Social-Justice Dispensation: A Nigerian Educational Leadership-Challenge in the 21st Century

A.A. Akiri (Ph.D.), Ekpe O. Ekpe (Ph.D.)
Department of Educational Administration and Policy
Studies, Delta State University, Abraka

ABSTRACT: *The phrase 'social justice' falls within the ambit of more than one field of study. In this paper, the phrase is expatiated from the angle of education. However, because the phrase figures very prominently in philosophy, to which the writers of this paper are not averse, they could not resist the urge to underpin the explication with a philosophical foundation. In the paper, the writers also seek to establish that the 21st century Nigerian educational leadership challenge consists in educational leaders' occasional failure to take into consideration the feelings of the masses or seek their opinion on some sensitive issues like those of religion and language as curricular subjects. Toward the end of the paper, the writers pit philosophical stance against the general consensus about giving all children equal educational opportunity.*

KEYWORDS: *Social Justice/ Leadership Challenge.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept 'justice' is defined as the maintenance or administration of what is just (Webster, 1986). "Most Nigerian judges", it has been observed, "perceive their role as" that of "applying justice according to law rather than law according to justice" (Oyebode, 1992:4-5, quoted by Oyebode, 2005:153-154). Of course, individual justice is meant above, not social justice. In the individual context, justice entails the promotion and protection of human rights. Human rights include right to life; right to self-dignity; right to personal liberty; right to fair hearing; right to family; right to freedom of thought, conscience, expression, movement, association, and assembly; right to freedom from discrimination; right to one's property ownership; right to, one's being educated, etc.

These are some of an individual's rights the equal promotion and protection of which, for all involved, mean that justice is done to each of those individuals. Access to this justice can be possible from two perspectives: the narrow and the wide perspectives. The narrow perspective consists in the law courts while the wide perspective encapsulates the political system and the benefits accruing from the social and economic development wrought by that system. An individual's access to the justice can be impeded by such factors as high cost of litigation, observing technical rules, *locus standi*, illiteracy, etc (Okogbule, 2005). This paragraph hints at individual justice, but the thrust of the paper is social justice.

The concept "justice" is an interdisplinary one. It figures prominently in religion (theodicy), law, philosophy, and education, for instance. 'Social justice' is a construct regularly used in educational administration, just as some philosophers use the phrase 'justice in society'. The two phrases do not have exactly the same meaning. Nonetheless, their underlying principles are the same. Of course, "social justice" is also a construct in philosophy (Stewart and Blocker, 1992:466). In fact, Hornby (2010:298) illustrates a point by making reference to "Marx's conception of social justice". That illustration lends support to the assertion that "social justice" is a philosophical construct. It is for these and other reasons that philosophical principles and those of educational administration along with the applications of both pervade the paper. In the very first section of it after introduction, the writers delve into social justice in the context of philosophy.

Precisely, the writers seek to answer the following questions: (i) How is social justice conceived in philosophy? (ii) How is social justice dispensed in an educational setting? (iii) In what ways is social-justice dispensation an educational leadership-challenge in the 21st century Nigerian situation? (iv) What is the general consensus regarding social-justice dispensation as an educational leadership-challenge in the 21st century Nigerian polity? In the sequence in which they occur in this paragraph, these questions are answered below.

II. HOW IS SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCEIVED IN PHILOSOPHY?

Four second-level subheadings: social justice in a political setting; four egalitarian conceptions of social justice; principles underlying those conceptions, and the conceptions and their underlying principles illustrated appear under this first-level subheading. The first one of the second-level subheadings now receives attention.

Social Justice in a Political Setting

Some authors equate social justice in a political setting with social democracy (Oroka, 2005; Dewey, 1916). One of them describes social democracy as "the practice of giving … equal treatment and respect to every person" in the society. He even conceptualises another form of democracy which he christens: "economic democracy and describes it as "a policy of redistribution of wealth and equalization of economic opportunities". According to him: "a good measure of the worth of a democratic political system, and therefore, of a democratic society is the extent to which the interests of a group are conjointly shared and the fullness of interaction with other societies" (Oroka, 2005:128, citing Peters, 1966).

A prototypical democracy was practised in Athens in the 4th century BC as a collective form of governance (Oroka, 2005, citing Ira, 1978 and Murphy, 1977). In modern times, the United States of America experiments with democracy as a representative government. During the period of her second Republic, Nigeria also experimented with that representative form, albeit unsuccessfully. Since 1979, she has been flirting with it rather precariously. These authors referenced herein approach the issue of social justice from the angle of political systems one of which democracy indubitably is.

