

**EDUCATIONAL DISPARITY:  
THE NIGERIAN SITUATION**

**BY**

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## EDUCATIONAL DISPARITY IN AKWA IBOM STATE OF NIGERIA

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### Introduction

The philosophy of the new system of education in Nigeria, "is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system". (National Policy on Education 1981, p.7). In order to implement this policy and keep the philosophy in line with the objectives and our aspirations as a nation, the government has placed emphasis on education as "the most important instrument of change, as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution" (p.8). The lofty ideals and plans of action documented in the new National Policy on Education have been hailed by many people across the country, as capable of making Nigeria achieve the long-awaited technological break-through in no distant future. It may still remain 'capable' for quite sometime, if the implementation of the policy is not pursued with vigour and vision that will have a firm grip on the whole country.

Based on certain statistical returns from dubious or 'doctored' origin, Akwa Ibom State, created by a Federal Government fiat of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1987, is said to be an educational advantaged State. That is, it is an 'able to do State', education-wise. When it formed part of the old Cross River State, that is before 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1987, it was an educationally disadvantaged area. This chapter focuses on some of the inequalities observed in the actual dispensation of educational provisions in Akwa Ibom State. So the educational provisions in Akwa Ibom State, the distribution of educational resources, the distribution of Primary, secondary and technical schools in Akwa Ibom State, among other areas of interest, will be treated in this chapter.

### Educational Provisions in Akwa Ibom State

The principle of equality of educational opportunity has been applied to the dispensation of education in Nigeria. As R. S. Peters (1976) notes, it is

absolutely impossible to talk about educational equality but one can only talk about equality in terms of educational opportunities. Even while talking about educational opportunities, he further argues that it is impossible for all to have equal opportunity in education owing to disparity in the personality and background of the educational beneficiaries. It is against this background that the educational disparity in Akwa Ibom State is discussed.

In Akwa Ibom State, the dispensation of education is according to the provisions in the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981). During the six years in the primary school, a teacher is responsible for a particular class for each academic year. The basic subjects taught include the following: English language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Moral Instruction, Craft, the Local Language, Health Education and Elementary Science. The head teacher only does the administrative duties and the supervision of the other teachers under him. At the end of the course, a State Controlled Terminal Examination is given on the basis of which pupils are placed in Secondary schools.

In the secondary school, the first three years are devoted to a broad based curriculum. Apart from the core subjects offered by all, - Mathematics, English language, Science, Arts and Music, Practical Agriculture, Religious and Moral Instructions, and Physical Education - Pre-Vocational subjects are offered. These Pre-vocational subjects include woodwork, metal work, electronics, mechanics, Local crafts, home economics and business studies. One Nigerian language is also taught at this level. The students are expected to have some knowledge of one out of French and Arabic Studies. A State Controlled Examination is administered at the end of the three-year duration and credits are awarded according to the subjects passed.

The Senior Secondary section can only be attempted after successful completion of the Junior Secondary section. The core subjects include: English language, Mathematics, one science based subject and one Vocational subject. The other subjects are to be chosen by the student depending on the course he expects to study in future. On the whole, a candidate for the Senior Secondary examination is expected to register with a minimum of eight subjects and a maximum of ten; the West African Examinations Council controls this examination. After a successful completion of the Senior Secondary School, a performance at credit level in at least five subjects including English language, and a good performance in the Joint Matriculation Examination, the candidate is admitted into any of the Nigerian Universities of his choice; or, he could gain admission into any other tertiary institution, depending on his career orientation. It is worth noting that gaining admission into a tertiary institution is not the ultimate for attending the secondary school. Quite a number are gainfully employed based on the



knowledge they acquired and the training obtained from the vocational subjects offered at the secondary school level.

The above is of course the basic procedure through which an Akwa Ibom State Student acquires education. Looking at the provision highlighted above one is tempted to believe that there is equality in educational provision in Akwa Ibom State. Let us now take a closer view at educational provisions in the different sections of the State.

