Regional Demands and Contemporary Educational Disparities in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Ethnic needs and struggles are identified to be contributing factors to disparity in educational development in nations. This is known to be capable of causing disintegration in any nation if not carefully managed. The paper employs critical analysis as its method of explaining the causes of disparity in educational development within regions and within nations. The paper concludes that an understanding of the actual causes of educational disparities can help nations to determine the compensatory education scheme(s) to employ in solving the problems.

INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to emphasise from the outset that the attempt here to analyse ‘regional demand or question’ is to acknowledge the fact that there is a gradual change from the tendency in comparative researches to bring out the similarities and points of convergence in education in national environments to trying to have a critical examination and a clear understanding of the differences in education. In other words, an attempt will be made in this paper, to show the importance of having an understanding of the differences within territories since it is the view of this author that their analysis will allow us to have an understanding of the inequalities, which do not show up in national analyses. It is also possible to reveal through this approach, the cultural and social forces within the regional movements that may become the instigators of development or lack of it. While the paper concentrates on Nigeria, it draws examples from Australia, Canada, and the United States of America for clarity. In the past, it was possible to compare one educational system with another in order to say that they were very comparable. This corresponded to a traditional ambition of comparative educationists who wished not so much to discover universality in education, but to contribute to a better understanding between peoples of different nations thus bring international co-operation and peace (Aluede, 1998). Furter (1980: 74) noted that whatever the generous intentions of this approach there is suspicion of ethnocentrism about any generalising construct which ill conceals a desire to reduce the plurality of worlds to the near, the familiar, the well known, in short, to a world revolving around oneself.

The point that is being made here is that it is legitimate to compare policies behind one system of education and another in order to establish that they are different. From this perspective, analysis of the regional issue will reveal extent of the differences within a single territorial unit and would bring out inequalities, which would not show up in macro analysis on a national level or within the political framework of a sovereign state. It follows that for a true understanding of educational development in any nation, one would not need to be satisfied with macro-national diagnoses, national aggregates and national averages instead, a researcher interested in comparative studies will need to check for the validity of his data through regional studies. This view is supported by Ryba (cited in Furter, 1980), that we should pay greater attention to educational geography to verify the effective establishment of systems over a territory as a whole and to measure their real spatial extent. We should also ask ourselves whether national-meaning sub-national-differences are not just as profound as and perhaps of even greater significance than, international comparisons.

This argument is further strengthened by the view held by Bugincourt (in Furter, 1980). He opined that in Africa, a territory cannot be considered a priori as homogeneous unit since it is “an area perceived, modulated and experienced differently according to what people want and how they live” that is, according to their history.
and different forms of settlement. He went further to explain that the same organization, the same curriculum, the same pedagogical rules will be interpreted in various ways and will have distinctly different impact within such an area, which is extremely diverse by internal and external migrations. These forms of diversity should be the object of comparative studies, but have unfortunately been readily neglected. The point that is being made here is that international research on regional differences shows that the most readily available information is not adapted to the real regional demand since it has been collected at the request of a central administration. That is the reason why ratios of illiteracy are frequently presented as averages; the distribution of illiteracy is either underestimated or unknown.

Since national analysis tend to show that there is even development within the nation state, issues and regional approaches are now being employed. This is done to be sure that economic growth; social-political development and political forces do not take place in accordance with a model of uneven development which favours certain areas to the detriment of others undiscovered. It is necessary to monitor the mode of development because if any model for growth encourages the dependence of peripheral regions on the center, diversity can only engender inequalities. Particularly as to be different and to preserve one’s ‘differenceness’ can result only in inferiority of status and lead to inexorable marginalisation, which could lead to disintegration (Aluede, 1998; Kosemani, 1997).

At this juncture, it will be necessary to analyse the factors that have produced disparity or inequality in the regions, which national educational policies have been trying to balance over the years. Researches in developed nations have concentrated upon the role of social-economic status as a predictor of academic achievement and subsequent occupational status. This situation has either reduced the problem of regional or geographic difference in access to education to a non-issue or of no vital importance or significance. It is apparent that in developed and underdeveloped countries, regional inequalities exist. There is no doubt, however, that such variations are immensely greater in less-developed nations and that the problem is even more compounded by the fact that geographical or regional inequalities has often coincided with ethnic divisions such as those in Nigeria (Foster, 1980).

