperity. These are hard words that anybody can hardly deny. Social justice has numerous contested definitions but limited consensus on its meaning across disciplines exists, (Jost & Kay 2010; Reisch, 2002). However, these definitions converge on vital conceptual components including a definite allocation system for social goods, a process to protect rights, and a concern with human well-being. (Bells and Adams, (2016); Blackwell, Kramer, Vaidynathan, Iyer & Kirschenbaum (2017); Toubiana, 2014). For this paper, social justice is used to refer to explicit consideration of concepts related to fairness, equality, and equity in Business education pedagogy. This opinion aligns with Toubiana's (2014) argument that social justice-focused business schools would strive to define the role of business in achieving an equitable, fair, and just society.

The importance of social justice would be seen in the number of researches done in this area. Recent research has shown that group membership may affect or influence students' experience and outcome on understanding cultural differences in the campuses by consideration of social justice. Students' exposure to diversity is supported by an understanding of how resources and privileges are inequitably distributed in society, (Bell & Adams 2016; Poole & Garett-Walker, 2016). One of the main goals of multi-cultural education is for students to gain a better understanding of different cultures and learn to cooperate with them, as well as to eliminate stereotyping and prejudice, challenge societal inequalities (Banks, 2015). Without awareness and frame of reference for social inequality, a student may be handicapped in on-campus dynamics and in their ability to contribute to equitable workforce diversity experience postgraduation.

Diversity and social justice in education are central issues for today's teachers, especially in Nigeria, Education has always been regarded as a part of a society where a true meritocracy reign. Educators are equally aware that further works need to be done to fully create a fair playing field for people of all races, tribes, religions, and cultural backgrounds. A search through the literature revealed that social justice in education in this part of the world is relatively new as there are not enough studies to showcase what is prevalent. This study will inevitably kick off the examination of this all-important topic and provide what is available and in practice in Nigeria where kidnapping of school children for ransom, gender-based killings, communal and politically motivated inequality have become commonplace.

2. Research Methodology

The paper adopts the methodology of documentary analysis on current issues in the surveyed literature which enhances the critical and contextual analysis of issues. When students are not privileged to receive an education that is at par with which the more privileged ones are given, it causes them to have a weak foundation for the rest of their life. Their ability to earn a specific amount of money may be harmed, affecting their access to excellent health, decent housing, and safety. When an educational system is not devoted to offering equal opportunity and benefits, it has a detrimental cultural and economic impact on society. This has given serious concern to well-meaning people, educators, researchers, business leaders, and even governments

3. Literature Review

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Social justice in education is a diverse and plural concept and faces many tensions when issues concerning equality are discussed and implemented in society (Elkma, 2017). In education, social justice can also be characterized as a dedication to addressing social, cultural, and economic injustices imposed on individuals as a result of differences in power, economic resources, and privileges. Educators who have dedicated their lives to implementing changes and reforms in schools, on the other hand, see social justice as implying educational injustice. This is because education is recognized as the great equalizer, but when basic unfairness prevails inside the educational system, this promise of equality cannot be realized.

Dell' Angelo (2014) describes social justice as recognizing and assisting in the development of each individual's inherent strength and ability to effect positive change. Dell' Angelo (2014) also acknowledges that instructors play a critical part in enacting social justice in their classrooms, recommending that they vividly execute classroom drills and practices to take it to a dynamic level.

Torres (2015) investigated why teaching about social justice matters and found that as teachers we should ensure what our pupils are to face in the classrooms, but we cannot make sure what they are going to come across and have to deal with in the outside world. This is why it is inevitable for us to arm children with the knowledge and lessons of social justice for them to meet the many faces of the actual world that lies ahead (Hossain, 2018)

On the importance of dealing with social justice lessons in institutions, Blake (2015) argues that classrooms are proven platforms for social transformations, providing spaces for championing and implementing novel innovations and ideas that lead to the development of learners' critical thinking about their rights, roles, and power to change for the better.

The duty of an educator does not end with instilling in kids a sense of right and wrong teachers must also take action and break down long-standing barriers to ensure that every kid has the opportunity to be protected, encouraged, and inspired. This is because, while social justice in education demands equality for all students, it also aspires to growth spurred by the diversity of pupils.

Diversity is the difference between and among people of different cultural backgrounds and acknowledging the differences to pave way for the understanding of one another for the achievement of a common goal (Aminu, 2016).

