

**JIBRIL AMINU'S EQUALITY PRINCIPLES AND THE REALITIES OF PROMOTING  
EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This paper is an examination of Jibril Aminu's equality principles and the realities of promoting equal educational opportunities in an inclusive education system in Nigeria. Under the inclusive education model, students with special needs are meant to spend most of their times with non-disabled students and share in the same curriculum and learning conditions regardless of their differences, strengths and weaknesses in any area. It seeks to maximize the potentials of persons that are excluded from certain meaningful activities, especially persons living with disabilities in the societies. As equal educational opportunity for all citizens is pronounced in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, scholars and stakeholders have questioned the extent to which persons with disability is being integrated in the course of providing equal educational opportunity for all. This paper therefore examined the realities and concluded that, though inclusive education is realizable, it would be practically difficult to achieve in the present day Nigeria as the nation is still struggling to put her education system on a better footing. Based on this opinion, the writers posited that equal educational opportunity could be provided for the children with special needs but in a separated and censured environment where they shall be given maximum attention; but suggested among other things that, for inclusive education to be adopted, All*

*staff of Nigerian schools should be given additional training to enable them adapt to demands of and approaches to an inclusive education system.*

## **Introduction**

In recent times, the debate about inclusive education has moved from more developed countries like the United States and Canada to less developed countries like Nigeria, where an official policy of educating children and youths with disabilities and those without disabilities in regular schools is being considered. This is as a result of a growing argument that including students with disabilities in general education setting could provide them with the opportunity to learn in a natural and stimulating environment, which may also lead to increased acceptance and appreciation of differences. Thus, the debate continues among educators, local, state and federal policy makers, parents, and even institutions of government that are responsible for the well-being of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. The bone of contention is majorly on the realities, possibility and efficacy of running an inclusive education system, considering the inevitable need for the restructuring of general education in order to make learning more meaningful in an inclusive environment.

Those advocating for children with disabilities to access the general curriculum and attain the same standards as normal/able persons strengthen their argument on the grounds that such inclusive education system would guarantee the provision of equal educational opportunities for all children of school age as stipulated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education. However, arguments abound that the issue of equality and equal educational opportunity especially in Nigerian assumes so much on paper and resolutions while its reality is in serious doubt. In other words, it conveys an idea which is approved by most people but in countries like Nigeria, equality in general and equal educational opportunity in particular is a mere political jargon- easier to say than applied. On the issue of equality of opportunity, Prof. Jibril Aminu developed some equality principles in which he explains factors and circumstances that are considerable in attaining equal opportunities.

Professor Jibril Aminu is a Nigerian from Adamawa State born in August 1938. He was the Nigeria ambassador to the United States of America between 1999 and 2003; a former minister of education in Nigeria and later was elected senator for Adamawa central constituency in 2003. He was more of a political philosopher. He wrote one of his famous books titled "*quality and stress in Nigerian education*" in 1986, in which he extensively discussed issues that bother on equality principles and

equality of educational opportunity. In this Aminu's book as reviewed by Enoh (1996), Jibril Aminu did well to establish what in reality should constitute equal educational opportunity for all citizens. He perceived equality in line with his three principles of equality Viz: Absolute equality, equality of consideration and principle of positive or reserve discrimination; explaining that it is not only Nigerians that are equal to one another but the entire human race, with the result that all are entitled to equal treatment, including the provision of equal educational opportunity. Aminu's assertion is in line with one of the main goals of Nigerian education, which is to achieve "A just and Egalitarian Society" through education, (FRN, 2013). It may not be out of place to say that the goal sought for a society where justice, fairness and equity prevails and the provision of equal educational opportunity for all Nigerians should be an indicator to the attainment of that stated goal.

It must be noted clearer that under the inclusive education, students with special needs would spend most of their time with non-disabled students regardless of their strengths and weaknesses in any area, and seek to maximize the potentials of persons that are excluded from certain meaningful activities especially persons living with disabilities in the societies. In other words, an Inclusive education policy and programmes if applied in Nigeria would help to provide equal educational opportunity for recipient to develop his or her potentials in an atmosphere that is devoid of discrimination of any sort; since Odionye (2014:206) affirmed that "equal educational opportunity implies a situation where the same type or similar type of educational treatment is given to everyone without discrimination of any sort or consideration of status or personality". That means that application of the principles of equality is imperative in actualizing inclusive education. On the contrary, judging from what equal educational opportunity represents, the realities on ground in Nigeria indicates a total negligence of the principle of equality and provision of equal educational opportunity. It also reveals a situation where inclusive education seems unrealizable. Against this background, the writers examined the realities of promoting educational opportunities in Nigeria through an inclusive education, with reference to Jibril Aminu's Equality principles.