However, in the context of this paper, social justice is approached from two different angles. It is not approached from the angle of a political system perceived by most persons as the bastion of social justice which democracy is generally considered to be. It is approached from the angle of the discourse about social-justice dispensation in philosophy and in education. In connection with philosophy, these writers limit themselves to the conceptions of social-justice dispensation in egalitarian philosophy. Purveyed below are four of the conceptions.

Four Egalitarian Conceptions about Justice in Society

The term 'justice' could also be conceptualised as equal treatment for all in a similar situation. They are two major stances of ideologists on social justice in philosophical setting; the stances are egalitarianism and libertarianism. These writers restrict themselves to egalitariansim because of a factor which is more or less intricate. Many, if not most, persons who were formerly anti-egalitarian now believe that people have the "right to be treated equally in certain respects". Although libertarians detest egalitarianism, they share the belief that there are some rights that each person must possess: rights which ipso facto are egalitarian. Well, for them, the rights are negative. Nonetheless, rights they are all the same.

Most contemporary moralists, including even anti-egalitarian thinkers on the 'right', identify with egalitarians vis-à-vis "an assumption of moral equality between persons". Of course, they differ in their interpretation of it. They accept the view that the moral claims of all persons are, at a sufficiently abstract level, the same, but disagree over what these are" (Stewart and Blocker, 1992:462).

Three components of the factor said to be more or less intricate are articulated below. They are: (i) People have the right to be treated equally in certain respects. (ii) There are some rights that each person must possess. (iii) Most contemporary moralists, including even anti-egalitarian thinkers, accept the view that the moral claims of all persons are, at a sufficiently abstract level, the same. The four conceptions and their two underlying principles are illuminated by some illustrations of them. It may be germane, at this juncture, to intimate that libertarians advocate a system of justice which specified that "each person must have an equal opportunity for training and education… and allow that whatever unequal distribution resulted (*sic*: resulting) from this was simply the survival of the fittest and was therefore deserved and just" (Steward and Blocker, 1992:474).

What follow now are the four conceptions and the two principles which underlie them:

1. Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as requiring that each person be treated with equal respect irrespective of desert and that each person be entitled to the social conditions supportive of self-respect irrespective of desert.

2. Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as requiring that each person be so treated such that we approach, as close as we can, a condition where everyone will be equal in satisfaction and in such distress as is necessary for achieving our commonly accepted ends. (We must recognize that we cannot achieve this for the severely handicapped and for people in analogous positions and we cannot do that for people with expensive tastes. The latter are not so worrisome, but even for them, in conditions of great abundance, we should work towards such a taste.)

3. Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as a complete equality of the overall level of benefits and burdens of each member of that society. (This should be understood as ranging over a person's life as a whole.)

4. Justice in society as a whole ought to be understood as a structuring of the institutions of society so that each person can to the fullest extent compatible with all other people doing likewise, satisfy his or her genuine needs (Stewart and Blocker, 1992:464).

The Principles Underlying Those Conceptions

Underlying these four conceptions are the following two principles as put forth by one of the two egalitarian philosophers referenced below:

1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties and opportunities (including equal opportunities for meaningful work, for self-determination and political and economic participation) compatible with a similar treatment of all. (This principle gives expression to a commitment to attain and/or sustain equal moral autonomy and equal self-respect.)

2. After provisions are made for common social (community) values, for capital overhead to preserve the society's productive capacity, allowances made for differing unmanipulated needs and preferences, and due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals, the income and wealth (the common stock of means) is (*sic:* are) to be so divided that each person will have a right to equal share. The necessary burdens requisite to enhance human wellbeing are also to be equally shared, subject, of course, to limitations by differing abilities and differing situations (Here I refer to different natural environments and the like and not class position and the like.) (Stewart and Blocker, 1992:467-468).

The second one of the two principles above is meant to be a strategy designed for the purpose of attempting to structure a situation wherein there are no significant differences in the life prospects of two persons in a sub-group or between the mobility feasibility of two sub-groups in a society. Such differences take the forms of some people's having a greater income, power, authority or privilege than do others. Therefore, the principle favours the distribution of benefits and burdens in such a way that they are, as far as is compatible with people having different abilities and needs, equally shared. The principle does not imply that all wealth should be divided equally, the same way slices of a loaf could be equally shared by those individuals who own the loaf. A fraction of social product must be used for the promotion of public services in form of building and maintaining such institutions as hospitals and schools, construction and maintenance of roads and recreational facilities and so forth.

Another fraction must be invested prudently for the sake of posterity. Yet another fraction must be ploughed back into the society's production machinery so that there could be a continuous and adequate supply of goods for subsequent dividing. In any case, there is need to be cautious about possibly getting captivated or entrapped by productivism sometimes caused by the failure to forestall an economically, authoritarian controlled, capitalist society geared toward production for profit and capital accumulation: a tradition which relegates the needs of the masses to the background in preference to those of the capitalists (Stewart and Blocker, 1992).