Esty, Griffin, and Schorr-Hirsh (1995) define diversity as when people's differences are recognized, understood, accepted, valued, and celebrated with regards to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental aptitude, race, sexuality orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (1998), diversity means valuing the characteristics that make a person unique such as age, ethnicity, education level, and family background. This definition has given a clear meaning of diversity to encompass acceptance and respect for everyone by understanding that each individual is naturally unique but must find ways and means of accommodating others for the achievement of national development.

For Bell, Connerley, and Cocchiara (2009), People's treatment, opportunities, and outcomes are influenced by real or perceived variations in color, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, physical and mental aptitude, sexual orientation, and familial status. The emphasis in the definition on the impact of people's identities on their treatment, opportunities, and outcomes recognizes the business significance of real or perceived inequalities among people. The focus on the business case for valuing diversity was accentuated further by the U.S. census prediction in the early 1990s that by the year 2020 that minority would be the majority of the U.S. population. The resultant business implication for diversity emphasizes the potential for increases in customers and profitability through understanding the spirit of diversity.

Davis (2013) as cited by Grier (2020) shows that it was the economic self-interest and not social pressures that drove marketers' interest in Black consumers. Nowadays, research and practice have shifted from a focus on diversity to emphasizing inclusion. Inclusion refers to how well organizations and their members connect with, engage and utilize people across all types of differences (Ferdman, 2013). Inclusion and diversity go hand in hand but are

different from one another. This means that businesses must address both in their human resource management, procedures, and strategies. Inclusion refers to valuing and utilizing people's diversity for everyone to succeed at work. An inclusive workplace is one in which everyone feels like they belong, without having to prove that their contribution matters or that they can achieve to their full capacity, regardless of their history, identity, or circumstances (CIPD, 2021). Fair policies and procedures are in place in an inclusive workplace, allowing a diverse group of people to work well together. (Faragher, 2020).

Today's workforce in Nigeria tends to be quite diverse. Globalization and the increasing influx of women and other minority groups into paid employment seem to have impacted positively on diversity over time. Also, the era of knowledge work has brought in some unconventional workers who do not fit the mold of the traditional worker and who may be unwilling to conform to the expectations of the older workforce (Agbonifoh and Idubor, 2016).

Workforce diversity simply means differences among employees in an organization. Workforce diversity has continued to attract academic and professional attention in Management education circles because of its potential and actual impact on individual and group attitudes and behaviours among employees. Managed properly, diversity can have a salutary effect on the workforce and organizational performance (Cox and Blake, 1991; Robbins, Judge, and Vohra, 2012, Ingram, 2013). But when not managed properly, workforce diversity can have disastrous consequences. In fact, according to Rodgers (2016) studies have found that unmanaged diversity diminishes organizational performance.

One of the painful disadvantages of having an improperly managed diverse workforce is the strong likelihood of discrimination. Here discrimination refers to making decisions about individuals based on stereotypes regarding their demographic groups. Unfair discrimination according to (Robbins, Judge, and Vohra 2012) assumes that everyone in a group is the same and this is quite harmful to the organization and employees. This discrimination could be in form of discriminatory policies, sexual harassment, intimidation, mockery, insults, exclusion, and incivility.

Without mincing words, improperly managed diversity can lead to discrimination or exclusion. Research attention has always been tailored towards its advantages and no disadvantages in the workforce, for instance, the impact of diversity on employee turnover (Choi & Rainey, 2010), the impact of team diversity on team outcome, (Horwitz and Horwatz, 2007), the effect of diversity in business performance (Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely, Jackson, Jost & Jehny, 2003) and strategies for managing diversity (Bater and Snell, 1999), Esty, Coffin, & Schorr-Hirsh, 1995; Choi, 2009; Burney, 2015).

There is no gainsaying the fact that research interest on diversity has increased from leaps to bounds, there is still a need to examine social justice in education and link it to workforce diversity given the increased multi-culturalism in the world today. This is the focus of this study; it is against this backdrop therefore that objectives of this study seek to investigate are: to identify the patterns of prevalence of social justice in the educational workforce based on diversity; to expose challenges that could mitigate implementation of social justice in education and finally to determine available resources for stemming the incidence of social injustice in education.

