

EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

This paper discusses equity and social justice in teacher education in the era of artificial intelligence based on the observation of the existence of inequality and injustice in the system as a result of which many teacher candidates have been denied certain rights and privileges. For teacher education to serve its purpose of meeting the needs of all teacher candidates irrespective of religious, cultural, ethnic, and gender differences; learning challenges; physical disabilities; and language barriers, it must be all-inclusive and accessible. This is only possible if and when there is fair and equal treatment among all stakeholders. Hence, the discussion on equity and social justice in teacher education becomes necessary. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence has been discussed as a relevant instrument for promoting equity and social justice in teacher education, most especially now that AI technologies are utilized in education for diverse purposes.

Keywords: Equity, Social Justice, Teacher Education, Artificial Intelligence, Inclusive, Accessible

Introduction

The word equity and the phrase social justice are often used together to express an idea or describe a situation where fair play and equal treatment for everyone should be the order of the day. However, they both have different meanings. While equity is broadly defined as the treatment of others with justice and fairness (Sheppard, n. d.), social justice is explained as an ideal construct referring to the overall fairness of a society in its divisions and distributions of rewards and burdens (Banta, 2016). It should be stated that the central focus of these two definitions of equity and social justice is about establishment of social order where there is fair treatment and equal access to resources, so as to engender peace and harmony in the society. Therefore, both equity and social justice are used in opposition to injustice at all levels. According to GGI Insightful (2024), social justice (or equity) is a multifaceted concept focused on creating a fair and equitable

society. It challenges systemic inequities and strives to redistribute resources and opportunities to disadvantaged groups. The conception of social justice includes the following ends: an equitable division of resources, that all persons are physically and psychologically secure, that people are self-determined and have a sense of their own agency, and that people possess a sense of social responsibility toward others, their society, and the broader world (Banta, 2016).

Equity and social justice as concepts are also employed in relation to education. They are deployed to challenge and correct some ills and injustices that occur as a result of racial, cultural, political socio-economic and gender differences, and learning challenges and physical disabilities among individuals and various groups in schools and in the field of education generally. Therefore, teaching and teacher education for social justice and equity is a moral and political undertaking. In addition to a

fundamental concern for creating rich learning opportunities for all children, it entails engaging learners in critical thinking, caring about them and fostering relationships with them and their families and communities, getting to know their lives inside and outside the classroom, valuing and building on the experiences they bring with them into the classroom by making learning meaningful to their lives, noticing and challenging inequities and injustices that prevail in education and society, understanding and interrogating teachers' own positioning, beliefs and attitudes and their role in sustaining the status quo, and at individual and/or collective levels working with and for diverse learners to advocate for a more just and more equitable life chances for all students, to imagine and work for a more just society. This is not an exhaustive list by any count, but for one it captures the essence of what it means to teach for social justice and equity. It also signifies that all attempts at 'meeting the needs of diverse learners' are not necessarily informed by similar ideological positions, and further, that it is not an easy or simple task to effect the far-reaching changes at individual or systemic levels that are needed for such a transformative agenda of teacher education (Baljit, 2012).

Though equity and social justice are employed in teacher education as a measure to fight injustices in order to make teaching-learning more inclusive, accessible and for education to serve its purpose in all ways, it should be noted that available literature reveal that issues relating to equity and social justice in teacher education are prevalent in Europe and America, specifically, in countries such as United Kingdoms, United State of America and Canada where racism and segregation are practiced (William & Tonya, 2022.; Baljit, 2012). Hence, social justice has

become an increasingly important focus of teacher education programmes and the field of teacher education in the United States over the past 5 to 10 years (William & Tonya, 2022). These concerns are discernible in the articles published in Teaching and Teacher Education (TATE). The number of articles that explicitly deal with issues of equity and/or social justice has been on the increase in the last five to ten years. Thus a Scopus search yields over 300 articles relevant to these themes (Baljit, 2012).