#### Distribution of Educational Facilities in Akwa Ibom State

**TABLE 1:** Teacher-Pupil Ratio in Primary Schools in Akwa Ibom State (1989/90 Session).

S/No.	Local Govt. Area	Pupil's Enrolment	Teacher's Posted	No of Schools	Teacher/Pupil Ratio
1.	Abak	71920	1424	102	1:51
2.	Eket	25439	407	28	1:63
3.	Ekpe Atai	25663	305	38	1:84
4.	Essien Udim	39920	657	51	1:61
5.	Etinan	30542	448	540	1:68
6.	Ikono	51330	904	97	1:57
7.	Ikot Abasi	22348	311	38	1:72
8.	Ikot Ekpene	47206	941	67	1:50
9.	Itu	49829	1148	90	1:43
10.	Mbo	20161	123	20	1:164
11.	Mkpat Enin	28324	384	48	1:74
12.	Nsit Udium	40068	664	68	1:60
13.	Okobo	20615	218	28	1:94
14.	Onna	20253	222	24	1:91
15.	Oron	32125	508	36	1:63
16.	Oruk Anam	39753	550	68	1:72
17.	Ukanafun	32295	432	54	1:75
18.	Uquo Ibeno	19706	191	22	1:103
19.	Uruan	23995	327	40	1:73
20.	Uyo	57036	1444	81	1:40
	<b>TOTAL</b>	698528	11588		1:60

At the primary school level the average teacher-pupil ratio shows one teacher to sixty (60) pupils. One may argue that this may not be very bad when compared to the past year's ratios (1:90 in 1980, 1:75 in 1985). The

overall ratio may not show the actual provision of education opportunity in the State. As could be seen on the table provided, the capital city (Uyo) enjoys an adequate teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 which is the lowest in the whole State. Local Government Areas nearer in distance to the capital city and those near to other semi-urban towns have fairly smaller ratios than those in the rural areas. This is seen in the case of Abak, Eket, Essien Udim, Etinan, Ikono, Ikot Ekpene, Itu, Nsit Ubium and Oron having a ratio of 1:51, 1:63, 1:61, 1:68, 1:57, 1:50, 1:43, 1:60 and 1:63 respectively. Local Government Areas which are basically rural and are not very close to any urban centre have fairly large teacher-pupil ratio (1:84, 1:72, 1:74, 1:91, 1:72, 1:75, 1:73 for Ekpe Atai, Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin, Onna, Oruk Anam, Ukanafun and Uruan Local Government Areas respectively). Riverine areas are seen to have the highest teacher-pupil ratios for 1:94, 1:103 and 1:164 for Okobo, Uquo Ibeno and Mbo. Even though the impression one gets from these figures is that of a rather high teacher-pupil ratio generally, particularly if one bears the (1:20 Pre-primary) and (1:30 Primary) as recommended by Government, in mind. The intention of the new policy had been that during the period of transition, a ratio of 1:40 for the primary school could be accepted. It is still in great doubt, when the recommended teacher-pupil ratio in the primary school set up will be realised in Akwa Ibom State.

Another factor that these figures have failed to portray is the issue of some primary classes being merged as it were, and handled by one teacher. In some of the schools in the newly created Local Governments, Primary one to three in some schools are merged into one class and handled by a teacher, while the same practice is adopted for primary four to six, in some of the schools visited. Teachers teaching such classes were rather surprised and unhappy that such an unhealthy arrangement should even have been contemplated when many qualified but unemployed teachers still roam the streets in search of work that have still not come their ways.

Gross inequalities in terms of personnel, materials and infrastructural facilities are quite evident in the dispensation of the primary school system. While most primary schools in the urban centres in the State are fairly well equipped, and well staffed, primary schools in most rural areas of the State are still to be allocated the much needed equipment to make primary school effectively functional there. It is however hoped that with the transfer of the primary school control and administration to the Local Governments, these glaring imbalances will be redressed.

**TABLE 2:** Distribution of Secondary Education in Akwa Ibom State

S/No	Local Govt. Area	No of Schools	Students Enrolment	No. Of Teachers	Teacher-Student Ratio
1.	Abak	21	6961	493	1:14
2.	Eket	21	5992	376	1:16
3.	Etinan	28	7741	518	1:15
4.	Ikono	19	5464	404	1:14
5.	Ikot Abasi	19	4479	331	1:14
6.	Ikot Ekpene	25	10558	675	1:16
7.	Itu	18	6147	449	1:14
8.	Oron	18	6681	349	1:19
9.	Ukanafun	16	4063	251	1:16
10.	Uyo	17	14103	1073	1:13
	<b>TOTAL</b>	202	72189	4919	1:15

Based on the 10 former Local Government Areas out of which the present 20 have been created. (situation as at September 1990)

A sharp departure from a large teacher-pupil ratio is noticed when one moves from the primary to the secondary school level. Whereas that of the primary school is as high as 1:60, the secondary school average teacher-student ratio stands at 1:15. There seems to be a uniform spread of teachers in all the secondary schools in the State (See Table 2). This is based on the range in the teacher-pupil ratio between 1:13 and 1:19.