In carrying out this study, the author employed the critical analysis approach in explaining the issues raised as causes of educational disparities within regions and nations. The study is expected to provide for the readers, explanations for disparities in educational development within regions and within nation states.

**CAUSES OF REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION: HISTORICAL FACTOR**

Most debates on regional inequalities tend to be ahistorical in nature whereas such inequalities can not be understood without reference to much earlier processes of educational diffusion (Kosemani, 1993). Foster (1980:26) aptly placed this view in correct perspective when he argued that an understanding of contemporary disparities necessarily involves an examination of the dynamics of earlier educational development, since these may indicate present constraints within which realistic planning must take place. He went further to explain that there are cases where it is possible to show that certain educational profiles have been the result of ‘historical’ or apparently fortuitous circumstances. Carron and Chau (1980) argued that by adopting an historical perspective, it is, firstly evident that the interaction between the supply and demand of education in various societies cannot be understood by a mere means of mechanical and linear pattern of the investigation-response type, but that it has, as a matter of fact, taken on very different forms at different points in time and space. They gave this as a reason why present regional disparities cannot be understood without connecting them up to the dynamics of past educational development. This position is further strengthened by the views held by MacIver and Page (1969:39) when they indicated, “ethnic group relations are products of historical conditions and thus are reactions to the social and cultural context”. In the colonial situation in which many countries found themselves, the new realities compelled some ethnic groups to demand more education than others.

The history of educational development in an environment can as well explain the cause of educational disparity in that particular environment. This is true of Nigeria. Western form of education came into Nigeria through the activities
of the missionaries. Abernethy, (1969:27) saw the attraction of the missionaries to Nigeria as “a curious by product of slaves’ trade.” This greatly determined which area was to have early taste of western education and the areas that were not to experience early missionary activities. Thus, Kosemani (1993) observed that the British had set up the colony of Sierra Leone in 1784 as a haven for freed slaves. Later many New World bound slaves who were rescued by British Squadrions were resettled in Sierra Leone. As it turned out, many of those captured were Nigerians mostly Yorubas from the Southwest of Nigeria. By 1870, many of them have been converted to Christianity and have become wealthy enough to plan a return to their father land. The effect of this movement back home on Christianity and western education in Nigeria was tremendous. As slave settlers in Sierra Leone, they had received religious, academic and some technical education and a taste of European ways of life. This accident of history brought along with the returnee Nigerians Christianity. This in turn led the early ex-slave settlers in Abeokuta and other areas in West Africa to request for Christian evangelists to come over and ‘civilize’ the indigenous Africans. The arrival of the missionaries brought with it western education and civilization.

It should be noted that the areas that did not experience the activities of the returned ex-slaves and of course early contact with the missionaries; who brought with them western education and civilization, were bound to be educationally disadvantaged. The Sokoto Caliphate-excluding some parts of the Middle Belt that were forcefully brought under the caliphate constitute part of the territory that stood educationally disadvantaged in Nigeria for many years. The above reason accounts for why Bonny (due to the fact that it became a satellite of the missionaries) was educationally advantaged, while Opobo, her neighbour was educationally disadvantaged because of King Jaja who fervently opposed the missionaries and blockaded its immediate interior from missionary activities, parts of which was western education and civilization.

In the United States of America, historical factors also caused educational disparity. The immigrants came with different levels of educational development, civilization and general awareness. While the English, the Germans, the French and the Russians were able to find their bearing and thus able to benefit from the educational system, the Blacks, the Puerto-Ricans and Chicanos were educationally disadvantaged. The cause of this is historical – a result of the background from which they came (Bullivant, 1981; Aluede, 1998).

In Canada, educational disparity has its history. Porter (in Bullivant, 1981) analysed the Canadian experience. He noted that immigrants from Britain and the United States of America continued to be heavily over-represented in the higher professional, managerial and white-collar occupational levels because of their educational advantages over others such as those from Portugal and Greece who according to him, were taking over from Italians at the lower levels of the immigrant labour force. These latter groups he argued had to be contented with the provision of lower level labour force supplier because of the limitations of their level of educational development and the status their ethnic groups occupied in Canada. It needs to be emphasised that there is hardly any nation without a long history of educational disparity. In some countries that experienced colonization, the early development of schooling in specific areas was due to proximity to the coast, to the existence of climatic conditions conducive to missionary settlement and endeavour, or to the presence of particular local rulers or forms of political authority that were hospitable (for whatever reasons) to the spread of western-type schools (Foster, 1980).