Although racism and segregation are no issues of concern in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, issues of ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic differences, gender preferential treatment in students' supervision of teaching practice and projects that could result to inequality and injustice are very much prevalent. In the light of this, the academic achievement gap among different racial, cultural, linguistic, gender and socio-economic status groups of students is exacerbated by inequitable educational opportunities and resources, access to highly qualified teachers, and access to proper pedagogy and pedagogical resources. Such a demographic imperative and demographic divide calls for more equitable education-that is, preparing future teachers to teach for social justice. To better prepare teacher candidates to teach for social justice, teacher educators need to know their students' understandings of social justice embedded in their personal histories and past and current learning experiences (Young, 2021). William and Tonya (2022) declare that social justice should cut across all elements of teacher education, including curricular and pedagogical decisions, the recruitment and selection of diverse faculty, teacher candidates, and in

selecting and assessing programme and student learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, the aim of this study is to discuss the relevance of equity and social justice in teacher education as a means of empowering students to become agents of change by teaching them about social issues, encouraging critical thinking, and fostering empathy and equipping them with the tools to challenge injustice and advocate for a fairer society. It is hoped that by instilling values of equity and justice in the present generation of teacher candidates in Nigeria, the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious future is being laid. This is in consonance with the goals of education in Nigeria which is the provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system, and the development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

However, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education and other fields of life endeavor is fast spreading and gaining worldwide acceptance because of its relevance in promoting teaching-learning at all levels, and in making education all-inclusive and accessible. Hence, the Council of Europe believes that education should be accessible, inclusive, and equitable for all. AI systems have the potential to play a transformative role in achieving these goals. Through personalized learning pathways, real-time feedback mechanisms, and innovative teaching methodologies, AI can cater to diverse learning needs and ensure that no one is left behind (Council of Europe, 2024). In consonance with this policy statement, the World Economic Forum (2024) affirms thus, ‘recognizing AI’s

potential to exacerbate current education gaps, AI-enabled educational innovations must prioritize equity in their design. That means addressing disparities between genders, public and private schools, as well as catering to children with diverse abilities and learning styles, while removing language and access barriers’. As a matter of fact, AI offers a promising opportunity for teacher education in bringing about equity and social justice, thereby making teacher education accessible to all Nigerians irrespective of differences in religion, ethnicity, cultural beliefs, gender, intellectual ability, and learning needs.

Equity and Social Justice in Teacher Education: The Discourse

Teacher education is said to be a very significant investment for bringing qualitative improvement in education (Sharmila, 2019). The theoretical foundation of this field, however, is anchored by the notion that the purpose of education is in service of human enlightenment and human liberation (Beth et al., 2017). Therefore, teacher education is the professional preparation in pedagogy of those who want to enter the profession of teaching. This may be a traditional or closed type with an objectivist orientation which focuses on the product of learning and the progressive or open type with an orientation of subjectivity of the pupils focusing on the process of learning. The concept of the teacher as a benevolent despot who fills children’s minds with the values and information considered important by adults, who shapes their “personality” through the impact of his own personality in the background in order to help the pupils to be self-directing individuals. He prepares them for going through a series of educative experiences and assists in

investing their usual childhood experience with educational meaning (Sharmila, 2019).

The American Commission on Teacher-Education rightly observes: that as the quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its citizens, so also the quality of its citizens depends upon the quality of their teacher. This is an indication that the teacher is a key player in education industry who must equip himself with relevant knowledge to function effectively. According to Sharmila (2019), the teacher needs the appropriate knowledge skills, personal characteristics, professional prospectus and motivation if he must meet the expectations placed upon him. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the teacher to acquire relevant knowledge and experience on the principles of equity and justice. This will guide him in the discharge of his duties, and his interpersonal relationships with students and other community members in order to bring qualitative improvement in education that will translate to human enlightenment and liberation.

Banta (2016) argues that equity and social justice in teacher education ought to enable people to develop the tools necessary to understand oppression, their own socialization within oppressive systems, to develop a sense of agency and the ability to change oppressive behaviors in themselves, in their institutions and in their communities. Furthermore, equity and social justice in teacher education encourages students to take an active role in their education and supports teachers in creating empowering, democratic, and critical education environments. It also requires the examination of systems of power and oppression, with an emphasis on social change and student advocacy. Hence, he lists the following five key components of a social justice

approach to education: tools for content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for action and social change, tools for personal reflection, and multicultural group dynamics.