## **Review of major concepts**

### **Equality**

The concept of equality is considered by many philosophers as complicated especially when the term 'equal' is not explicit as to spell clearer, the parameter used in discussing the term. For instance, in saying that "all men are equal", one ought to know whether two men are equal in respect of height,

intelligence, sensitivity, weight or any other attributes; since judging by attributes mentioned above, men are not equal. For what it really is, scholars have grouped themselves into the “myth and “reality” group, thereby creating widespread misconception about this social discourse-equality. Little wonder Dworkin (2002:2) opines that, “equality is a contested concept, people who praise it or disparage it equally disagree about what they are praising or despairing. The general conception of equality implies similarity or sameness of status and treatment. Throwing more light on the concept, Okoh (2003) examines the equality in the following perspectives: **Mathematical Equality:** For him equality perceived in mathematical term suggests a state of sameness in quality, quantity, nature, status, ability and so on. It gives a picture of a situation where the sum total of figure on the right must be perfectly equal to that on the left. In education, it implies that the sum total of provisions made for school **A** must be mathematically equal to school **B**. **Legal Equality:** This Okoh noted, refers to a situation whereby every citizen whether high or low in the society is treated equal before the law of the state. In order words, the child with special need (the physically challenged) and the normal child are to be treated equal according to the law. **Social Equality:** This refers to a situation whereby everybody is treated fairly; that the individuals receive from the society as much as will be adequate to make him develop a feeling of belonging to that society. However, Okoh’s view does not summarize the meaning of equality as long as other scholars are concern but he did well to throw more light on the gravity of the concept of equality.

### **Equal Educational Opportunity**

The consideration of equality in the distribution of education stems from the consideration that at least all men are equal and as such they ought to be treated equally. The phrase “equal educational opportunity” has been interpreted by different scholars in different ways. According to Nwogu and Nwafor (2014) equality of educational opportunity implies a fair start in life, an opportunity for all children to develop their faculties and proceeds into adult life and employment without been adversely affected by poor homes or families. In order word, equality of educational opportunity suggests that provision should be made for all children to start at the same and if possible, come out with the same result. Akinpelus as cited in Musa (2014) states that equal educational opportunity can be interpreted in two ways; either equal right to education for everyone or right to equal education. He argues that the claim to equal right to education derives from a more fundamental equality, namely; the social and political equality conferred by a common citizenship. Garms (2010) is of the opinion that equal

educational opportunity has the following elements: equal access to education; equal educational treatment and equal educational outcome. Explaining these elements, he further notes that equal access to education would suggest that the school fees, facilities available and utilized, curriculum content and implementation, quality of staff, etc. are equally accessible to recipients of education. Equal treatment is related to equal access to education but more specific in the area of implementation. In this case, education is provided according to capability, disabilities are appropriately handled, resources and services provided have equal spread amongst the schools in a given country. Equal of educational outcome for him suggest that public expectations of schools products within the same operational level should be alike; that is to say that having equal access and equal educational treatment, products of schools should have comparable performance with that of another school. The above assertion may be correct to an extent but there is no guarantee that equal access and equal treatment must result to equal outcome because the outcome of education even when there is equal access and treatment is often determined by the individual recipient of education.

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education refers to the full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classroom and the inclusion movement believes that children with special needs should be placed in the regular school classroom which they would have otherwise attended if they had been normal children, Ainscow and Farrell (2002). Inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming, as it presents a means by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering and restructuring its curricular organization and provision as well as in allocating resources to enhance equality of educational opportunity. Ahmad (2000) defines inclusive education as the education of all children and young people with and without disabilities or difficulties in learning together in ordinary pre-primary schools, colleges, and universities with appropriate network support. Today, if there is any concept that has gained currency in the world of special needs education, it is inclusive. Inclusion is generating thoughts and attention worldwide as a new approach in the provision equal educational opportunity for learners with special need.

### **Jibril Aminu's Equality Principles**

Jibril Aminu is no doubt an advocate of the capability of education as a veritable instrument for nation building and national development. For that reason, the need for proper planning, most

particularly in addressing the educational problem of declining quality as well as the need to extend educational opportunities to the neglected group provide a great concern in his thought. He therefore came up with four principles of educational equality. Aminu gives premium to these principles as the only alternative that addresses the immediate problem that threatens national accord. The following constitutes the equality principles of Jibril Aminu;

