

CAN THERE BE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN A DEPRIVED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT? THE POWER OF EDUCATIONAL HISTORY AND A RETHINK OF DR. B. R AMBEDKAR'S ENVISIONMENT FOR NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The major part of this research is a historiographical type of qualitative or narrative study, aimed at linking the good works of Dr Ambedkar to the ingredients that make for success in today's society. In order to achieve this purpose, the study engaged a systematic review of both primary and secondary data with a view to critically appraise and summarize as well as to reconcile the evidence involved with the preset research. The anchor theories were Vygotsky's Defectology theory (1993) and Deprivation theory of Gurr (1970) which both formed the foundation on which the operating concepts of equality and inclusion in special education are laid, and commonly point to social attribution (of society) as the source of creation of discrimination. Some key concepts – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's envisioned equality and inclusion in education, learning environment and deprivation were explained under conceptual and contextual issues. Impact of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision on nations and international bodies including NGOs as they relate to inclusive education were meticulously reviewed with the aim to raise an answer to the question that gave rise to the study. The paper concludes by promoting the envisaged view of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as what must be upheld in all countries particularly the least developing countries like Nigeria, as a means of not only achieving a sustained social, economic, political adjusted society that has educationally empowered persons and community through equitable access and inclusion but as a charted course to arrive at SDG4. Recommendations among others include that government should make efforts to provide education with ingredients of equality and inclusion to every learner at all levels of education to achieve development. Increased government passion for inclusive education provision, learning technology with improved learning environment, funding, teacher training among other educational needs particularly for the inclusive learners. And concluded that Since Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision has become the national and international vision for the global community, governments should have no option of making her education responsive to current global demands to engender sustainable development.

Keywords: *Historiology, Cultural society, Ambedkar's lens, Equality, Inclusion, Learning environment, Rethink, Education system, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Education is a broad term which can be described in different ways including transmission of society's cultural ideas, language, habits, value system, customs and institutions from generation to generation. Every society comes with its culture which comprises the language, habits, beliefs, value system, customs and institutions. Within the society too, culture can be created, learned, borrowed, imposed or passed on to generations (Asuquo, Inaja, David and Bassey, 2005). Some major aspects of human culture identifiable include, i) Religious, is connected with man's orientation towards natural and supernatural goal; ii) Social, deals with human relations with his fellow man in politics of government; iii) Economic, is concerned with proper use of environmental products, and iv) Scientific, is reflected in man's orientation towards speculative and practical truth (Asuquo, et al, 2005). These are the different aspects that Dr B. R. Ambedkar's lens has need to pass through in our contemporary times for an enhanced society to emerge in accordance with his vision not only for India but the entire world. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar existed between 1891 and 1956 (yourstory.com). The role he played in ensuring an empowered society, and one free from all manner of discrimination, inequality, injustice and exclusion extended to all areas of Indian life including social, political, economic, legal and cultural and saw in educational opportunities for the people, a veritable tool to promote equality, fairness, empowerment and development. In the culturally educational and social perspectives, he worked so hard to fight against the caste

system in India. The system was a major avenue for the perpetration of inequality and exclusiveness in the Indian Society, having been born into a Mahar ('Untouchable'/ Dalit) family which opened him up for segregation along with his Dalit friends that happened to defy the law to attend school. The caste system was a culture that discouraged full utilization and empowerment of individuals in terms of gender participation in education, religion and other social interactions, economic and political life among others. Therefore, without the efforts of the social reformist and the human right activist, we would receive from generation to generation a society that will be characterized by lack of fairness, justice, equitable access and where development would be a far cry. His influence in the area of cultural liberation is as much felt in education where he maintained through his constitutional involvement an educational policy that caters for all classes of individuals to attain any level in their education endeavor. This paper is not dwelling on culture, but draws from the fact that education is the vehicle that transmits the cultural gains of any society to generations and prepares and empowers individuals for life and development. The power of education history can be examined at this point. Thereafter, the main components of the lens of Ambedkar in the context of this paper will be explored, along with bridging the educational gap of deprivation caused by inequality, exclusion and lack of access to quality learning in our educational system.

Educational history

The ancient Indian government and education were popularly known to be based on castes. The castes were one system which identifiably imbibed social interactions among members of different groups - The Brahmins, the Kashatriyas, the Vaisayas, the Sudras. Though many least developing societies in the sub-Sahara have progressed with their culture, there is no gainsaying that cultural and educational efforts that segregate and deprive its citizens based on social class, economic, political, religious and other limiting factors can hardly produce a society that meets with sufficient progress and growth. These may have been part of the motivation of earlier transformational visionaries including Dr. Babasaheb R. Ambedkar who envisaged India to be a society where all sections are economically developed, socially equal and emancipated, and culturally civilized and free as against what was obtainable in the traditional society of caste system. He therefore, envisioned political, economic, social and cultural inclusion of all sections of his society, the sustained kind of development 'call' which the UN's SDGs are not only being anchored on, but has become an annual celebration of high-ranking global organizations including International Council for Education, Research and Training (ICERT). The power and impact of educational history has been felt in the conveyance of the work of past great educators, educational thinkers and reformers, and this role has been useful to us as educators of today in many ways including;

- ✓ furthering the works of such past great men for sustained vision and developments. Through literature, a number of benefits have been revealed

which the present educators stand to appreciate by engaging the role of education history. According to Asuquo et al (2005.4), the study of the past would help modern educators to become more aware of the implications of the various issues involved in education.

- ✓ It will increase the ability of educators to influence educational policies, because with their knowledge of the past, they can presently offer alternatives for actions to be taken towards improvement of the system.