3.2 Issues on the Prevalence of Social Injustice in Education

Educational inequality is the unequal distribution of academic resources to socially excluded groups and cities, including but not limited to school money, trained and experienced instructors, books, and technology. These communities have a history of being marginalized and oppressed. These are highly marginalized communities that are frequently denied access to schools with necessary resources. As a result, this disparity leads to significant inequalities in these individuals' educational performance or efficiency, stifling their ability to move up the social and economic ladder.

In Enugu State of Nigeria, measuring educational efficacy varies from urban to rural areas. Available research has shown that Grade Point Average (GPA) scores, test scores, dropout rates, college entrance statistics, and secondary school completion rates are used to measure educational success. When determining what should be used in terms of an individual's educational achievement, these are measures of an individual's academic performance capacity. Many academics and experts argue that GPAs, test scores, and other performance metrics aren't the only factors to consider when judging efficiency (Belinda, 2003). When evaluating an individual's educational success, factors such as achievement of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, contentment, persistence, and post-secondary performance should all be considered. Academic achievement, according to scholars, is solely the result of achieving learning objectives and obtaining the required skills and abilities.

Academic achievement must be separated from learning capacity to appropriately quantify educational efficiency. The academic achievement reflects only a student's performance ability, not their learning or ability to effectively employ what they have learned. Susan York-Gibson and Charles York-Gibson, 2015. Much modern discussion about educational equity conflates the two, illustrating how they are inseparable from state to state in Nigeria. Inequity in education between Northern and Southern Nigeria perpetuates social and economic disparities. This has resulted in cronyism, tribal affiliations, and, most recently, agitation in the southern region of the country.

Throughout Nigeria, there have been continuous attempts to reform education at all levels. There have been different causes of educational inequality leading to social injustice. These causes are rooted in history, society, and culture. This inequality is very challenging to eradicate. Even though it is very challenging to eradicate, education is still needed for society to move forward. This is because it promotes citizenship identity, equality of opportunity and social inclusion, social cohesiveness, and economic growth and empowerment. As a result of these reasons, social justice in education equality is very much sought after and promoted. Accentuating to this fact a world Bank study found that 53 percent of children in low and middle-income nations are unable to read and comprehend simple stories at the end of primary or basic school (World Bank, 2021)

3.3 Challenges of Implementing Social justice in Workforce Diversity

Diversity in the workplace should be promoted and supported as part of good people management. It is all about treating everyone in the company as an individual. To gain the benefits of a diverse workforce, however, an inclusive workplace in which everyone feels free to engage and reach their full potential is essential. Whereas the Nigerian constitution establishes minimum standards for the protection of people of all ages, disabilities, races, religions, sex, and sexual orientation, among other things, an effective inclusion and diversity strategy seeks to add value to an organization by contributing to employee wellbeing and engagement.

The moral case for creating a more equitable and inclusive labor market and workplace is unarguable: regardless of our identity, background, or circumstances, we all deserve the opportunity to develop our skills and talents to their full potential, work in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment, be fairly treated, rewarded, and recognized for our work, and have a meaningful voice on issues that affect us. It is also beneficial for the sustainability of businesses and economies. When we value and welcome the diversity of thoughts, ideas, and ways of working that people from all backgrounds, experiences, and identities offer to an organization, everyone stands to benefit. As a result, organizations must guarantee that their people management strategies do not disadvantage any group. Professionals have a critical role to play in promoting diversity and inclusion in their workplaces.

There are human resource management principles that provide frameworks and guidelines to help organizations recognize the actual and potential value of their people and ensure that their people's policies and practices are bias-free. The concept of 'intersectionality' is that we all have multiple overlapping identities that affect our experience consider this principle. People's backgrounds, cultures, personalities, work styles, accents, and languages are examples of visible and non-visible differences.

It is critical to acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach to human resource management does not result in fairness or equal opportunity for everybody. Individuals hold a variety of values and views. To serve both individual and organizational needs, good people management practices must be consistent, fair, and inclusive. (CIPD, 2021).

In this nation, age, disability, gender issues, marriage, and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation are protected characteristics covered by discrimination law to give people protection against being treated unfairly.

This is because discrimination can:

1. have a negative impact on an individual's well-being, work performance, and inclination to stay; and
2. have a negative impact on employment chances.
3. This leads to an inability to recognize abilities, potential, and experience based on skills.
4. Lead to spending money on legal fees, compensation, and settlements in order to avoid the expense of fighting discrimination claims.