### **Principle of Absolute Equality**

The principle of absolute equality means “all men are equal”. Aminu perceived education as the most veritable instrument that can equip man with all he needs to be responsible to the society. In his opinion, human beings are essentially the same but there are certain intrinsic values that are necessary for man to acquire. Attainment of these common values for him guarantees the full development of such essential human qualities. For this reason, Aminu in his ‘Absolute Equality Principle’ argues that “any method of educational distribution that discriminates against any segment of the population is unjust. Buttressing his argument, Aminu notes that it is a fact that the cattle rearers like the senators are all Nigerian citizens; therefore they are entitled to the same rights and privileges as any other Nigerian. Supporting Aminu, Ajuwon (2008) opines that physical challenged children are Nigerians and so have the right to attend a regular school like their able counterparts. It is in an attempt to remove discrimination in the provision and distribution of education that the issue of inclusive education arose with many advocates. Though the argument is, if we accept that all men are equal, and if it is true, is it in all respect that men are equal? This absolute equality is questioned because advocates of absolute equality fail to establish what respect(s) men are equal. However, it can at least be accepted that all men are equal in certain respects between certain classes for certain purposes under certain conditions. It should be made clear that we can never secure it in all respects between men for all purposes and under all conditions. This is the argument of some scholars and philosophers on the issue of absolute equality. Aminu based his argument for absolute equality in education on the need for responsible human beings and a good society; the reciprocal responsibility between individual and society and the universality of value. Aminu’s opinion is correct considering the contribution of the cattle rearers to the economy of Nigeria in terms of the provision of meat and milk for human consumption just as the law maker’s contribution in moving the country forward. For this reason, Aminu says each of these groups of people must be treated absolutely equal as others in terms of provision of quality education. However, we must acknowledge the difficulty in applying this principle of absolute equality in the true sense of it not even

when it is indisputable that some are more endowed than others while some other do not utilize the opportunity even when it is provided.

### **Principle of Equality of Consideration**

This principle is less stringent compared to the principle of absolute equality. Aminu placed this principle side by side with the principle of opportunity, arguing that all men should be treated on the platform of equal consideration, which he noted, is the liberation of opportunities from guide privileges and restrictions and with the development of healthy competition based on merit or ability. Consideration in Aminu's principles implies that in the provision of equal educational opportunity, merit and ability should be considered. If that is the case, how can inclusive education work? The child with special need under an inclusive education is to enjoy the same opportunity with the normal child; so emphasizing merit and ability as criteria may not favour the physically challenged child. Advancing his principle of equality of educational opportunity, Aminu made strong case for the talented or gifted children all over the state. In his opinion, the sincerity in adhering to this principle will amount to searching and fetching these gifted or talented children wherever they are and giving them education. What instituted inequality of educational opportunity according to him, is the lack of opportunity to develop the potential ability of those children. Udensi (2012) brought some logical questions to prove some inherent loopholes in this principle. He asked in view of keeping to this equality of consideration principle, whether all men are to pay the same amount of tax irrespective of their income. Showing that consideration sometimes comes to play in as much as all men are to be treated equally.

The principle of equality of consideration suggests that men should be treated differently if there are relevant grounds for doing so (Corray, 2010). This principle is in line with Aristotle's principle of distributive justice which holds that injustice results just as much from treating unequal equally as it does from treating equals unequally. However, the argument against this principle is on what constitutes relevant reason(s) for treating men differently. This is because any individual can justify any reason(s) for treating people differently even if the reason(s) is/are based on personal prejudice. In his evaluation of Aminu's principle of equality of consideration, Obiagu (2016) argued that what should be used for selection for enrollment in schools and promotion or advancement to other levels in schools should be based purely on merit. In a nutshell Aminu is of the view that, to ensure the reality of equality of educational opportunity, special people which include the physically challenged, the visually impaired, mentally disable, hearing handicapped and of course the gifted in the society must be incorporated.

Such people in his argument should be identified and fully educated as any other individual in the society, failure to do so, makes the issue of equal educational opportunity in Nigeria a mirage.

### **Principle of Positive or Reversed Discrimination**

As one of the measures taken to address the negative consequences of inequalities in Nigerian educational system, Aminu advocates for the principle of positive or reversed discrimination. According to Jibril Aminu, Positive or reversed discrimination is a call to offset the effects of past acts of bias by giving opportunity in the opposite direction. This principle may take place in such a way that more financial resources are provided for education in areas or regions that are considered to be less developed and educationally disadvantaged, as the children in such places cannot compete favourably with children from more developed and educationally advantaged areas. In the thinking of Aminu, the disparity existing between the educationally advantaged states and the less educationally advantaged states has antecedents of historical inclination. Aminu thus adjudged that if these discriminations or disparities were not reserved, the gap between them would always continue as it affects other aspects of human development.