- ✓ educators can become aware through involvement in studying other civilization, that the principles upon which their own is founded are peculiar and unique.

- ✓ education history brings the consciousness to the present educators that civilization is relative to social values.

- ✓ brings educators to a point of analysing the present critically and objectively based on their study of the past.

- ✓ the power of education history exposes the past educational problems of different societies and how they evolved in each generation and each culture. The accumulated solutions constitute a historical laboratory which in several ways can serve those concerned with the problems of education. Therefore, how educational thinkers and reformers responded to social demands of their times is made familiar to us, the present educators through the vehicle of education history.

Moreso, people, organization and governance concerned with the improvement of education, can learn through

the passion of those past educational reformists as expressed by education history. There is so much to be talked about when looking at benefits which stand to be gained through education history. For instance, we would not know about Ambedkar and all his groundbreaking contributions to end inequality and exclusion if not for the power of Education particularly Educational History. Educational history provides a powerful tool to convert the past to the present and into future generations.

The overall development achievable in a society, be it cultural, social, political, economic, and technological lie in connecting with how it was in the past to what changes are envisioned for the future. He inherited a society that was full of injustice, inequality and exclusion and he was bent on reforming the society with equality and inclusion. His contribution has come to us through the power of educational history. History is to lift certain people who leave a mark on the sand of society and Dr. Ambedkar is one of such rare individuals. Therefore, the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar to the development of education, to the extent envisioned, where equality replaces inequality and inclusion criteria become enthroned over exclusion cannot be overemphasized. More of Ambedkar's educational philosophy will be examined at the later part of this research paper.

Statement of the research problem.

Some of the underlying causes of challenges found in our educational system are the result of practice of inequality, discrimination, inadequate access and exclusion to educational opportunities. These problems include lack of

egalitarianism in political systems, insecurity, corruption, deprivation, school failure, absenteeism, drop-out, unemployment, idleness, frustration, aggression, bitterness, and taking to crimes among others. These have also led to increased educational costs. It is a common belief that the enlightenment that education brings should have the tendency to reduce inequality among people and society in general. Some critical issues that notably have helped to widen the equality gap have however, persisted despite the effort by various governments, agencies and international organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, WORLD BANK, NGOs to increase access to education. Some of the challenges have hung around for long and ICERT's regular seminars are relevantly providing opportunities for addressing the bedeviling issues of education of countries particularly the least developing countries (LDCs), and the world at large. Hence, the need for a paper like this, to make a contribution towards re-thinking and re-enforcing equality and fairness, access and inclusiveness as envisioned by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The study question therefore, is 'Can there be equality and inclusion in a deprived environment of learning'?

Conceptual and contextual issues of the study.

Key terms in the research are conceptually and contextually reviewed and this session concludes that a government and society that denies learners access and inclusion may be walking to future society with distorted individuals or citizens who may not contribute to the development of their country.

Equality and Equity, Inclusion and Learning Environment in our Education System.

Conceptually, providing education empowerment at any level, individual or community comes relatively easy in an environment of fairness of opportunities. Ordinarily, equality of opportunities means to give equal chance to every individual for the development of his capacity. Equality means that everyone is treated the same way regardless of need, sex, religion, language, race, color, caste, political affiliation, nation or social origin, economic condition at birth / background or any other individual difference. It does not however assume that all individuals are basically equal to capacities. Rather, it means that the opportunity an individual gets is what his or her innate capacities warrant. This implies that no-one should be stopped from going up except when he himself lacks the ability to go up. Equality in education is equal educational opportunities to people, (same level of support, environment, resources or opportunities to bring out the best in them). According to Medina-Garcia, Dona-Toledo and Higuera (2020), equal opportunities have become an objective to be achieved in a sustainable society. Equity on the other hand recognizes that everyone is provided with what they need to succeed; it is synonymous with fairness and inclusion (Ugodulunwa, 2005; Idika and Offem, 2023), and adapts the educational environment to match the needs of the learner.

Equality with inclusiveness in education would likely encourage a good learning environment for every child whether

physical or virtual space; will encourage and support the process of acquiring, developing and applying knowledge. Medina-Garcia, et al, (2020) refer inclusive education to mean the right of all people to education, guaranteeing the presence, participation, and progress of all students and, above all, equal opportunities. This is an environment designed to engage rather than disengage learners; that provides meaningful and active interactions of learners with one another and ultimately produce well-adjusted and socially cooperative members of the society (William and Clint, 2022).

On the other hand, the authors posit that an environment that fails to support learning, skill development and adjusted society, has defeated the aim of learning because learning itself characteristically is the purpose of the environment, which produces effective learner with assurance of well aligned goals, being safe, engaging, with conducive learning spaces, designed to support the development of skills and knowledge. William and Clint (2022) highlighted some types of learning environment to include classrooms, gyms and digital spaces, and maintained that a good learning environment is a physical or virtual space that supports the process of acquiring, developing, and applying knowledge. Learning environment however, may vary from context to context. It is important to note that a deprived learner or environment of learning is a major problem to be tackled for adequate empowerment that can result in any meaningful progress in our educational systems and economy as a whole.