It is imperative, then, that teacher education programs should prepare teachers for the huge undertaking of this task. Teacher education attempts to prepare teachers to be agents of social change who advocate for their own students by providing teacher candidates with knowledge (through coursework) as well as experience (through student teaching). This unique period in the development of a teacher is precious. During this time, teacher candidates have the luxury of meaningfully connecting their student teaching with their coursework on a regular basis. This includes making connections related to social justice, and while social justice is an idea that is not always consistently defined, there are ideologies, practices, and pedagogies that clearly emphasize and center social justice in education and teaching. Emphasizing social justice in teaching might embrace, for example, centering inclusion and equity, engaging in and facilitating critical thinking and reflection, cultural responsiveness, and multicultural awareness (Hood, 2024).

There is no doubt that teachers encounter contested values, beliefs, and behaviors of their students that they may or may not recognize and accept. To become a teacher for social justice, according to Young (2011), teachers need to understand who they are and their views on the sources of inequities and privileges. By knowing their views, teachers should be able to recognize and accept the differences of their students and families. He warns that one way of knowing and thinking shouldn't be replaced with another. That is, multiple ways of knowing and thinking should be recognized and

encouraged. However, she adds that the process of making a classroom more inclusive creates chaos and confusion, so we must be both patient and attentive. Teacher candidates also need to develop teaching approaches that are social justice-oriented. These might include integrating students' diverse cultures into the curriculum, creating learning environments to reduce prejudice and oppression, developing equitable pedagogy for all students, incorporating multiple knowledge construction processes, and getting involved in empowering school culture and social structure.

In addition to this, Hood (2024) says that calls to address issues of equity and social justice in teacher education have come with guidance and recommendations. He proposed some opportunities that schools of education should give to future teachers to take a stand on social justice and diversity. These include opportunities to reflect on their own identity and develop an understanding of their students' realities and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, more recent recommendations on how teachers can be prepared to employ equitable teaching practices are sensitive to the diverse range of contexts teachers may find themselves in, as well as the different settings and communities surrounding schools of education. In relation to this, Banta (2016) suggests that just schools and just teachers promote things like: high expectations for all students, inclusion and equity in schools and classrooms, reciprocal community relationships, global perspectives, and collaboration at various levels to support and defend public education, culturally responsive teachers, openness to change, and reflectiveness in teachers.

Importance of Equity and Social Justice in Teacher Education

For teacher education to be all-inclusive, qualitative, enlightening, and liberating, there must be equity and social justice. Thus, GGI Insights (2024) discusses the importance of equity and social justice in teacher education as follows:

1. Promoting equity and social justice in schools creates a nurturing environment where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed. It also prepares students to become active citizens who challenge and dismantle systemic community inequalities. Social justice in education is a moral imperative and a catalyst for positive societal change.
2. When equity and social justice are prioritized in teacher education, students' immediate needs are recognized. By dismantling systemic barriers and providing equal access to resources and opportunities, the achievement gap is narrowed and every student has a fair chance of success. This, in turn, has a ripple effect on society, leading to a more just and inclusive community.
3. Equity and social justice in teacher education empower students to become agents of change. By teaching them about equity and social justice issues, encouraging critical thinking, and fostering empathy, students are equipped with the tools to challenge injustice and advocate for a fairer society. By instilling values of equality and justice in the next generation, the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious future is being laid.
4. Equity and social justice in teacher education are not just a theoretical concept but a practical and necessary approach to creating a

more equitable and inclusive society. By defining equity and social justice in teacher education and understanding their importance, our educational systems are transformed to serve all students better, regardless of their background or circumstances. Through the lens of equity and social justice, educational excellence is achieved and a brighter future for future generations is created.