This principle as it concerns inclusive education reminds us that in the past, the children with special needs were not opportuned to learn in the same classroom with the normal children which amount to disparity but through inclusive education in line with the principle of reserved or positive discrimination, the special children could now be provided with the opportunity to learn in the same classroom with the normal children. These Aminu's equality principles are of great relevant as they provide in-depth knowledge on diversified ways of interpreting equality of educational opportunity such that one could understand better of what constitutes equality of educational opportunity both in meaning and in reality.

### **Discussions**

Reforms in education have led to a move-away from segregation of learners with disabilities in special classes toward the inclusion of such learners in general education. The duties of the school administrator in an inclusive school therefore involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children with Special educational needs and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (Akinnubi, 2010). It must be noted here that, the teacher's knowledge, belief and values are



brought to bear in creating the effective learning environment for children; thus, they are a crucial influence in the development of an inclusive system. Inclusion of students with special needs will require teachers who are knowledgeable about the concept; otherwise, the purpose of inclusive education would not easily be realized.

Another important factor to the success of inclusive education as Kern (2006) noted is the educator's attitude and preparedness to accommodate students who have disabilities. It is therefore expected that the school administrator prepares his staff to incorporate the policies inherent in an inclusive education system. Also, Haskell (2011) is of the opinion that inclusive education requires teachers that are prepared to deal with full array of learning requirements, who have acquired knowledge and skills as well as appropriate grasp of curriculum and assessment practices that are responsive to the needs of all children. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that adequate funding is not negotiable in running an inclusive education system because more and appropriate infrastructure in terms of equipments and facilities must be provided. Continual teacher development is also needed to run a smooth inclusive education system, among many other necessities. It therefore requires a national, state, and local government with unquestionable commitment, political will, proactive administration and willingness to collaborate with all concerned.

It may not be out of place to say that Nigeria at present actually lack most of these prerequisite and so may not be able to achieve a successful inclusive education system. The writers' position is that equal educational opportunities could be provided for both the normal/able children as well as the children with special needs in separate coordinated school environment instead of putting them in the same school in the bid to prove that they are equal. The crux of the matter is that the nation should give the disabled children the sense of belonging by sincerely packaging special education programmes, putting in place the necessary equipment and facilities, ensure adequate training of special education teachers and provide the handicapped children with all the necessary gadget and information and communication technologies that will enhance the teaching and learning in a special education environment. When these things are in place, the nation would now boast of promoting equal educational opportunity for all children (citizens)., secondly, on the argument that an inclusive education system will promote greater chance for acceptance of the children with special needs by their able counterparts, what the nation need to do is to promote such acceptance through sensitizations and re-reorientation for the normal children and make them see the others with special needs as fellow Nigerians who are unfortunately challenged by physical impairments. In a very simple language, an

inclusive education system is ideal but not a yardstick to measure the promotion of equal educational opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

Having concisely examined at the principles of equality as presented by Jibril Aminu and x-rayed his opinion in the light of realities and validity of some of his postulations, it is clear that this principles require that no one should be held to have a claim of better treatment than the other. By this, Aminu presupposed a commitment to some empirical generalization about the nature of man. Thus, every man should be treated equally. This seems logically impossible as all cannot be justifiably treated equally and seemly. This paper argues that inclusive education is a human right based, which centers on the principles of social justice and equitable distribution of education without discrimination. It concludes that inclusive education is realizable but may be practically impossible in Nigeria because the nation is still struggling to put her education system in a better footing. Moreover, there are better ways of providing or ensuring equal educational opportunity for the children with special needs in Nigeria, such as the establishment of special schools for the handicap and physically impaired children which are already scattered across the nation. The writers therefore conclude that, if inclusive education is considered ideal for the promotion of equal educational opportunity in Nigeria, there is need to first work out the modalities for its actualization and clearly examine its objectives side by side with realities on ground.

### **Recommendations**

For inclusive education to be adopted as a new way of promoting equal educational opportunity in Nigeria, the following has to be done:

- School teachers, school administrators and all other stakeholders should come to terms and accept the responsibility to educate both the children with special need and those that are not handicapped in an inclusive education system.
- All staff of Nigerian schools should be given additional training to enable them adapt to demands of and approaches to an inclusive education system.
- Since funding is an important issue in policy actualization. Nigerian government and all concerned stakeholders should urgently address the issue of funding the education sector to enhance proper provisions for the placement of the Nigerian child with special need.

- There should be proper enlightenment/sensitization/ of learners with no special need to ensure an increased acceptance of their fellow learners who are handicapped
- There should be diversification in school activities through the development of more flexible curricular and more relevant student evaluation mechanism.
- Religious, political, tribal and cultural sentiments should be kept aside in the provision and distribution of educational resources and infrastructure in Nigerian schools.

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