Incidentally, Nigeria inherited an education system that from the onset in the

1960s opened doors for inequality and exclusion especially as the colonial policy had not totally given way to the indigenous needs of the people (Okparaugo, 2021). Consequently, after several years of independence, the educational system of Nigeria is still very slow in witnessing these gains despite the 5 all enriching goals clearly stated in the National Policy (2014), because of continued lack of access to quality and functional education and the deplorable environment under which educational processes particularly teaching and learning take place. Orji, Anakwue and Oseola (2019) observed that the deprived environment under which learners have continued to be exposed has the tendency to deter learning because of severe and damaging lack of materials such as textbooks, desks, transportation and other educational facilities for effective and efficient studies. Educational deprivation, the authors noted can come in many faces, and takes its root not only in school but from home (Orji et al 2019). It can result from; i) Social exclusion enabled by discriminatory rules and regulation, laws and policies; teacher may unknowingly develop the habit of relating to only some class members; ii) Center on stereotypes and cultural norms as is the case in most African and less developing worlds; iii) Social restrictions caused by limited access to education and health opportunities; iv) When the home as the basic social unit fails in its responsibility to integrate a child, it could upshoot to deprivation at school and society. For instance, a child who grows up in a home which is culturally and educationally unstimulating is handicapped even before he/she makes entrance into school or society. If unfortunate such a child

encounters any financial challenge and forms the opinion that he will not be able to fulfill the needs and requirements related to education, such a child is experiencing educational deprivation. Yet, in another way, some learners may likely have to face the deprivation of opportunity to play, for language development etc. Generally, a child can be educationally deprived when such lacks educational learning/study resources such as a comfortable seat to study, a quiet corner, or space, or place to work (library), computers for school work, educational software, internet connection, a dictionary, and school textbooks (OECD, 2012).

Deprived learning environment occurs in a school when one suffers a severe and damaging lack of educational materials, a lack of trained teachers, poor infrastructure and the actual benefits which make learning difficult (<https://www.unicef.org>). Consequently, deprived learning environment is one that strengthens and upholds exclusion criteria, a situation that tends to widen the gap of inequality and increases poverty caused by it in the first place (UNICEF), frustration, depression and often many authors have associated social and political discrimination, and frustration to the reoccurring violence, destruction of property and killings, kidnapping, etc., in our society lately because of deprivation of youths (Ibuoke, 2022; Elem, 2020; Dada, Idika and Ojo, 2017; Human Right Watch, 2007; 2011). This is why great reformists like Dr. Ambedkar and their contributions to social inclusion and upliftment of marginalized sections of society cannot go unnoticed and unrewarded.

Access and Inclusion in Education Empowerment.

Access- education for all involves getting all children in the school. Learning concept of inclusive education means that all children in the classrooms, in same schools and real learning opportunities are open for all groups including learners with disability, and other group constituents who have traditionally been excluded (unicef.org/edu). Inclusive education means that schools accommodate all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities; these including street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistics, ethnic or cultural minorities and children other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups (UNESCO, 2003:4).

Inclusion in education has become a widely talked about concept in education and in many societies. It has been seen as the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school in same environment, learn in the same classroom and be empowered with the skills necessary to thrive in today's world. It involves ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all. According to UNESCO, 2017: 7), inclusive education is the process of reinforcing the capacity of education system to welcome and reach out to all learners. By this for instance, everyone should be able to read, write, think through basic problem to provide an answer, and do simple mathematics. Nanjwan, Ikwuen and Egaga (2019) see inclusive education as education with a more re-structured mainstreaming setting with a goal for successful learning and social experience for all learners. The major structure of inclusive education is the

removal of all forms of barrier to learning and participation so that all learners receive and achieve quality education (Nanjwan, et all, 2019). Inclusion aligns very well with equity. In essence, equity implies that all learners can learn and should be given the opportunity to do so without hindrances emanating from whatever may be their background. Equitable and sustainable access to education was envisaged by Ambedkar for promoting a holistic vision of education; this understanding is what contemporary educators must not be tired to propagate.

Inspite of these understanding, UNICEF (2023) notes a number of factors have continued to stand in the way of access to education, including, i) lack of school, ii) not understanding the importance of education, iii) lack of money, iv) unfavorable geographical position, v) prejudice against some ethnic minority (tribalism) and children with disabilities, v) inadequate conditions (manifesting as lack of; qualified teachers, teaching materials, poor sanitation, all affecting about 617 million children who fail to acquire minimum literacy and mathematics knowledge with two thirds of them in school attendance). It is important to note that causes that prevent one from accessing a quality education may be just as severe as the effects that the lack of education can create. This explains why countries with poor economic sectors including poorly developed educational systems and opportunities are unable to depart from their vicious circle of poverty without interventions of the international agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, WORLD Bank, rich NGOs, etc. According to UNICEF (2023), ten consequences of not

having access to education include, i) poor health, ii) shorter life expectancy, iii) poverty, iv) unemployment, v) lower salary, vi) gender inequality, vii) social isolation, viii) illegal or criminal activities as only way out of disadvantaged position, ix) poor economy as different from strong, better developed, and more sustainable economies made up of educated people, x) impossibility of (adequate) participation in political and social life.

UNICEF notes too that lack of education does not only arise from not having access to education and attendance, but it is also a direct consequence of poor quality of teaching, thus underlines that schooling does not always lead to learning because worldwide, there are more non-learners in school than out of school. Therefore, raising the quality of instruction so as to overcome the global challenge that lack of education presents has become a clarion call to educators for pedagogical and overall improvement of the system. For effective pedagogy and maximum performance of learners in an inclusive setting, given learners' different background, characteristics and cognitive abilities, Idika and Orji (2017) opine that the teacher ought to be especially thoughtful and creative in balancing various teaching styles and methods in order to meet individual needs for learning and good performance.