It must be stated that there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up many challenges to businesses including making difficult workforce decisions such as redundancies, furloughing, and returning to work. Employers must verify that their decisions are compliant with the law and do not discriminate. Employers must also take an

inclusive, fair, and transparent approach to people management, including when altering Human Resources policies in response to changing conditions, such as virtual recruitment tactics.

Employers need to comprehend the impact the pandemic and related workplace change has on people, depending on their background, or circumstances. Increased learning duties, for example, necessitate the consideration of flexible working possibilities. Reasonable adjustments that enable people to perform at their best must be given due consideration. Given the challenges and uncertainty that workers may be facing, it's also important to remember that employee health, safety, and well-being are critical. The authors are happy to report that the pandemic is not doing serious havoc on the Nigerian people relative to happenings in many parts of the global communities.

3.4 Challenges of Implementing Social Justice in Education to Teacher Educators
In Enugu State Nigeria, the school year is already underway. Implementation of social justice equality education is not easy in this part of the world where kidnapping of school children, terrorism, and banditry are commonplace. Some impediments/challenges interact to make this realization of social justice in the classroom very challenging.

1. Use of technological innovation in teaching. Many times, teacher educators found it challenging about having the right posters on the wall or trying to become experts at the use of technology in the classrooms. As important as technology aids in teaching, there can be a weak commitment to learning through a social justice framework.
2. Creating an all-inclusive classroom that is safe and equitable becomes very challenging where students care for each other. This is not an easy culture especially in multicultural and multireligious environments like ours.
3. The Impact of colonialism on teaching and education: Nigeria was colonized by the British government before she got her independence in 1960. It is true to affirm that colonialism is not just a thing of the past but a process that continues to this day in a form called neocolonialism. As teacher educators, the job of the decolonization process cannot be swept under the carpet. We still have some of the colonial hangovers in our education system.
4. Discrimination amongst children of wealthy parents versus low-class parents still exists. As teacher educators, people should not be afraid to speak out on inherent subtle discrimination among children in any school environment.
5. Impact of poverty on students' lives: Teacher educators face the challenges of how poverty affects students' lives. Most often teachers blame students for their behaviours without looking at the context of the environments that they live in. Without much ado, poverty has an immense impact on a student's ability to succeed in the classroom. As teachers, this is an everyday experience in our different classrooms. It should be noted that when we signed up to become teachers, we also signed up to advocate for our students. Teachers should get involved in their communities and ask how they could contribute to the solutions to create social change to eliminate or alleviate poverty.
6. Taking on controversial issues: Teachers also face discussing controversial topics in the classroom. In some educational institutions especially in public schools, teachers found it extremely challenging to deliberate on controversial issues in their classroom. An example is the issue of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, Muslim sharia law controversy in education which tends to be at variance with acceptable global norms. This is because if we do not prepare them to engage in the task of understanding the world, then we do them a great disservice.

3.5 How Educational Organizations Can Achieve Celebration of Workforce Diversity
Diversity is a term that describes the variation of different perspectives represented on a team. Diversity is connected to race and social justice issues. They are aspects of a larger discussion. The term represents a wide range of experiences including sex, gender, background, ethnicity, socio-economic, religion, education, upbringing, sexual orientation, neuro, diversity, and life experiences (Cooks- Campbell, 2021). Inclusion, on the other hand, indicates that people should not be refused access to education, resources, opportunities, or any other treatment because of their distinguishing characteristics. In an ideal world, diversity and inclusion would be a debate about rewriting latent bias and challenging the notion that being different equals being inferior.

Diversity benefits organizations at all levels. Beyond the moral imperative of a sense of fairness, the business case for investing in diversity is clear. Relevant researchers have found that groups that are diverse in gender, race, and age perform better, make better decisions, and earn more revenue (Grier, 2019). Similarly, a comprehensive study

of European companies found that those with a higher proportion of women in top positions perform better financially, particularly in high-tech and other industries where critical thinking, creativity, and knowledge work are important. Without any iota of doubt, diversity is good for business when the organization knows how to truly embrace the value and make use of the diversity in its leadership and workforce. Managers and leaders that understand how to elicit various perspectives, build on them and be inclusive of all perspectives accessible on their teams always generate question assumptions, develop new ways, discover blind spots, better ideas, and create better solutions. Consequently, the organizations would experience high massive team innovation, performance, and growth.