Sometimes, it becomes necessary for decisions to be taken democratically regarding, for example, what is to be produced, by whom and in what quantity. The rationale behind such decision-making approach is to meet as much as possible and as equally as possible (barring their individual differences) the needs of all people. Nonetheless, care must be exercised, particularly if the polity has been enmeshed in a capitalist system and the polity happens to be passing through a period in which it is extricating itself from that entanglement, so that the needs referred to are those which people will acknowledge when they become fully aware of the various persuaders operating on them.

People at different ages, in different situations, with different needs and preferences will, on occasions, have to be treated differently in a relative sense. Consider this example, two sisters may not both be given skirts; one is given skirts which are what she needs and another one is given blouses which also are what she needs. Thus, by being treated differently in a way, both of them have their needs provided to their satisfaction. Since their different needs were provided to their satisfaction, it could be concluded that they were treated equally. Put differently, it could correctly be surmised that social justice was dispensed to each of the two girls. There are, nonetheless, situations in which individuals need one and the same items, goods or services but which happen to be in short supply due to the scarcity of the item at the moment. The following examples illustrate the way egalitarians could deal with such problems.

The Conceptions and Their Underlying Principles Illustrated

Suppose in a remote village there is only one doctor attending to patients in the community's village hospital. At one moment, two patients whose appendixes must be removed instantly in order for them to survive are awaiting the attention of that one doctor in the hospital which, for their survival, the two of them must receive at the same time but which is impossible. The only available doctor cannot be severed; nor is it possible to come by a second doctor at that critical moment. There can be no equal treatment for the two patients in such a situation. If there are no significant differences between the two patients needing the doctor's attention, the only just thing to do may be something like flipping a coin. However, there almost always are significant differences which could alter the situation into that of a different ball game.

It might be thought that the radical egalitarian would, in such a situation insist on something like a game of chance: may be, something like tossing a coin as opined earlier. It has been averred above that there almost always are significant differences which could have a direct bearing on a given situation. Those differences must not be glossed over; they should be duely taken into consideration. For instance, suppose the two patients are the same in all respects apart from one. Let it be supposed that two of them are legal practitioners who visited their village homes at the same time. One of them has a long record of being hostile to all medical doctors out of sheer jealousy. He has litigiously harassed and victimised many members of his country's national medical association (NMA) and actually succeeded in causing some of them to be jailed. The second one, on the contrary, has a long record of benign dealings with the same NMA members generally; he has also donated generously to NMA funds on many occasions.

In such a situation, there is certainly the tendency to include desert as one of the factors to determine the patient who should receive the lone doctor's attention. Lawyer B, prior to that moment of emergency, has done a very good job of cooperating with those whose lone ilk can save the situation for him. On the contrary, prior to that emergency moment, Lawyer A has taken many measures that antagonized those whose lone ilk could have saved the situation for him. It may therefore not be unfair for Lawyer B to receive the attention at the expense of Lawyer B since the one doctor cannot be severed or another one easily come by. After all, justice should not be conceived in terms of equality only.

The second principle above is concluded with the stance that natural environments and the like, not social position and the like, should be recognised as a criterion for determining the just entitlements of individuals. In case of Lawyer B, class position is not the determinant of his entitlement, after all, both patients occupy the same class position. The determinant is not their social status; it is their track records vis-à-vis medical personnel.

Another pair of individuals may need to be considered also. The pair is that of, on the one hand, a young wife having about five children whose needs, along with her husband's own she attends to, and that of, on the other hand, a very old widow having no dependant children. Both of them happen to find themselves in a situation similar to that of the two lawyers who visited home. The right candidate for the doctor's attention should be the young wife and mother.

It may not be quite correct any way, to conclude that the wife needs the attention more than does the widow; nor should it be a case of concluding that the widow deserves the attention less than does the wife. The best that could be drawn by way of conclusion is that more needs would be satisfied if the wife receives the attention. Of course this conclusion veers in the direction of utilitarian reasoning. Be that as it may, no matter the position taken by any on the issue of utilitarianism as a total theory of morality, that position may not attenuate the propriety of this reasoning in the present circumstances.

The final pair of individuals to be considered comprises the only pharmacist who alone supplies drugs to all members of a community and a habitual drunkard who resists every effort designed to extricate him from his addiction. The pharmacist perceives his medical services to the community as a calling on which he must never renege. Both of them alike are middle-aged bachelors. In the interest of the community's overall good, the pharmacist just have to receive the doctor's attention. This case too does not violate the rule of equal treatment since an equal division is impossible here.