More, still needs to be done especially in LDCs as a proof that education is meant for all. Although continuously being categorized as fundamental human right, educational access is evidently still being denied to many children in most LDCs around the world including Nigeria. The Borgen Project research

(<https://www.allisonacademy.com>) reports that 72 million children do not attend primary school, and a staggering number of 759 million adults are illiterates in least developing countries, while in many developed countries, where importance of education has long been recognized, access to quality education is given. Access to education will reduce inequality and exclusivity and the attendant negative vices associated with social deprivation, school failure and drop out. The fact that tackling school failure helps to overcome the effect of social deprivation which often causes school failure, is an indication of the fact that the two dimensions are closely intertwined. This was envisioned by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who desired a well-adjusted society of citizens who would be free from social, political, cultural and scientific limitations, and grow and adapt to a healthy economic environment with little or no lack in resources/facilities, to enrich means of livelihood. His major concern was empowerment of individuals and community through education for future relevance and a fulfilled society. Through the lens of education, equality and inclusion would be promoted for such empowerment to become a reality.

Theoretical and Literature Reviews

The theories reviewed for the qualitative study are (i) Deprivation theory of Gurr (1970), and (ii) Vygotsky's Defectology theory (1896-1934).

The deprivation theory of Gurr emphasized the reason why people get involved in negative collective actions such as violence, that degenerate for instance to political instability with its attendant effects

on school, schooling and the society. When people are deprived, discriminated or denied, the feeling or experience of discontent which is relative rather than absolute, which emerges could amount to hurts, ill feeling, frustration, stress, aggressions, depression, participation in collective actions, and these impacts can be felt in different areas where the deprivation occurs, in social, political and economic. The concept therefore, has its consequences both in behavior and attitudes, and it is most inextricably linked to similar negative terms like inequality, poverty and exclusion.

The theory was appropriate for the study because it allows the reader to understand how society or how environment, particularly a deprived environment can limit equality and inclusion in education, and thus reduce opportunities open to learners to be empowered with skills which they need to better their lives and for society's progress. This throws much light on the theme of this research, 'can there be equality and inclusion in a deprived environment of learning?' Much rethink based on Dr Ambedkar's envisioning is called for as a major way to achieve a sound and fulfilled society. Dr Ambedkar's vision of the Indian society was an environment bubbling with economic development, industrialization, empowerment and social democracy, and an education that is not only accessible to all, but as a tool for building character and morality. Today, by adopting his lens, education can be used as a tool for achieving equality, inclusion and development. It has long been associated with a tool for societal enhancement.

Vygotsky was a Russian Psychology who postulated the theory of Defectology in

1993 which forms the foundation on which the current operating concept of inclusion in special education is laid and to which also SDG4 and Ambedkar vision anchor. Vygotsky carried out research from where he identified the zone of proximal development (ZPD). His theory discusses two developmental process of a child that must blend together so as to breed rational and productive life. These are the natural line of biological development (cognitive, affective and psychomotor development), and the cultural line of development which studies the socialization and development of cultural tools that are required gradually in the course of the individual's development. His theory held that it is the structure of a particular culture that produces the societal inability to understand and cater for the social development of her children. Vygotsky noted that for a child with no special needs (no disability), their stages of development (as expressed in the two lines of development above) will support one another. However, where there is disability, the process is interrupted. The disruption however, is not attributable to the child but to the cultural norms and expectations in which he is living. On the basis of his reasoning, what creates disability is not the issue of special needs area or handicap but social attribution which tends to create discrimination. In other words, the society by reason of its cultural inclination creates inequality and exclusion. The Defectology theory of Vygotsky is of great relevance to Dr Ambedkar's inclusion principle which recognized the role of the Indian society and others in general in empowering and developing the citizens based on the

understanding of their individual differences and granting equitable access to them.

A synthesis of the literature searched and gathered for this review like the theories above have shown some commonalities and gaps in the current investigation. The findings of the studies indicated a consensus that inequality and exclusion are major barrier to educational progress and there is so little that a learner can achieve in a deprived environment (UNESCO, 2003:4; Mooney and French, 2005; UNICEF, 2013; Orji, Anakwue and Oseola, 2019; Kainuwa and Yusuf, 2013; Idika and Offem, 2023). This is confirmed in a study by Orji, et al., (2019) who found deprived environment as the major development of delinquency among undergraduate students. Inadequate classroom facilities for example, creates discomfort, demotivation and absenteeism among students. In the same way, lack of gender sensitive infrastructure such as toilet facilities may increase the vulnerability of many female students to absenteeism which impacts negatively on their school attendance and learning.

Ajayi and Awodiji (2016) examined how the educational needs of school age children can be managed for sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the most deprived and disaster area of Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The study population comprised all school age of primary and secondary schools and staff of government and non-governmental management agencies. The study used proportional stratified sampling technique with the help of Taro Yamane sample size formula to select 9 staff of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), 10 staff of

National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), 12 staff of UNICEF, 88 school age, and 6 Nigerian Army educational staff. An adopted questionnaire titled “Intervention Programme for Meeting Educational Needs Questionnaire (IPMENQ) and checklist on educational materials and emergency teachers (CEMET) were used. Actual response rate was 92% from schools from 3 states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. The data was transcribed and analyzed thematically using mean rating, frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that library services, trained teachers and other educational materials were not adequately available at 62.9%, while provision of teachers, pre-primary, primary and secondary school education were highly inadequate at 71.1%, 69.0%, 56.9% and 71.5% respectively among others.