**TABLE 3:** Distribution of Technical Education in Awka Ibom State

S/No	Local Govt. Area	No. of Schools	Students enrolments	No of Teachers	Teacher/Student ratio
1.	Abak	2	1161	71	1:16
2.	Eket	1	36*	24	1:2
3.	Etinan	-	-	-	-
4.	Ikono	-	-	-	-
5.	Ikot Abasi	1	886	52	1:17
6.	Ikot Ekpene	-	-	-	-
7.	Itu	1	476**	51	1:9
8.	Oron	1	425*	30	1:14
9.	Ukanafun	-	-	-	-
10.	Uyo	1	746	53	1:14
	<b>TOTAL</b>	7	3730	281	1:13

**KEY**

- \* - Only Junior Secondary Section
  - \*\* - Only Senior Secondary Section
- Based on the former 10 Local Government Areas (Situation as at September 1990).

From the table presented it is easily observed that there are only seven (7) Technical schools in Awka Ibom State (see Table 3). Only four (4) have both the Junior Secondary and the Senior secondary sections. The spread of these schools are quite uneven. One Local Government Area has two (2), five others one each and the rest none. There is also disparity as far as the teacher-student ratio is concerned, it ranges between 1:2 to 1:17. The older Technical Colleges at Abak, Ikot Abasi, Oron and Uyo appear to attract more pupils, than the newly created one at Eket 1:2, Itu 1:9. Apart from this, parents still seem to prefer the Grammar School type of Education at the secondary level. This, some of them hope, will more easily see their children through the university. This is a goal towards which most parents feel their children should aspire.

At the secondary school level, there is a significant drop in enrolment when compared with the enrolment at the primary school level from the total



primary school enrolment of 698,528 and the total enrolment in secondary and Technical schools of 75,8\919, one notices that only a negligible percentage (about 10%) proceed to secondary schools after the primary school level. This shows a great imbalance in the provision of education in Akwa Ibom State. The same imbalance is observed when an attempt is made to compare secondary school enrolment and the actual number of Akwa Ibom State indigenes enrolled in Higher Institutions. The same argument still remains. These opportunities of primary, secondary and tertiary education have been open to all at the same rate, therefore equal educational opportunity is provided. This argument leads us to consider other causes of educational disparity in the State.

### **Some Causes of Educational Disparity in Akwa Ibom State**

It is worth noting that one of the main objectives of education in Nigeria as a whole is to reduce inequality in education. As Durojaiye (1987) rightly points out, the fact of inequality was the main reason for the first articulation of a National Policy on Education (1977 and 1981). Upon this gigantic governmental effort, there still exists a great disparity in the educational system and the educational outcome. What are the factors which encourage this inequality.

### **Geographical Location**

As already seen in the table presented above, the urban areas enjoy a smaller teacher-pupil ratio than the rural areas. The later comparatively enjoys a smaller ratio than the riverine areas. The reason is not far fetched. The provision of social amenities like pipe-borne water, electricity and other comforts are hardly to come by in the rural and riverine areas. Therefore teachers would do everything to see that they are not posted to such areas. In some cases means of transport to and from the area may be difficult, so this further makes the place rather rejectable by the teachers posted there.

With the recent awareness, almost every Akwa Ibom State child wants to go to school. Schools at these rural places, although comparatively fewer, are faced with an influx of pupils but no teachers to teach. This on its own is a sufficient source of disparity. Schools in urban areas enjoy more inspections from officials of the Ministry of Education or at least teachers live with the psychological expectation of such an inspection. Because of this, they are bound to follow the stipulated school routine. But in the rural area, most schools may spend more than one school term without any inspection. Then

there is bound to be a relaxed atmosphere where most school schedules especially those ones which are not convenient to the teacher, are omitted.