Giving a central place either to the category of desert or to that of utility as a determinant of people's entitlement is not now being advocated here. However, the use of either category in this situation is not altogether unjust because it neither violates the second principle above, not runs counter to justice as equal treatment for all in a similar situation (Stewart and Blocker, 1992).

So far, justice in society or social justice philosophy-wise has been the focus of attention. The attention now temporarily shifts to the same construct and its import in educational administration.

III.   HOW IS SOCIAL JUSTICE DISPENSED IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING?

Social justice in an educational setting has been described as democratic-accountability leadership (DAL) as well as a theory of practice (Hoffman-Kipp, 2003; cited by Mullen, 2010). These describtions imply that there should be a free play of the tenets of democracy and accountability (e.g. individuality, community, justice, fairness, equity) whenever critical decisions are in the process of being taken. Social justice in an educational setting therefore, is the conflation of the two principles of democracy and accountability applied in an educational leadership situation. The concepts 'democracy' and 'countability' may appear to some as though they are separate. However, the fact is that leaders in education should always construe these concepts as two dimensions of a complex whole and then strive to utilise both of them as such in course of their performing their leadership duties.

Advocates of social justice in educational leadership contexts sometimes advertently or inadvertently overplay the apparent dissonance between democracy and accountability. For example, in an effort to create power-sharing arenas for transformative communal work within their own locales, those leaders have developed sustainable, professional, learning communities that are simultaneously teacher-led and learner-centred (Bullough and Baugh, 2009; Mullen, 2009; cited by Mullern, 2010).

DAL as a Model for all Educational Leadership Functionaries

This mode is designed to have a real-world appeal for all leaders. DAL has other meanings still. One of the other meanings is 'participatory leadership involving collaborative decision making along with inclusiveness in policy and practice'. Another meaning is 'responsibility for the learning and success of all student subgroups'. Although democracy and accountability appear to be two disparate concepts, in the real sense of the concepts, they share resonances and overlaps, dissonances and raptures. Taken as social justice framework in education, DAL lays bare these dual principles.

Through collective agency and social action, the activist leader becomes a broker of change who performs across the democratic-accountability platforms of freedom, equality, responsibility and improvement. The personnel model of accountability assumes that it is the responsibility of the leader or leadership team to enhance the participation of such constituents as community members, parents, administrators, teachers, employees, and students (Grant and Keohane, 2005; Jones, 2006). Leaders' performance is, in effect, judged by stakeholder groups and the entire community or representatives thereof.

Some public schools are entrenched in inequitable practices that do not provide poor and minority students with ample opportunity to engage in authentic and alternative approaches to learning (Kincheloe, 2003; Shields, 2006; Shields and Mohan, 2008). Social justice leaders in these schools may entertain democratic thoughts or perform democratic actions, but all those thoughts and actions may constitute a source of stress because such efforts could amount to swimming against the tide as a result of those inequitable practices. However, if a democratic-accountability leader of dynamism happens to find his way into such a school, he may be able to attempt saving the situation with the use of his talents.

The Modus Operandi (MO) of a Democratic-Accountability Leader

Such leaders are identifiable by means of specific predilection, agendas, purposes and values all of which characterise each of them as an action-oriented functionary and give the assurance that he throws in his lot with agents of social justice. Some factors usually at work in a democratic-accountability leader's style always constitute a practical proof of social justice (Jean-Marie, 2008). In a situation whereby an educational leadership is characterised by a strong desire on the part of the leader or leaders to reflect the needs of his or their subjects in connection with his or their policy formulation and implementation, the leadership or leaders always places or place high value on democratic agendas (Shield, 2006; Shields and Mohan, 2008). Of course, educational leaders who totally depend on mandates and others' dictates are puppets.

Such leaders must rise to the challenge of transforming the puppetry traditions into active democracies. The transformation can be wrought by synthesising the principles of accountability with those of democracy. They should also constantly guard against a possible relapse. In the same vein, educational leaders who are pre-occupied exclusively with democratic agendas as though their own actions are performed in a vacuum, apart from policy-driven accountability-pressures, including high-stakes accountability, may win the battle, but lose the war (Mullen, Harys, Pryor, and Browne-Ferrigno, 2008); that is, they may exemplify democratic leadership only to jeopardise their leadership positions, particularly if their schools do not boast of the requisite scores on various accountability measures (Mullen, 2010). Effecting a change beyond the local school community with regard to socio-political action and policy making therefore has saliency for leadership preparation programmes.