The important thing is that the coaster towns that had European settlements had early contact with western education and civilization while others who settled in the interior could not have early contact with neither the missionaries nor the colonial masters. The fact is that early centres of educational development have proved to maintain their initial advantages over relatively long periods. That perhaps may explain why Abeokuta and Ondo areas in Yoruba land tend to maintain their educational lead in Nigeria. This initial disparity in level of educational development has continued to expand since more advanced regions are able to capitalise on their earlier educational traditions and compound the pattern of relative inequality as evidenced by the disparity between the whites and blacks in the United States of America.

**Ethnic Factors**

The ethnic factor in educational development
is examined here because it is seen as an important factor in educational imbalance. The history of educational development in most societies is deeply rooted in ethnicity; hence the current educational imbalance in many countries is to a large extent attributable to ethnicity. There have been ethnic rivalry in Nigeria, United States of America, Canada and many other countries; in which case, some ethnic groups see themselves as disadvantaged because they have not attained educational parity with others. Kosemani (1997:2) argued, “in essence the argument is not about schooling perse but about the social-economic mobility and political power which schooling creates”. The implication of the above sentence is that although ethnicity is a factor that brings about disparity in educational development in national environments, social-economic and political factors are also responsible for the struggles within society; they also bring about educational imbalance since education is seen as the main issue involved in power distribution. In this regard, an attempt is made here to examine one of the basic causes of educational disparity or imbalance; that is, ethnicity or the ethnic factor in educational development is investigated because the contemporary manifestations of educational disparity in many nations cannot be adequately explained and/or understood without references to the immediate internal social structure and the factors that accelerated education in certain areas and those that hindered it in others.

Ethnicity has been defined by Nnoli (1980:5) as “social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture or both.” He further identified conflict as an important characteristic in ethnic relations. On their part, Maclver and Page (1969: 386-387) wrote that an ethnic group is generally conceived to be one whose members share a distinctive social and cultural tradition maintained within the group from generation to generation, whether as a part of more complex society or in isolation.

It need be emphasized here that ethnic groups lived in the past in isolation but that with the establishment of colonial governments over territories that were independent, rivalry began to set into the form of relationships that exist between ethnic groups. Abernethy (1969) described the setting for ethnicity as the outcome of the struggle for employment which was bound to produce frustration and those not chosen for the best jobs found it easy to blame their plight on the advantages possessed by members of other groups. Nnoli (1980) went further to adequately illustrate the above view by stating that the various ethnic groups did not perceive themselves in the pre-colonial period as they do today. Kosemani (1987: 3) illustrated this by saying that “the Yorubas fought each other,... The Igbo on the other hand did not see their relationship beyond the clan at most. The basis of ethnic rivalry in the colonial situation in Nigeria for example, were; urbanization, an attempt to prepare for the eventual competition for governmental and colonial positions, which were all attempts to dominate the source of political and economic power in the new order”.

He went further to explain that in Nigeria, especially in the south, the need for governmental employment and the increased urbanization initiated by it demanded a labour force that only the school system could provide. This according to him, lead to the formation of ethnic associations for individual protection and survival in urban areas where the face-to-face relationship of the village or clan was no longer possible. It was the desire to protect their future economic and political position that lead to the increase in the education base of the various groups. Ethnic associations were thus compelled to initiate action from their bases in urban centres for the expansion of modern type of education among their ethnic group. The awareness that the future of the various ethnic group was to be determined by their level of educational development made ethnic associations to establish secondary schools and sponsor selected promising students overseas for university education. In a way, education became a motivational complex for ethnic solidarity and identification and the various ethnic associations gave priority to educational programmes and propaganda.