### **Pre-Primary Education**

Nursery, Kindergarten and Day-Care centres, owned by individuals and organizations, are usually located in urban areas of the State. The main motives behind the establishment of such schools, is to use them as profit making "business". Owners of such schools therefore attempt, through the various fees charged to maximize their profits.

According to Eheazu (1987)

... most nursery, kindergarten or reception schools are owned by individuals or organisations who, naturally, would wish to maximise profits from their investment. The result is that the schools generally charge fees, which sometimes are prohibitive in nature. Apart from tuition fees, there are usually some other charges like those for snacks, uniforms, toys and transport, where applicable. In effect, pre-primary education in Nigeria is generally expensive and thus has become the exclusive preserve of those who can afford to pay the bills...

This is equally true of Akwa Ibom State. Such schools are generally located in the built-up urban areas with the right population to utilize their services. "In essence, many rural dwellers are deprived of the opportunity of access to Pre-primary education even where some of them could afford to pay for their children. This is especially so where there are transportation difficulties between the rural areas and the nursery schools" (Eheazu, 1987).

Most rural dwellers are unaware of the benefits derived from Pre-Primary schooling. Some even consider the nursery school to be a place for the already spoilt children of the rich. Others still would want their children to get the benefit of this level of education at any cost. So, many business-minded people have started to cash in on this later school, and have commenced building nursery schools at strategic positions in some Local Government Areas. Therefore, a great gap still exists between the provision of the right type of the Pre-primary school system, between the urban and rural areas in Akwa Ibom State. It should be noted, however, that:



"... educational inequality uncorrected during early childhood can only worsen and lead to further inequalities throughout the educational system for the unfortunate child victim of such inequalities" (Durojaiye, 1987).

These children who have no access to these type of formal Pre-primary education, have no choice but to make do with what is available. This situation further creates a basis for further educational disparity in the future.

### Socio-Economic Status of Parents

As already mentioned above, children enjoy the type of education that their parents can afford. Schools abound in Akwa Ibom State, starting from the Pre-primary school to the university and from Grammar schools to Technical colleges. Children who attend Pre-primary schools before the age of six do so because the parents can afford to pay the fees charged by such schools and not only as a factor of choice. Although the public primary schools are non-fee paying in Akwa Ibom State, permission is given for them to collect Parent/Teacher Association fees to sponsor self-help projects. Such collections still bring in disparity in that there is inequality between those pupils who can pay and those who cannot pay such fees, let alone the psychological effect which non-payment of such fees would have on pupils who may not afford it. Secondary and Technical colleges are all fee paying institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The fact of their paying fees and the cost of the provisions required are the only reasons behind only about 10% of the children who leave the primary school being able to attend the secondary level schools.

Education may not be only formal. Only children from a few working class parents realise the use of libraries. Libraries both in the secondary schools and the few public libraries are deserted places. Only libraries in the few higher institutions in the State are adequately used. Moreover, the class of people the child interacts with according to the parental background also differ. All these go a long way to further create a disparity in the education of children in Akwa Ibom State.

### Availability of Schools

In almost every village in Akwa Ibom State there is a primary school. At the primary level there is enough accessibility to primary schools. Although the teacher-pupil ratio may be high, children who are interested still pass through these schools to the secondary school. Secondary schools on their own also are many and within reasonable distances one from the other. The only levels of education where there may not be enough to cater for the needs of Akwa Ibom State are at the Pre-Primary and at the tertiary levels. The Pre-Primary schools are clustered around the urban centres to an almost total neglect of the rural areas. Of course the urban areas are places where most of those who have educational awareness are. The only Tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State include the University of (Cross River State) Uyo, a campus of Calabar Polytechnic at Obio Akpa, Maritime Academy of Nigeria at Oron and a recently established College of Education at Afaha Nsit. These obviously do not have enough room to accommodate the graduates of Akwa Ibom State secondary schools. Nevertheless, Akwa Ibom State students have access to universities and colleges in the country through the same qualifying examinations with others.