Objects of contemplative analysis include messages of puppetry (for example, academic standards being mandated; academic freedom being curtailed; punitive consequences being threatened or endured for perceived inadequacy on the part of schools themselves) that some prospective school and district leaders have conveyed in higher education settings (Mullen, et al, 2008), as well as some classroom teachers on their school cites (Kincheloe, 2008). The image of a school leader as a puppet is alarming, if not disturbing. This imagery needs to be reappraised for the purpose of its being changed through real-world experiences of liberation. Images of leadership empowerment underscore the social influence and policy activism integral to the role of democratic-accountability leaders (Mullen, 2010).

Democratic-accountability leaders generally, for being committed to the democratic and accountability principles which guide them in course of their role performance, thoughtfully integrate these tenets within their orientations and actions. Principals, teachers and others who are such leaders exhibit "a social justice orientation" in "issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007:221, quoted by Mullen, 2010:140).

The goals of democracy and accountability have common attainment challenges just as democracy-oriented and accountability-oriented policies have common implementation problems. However, the benefits of accountability can complement the outcomes of democratic integrity which is maintained in connection with policy formulation and implementation, the identification and pursuit of goals and even teaching and learning exercises, as well as school leadership itself. On the contrary, if people's accountability expectation are two high, the height may altogether oppose, or simply neutralise the integrity and yet, integrity is indispensible to democratic –accountability leadership.

It is for this reasons that a DAL figure: (i) Models the behaviours expected from stakeholders within the organisation. (ii) Utilises ethical standards in resolving conflicts and implementing policies. (iii) Makes allowance for a stakeholder to air his views and express his opinions in a situation devoid of threat and rancour. (iv) Seeks to attain goals by maximising the strengths and talents within the organisation. (v) Negotiates and renegotiates with others for the purpose of reaching with them an equitable consensus. (vi) Motivates his followers to vigorously exert themselves in the interest of organisational goals attainment. (vii) Structures a situation of equity by inspiring his followers to throw in their lot with him as they collectively develop the culture of that equity which thrives on democratic principle of representativeness among groups within the system. (viii) With the use of professionally acceptable accountability machinery, continually adjusts policies and their implementation strategies in consonance with the organisational objectives. This MO is presented in a tabular form below.

The MO of Democratically Accountable Leaders

Modelling the behaviours expected from stakeholders within the organization.
Utilising ethical standards in resolving conflicts and implementing policies.
Making allowance for every stakeholder to air his views and express his opinions in a situation devoid of threat and rancour.
Seeking to attain goals by maximising the strengths and talents within the organisation.
Negotiating and renegotiating with others for the purpose of reaching with them an equitable consensus.
Motivating his followers to vigorously exert themselves in the interest of organisational goals attainment.
Structuring a situation of equity by inspiring his followers to throw in their lot with him as they collectively develop the culture of that equity which thrives on democratic principle of representativeness among groups within the system.
With the use of professionally acceptable accountability machinery, continually adjusting policies and their implementation strategies in consonance with the organisational objectives.

A leader who fastidiously puts this MO into proper use conduces to the success of educational DAL. In such a situation, the followership of the leadership totally supports it because the person or team functions as the mouthpiece of it, that is, of the community or followership. The leader or leadership is usually entrusted by the community or the followership with the responsibility of considering the ideas put forth by any of the members with a view to incorporating all the viable suggestions inherent in the ideas. If the consideration of all members' ideas is not feasible, at least, those of principal stakeholders and representative members must be taken into consideration before policy decisions which must also reflect those suggestions are taken.

In the Nigerian context, the leader is the Head of government; the leadership, the government, makers of education policy, and educational administrators; the community or followership, the citizenry or the subjects. What follow are examples which will enable the reader to determine the nature of Nigerian leadership style vis-à-vis social-justice dispensation insofar as it concerns educational leadership in this (21st) century, with a view to ascertaining whether or not social justice is being dispensed by the leader or leadership of Nigerian education during this 21st century.

IV.   IN WHAT WAYS IS SOCIAL-JUSTICE DISPENSATION AN EDUCATIONAL-LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN SITUATION?

In 1979, at the inception of Nigerian Second Republic, Federal Republic of Nigeria's (FRN) Government unilaterally withdrew the erstwhile, direct subsidy for primary education and transferred primary school funding responsibility to local governments. It was this sudden withdrawal of the subsidy that engendered the sad demise of the then Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria as most states, in double-quick time, introduced school fees after the withdrawal (Egwunyenga, 2005). This withdrawal episode occurred in the 20th century as the date bespeaks. Since the thrust of this section is about Nigerian education in the 21st century, the episode in this section of what occurred in the 20th century only serves the dual purpose of prefacing the section in the manner that whets appetite for what follows the 20th century episode and purveying a bird's-eye view of what preceded it.