Having a diverse team provides access to a wider range of skillset experiences and different ways of thinking, believing, and communication. This facilitates the growth of new ideas and reduces group-think. Group-think occurs when individuals avoid disagreeing with a group or expressing doubt. The larger and more similar the group, the less likely individuals are to dissent. This tendency does not support diversity and inclusiveness in organizations.

However, there are many ways educational organizations especially universities, can achieve a celebration of workforce diversity in their environment. These are discussed briefly as follows:

1. Hiring Practices
Organizations interested in workforce diversity can enhance organizational performance, growth, and innovation when they look at talents from all backgrounds. They should not impede entry into their organizations by creating barriers in the recruitment process, such as higher degrees, costly certifications, or experience from certain firms. They should flaunt their organization's commitment to inclusive hiring, regardless of background and disability in the job descriptions. Again, when conducting interviews they should reflect diversity among the panel interviewers as well as in potential employees.

i. Diverse Employee Groups
Your employees are whole people and they come to work every day with their entire selves. Organizations should provide spaces where employees can connect with other people of different backgrounds, tribes, ethnicity who share certain interests. This is one way to make sure that people feel included and represented at work.

ii. Inclusive Leadership
It is generally known that leaders set the tone and pace for their organizations in more ways than one. Inclusive leadership boards make better decisions and thus are a powerful reminder to other members of the organization of the core values, that the organization embodies. This is because many people are concerned about their ability to progress in their career, so seeing someone they can relate to reassures them that the organization is a place to work and thrive.

iii. Transparency
Leaders should not try to build diversity on their own. They should be transparent enough about efforts being made to build an inclusive organization. One person can not see and fix everything by himself or herself. Regular meetings and feedback devices should be used so that employees can see what needs to be improved and discuss freely in a neutral space, any concerns they may have. Leaders and managers should be quick to acknowledge such concerns and implement expected desirable changes.

iv. Allyship
Social justice issues are everywhere and organizations cannot be quiet about where they stand. There is no need to put a statement that does not reflect what employees are seeing around them. Organizational leaders should take an unequivocal stance against racism, discrimination, sexism, prejudice, and harassment. These things are human rights issues and therefore not limited to special interest groups. To build an environment where people feel safe and valued means standing up for their rights.

v. Be Vulnerable
Diversity and teams mean diversity of thought. Ask employees to contribute to conversation/discussion especially if they have not spoken up before. Recall that when a conversation becomes too homogenous (group thinks) it becomes harder for people to speak with dissenting opinions. Leaders and managers should feel free to play the devil's advocate and discuss the pros and cons of their ideas. This will demonstrate to the employees that you are interested in the best idea not just the most popular one.

vi. Be Proactive about Research on Diversity

Top management should continue to enlighten teams and employees on the benefits of inclusion and diversity. Researches are continuously being done on the benefits of a diverse workforce and place. Diversity is not about a conversation with others. Everyone has something that makes them different. Whether it is a unique upbringing, educational background, and way of thinking, or a general perspective of the world. People bring their strengths to the table. An inclusive and diverse organization is at the forefront of innovation and social change.

4. Conclusion

The teaching of social justice in education especially in Nigeria now is very germane to workforce diversity. This is because its knowledge equips students with the intellectual capacity to tackle real-world challenges using multiple viewpoints. Over time such individuals learn to look at current and historical events through the lens of social justice. Equipped with this knowledge, they would be able to spot discrimination, gender issues, cronyism, tribal alliances, ethnocentric jingoism, and more recently the heightened agitations in the southern part of Nigeria for self-determination.

5. Recommendations

1. Educational inequality has been attributed to disparities between the wealthy and the extremely poor. Thus, there is a serious need to keep reforming the sector for better performance at all levels. This can be made possible through the higher budgetary allocation of the nation's resources to the sector. The country has never met the UNESCO's minimum.
2. Teachers should be courageous to tackle issues of discrimination between wealthy parents and poor parents through the use of open and honest answers to children's questions about identified differences.
3. Social justice in education should be an integrated part of all activities in education from kindergarten to higher education. This could be implemented through embedded curriculum transformation.
4. Employers and teachers should have a deeper knowledge of diversity to upscale their organizations through constant workshops and conference attendances.
5. Policymakers and stakeholders in organizations should be interested in workforce diversity through all-inclusive hiring practices. This could be achieved by subtle de-emphasizing of barriers in the recruitment process like advanced degrees, high profile certifications, or experience from certain firms/organizations.

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Profile

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Profile

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