The data shown above seem to give the impression of a somewhat even distribution of schools among the Local Government Areas. It does not certainly show the ratio of school attendance to the number of children resident in the area. The discussion so far tends to stress the high or low teacher-pupil ratio. In the riverine areas like Mbo, Ibeno, the main occupation is fishing. Most of the creeks are swampy and therefore not conducive for the establishment of formal schools. Most children of primary school age resident in these areas hardly go to school. Where they do, they have to trek several kilometres each day. Educational opportunity would not be said to be the same in this area as in the other areas of the State.

There is scarcely any human community where favouritism, at least in its minutest form is not practiced. Certain schools enjoy preferential posting of teachers. This of course is as a result of the occupant of the "teacher posting bureau" and the relationship of the schools in question to him. It is either an "alma matter issue" or "my children are in that school" therefore all the good teachers for the particular school are treated favourably before others. Apart from the above stated reason for selection of teachers for particular schools, there are other schools which enjoy special attention when compared with others. Special science schools, demonstration schools also enjoy special selection of teachers and other provisions. These of course, further enhance the educational inequality situation in the State.

Homogeneity in the provision of education cannot be addressed when most schools in the State are day schools. Children go to school from their



homes and return to their normal household chores after school. When this situation is compared with the boarding system which obtains in a few schools in the State, a great disparity in opportunity becomes evident. The experiences in a boarding house prepare the student for a desirable academic life. In the University, the situation is not different, boarding is becoming less popular. In the University, boarding no more includes the provision of meals. It only ends with the provision of accommodation for students while they take care of feeding and all other needs.

### Government's Efforts

The foremost attempt by the Federal Government to ensure equality in educational opportunities among the different States in Nigeria and instill the idea of unity at the secondary school level, was the establishment of Federal Government colleges, otherwise referred to as Unity Schools. Presently, two of such unity schools are located in Akwa Ibom State – one at Ikot Ekpene and another at Ikot Abasi. Instead of these schools ensuring equality in education, it further widens the inequality gap. The resources placed at the disposal of the Unity Schools are significantly more superior in quantity and quality than those found in State managed schools.

The State Government has also tried to bridge the gap between the various facets where one notices any educational disparity. One way it has tried to achieve this is by the State Government taking upon itself to supply to secondary schools that must have, to build their own workshop through self effort.

Currently, plans are under way to start mobile schools in the Riverine areas to cater for the educational needs of children who may not have access to formal schools. This appears to be an adaptation of the Nomadic Education Programme earlier launched by the Federal Government. When this is done, then it is hoped that the educational disparity between the riverine children and those other children in other parts of the State shall have been bridged or at least narrowed. These are courageous efforts on the part of the Government, but much still remains to be done. These efforts to equalize opportunities are often negated by other governmental policies. The decision to establish special Science schools is one such decision. This establishment results in a conglomeration of Science teachers in such schools to an almost absolute neglect of the other secondary schools in the State. On the whole, with the present system, educational disparity will ever exist because of the different uncontrollable variables highlighted above. Educational homogeneity would only be dreamt of in a State where children are taken

away from the parents soon after birth to an educational camp just like the Spartan child.

### Conclusion

Akwa Ibom State has been seen to offer education at the Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels to its children. The Federal and State Governments have tried to bridge the disparity existing among the different facets of education so as to bring about equality of educational opportunities. Despite their efforts, there still exists educational inequality caused by the geographical location of some areas of the State, individual home background, the socio-economic status of parents, and the pre-school preparatory experiences. In an attempt to solve the problem of educational disparity, the government has further widened the gap by the creation of the so-called "Unity Schools" and special Science Schools.

The 1975 – 1980 Development Plan of the Federal Government had envisaged the need for a free Universal Primary Education scheme as a "prerequisite for equalization of opportunities for education across the country in all its known facets" (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1975). The rise in Primary school enrolment was astronomical in this State as long as the scheme had remained fee-free. When the five Naira levy or registration fee was introduced in the primary school, even as low as that, a sudden drop in enrolment was recorded at the primary schools, particularly in the rural areas.

Effort should be intensified in adopting more realistic approaches to this problem. Such efforts should include a realistic review of existing policies on "the establishment, equipment, location of and admission into educational institutions with the objective of providing equal opportunities for all beneficiaries and aspirants" (Eheazu, 1987). Those administering education in the State should consciously strive to eliminate or at least limit these inequalities.

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