In the 21st century, instances abound of such unilateral decisions taken and implement by the leader and leadership without regard for their subjects, but only two of the instances are recounted in this section. The first one is a curricular policy while the last one is the decision about a novel programme of education. The policy is on which of Nigerian languages and religions should be on the secondary school curriculum; the last one is on the new programme of education which alters Nigerian system of education from that of 6-3-3-4 to that of 9-3-4. Those instances are addressed in the order of the last one first.

The Alteration of Nigerian System of Education

On Monday 26, 2004, the then Mr. President (Olusegun Obasanjo) accepted what has been passed by the Senate on March 18 of the same year after it was passed by the House of Representatives on December 9, 2003. What Mr. President accepted that day was "The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, 2004" (UBE Commission (UBEC, 2005:2-6), culled from FRN, 2004a:A113, A124). This basic education (BE) shall be of 9-year duration. It has two sublevels (primary six (PS) sublevel, lasting the period of six years and junior secondary (JS) sublevel, lasting the period of three years). The programme shall be free and compulsory. It shall include adult and non-formal education features at primary and JS sublevels for adults and out-of-school youths. The goals of this programme are the same as those of its obsolete counterpart, i.e., PS, JS and adult and non-formal education (FRN, 2004) in the system being replaced now.

It has been charged above that DAL is that which (or its figure, one who) considers the ideas and suggestions put forth by the followership before it or he formulates policies which must also reflect those ideas and suggestions. There is no indication that either the National Assembly or Mr. President consulted with the electorate before passing or signing that bill. There is not even the indication that Nigeria has a machinery for such consultation (something whose nature approaches that of referendum).

It seems to these writers that three factors underscore the need for such consultation, viz.: (i) adult involvement, (ii) the inclusion of a non-formal version in the new programme, and (iii) the possibility that a parent or even both parents and his/her or their child/children may be in the same class. Some parents, for these reasons, may opt for something other than UBE, at least for themselves and if the vast majority of Nigerians so opts, then UBE as it is currently constituted becomes somewhat insipid to some Nigerians. Therefore, as far as UBE scheme and Nigerian adult education clients are concerned, educational leaders in the Nigeria of this (21st) century did not dispense social justice to the later.

Islam and Christianity as the Only Religions to be on the Curriculum
By all standards, these two religions as they are taught at schools hardly possess anything lacked by African Tradition Religion (ATR); probably, the latter possesses something lacked by the former. Regarding the Muslims and adherents to the religion practiced by the Churches of Christendom which they call "Christianity", it has been alleged that: "The hostility of the two descendants toward the parent faith and toward each other is a sad commentary on human unreasonableness, a commentary much amplified by the Israeli-Arab war" of 1956, "which was in part a religious war" (Good and Teller, 1960:62). The parent faith is Judaism. Christianity (as it is understood and practised in the Churches of Christendom) and Islam sometimes function counterproductively. Yet, as curricular subjects, those policy makers prefer them to ATR.

An author bemoans the fact that throughout his years at a Bible College and Seminary in Nigeria, he could not remember having offered courses in ATR apart from those taught with the intent of showing how "heathenistic" and useless ATR and its nascent culture are. When he first entered the College in 1968, he was taught to see everything through American eyes; hence, before he graduated, he had already begun to interpret the Bible and to preach it the American way. More detrimentally, he learned how to condemn ATR in no uncertain terms because he was taught that it (ATR) was of no value (Adamo, 2004:8,14). Yet, as a developing nation, Nigeria itches to give her young learners the citizenship education which, according to Nigerian nationalist, should stress freedom from mental colonisation and foster national outlook (Oroka, 2005).

It is true that at present professional teachers approach the teaching of Church religion differently when compared to the way those Church teachers did the teaching in the past. However, under no circumstances will the teaching of ATR at school do any harm to Nigerian nationalists.

Is anything fundamentally wrong with the inclusion of ATR on the secondary school curriculum? These writers do not think so. Contrary-wise, they believe that when taught as a secondary school subject, ATR holds out the prospect of imbuing young Nigerians with the people's primordial predilection for social solidarity in which case every student who imbibes that spirit will say with regard to all members of the society: "I am because we are, and" because "we are, I am". Traditionally, ethnic groups in Nigeria believe that an individual cannot live successfully in isolation from others but in concert with them (Mbiti, 1970, quoted by Oroka, 2005). This belief deeply entrenched in primeval people (belief in corporate existence) is engendered by religious (ATR) relationship and reflected in a web of closely knit kinship.