Key Theories of Equity and Social Justice in Teacher Education

Education is a powerful tool for promoting social justice and equality. To ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed, various theories of equity and social justice have emerged within the field of education. These theories address the fair distribution of resources, the recognition of diverse identities, and the development of individual capabilities. According to GGI Insights (2024), the theories are as follows:

1. Distributive Justice Theory

Distributive justice theory focuses on the fair distribution of educational resources and opportunities. It recognizes that disparities in funding, teacher quality, and access to technology can create significant barriers for certain students. By addressing these disparities, distributive justice theory aims to level the playing field and narrow achievement gaps. For example, schools in low-income neighborhoods often struggle with limited resources and outdated facilities. Distributive justice theory advocates for increased funding to these schools, ensuring that students in marginalized communities have access to the same quality of education as their peers in more affluent areas. Additionally, this theory calls for equitable distribution of

experienced and qualified teachers and access to technology and educational materials.

2. Recognition Theory

Recognition theory centers on validating students' diverse identities and experiences within the educational system. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge and affirm historically marginalized groups, fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. One way recognition theory is implemented in schools is by integrating culturally responsive pedagogy. This approach incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, histories, and perspectives into the curriculum. By doing so, educators create a learning environment that values and respects the diverse identities of their students. Recognition theory also advocates for inclusive practices that challenge stereotypes and promote social justice. For instance, schools may organize events and activities that celebrate different cultures, promote understanding, and encourage dialogue among students from various backgrounds.

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3. Capability Approach

The capability approach views education as expanding individuals' capabilities and agency. It recognizes that education is not solely about academic achievement but also about nurturing students' social, emotional, and civic capacities. This theory emphasizes the importance of developing students' skills, knowledge, and abilities, enabling them to participate fully in society. It encourages a holistic approach to education that goes beyond traditional academic subjects. For example, schools that adopt the capability approach may prioritize the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration skills. The capability

approach promotes education as a tool for empowering students to become active citizens who can contribute to positive social change. It encourages schools to provide opportunities for students to engage in community service, social activism, and civic participation.

Applying Equity and Social Justice Theories in the Teacher Education Classroom

Educators must go beyond traditional teaching methods and incorporate equity and social justice theories in today's diverse and interconnected world. By doing so, teachers can empower students, foster inclusivity, and cultivate a deep understanding of social issues. However, implementing these theories requires more than good intentions; it requires practical strategies that effectively translate theory into action. GGI Insightful (2024) enumerates the following applications of equity and social justice theories in the classroom:

1. Practical Strategies for Teachers

One practical strategy teachers can employ is incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum. By including texts, materials, and activities that represent a wide range of cultures, identities, and experiences, [educators](#) can expose students to different viewpoints and challenge their preconceived notions. This promotes empathy and understanding and helps students develop critical thinking skills.

2. Encouraging Critical Thinking and Dialogue

Encouraging critical thinking and dialogue is another key strategy in applying equity and social justice theories. Teachers can create a safe and respectful space where students can discuss social issues, share their thoughts and experiences, and engage

in meaningful conversations. This allows students to develop their perspectives and teaches them the importance of listening to others and considering multiple viewpoints.

3. Fostering student-led activism

Fostering student-led activism is another practical strategy that empowers students to become agents of change. By encouraging students to identify social issues that are important to them and supporting their efforts to address these issues, teachers can help students develop a sense of agency and advocacy skills. This can be done through projects, community service, or even by organizing events or campaigns within the school.

4. Teacher professional development

Teacher professional development and ongoing reflection are essential for effectively applying equity and social justice principles in [educational](#) practice. Educators should engage in continuous learning, attend workshops or conferences, and seek out resources that deepen their understanding of equity and social justice theories and provide practical strategies for implementation. Reflecting on their biases, privileges, and teaching practices is crucial for creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Teacher Education