UNICEF (2019) observed that deprived persons particularly the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) more often than not face severe social tensions and discriminations on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or simply being displaced. This sometimes happens in schools. Mooney and French (2005) found that these tensions resulted in the segregated education in Georgia, where many IDPs could not send their children to schools dominated by rival ethnic groups. In another study, the researchers also reported that IDPs face severe socio-economic crises which also largely affect their access to education. Similarly, UNESCO (2011) global monitoring report found that many learners especially boys in the segregated camps for reason of poverty stay away from school to assist families to earn incomes. These reflect on issues affecting learning environment,

equality of learning opportunities, inclusion and access to education but in countries other than the LDC like Nigeria, or the Indian society which was the target of Dr Ambedkar, thus making the appropriation of this vision in all nations of critical essence. Equality and inclusion with education are critical issues as they have made their way to the global attention in recent times. This is due to the fact that equality of education opportunities and inclusion in education also implies equality of access to school and equality of success. It is having everyone to be in school and also succeeding regardless of age, sex, individual differences etc. These are basic issues that bring advancement in educational achievement, and so should be given priority, and the environment for their success adequately created. Through the lens of Ambedkar, an environment that promotes both is needed while that which hinders equality and inclusion, is depriving to the learners. The importance which education renders to the development of any society is enormous. As a result, there is need to take these concepts very seriously, and as much as possible demonstrate adequate rethink on how best to improve the environment of learning and consequently improve equality and inclusion in education. This is a reason for this paper.

Incidentally, many countries of the world are beginning to show promising indications of embracing visions and philosophies behind inclusion and equality. Research evidence has it that in OECD countries, most of 15-year-old children have all the basic school resources to support learning. In 2009, the proportion of educationally deprived children was 26 times higher in Mexico than in Iceland

(OECD, 2012). Educational deprivation has been most prevalent in Chile, Mexico, Turkey where OECD reports that around one-fifth or more students are missing most educational resources. By contrast less than 1.5% of children in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Slovenia are educationally deprived. Some reports have also shown that a particular gender may be more deprived than the other gender. In a study of OECD countries in 2002 - 2009 and contrary to what obtains in Nigeria and many other African countries, boys were reported to be more educationally deprived than girls (OECD). The findings of Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013), however, was more favorable to the boys than the girls in terms of access to education. He reported that inaccessibility of girls to education in Zamfara State of Nigeria was a result of cultural tradition and practices which prevented parents from sending their children to school, and said these can have far reaching consequence in the lives of the children as they may be vulnerable to disease like HIV/AIDS, teenage or early pregnancy, child labor. This calls for adequate intervention by way of increasing awareness of the importance of education in the life of any individual and society to bring about change, and education history as a potent vehicle to transport the change across societies to generations.

In his most recent contribution to improving inclusive learning environment in Nigeria, Adeniyi (2023) explained the Russian model of defectology which was initially grounded in the belief that children with special needs were defective and incapable of functioning, and noted that this ideology is found similar to the traditional

Nigerian belief systems about this group of learners. He therefore, saw a great need for a change to intensify the current move in inclusivity in education in Nigeria. This could come by increasing the advocacy for safe and supporting environment for learners of all categories, particularly the special needs learners who have long been neglected from instruction and social lives in the school community (Adeniyi, 2023). The author emphasized that the old practice must give way to a new understanding that will enable all stakeholders of education to cater for the needs of all learners in the school community.

The Implementation Need from Going through the Lens /To Rethink Vision as means to Stem down Issues that trouble Education in Nigeria.

The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, background, medical or other needs. It is about offering equality in accessing opportunities that will lead to better empowerment of individuals and communities for a more sustainable development and society. This was the vision of Dr Ambedkar, the human right fighter, to get rid of discrimination and intolerance and enforce a society where there would be no form of barrier. While the research literature substantially revealed the nature of the prevailing learning environment which have scarcely offered support for the above vision, the opinions as to reasons why inequality, lack of access and exclusion have remained the feature of education in Nigeria as exemplified by the many challenges facing the system, the search has shown much gap in the area of

successful implementation of the recommendations of the research studies. For instance, several recent studies have reported the inability of the system to encourage learners by financing education in general and study facilities /environment in particular. Ekaette, et al (2019), Odigwe and Owan (2019) reported of the government's allocations of funds to the education sector which have been insufficient over the years. This lack has led to a shortage of resources, limited access to quality education, and inadequate salaries for teachers.

Corruption in the education sector has also been a significant challenge towards educational access and quality in Nigeria. For instance, some officials and administrators embezzle funds meant for education, leading to shortage of resources and inadequate facilities in schools (Madukwe et al., 2019). The security challenges in Nigeria, such as the Boko Haram insurgency, have disrupted education in many parts of the country. Many schools have been closed, and students and teachers have been abducted, making it difficult for students to receive access and quality education (Arop & Owan, 2018; Idika, Orji, Bichene & Oke, 2021). Bassey et al., (2019) note that many schools in Nigeria lack basic facilities like classrooms, furniture, textbooks, libraries and laboratories. This lack of infrastructure and other environmental inadequacies make it difficult for teachers to deliver quality education, and students may struggle to learn effectively (Bassey et al.,2019).

Moreover, from the perspective of the SDG (4) with the agenda ending in few years, comes the urgent need for rethinking

the envisioning of Dr Ambedkar particularly in terms of implementation. In the entire SDGs Agenda, people have been considered and are the center of the Goal. On the basis of this consideration, Nigeria promised and signed to strive for a world and a society that is just, equitable and inclusive in economic growth, social development and environmental protection in order to benefit the people, the youth now and in future. This commitment from the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on SDGs was to be based on agreement without any individual difference. It is about offering equality and accessing opportunities that will lead to better empowerment of individuals and communities for a more sustained development and society. The time for the enhanced livelihood from such empowerment is now.

This is the same lens many agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, NGOs, have viewed inclusive education; as a process of addressing and responding to diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. Several of these bodies have seen equality and inclusion in education as essential ingredients that work together for the achievement of eventual progress and growth in all aspects of the society and particularly in education, and have made huge commitments in terms of implementation of policies in this direction. This paper has also explored the impact of Ambedkar's vision on the activities of some agencies based on the subject matter.