In Nigeria, the prominent ethnic groups in the race for provision of secondary schools were the Ibibio’s State Union that established Ibibio College at Ikot Ekpene in 1946; the Ibo Union, established Ibo National College, Aba in 1948; Urhobo Brotherly Society established Urhobo College, Efurun in 1949; Ijesha Improvement Union established Ijesha High School Illesha in 1934; and later Ijebu-Ijesha Grammar School in 1955 (Kosemani 1992). Other ethnic groups followed the examples of the ones mentioned
above and the result was that the ethnic groups that faced the challenges of the time helped education to develop in their areas while those who did not participate in the rivalry experienced educational backwardness. The tables below may give clearer pictures.

The tables 1 and 2 were given further analysis by Kosemani (1997). He explained that the community schools in the Northern region were either established by the Northern minorities or other Southern communities in the north as evidenced by the Ibo Union Grammar School, Kano founded in 1959, and another in Kafanchan in 1961. The basic explanation for the lack of competition in the North may be as a result of the indirect rule system, which consolidated the traditional elite in their position. Moreover, there was equally the general antipathy for western style education among the majority Muslims of Northern Nigeria.

### Table 1: Ethnic/community schools up to 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Northern region</th>
<th>Eastern region</th>
<th>Western region</th>
<th>Mid-West region</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1959</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Kosemani (1992: 15)

### Table 2: Private schools in Nigeria Up to 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Northern region</th>
<th>Eastern region</th>
<th>Western region</th>
<th>Mid-West region</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1959</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Kosemani (1992: 16a)

### Economic Factor

The existing historical and ethnic factors were further complicated by economic factor in the United States of America. The growth of industries brought about urban and rural settlements. The companies attracted educated men and women as workers in the industries. These workers on their parts struggled to ensure that their children received good education. This brought about a situation where schools in urban areas were well staffed, equipped and financed while rural schools experienced poor staffing, furnishing and financing. In some cases, teachers refused transfer to rural areas (Aluede, 1998).

In Nigeria, economic factor is contributing to educational disparity from two perspectives. In the first place, there is clear disparity between the level of educational development in urban and rural areas as in the United States of America. Another area where economic factor is influencing the level of educational development is in those areas that experienced sales of cash crops in Nigeria and, had farmers who could pay the fees of their children in schools overseas in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is evidenced by the activities of the cocoa farmers and traders in Western region, the palm oil farmers and traders in the Eastern region and in the Southern minorities. The favourable economic activities that took place in those areas made them to have educational advantage over their neighbours that did not experience economic boom.

### Political Factor

Education is generally expected to bring about changes in the society and if education is to promote change, it is important to define what the change should be. Kosemani (1996) argued that it is invariably politicians who take the decision on the course of the envisaged change. Equally, in the normal situation, political systems invariably influence what goes on in the school system. Educational systems are influenced and even dictated to by the political system operated in the society. This point is illustrated by the South African apartheid system. In the South Africa situation, the racist regime determined the type and level of education the blacks and those described as ‘coloured’ should and could have. The Russian experience is another example of how politics determine the level of educational development. The Russian government made education available to all as a result of the political leadership since 1917. In Nigeria, politics brought about disparity in educational development. The political activities of the 1950s to 1960 brought about changes in educational development. The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 sowed the seed of disparity in terms of educational development. It among other things, gave powers to the regional governments to pass laws on education. The result of this was the presentation of a comprehensive proposal for the introduction of free universal and compulsory primary education other wise known as universal Primary Education (UPE) to the Western House of Assembly by chief Awolowo. The implementation of the programme took effect in the Western Region in January, 1955.
The Eastern regional government also planned for the UPE which took effect in 1957. The implication of this for educational development in Nigeria was that the population of school pupils increased in the Western Region, including the Mid-West area and the Eastern region (Okonkwo, 1989). There was however no such increase in the number of school pupils in Northern Nigeria. This view was aptly reported in the Ashby Report (1960:9). The report puts the scenario in perspective when it stated:

In the East and West, it can be assumed that the majority of children of school age will complete primary education; in the North only about one in eleven children of school age are at school and in some areas, the proportion is as low as one in fifty.