One of the key objectives of AI in education is to make education accessible and inclusive through the instrumentality of modern technologies to perform educational tasks that are difficult to achieve with traditional educational methods. According to Trisha (2024), artificial intelligence (AI) is the simulation of human intelligence processes in robots. It is generally expressed by the public as the ability of computers or machines to act and think in a way that humans do. It

represents the efforts towards computerized systems to imitate the human mind and actions. On its relevance and application in education, Niall (2024), argues that artificial intelligence is reshaping the educational landscape, forging pathways towards a more inclusive environment for learning. As AI technologies evolve, they are increasingly applied to tailor education to individual learning styles and needs, supporting the principle of inclusive education. This approach not only accommodates a diverse student population, including those with disabilities, but also promotes equity in learning opportunities. AI-driven tools, such as adaptive learning platforms and AI-facilitated analytics, are central to this transformation, providing personalized learning experiences and insights that were once beyond the reach of traditional educational methods. Besides, there are various applications of AI in the education field including content design, delivery, assessment, feedback, and support. Thus, it can be argued that AI-based education delivery is more learner-centric compared to the traditional method of educational delivery and is beneficial for learners as well as tutors (Muhammad et al., 2024).

The general benefits of AI such as efficiency and customization also apply to AI in education. The main benefit of AI in education is that it can facilitate learning with greater flexibility and convenience as learners can learn in their own time and space using AI-related infrastructure. Along with flexibility, AI can also enhance accessibility to education as more and more learners can access quality educational resources regardless of their economic background or geographic location. This advantage makes providing universal access to

education much easier. AI can also enable tutors to empower their students' AI competencies, attitudes, and readiness to communicate with other learners, solve authentic problems, and develop ideas, theories, and solutions innovatively and collaboratively. Thus, the use of AI in education is resulting in overall improvement of the student's performance (Muhammad et al., 2024).

Benefits of Artificial Intelligence in Teacher Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the way educational content is delivered, offering personalized learning paths for diverse learners and ensuring that education is accessible for all. Therefore, the following are the benefits of AI in teacher education:

1. **Transforming Learning Experiences:** AI has made significant strides in personalizing the learning experience. Adaptive learning systems use AI to assess a student's understanding, adjusting the curriculum to suit their pace and style. For example, they provide additional resources for topics a student may struggle with, or skip material the student has already mastered. These systems often include engaging multimedia and interactive tasks, which have been shown to enhance the learning experience. AI-driven analytics can also give educators insights into learning patterns, enabling them to tailor instruction more effectively (Niall, 2024). AI is used for making content including textbooks, personalized learning materials, and interactive courses according to the target audience. The AI and teachers are able to work together to create the best delivery method for students with maximum positive outcomes. The benefits of using AI for delivering educational content

- include the provision of individualized and customized learning, and universal access for all students who may speak different languages or have some disability such as visual or hearing impairment (Muhammad, 2024).
2. **Fostering Inclusive Education:** Inclusivity in education is about ensuring all learners have access to quality education that is respectful of and accommodates their individual needs. By leveraging AI, educational tools can support students with a variety of needs and backgrounds. Language processing tools help break down barriers for non-native speakers and individuals with learning disabilities, as seen in AI technologies transforming inclusive education. Furthermore, AI can assist in customizing learning materials for students with different abilities, thus promoting an inclusive environment (Niall, 2024). Muhammad (2024) believes that AI for delivering educational content include the provision of individualized and customized learning, and universal access for all students who may speak different languages or have some disability such as visual or hearing impairment. The impact of such new technologies could potentially revolutionize the way educational support is provided, fostering a more supportive, inclusive, and equitable learning space for all learners, and fostering an inclusive approach that respects cultural, linguistic, and social diversity (Niall, 2024&Council of Europe, 2024).
 3. **Tutorials and Virtual Assistance:** AI is used to create tutorials and interactive virtual assistants, systems that can answer students' questions, provide additional explanations, and guide students in real-time through the learning process. Thus, through tutorials and virtual assistance students can benefit from additional support and learn at an individualized pace receiving real-time guidance to support the learning process (Mircea, 2023).
 4. **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Virtual reality helps students encourage collaboration and teamwork, and tools like social media can be used to connect students with their peers and instructors (Mircea, 2023). Hesham et al., (2023) assert that social networking sites (SNSs) use social media to link students and instructors. Re-searchers have underlined the value of utilizing social networking sites (such as Face-book) to extend learning opportunities outside of the classroom, monitor students' well-being, and strengthen student-teacher relationships. They argue that using social media promotes students' active learning, cooperation abilities, and connections with communities outside of the classroom.
 5. **The role of AI includes greater support available to students.** For example, AI-based assistance to students uses Chatbot and virtual assistants which are based on intelligent systems and can offer round-the-clock availability, address queries, and offer valuable feedback. AI also enables enhanced engagement and motivation of students by providing tools such as gamification of learning or interactive content. It enables students to be more engaged and motivated (Muhammad, 2024).