The lens of Dr Ambedkar positions the concept of the learning environments of

equality and inclusion as essential ingredients and what make for an enhanced society as they facilitate empowerment of persons and community for a better society. This is capable of clearing barriers of fear, anxiety, hurt, failure and all forms of negative vices that can impact on children's experience, causing them to fail to achieve or to act collectively in the most negative way. For instance, in the face of discrimination, some children may feel left out and never enter school or class, or enter for a few years and end up as 'never do well' as they repeat or drop-out without having their needs met. This is why a major emphasis by UNESCO in illustrating the above, has often been the failure of school to teach rather than the failure of children to learn (UNESCO 2003:4). An examination of the concepts of inclusion and equality in the levels of Nigerian education is important in understanding the great role played by the international agencies in helping to stem the tide of inequality and exclusion in the system.

Concept of Inclusion, Equality and Equity in Education in Nigeria and the Big Question.

Equality means equal and fair availability of educational opportunities to every learner after eliminating all factors which brought about inequality, discrimination and exploitation in the first place. Inclusion in education is promoted by equitable access (impartial or fair opportunity to all learners to deliver based on individual abilities) The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2008) has in section 1, sub-section 6(c) provided equal access to quality educational opportunities

for all citizens at all levels of education within and outside the formal school system. This unequivocally provides equality and equity in education at all levels implying that every learner is given free and compulsory education until they complete school and enter the job market. It also ensures enrollment universally, early provision of physical facilities and retention universally. Thus, opportunity also ensures basic education as curriculum of the individuals.

At secondary level, the concept of equality and equity makes it possible for learners to be open to availability of educational opportunities on the basis of their diversified interests, aptitude and abilities as there exist differences at this level in all aspects - physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Moreover, equality at the secondary school level also includes availability of vocational and technical education opportunities in addition to the general educational opportunity provided to this population that is being considered as active from production point of view. At the tertiary (higher) level of education, there is also policy provision of availability of educational opportunities but this is on the basis of merit.

Education in Nigeria is classified in terms of formal, non-formal and informal, all acting as a medium to deliver the five (5) goals, at all the levels from pre-primary to tertiary. These goals include; i) development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic citizen; ii) total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; iii) provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at

all levels of education within and outside the formal school system; iv) inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; v) development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

Basic ideas of education particularly Education History irrespective of the environment where it is practiced include assisting individuals to understand the past, exposing them to different values, beliefs, habits, standards, systems and aspirations of the society with the aim to properly adapt and contribute meaningfully to solving the problems of the society while also enlisting and ensuring commitments to the societal progress, growth and development sustainably. In Nigeria, while education plays its roles at the three major levels, pre-primary/primary, secondary and tertiary, the question that subsists remains how successful, how adequate the process of education has transformed Nigerian society especially when weighed against the lingering issues of unequal educational opportunity which continues to manifest in lack of accessibility, equitability and inclusiveness as well as inadequate learning environment and facilities which the system offers to its vast number of learners.

This question has remained unresolved and a concern among educators and other stakeholders of education. This is particularly true in the light of many prevailing social, economic and political challenges surrounding education, other sectors and Nigeria in general. This is a concern that this paper is out to address looking through the lens of Dr B. R.

Ambedkar in the culture in which he was raised, and for which he stood firmly to criticize in terms of its socio-political, economic and educational inequality, a great lesson for today's world.

The great lesson is what this research is aimed at promoting, that is creating a medium through the ICERT Platform to yearn for an educational environment that ensures that there is inclusion, that is, education that ensures equality of success in school is a non-depriving environment. Such environments will promote education of all children without discrimination of achieving or making it in life, gender and or disability, all into the regular school together. This is attainable through the lens of Dr B. R. Ambedkar. It is a lens the world in general is invited to wear, stakeholders of education, all governments, all organizations at different levels of their activities and at all levels of education, can achieve the dream envisaged by Dr. Ambedkar yester years. Ambedkar fought for social, economic and political justice. He fought to make education a tool for emancipation of the man and society. Education by means of access to knowledge remains an important tool in our hands and can still play a pivotal role in social reform. His ground breaking contribution in fighting social, economic and political inequality in India is a worthy legacy; we live today to continue the good work and turn his vision for India (industrial focus, empowerment, social democracy, accessible education to all, and building character and morality through education) to reality. By so doing, a lot more would be achieved by the contemporary educators.

Importance of Education Through the Lens of Ambedkar /His Educational Philosophy

The systems of education in many LDCs are fraught with issues that existed even in the time of Dr Ambedkar. These challenges including inequality, lack of inclusion, poor learning environment, discrimination, exploitation, lack of care for teachers among others, have tended to cover the important role which education is meant to perform. In the eye of Ambedkar, education serves as a tool for emancipation of man and society. Education by means of access to knowledge and learning plays a pivotal role in social reform. Ambedkar's notion of education -to educate, agitate and organize came from this belief that education is a tool that can reform and sustain any system. Therefore, ensuring equality in education is making contribution to end social, economic and political inequality. This was one of the groundbreaking contributions of Dr. Ambedkar. His vision for India can become the vision for our various countries: (i) India's economic development (ii) India's focus on industrial development (iii) Empowerment of India (iv) Social democracy (v) Education that is accessible to all (vi) Building character and morality through education as a tool for the achievement of equality and inclusion.

