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## EDITORIAL DESK

**T**he Centre for General Nigerian Studies has continued to be a frontier for knowledge dissemination through her series of publications, among other activities being performed by the directorate.

This volume 5 journal of Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Economy of March 2025 housed a total of 18 well researched articles from scholars across the geographical boundaries of the Africa sub region. The team of experienced editors subjected the articles to peer review, and their plagiarism checks have satisfied the guild of editors.

The journal is recommended to researchers, scholars, lecturers, and students to read, and the planners can leverage on recommendations as panacea to the doldrums confronting the socio-economic and educational spheres of the Sub Sahara Africa nations

I wish all the contributors and readers Barka Eid Fitri and Easter in advance

**Prof. M.O.B Mohammed FNAEAP**

*Lead Editor*

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## **JUDITH BUTLER'S THEORY OF REDEMPTIVE EQUALITY AS BASIS FOR ADDRESSING INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR**

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### **Abstract**

*Redressing systemic inequality in contemporary societies demands a paradigm that transcends traditional egalitarian frameworks. This paper, employing a desk review methodology, explores Judith Butler's theory of Redemptive Equality as a viable philosophical foundation for addressing persistent social inequalities. It begins by examining the conceptual evolution of equality within critical theory, then focuses on Butler's notion of redemptive equality as a transformative ethic that seeks not merely equal treatment but the reconfiguration of normative power structures. The study highlights the implications of this theory for education, identity politics, and social justice, arguing that redemptive equality challenges the status quo by validating marginalized identities and fostering inclusive relationality. Recommendations include integrating redemptive equality into curriculum design, policymaking, and civic education to cultivate an ethically responsive society that recognises difference as a site of justice rather than a deviation from normativity.*

**Key words:** Redemptive Equality, Judith Butler, Social Inequality, Critical Theory, Inclusive Education.

### **Introduction**

Covid-19 has exposed the education divide in Nigeria. Children in public schools, rural areas and underserved communities in Nigeria are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to new methods of learning during the periods of pandemic total and partial lockdown across the globe. While their counter parts in most private schools kept learning. One can conclude from this ugly experience of sharp dichotomy that education sector in Nigeria has been operating on two unequal footings. The gap between Private and Public schools keeps widening by day. The relationship between the two categories of education is like fire and water.

Applying Butler's notion of redemptive equality can actually close the gap. Butlerian principle would help bridge the gap in inequality. According to 2019 executive summary on poverty and inequality by national bureau of statistics, 40.1% of the population in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the largest producer of oil in Africa is classified as poor. That is on average, four out of 10 Nigerians has per capital expenditure below \$400. This outrageous poverty level continues to attract more and more children from rich families to limited and expensive private

schools. Public schools have become a dumping ground where children from poor homes struggle to attend in spite of poor funding from government.

Whenever the word education is mentioned in Nigeria, what readily comes to mind is its quality. Over the years, private schools have gained popularity and acceptance from Nigerians' because of the failures of public schools. Private schools are seen as the better option for gaining quality education among many Nigerians. This has resulted to a sharp proliferation of private schools in the past one and half decade ranging from elementary to tertiary levels. For instance, private universities increased from 3 to 68 in 2007. In Lagos state alone, about 6,083 were registered in 2016. The unpleasant constant growing sharp disparity between private and public schools will be considered using Butler's radical equality policy to assess the extent to which access to higher quality education services within the private sector is determined by cost. Each chapter focuses on aspects of Butler's work and examines how they might be applied to explore social stratification in education

This study though legion, looked at two concepts. First it is obvious that the fight for equality can sometimes be exaggerated; equality itself is an ambiguous term that should not be interpreted univocally or equivocally but analogically. Qualitative and substantial education should be available to all children regardless of their social status. Education should not be given base on cost. Lastly, knowledge is central to human awareness. Humanity comprises of both poor and rich, male and female. As such human knowledge and how to acquire it should not be above the reach of anyone. (Butler, 2020). The purpose of this study is therefore to construct the educational services in Nigeria in such a way that qualitative education is at the reach of children in both private and public schools.