One may wish to inquire whether religious education as dispensed at present fosters said national outlook or weakens it. Well, its strengthening or weakening national outlook is not the issue now. The issue is the dispensation of social justice in the context of Nigerian education during this 21st century. If educational leadership in Nigeria which includes education-policy formulators, has conducted a poll, it would have leaned from the public that there is nothing practically wrong with the inclusion of ATR on the curriculum; instead, there is something lamentably wrong with the exclusion, viz.: by education policy-makers, Nigerian young learners are criminally deprived of the opportunity to academically acquaint themselves with the religion of their immediate community. What is more, by so woefully failing to consider their followers' ideas about and suggestions on the issue of religion on the curriculum, the leadership did not dispense to its followership social justice in this (21st) century's Nigerian education.

V.   WHAT IS THE GENERAL CONSENSUS ABOUT SOCIAL-JUSTICE-DISPENSATION AS AN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN POLITY?

Nigeria launched the UPE programme in 1976. Of course, before 1976, it has already been launched (in 1955) by Awolowo in Western Region of Nigeria and (in 1957) by Azikiwe in Eastern Region. Ultimately, the scheme became a fiasco in East. The 6-3-3-4 system was introduced in 1982 and one of its five national objectives is the building of a just and egalitarian society which implies equal treatment for all persons vis-à-vis the law and all opportunities.

In the context of education, the new system could be said to have eqaulised all opportunities as it opens up many educational vistas accessible to all persons for social mobility in a manner that is discrimination-free. The curriculum of the system is diversified to cater for the various talents and abilities of students, as well as prepare them to exploit many avenues which education could, at the end either of the first sublevel (junior stage) of the second sublevel (senior stage), open up to them. (This writers are not endorsing ATR for adherence purposes; they are prescribing it for curriculum purposes.)

Another scheme for the equalisation of educational opportunities is the quota system of admitting candidates into Federal Government (FG) owned educational institutions like universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, secondary and military schools. This mode of admission is designed for the purpose of guaranteeing equal spread of admission opportunities into these institutions to all geographical localities in Nigeria because if admission criteria are restricted to performances at the previous stage and at the competitive examinations for entrance into these institutions, candidates from some geographical locations will be disadvantaged. This mode of admission, which even carries over to specific appointments into FG services, is christened federal character.

In spite of these efforts put forth to ensure that there is equality of educational opportunities, irremediable disparities in terms of educational attainments among individuals and educational progress among some geographical locations are so pronounced that they bespeak the prevalence of a lamentable inequality of educational opportunities in Nigeria. Staff schools in some universities are monoplised by the privileged few for their children only and such schools are usually staffed and equipped to an enviable standard. There are some disparities between FG institutions and those of State governments in terms of staffing and equipment.

There are disparities between those so-called "unity" institutions and the public-utility institutions of urban areas on the one hand, and even the public-utility institutions in the urban areas and those in the rural areas on the other hand. (Unity institutions are those schools established by FG for indiscriminate admission of students from all parts of the country in order to foster national unity.) The problem is further compounded by the differences between the family background of some students and that of other students. Children start off without equal opportunities; therefore, the enormity of inequality of educational opportunities is something more complex than what meets the eye.

Philosophical Stance on the General Consensus

The consensus in résumé is this: Every Nigerian child, like every other child in the world, is entitled to equal opportunity of education; therefore educational leadership should ensure that educational opportunity is equalised for all Nigerian children. In the source consulted by the these writers, the adjective 'equal' has four different entries. The entries, in turn, have a total of about 24 shades and subshades of meaning. One of the shades is "… receiving or entitled to the same treatment or privileges any other individual has or is entitled to…" (Webster; 1986:766). In quantifiable data, it is easy to determine equality since figures are usually employed for said determination of equality. However, not in all contexts of the adjective is that determination possible. It is generally believed for example, that "all men are equal before the law" (Oroka, 2005:165).

In the introduction of this paper, it is adumbrated that factors like high cost of litigation, illiteracy, *locus standi*, among others, could impede individuals' access to justice. Yet, there are some who can hardly become victims of such impediments. In Nigeria, judges have succeeded in partially loosening the fetters of the *locus standi* doctrine. However, even when that feat has not been achieved, only some Nigerians resorted to self-help or left everything to a *deus ex machina* due to their finding themselves in a situation of anguish and helplessness vis-à-vis justice (Oyebode, 2005). It was not all men that found themselves in that awkward situation before the law, before which it is believed that all men are equal.

Social ideologists and religious dogmatists do assume that "all men are born equal" (Oroka, 2005:165). These are subjective generalisations which are difficult to be substantiated with empirical proofs. Disparity is ubiquitous, perennial and indeed, natural.