Ambedkar's social philosophies were in the areas of education, empowerment, economics, politics and law. Today, same philosophy has been the driver of the world's SDGs. This paper is limited to education in its scope. Dr Ambedkar believed that where traces of involvement of inequality and exclusion still exist, they do because people

have not received enlightenment through education as a key factor to equip and impact lives. By impacting individuals with knowledge, skills and orientation will get them removed from the practices of inequality. His belief covers the role education plays in governing the abilities of the future generation; creates awareness about the importance of sustainability and environmental issues as well as health; contributes to the development of various skills to enable individuals solve their problems and those of society, thus leading to achievement of SDGs.

Impact of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision on Nations' and International Agencies' contribution to Education.

Many Organizations' and Countries' efforts have been identified towards helping to promote equitable access/inclusion in education in many nations. Much of the impact can be seen in an evolving society with the highest performing education systems like the OECD countries- Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia with less than 1.5% percent of children lacking in educational resources. There is combined equity and equality with inclusiveness in education; demonstrating that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background do not prevent learners from achieving educational potential (fairness) and; providing that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). There is very little doubt that with the commitments as highlighted above may emerge an enhanced and sustained society socially, economically, politically and

technology in accordance with the dream of Dr. Ambedkar.

The research covered the activities of some notable international bodies like; UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank and NGOs example Light for the World, (Vienna Austria) in relation to promoting equitable access and inclusion in education as continuing lessons from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The strategies and achievement in attaining inclusion by these agencies and the NGOs were explored particularly those of UNESCO and Light for the World and with this, the LDCs have a path to toe (a great and lasting lesson from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar). Some of the ways UNICEF has rendered support include, i) Advocacy; ii) Awareness raising; iii) Capacity building; and iv) Implementation supports where it provides assistance with monitoring and evaluation in Nigeria. In many other countries it offers partnership to close the implementation gap between policy and practice.

UNESCO'S work in promoting inclusion in education is anchored in its belief that every learner matters, and should be treated equally, yet millions of people worldwide continue to suffer exclusion and deprivation from education from reasons of sex, gender orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition or ability. These are barriers that stood against nations from reaping the benefits of inclusive education. No wonder Dr R. B Ambedkar took the stand many years to decry exclusivity, and called on the Indian community to embrace equality and inclusive society for social and economic sustainable development.

Inclusive education works to identify all barriers to education and remove them and covers everything from curricula to pedagogy and teaching. In Nigeria, the recent NUC move for new Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standard (CCMASS) review for education and other disciplines is a step in the right direction. UNESCO'S work in promoting inclusive education is first guided by the conviction against discrimination in education (1960) as well as Sustainable Development Goal4 and the education 2020 framework for action which emphasize inclusion and equity as the foundation of quality education (<https://www.unesco.org/en>).

UNESCO'S World Higher Education conference held in Spain in 2020, has further added several other programmes including video production to increase awareness about inclusion in education. These programmes include; Global education monitoring report 2020; Inclusive education in action; Resource base on inclusive education, Language in education. Others are videos of a call to action to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, Inclusion and education as well as What does inclusion in education matter? Enlightenment from UNESCO have further indicated information on the important areas of this paper, pointing further solution to issues in question. These include information about: percentage of children and young people who face exclusion from education on a daily basis (20%); number of children living with a disability globally (93 to 150 million); number of female students who do not have minimum requirements for water, sanitation and hygiene(335 million);

percentage of children more likely to read at the end of primary education if they learn in their mother tongue (30%); and information on school feeding for inclusion as well as brief on inclusion on education (unesco.org/en).

UNESCO'S (2000) policies that have encouraged the practices of some countries' education system to seek to welcome learners in quality learning environments particularly those with disabilities have become great tools to such countries in moving toward inclusive education and ultimately toward SDGs. The LDCs can borrow a leaf of inclusiveness in education from countries such as Southern Africa, Netherland, where some ministry actors applied systems of inclusiveness, " systems thinking approach" in making education systems more inclusive because of their strong belief that education system requires a transition from traditional thinking to systems thinking, which takes into i)consideration the inter connectedness of different parts of the system ii)working with other actors towards a shared goal, i.e. collaborating with others, iii) identifying leverage point to effect transformative innovative change. In these nations, remarkable advances are being recorded including a drop in school failure, increase in economic growth, social and overall development. Some other notable countries that have made advances or promoted inclusive education are Australia, Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, International, USA.

In addition, some notable NGOs have made great impact in these areas still in connection with the vision of Dr. B. R.

Ambedkar. In this regard, the activities of the global development organization, Light for the World (LFW) NGO, with the headquarters in Vienna, Austria is worth exploring in this paper. LFW is one of the organizations that have stood firmly against exclusion. For instance, it works to ensure a dismantling of harmful stereotypes and discrimination towards children with disabilities within communities and education system. Its achievement is because of the following: i) passion in inclusiveness of education leads them to focus on the poorest and hardest to reach because they need it most; ii) passion to reset and restart line; (iii) passion for empowerment; to create enabling learning condition/environment that allows girls and boys with disabilities to thrive and reach their full potential; iv) collaborations- working with partners makes a team stronger (<https://inclusivefutures.org> > light-f..)