### **Statement of the problem**

The COVID-19 pandemic has starkly exposed the deep educational divide in Nigeria, where children in public schools, rural areas, and underserved communities have been disproportionately affected. During the pandemic's total and partial lockdowns, while students in many private schools continued their education through new learning methods, their counterparts in public schools were left behind. This disparity highlights the unequal footing on which Nigeria's education sector operates, with the gap between private and public schools widening daily. The relationship between these two educational systems is akin to fire and water -there is no basis for comparison. According to the 2019 Executive Summary on Poverty and Inequality by the National Bureau of Statistics, 40.1% of Nigeria's population Africa's most populous country and the largest oil producer is classified as poor. On average, four out of ten Nigerians have a per capita expenditure below \$400. This alarming poverty level continues to push more children from wealthy families into expensive private schools, while public schools, underfunded by the government, have become a last resort for children from poor households.

This paper aims to explore the growing educational inequality in Nigeria, particularly the stark contrast between private and public schools. It argues that the application of Judith Butler's notion of redemptive equality could help bridge this gap. Butler's principles, which emphasize the need for equitable treatment and the redress of systemic inequalities, offer a framework for addressing the disparities in the Nigerian education system.

## Literature review

Judith Butler's Redemptive Theory is a philosophical framework that suggests social inequalities can be countered through the continuous reformation and rearticulation of identity, norms, and power structures. Rooted in the principles of performativity and gender deconstruction, Butler argues that redemption is possible when marginalized individuals and groups reclaim and redefine societal narratives. This theory operates on the premise that transformation occurs through the subversion of dominant ideologies, allowing new possibilities for inclusion and equality to emerge. The first book reviewed is titled: *The Force of Non-Violence* by Judith Butler published in 2020 verso, chapter 1 of this book is devoted to the clarification of equality in non-violence environment and brings to lime light the work of philosophers who have struck out their neck to fight for equality at all level in the society. The second book here is entitled Judith Butler Race and Education (ed) by Charlotte Chadderton published by Palgrave Macmillan 2018. Chapter 1 this book is devoted to Class and education. The author of this chapter Charlotte challenges the assumed neutrality of schools, and the lack of consideration in education scholarship of the role of the institution in the formation of the subject, arguing that student and teacher identities are discursively and performatively constituted through educational discourses, by the schooling system and through the day to day practices of the institution, which operates according to hegemonic norms. According to Butler (2008), the following are principles of redemptive equality

**Redemptive Equality:** A theoretical concept rooted in Butler's work that seeks to challenge and reconfigure oppressive structures to include marginalized identities, ensuring their recognition and equality.

**Gender Performativity:** A key concept in Butler's theory, emphasizing that gender is a socially constructed performance rather than an inherent identity.

**Inequality in Education:** Disparities in access, quality, and outcomes of education due to factors like gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

**Inclusive Education:** An approach to education that ensures equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or identities.

**Performativity and Identity Reconstruction:** Butler posits that identity is not fixed but rather an ongoing process of reiteration and disruption. Through performative acts, individuals can challenge oppressive structures and redefine social roles.

**Subversion of Norms:** Central to Butler's theory is the idea that subversion destabilizes traditional hierarchies, enabling new interpretations of identity and power relations.

**Institutional Reformation:** Butler's framework extends beyond individual identity to advocate for institutional changes that accommodate diverse identities and expressions.

## Judith Butler and Education

Judith Butler was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised in a Jewish household. They attended Bennington College and later transferred to Yale University, where they earned a BA in Philosophy in 1978 and a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1984. Their academic background is deeply

rooted in the traditions of continental philosophy, drawing from thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida.