In case of all those "born" ("equal") at the same time, they do not always, for instance, have the same height, the same weight, the same size, the same intelligence quotient. Correspondingly, children are born with unequal endowment and into families of unequal backgrounds. The parents of some children are poor while those of others are rich; other parents are mid-way between the two extremes. Some children are even born with some infirmities. These are some of the circumstantial inequalities which surround children's school commencement. Philosophers of education therefore counsel that the issue of equalising educational opportunities should always be approached with extreme caution.

References

[1]. Adamo, D. T. (2004). *Decolonising African Biblical studies*. An inaugural lecture delivered on 10th June at Delta State University, Abraka.

[2]. Bullough, R.V. Jr. and Baugh, S.C. (2009). Developing professional learning communities in a university – public school partnership. In C.A. Mullen (Ed.). *The handbook of leadership and professional learning communities* (pp. 39-49). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[3]. Dewey, J., (1916). *Democracy and education,* New York: The free press.

[4]. Egwunyenga, E.J. (2005). Financing education in Nigeria. In P.O. Itedjere (Ed.). *History of education* (pp. 196-209). Abraka: Delta State University (Delsu) priting press (Delsu investment limited).

[5]. Federal Republic of Nigerian (FRN, 2004). *National policy on education.* Lagos: Nigeria educational research and development council.

[6]. FRN (2004a). *FRN Gazette. No. 66, vol. 91 Act. No. 8 of 8th August, 2004*, pp. A113, A124 (*sic*).

[7]. Good, G.H and Teller, D.J. (1969). *A History of Western education*. New York: Macmillan publishing co., inc.

[8]. Grand, R.W. and Keohane, R.O. (2005). Accountability and abuses in world politics. *American political science review*, 99(1), 29-43.

[9]. Hoffman-Kipp, P. (2003). Model activity system: Dialogic teacher learning for social justice teaching. *Teacher education quarterly*, 30(2), 27-39.

[10]. Hornby, A.S. (2010). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

[11]. Ira H.C. (1978). *Power and balance: An Introduction to Amirian constitutional government*, New York: Harcourt Bruce Jenavonich int.

[12]. Jean-Marie, G. (2008). Leadership for social justice: An Agenda for 21st century schools. *The educational forum*, 72(340-354).

[13]. Jones, K. (Ed.) (2006). *Democratic school accountability: A Model for school improvement*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield education.

[14]. Kincheloe, J.L. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment* (2nd ed.). London: Foutledge Falmer.

[15]. Mbiti, J.S. (1970). *African religions and philosophy*. New York: Doubleday.

[16]. Mullen, C.A. (2010). A Social justice framework for navigating the sea change in public school life. In J.I. Beverly (Ed.). *Promoting critical ideas of leadership, culture and diversity: The 2010 yearbook of the national council of professors of educational administration*. Lancaster, Pennsylvania: ProActive publications.

[17]. Mullen, C.A. Harys, S.; Pryor, C.R.; and Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2008). Democratically accountable leadership: Tensions, overlaps and principles in action. *Journal of school leadership*, 18(2), 224-248.

[18]. Murphy, W.F. (1977). *American Democracy*. Hunsdale: The Drydon press.

[19]. Okogbule, N.S. (2005). Access to justice and human rights protection in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *International journal on human right*, 2(3) (/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&Ing=en&id=145026).

[20]. Oroka, O. (2005). *The philosophy of education: An introduction.* Benin city: Ethiope publishing corporation.

[21]. Oyebode, A. (2005). *Law and nation-building in Nigeria: Selected essays*. Lagos: Centre for political and administrative research.

[22]. Oyebode, A. Bringing justice nearer to the people: Reforms necessary to make the judiciary more sensitive to the conditions and needs of ordinary people: A paper presented at the Seminar on the Judiciary in Nigeria: Can ordinary people get justice? Organised by the Centre for Advanced Social Science, Port Harcourt, November 24-25, 1993.

[23]. Peters, R.S. (1966). *Ethics and education*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

[24]. Shields, C.M. (2006, November). *Leadership, social justice and democratic schools: Conflicts, contradictions and paradoxes*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of University Council for Educational Administration. Sanitation, TX.

[25]. Shields, C.M. and Mohan, E.J. (2008). High quality education for all students: Putting social justice at its heart. *Teacher development: An International journal of teachers' professional development*, 12(4), 284-300.

[26]. Stewart, D. and Blocker, G.H. (1992). Fundamentals of philosophy. New York: Macmillan publishing company.

[27]. Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational administration quarterly*, 43(2), 221-258.

[28]. Webster, N. (1986). *Webster's third new international dictionary (unabridged)*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica inc.