Wikipedia defines LFW as an international disability and development NGO that aims at inclusive society. It makes evidence-based advocacy campaigns on investing in inclusive education, early childhood development and the teachers, and the roles are changing systems at both international and national level. It empowers people with disabilities and enable eye health services in low-income countries. Over the last 3 decades, LFW has improved health systems, enabled education for all, and amplified the voice of people with disabilities. It uniquely plans its programmes sustainably and long term. For instance, its Light for the world strategy 2023 serves as a guide for all its decisions. Its strategic focus is on: (i) Inclusive early childhood

development (from birth-5 years developmental age) (ii) fighting for the rights of the youngest children (0-5 years with disabilities) (iii) advocating the importance of play and parental support, iv) making early childhood development services disability inclusive using the Nurturing Care Framework; v) access to technology - they work with partners to harness the power of technology so students with special needs can access the curriculum; vi) supporting digital story telling with embedded sign language to promote literacy and socio-emotional development among preschool children with deafness and hard at hearing; vii) emphasizing learning from audio books to e-print, to tablets to digital storytelling, LFW believes technology can improve students' outcome and across the board, reduce teachers stress, and support quality social and emotional learning with parents; viii) encouraging youth leadership for change; ix) training the young people in special needs as teachers and inclusive education champions; specially, they bring live experience to the classroom and exhibit huge power as role models; x)they are leading change by serving as advisors to mainstream organizations and promote the inclusive development of schools; xi) training teachers who are the educational workforce. Teachers are the bedrock of inclusive education, so, they receive training supports in their institutions to deliver quality inclusive education training and provide further professional development for educational leaders, in-service teachers and specialist alike; xii) advocating for greater investment in a teacher that can support the need of learners, including those with disabilities;

xiii) education in emergency – especially in the period of disaster. When disaster strikes, education is more important than ever. It engages with partners on inclusive education in emergency contexts, to ensure no child is left behind; xiv) education financing –it makes the case for governments and donors to urgently increase investment in disability-responsive education financing to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Through the Organization’s intense and committed activities at promoting inclusiveness, the following discoveries have been made: (i) 258 million children worldwide do not go to school (ii) 32.5 million are children with disabilities from hard income countries (iii) 90% of a child’s brain is already developed by the age of five among others.

Conclusion

Education is a multifaceted discipline and a tool known for the development and preservation of societies. Education thrives and sustains in environments where equitable access has been firmly engraved and implemented as part of educational policy. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar envisioned a transformed society as one whose entire sections are economically developed, socially equal and emancipated and culturally civilized and free, and believed in the enlightenment from education as a means to end inequality and promote progress. This calls for a learning environment that is not depriving. The impact of his vision of political, economic, social and cultural inclusion of all units of the society in the process of development is increasingly being felt by individuals, nations and organization. It is a vision that every nation particularly the

LDCs need to imbibe for achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. The education system in Nigeria can ripely position for urgent implementation of the vision of Ambedkar. It is hoped that the different segments of this paper have provided an answer to the question, ‘Can there be equality and inclusion in a deprived environment of learning?’

Recommendations

Globally, nations face challenges arising from issues not readily tackled by stakeholders of education. Many propositions have arisen from findings of researches; issues of concern are continuously being envisioned with little or no attention paid to enforcing their proper attention and implementation. The following are recommended for careful implementation to an enhanced learning environment where equality and inclusion will be enthroned.

- i. Government and rich NGOs to provide effective and regular training of teachers (in-service teachers, professionals and other specialists) as bedrock of inclusion, refurbishing school facilities, providing adequate technology and granting access to students to have these learning materials. Training can take through workshops, seminars, conferences in-person and online modes. In addition to teachers; training the young people which have special needs as teachers and inclusive education champions should be considered and intensified.
- ii. Need to tackle discrimination and stigmatization at community level through adequate mounting of enlightenment campaigns sponsored by community, civil society and other leaders.

- iii. At the national level, government to strengthen inclusive educational policies with an emphasis on students with special needs; align policies and principles with the convention on the right of these persons.
 - iv. Government and NGOs to create and sustain investment (funding) to the needs of these learners enough to support them.
 - v. The government can collaborate with educational researchers, institutes and other institutions to regularly gather and analyze data to ensure children are reached with effective services.
 - vi. Enlisting support of the Federal and State Ministries of Education as the case in some reviewed countries, in the process of revising some regional or state educational information system for students with special needs to better reflect their educational situation.
 - vii. Closing of issues of education gap for children with special needs by having more hands joining hands with UNICEF'S, UNESCO'S work of supporting government's efforts to promote and access inclusive education.
 - viii. Ensuring urgent implementation of all reviewed policies particularly the new CCMAS curriculum is highly recommended.
 - ix. Application of successful models of other countries and NGOs such as the systems thinking approach to make educational system more inclusive and imbibing the strategies of Light of the World and others that have made their way through to inclusive education.
- extent that this has remained an inspiration for many who believe that caste system and its hierarchy should cease to exist, and the rethinking and formation of an equal society is the way forward:
- i. In the present Indian society, the motivation to celebrate annually “the voice of equality and inclusion” may not have come from educational policies that pay less attention to these educational and developmental key drivers. This is a model for others to follow.
 - ii. Pursuit of qualitative and functional as well as inclusion education and society is in the heart of any nation that aims at sustainable development.
 - iii. The lens together with the voice of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is what we need not only in India where this envisioning is fast transforming its systems and society, but in most nations of the world today.
 - iv. That same vision of achieving a better environment for sustainable goal attainment has become the anchor of the SDGs agenda of 2015 and realizable by 2030.
 - v. This would imply that the achievement of equality, fairness, access and inclusiveness will ultimately produce a well interacted and developed society where education will continue to transform with the ever-changing global society.
 - vi. Transformation in education brings social, economic, political, cultural and scientific change. This is one of the major reasons why education is desired by all nations, organizations such as UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, to be accessible to all, satisfy also the fairness or equality and inclusive criteria of sustainable development goals. It can notably be concluded that equality, equity, access as well as inclusiveness can achieve a better environment for teaching, learning involving all learners and such a system remains the vision of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

The Future Direction.

Through education history, generations after Ambedkar have received the tenets of the life and legacy of equality and inclusion as envisioned by the social reformer to the

and a strategy which the world needs to heal and to advance sustainably.

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