This signalled inequality in educational development which was again perpetuated in Nigeria by later political activities. During the second Republic, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) won in the then Western Region and in the Mid-West. The party, like the former Action Group of the Western Region, promised the electorate of free education at all levels. This they effected and between 1979 and 1984, there was a sudden increase in enrolment in primary, secondary and university education. The Eastern region experienced similar development while Northern Nigeria that was predominantly members of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) did not give free education at all levels. This later development came to establish the already existing inequality in educational development.

In Canada and Australia, Bullivant (1981) reported that government educational policies, which he maintained were political decisions, were to him, mere propaganda that were not matched by actions. In his view, the already existing inequality prevailed while policies aimed at parity failed to yield the expected results because of non-commitment on the part of government.

**Cultural Factor**

The differences in the cultural pattern of the peoples of Nigeria are reflected in educational development. In fact, culture dictates the level of educational development in societies. The Christian missionaries came to the coastal towns of Nigeria from where they moved into the interior, to places where they later settled at Abeokuta, Calabar, Ikot Ekpene and much later, Onitsha, Enugu, Ibandan and the then Mid-West with their religion and culture. While the people of Southern Nigeria continued to imitate the missionaries, acquire their education and religion and even dressed like them, the people of Northern Nigeria followed the Muslim pattern. The Puddah system further deprived their women or girls access to Western education. This on its own accounts for the disparity in the level of educational development between the people of Northern Nigeria and those in Southern Nigeria.

Further more, the nature of the social life in the South made the people to accept their European visitors easily. Their culture easily accepted what other culture had to offer because it was the open type. This made them to benefit from what other people had developed which they considered superior to their own, that is, the indigenous culture. But in the North, as a result of their religion and the culture that the people acquired over the years, they did not allow a mix up of their children and other children. This in a way deprived them of the opportunity of learning from others.

Moreover, the type of education that came to be popular in Nigeria is the Western type education, which came with the missionaries to Southern Nigeria thus, putting the people of Southern Nigeria at an educationally advantage position compared with their Northern neighbours that had Arabic education which was relegated to the background. The point to be noted here is that the North perhaps would have been the educationally advantaged group if Arabic education had been the model Nigeria as a country adopted. However, this imbalance in education remained for many years a problem without immediate solution not only in Nigeria, but also in the United States of America, Canada and Australia.

In addition to the above cultural causes of disparity in education, the level of material development, that is, technological advancement that has brought about the production of goods, has to a great extent affected the level of disparity of educational development. The advanced cultural groups have produced better learning facilities to further the gap of inequality within nations. In the United States of America, the whites are more able to produce teaching aids for learning in urban schools where majority of settlers are whites compared to areas where the blacks live.

Further still, the advanced cultural groups have been able to use modern technology to teach
their children all that is required to be able to
make a living in their environment. In the course
of doing this, children acquired a better
knowledge of their language, which the school
system uses to transmit knowledge in schools.
The ability to use a language effectively is known
to have been a determinant in the ability to benefit
from formal educational system. Thus, while those
that are good in the use of a given language excel
in academic programmes in schools, those that
have poor understanding of the language of commu-nication in schools perform poorly. This
is evidenced by the language programme in
Australia for the New Australian children to enable
them benefit from school teaching (Bullivant, 1981;
Aluede, 1998).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt was made to analyse
the causes of disparities in educational development
within regions, which cannot be easily
observed when viewed from international pers-
pective. It was discovered that although national
statistics do ignore the regional differences that
exist and project national figures as if equal
development was taking place, the differences
within regions are such that they can no longer
be ignored today. Many countries are now
concerned with what to do to reduce inequality
in educational development, which has been
observed to be bringing about inequality in
economic, political and social development as
well. It has also been observed that this disparity
in educational development can cause disinte-
gration in nations in the course of struggles for
positions and power.

One could say that while governments are
trying out policies to reduce disparity in educa-
tional development, the basic inequality that have
been caused by history of development, econo-
ic, political, and cultural factors have continued
to widen the gap of inequality. It is however, hoped that a level will be reached in future where
every region could be said to have been treated
fairly. This can be achieved through well-planned
and implemented compensatory education
schemes. It is however not expected that compen-
satory education schemes will bring about parity
in educational development particularly as there
are differences in history of origin and develop-
ment, economy, culture and even hopes and
aspirations of the multi-ethnic groups that are
present in nation states.

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