The Role of AI in Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Teacher Education

Artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize equity and social justice in teacher [education](#). It can amplify marginalized voices, provide access to resources, and facilitate global connections. However, we must also be mindful of the digital divide and ensure technology is harnessed equitably. Leveraging educational tools can support students with a variety of needs and backgrounds. Language processing tools help break down barriers for non-native speakers and individuals with learning disabilities. For example, assistive technologies bridge the accessibility gap for students with disabilities. Text-to-speech converters and voice recognition software enable students with visual impairments or learning disabilities like dyslexia to access course material. Eye-tracking systems and adaptive keyboards assist students with limited mobility, allowing them to interact with digital learning environments effectively. These emerging technologies are pivotal for creating accessible learning experiences for all students, and thereby create a more just and inclusive teacher [educational](#) landscape (GGI Insightful, 2024; & Council of Europe, 2024).

One way AI can promote equity and social justice is by amplifying marginalized voices. Social media platforms, for example, have become powerful tools for activism and advocacy. They allow individuals and communities to share their stories, raise awareness about social injustices, and mobilize for change. Artificial intelligence empowers individuals to challenge the status quo and work towards a more equitable society by giving voice to those traditionally silenced or marginalized (GGI Insightful, 2024).

Additionally, AI extends to broadening access to education across

geographical and socio-economic divides. With a commitment to educational equity and social justice as part of the core design of AI applications, these technologies can ensure a more diverse and inclusive future for global education systems (Council of Europe, 2024). According to GGI Insightful (2024), AI can provide access to previously inaccessible resources to many students. Online [educational](#) platforms, digital libraries, and open educational resources (OER) offer a wealth of learning materials that can supplement and enrich classroom instruction. These resources help level the playing field, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to learn and succeed. Furthermore, technology enables personalized learning experiences, allowing students to explore their interests and learn at their own pace.

Artificial intelligence can facilitate global connections and foster intercultural understanding, using tools like social media to connect students with their peers and instructors. Through video conferencing, online collaborations, and virtual exchange programs, students can connect with peers from different cultural backgrounds and gain a broader perspective on equity and social justice issues. These virtual connections promote empathy, tolerance, and a deeper appreciation for diversity. By breaking down geographical barriers, AI allows students to engage in meaningful cross-cultural dialogues and work together toward a more just and inclusive world. (GGI Insightful, 2024; & Trisha, 2024).

AI systems use learning analytics to monitor student progress and offer personalized feedback. These technologies identify individual learning patterns and accordingly adjust the curriculum. For example, a

system may recommend additional resources if it detects a student struggling with a particular concept. Such feedback ensures that learning is tailored to each student's needs, making education more inclusive (Council of Europe, 2024). Thus, Trisha (2024) affirms that artificial intelligence when integrated into online learning platforms, allows content and activities to be customized according to the needs and knowledge level of each student. Learning management systems can use artificial intelligence to provide personalized recommendations, automatic feedback, and monitor students' progress.

Conclusion

The relevance of equity and social justice in making teacher education all-inclusive and accessible to all teacher candidates, and thereby eradicating injustice and inequality has been established through discussions on various concepts relating to equity, social justice and artificial intelligence by establishing the relationship between these concepts and teacher education. Since teacher education is a potent agent of social change and transformation, there is a need to make it all-inclusive and accessible to all irrespective of gender, ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-political differences, diverse learning needs, and physical challenges.

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