Butler herself has not really explicitly paid more attention to education in her work. However, others have applied her theories to their own work in education. Butler writes that schooling is the time when humans enter a very specific threshold of vulnerability. Indeed, school is an important site of identity formation, where norms circulate which the individual has to negotiate, trying perhaps to conform or resist. Much work in education understands the subject as stable, self evident, reasonably autonomous and able to make rational choices with certain amount of choice as to who they want to become, and how they behave. Scholars have thus employed a Butlerian framework in order to challenge the assumed neutrality of schools, and the lack of consideration in education scholarship of the role of the institution in the formation of the subject, arguing that student and teacher identities are discursively and performatively constituted through educational discourses, by the schooling system and through the day-to-day practices of the institution, which operates according to hegemonic norms. (Butler, 2020),

Judith butler is arguably the most influential critical theorist Her early books, such as *Gender Trouble* 1990, Judith butlers' latest book, *The Force of Non-Violence* argues that our times, or perhaps all times, call for imagining an entirely new way for humans to live together in the world, a world of what Butler calls radical equality in education. No child should be left behind or deprived of quality education whatever the case may be. Judith butler holds a peculiar place in contemporary western culture. Like very few men and perhaps no other woman, Butler is an international celebrity academic. Over the last two decades she has been a major influence on research concerned with social justice in education and has changed the ways that classroom practice and relationships can be understood, transforming the way we think about both teacher and student. This thesis brings together some of the most outstanding work in education that has developed and applied Butler work to empirical questions, translating her philosophy for an education audience and providing compelling analyses of the ways that the subjects of education are made, how inequalities are produced in the minutiae of practice and how education's subjugated subjects can act politically.

### **Addressing Inequality in Nigeria's Education Sector**

Inequality in Nigeria's education sector is deeply embedded within broader socio-economic and structural disparities, particularly wealth distribution and social exclusion. As documented by Obasuyi and Rasiah (2019), wealth concentration is the principal driver of educational inequality in many Sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria. The education Gini coefficient highlights that educational attainment remains skewed in favour of wealthier households, leading to a persistent cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. This problem is exacerbated by inadequate public investment in education, especially in rural and underserved areas. The exclusionary effects of this wealth-based stratification hinder many Nigerians, particularly girls and children from low-income families, from accessing equitable education opportunities.

Judith Butler's theory of redemptive equality offers a philosophical lens to address these disparities. Drawing on the ethical premise that all individuals deserve recognition and inclusion, Butler's framework challenges the normative structures that produce and perpetuate inequality. Aina and Aremu (2022) argues that redemptive equality calls for an ontological shift in societal perception, one that sees marginalized groups not as subjects to be integrated into existing systems

but as co-creators of inclusive educational spaces. Nigeria implies a reevaluation of curricula, pedagogies, and policies to dismantle hierarchies and affirm the rights and potential of every learner regardless of gender, class, or region.

The persistence of inequality is further underscored by the institutional failures in Nigeria's educational governance. According to Adepoju and Fabiyi (2017), unequal access to quality education is reinforced by systemic issues such as underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and regional disparities in teacher availability. These limitations disproportionately affect students in northern Nigeria, where access to post-primary education is significantly lower, particularly among girls. Addressing these gaps requires not only increased financial commitment but also a reorientation toward inclusive policy frameworks that prioritize equity over efficiency.

Finally, tackling educational inequality in Nigeria demands multifaceted strategies grounded in data-driven policy interventions and ethical commitments to justice (Aina & Aremu, 2022). International frameworks, such as the Education For All (EFA) goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), advocate for inclusive and equitable quality education. However, domestic implementation must be rooted in a contextual understanding of Nigeria's historical and socio-political complexities. Butler's redemptive equality underscores the need for policies that do not merely equalize access, but also transform structures of domination and exclusion. As such, Nigeria must invest not only in expanding educational infrastructure but also in reimagining education as a tool of liberation, capable of redressing deep-seated inequalities.

### **Some Visible Inequalities in Nigeria Education till date**

Inequalities in Nigeria's education sector are deeply rooted in social, economic, cultural, and political factors. These disparities hinder access to quality education for various groups and perpetuate systemic challenges. Below are the key inequalities in Nigeria's education system to date:

#### **Gender Inequality**

- Access to Education: Girls, particularly in northern Nigeria, face barriers to education due to cultural and religious practices, early marriage, and gender-based violence.
- Dropout Rates: Higher dropout rates among girls, especially in secondary school, are linked to poverty, household labor responsibilities, and early pregnancy.
- STEM Participation: Girls are underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields due to societal stereotypes and limited encouragement.

#### **Regional Disparities**

- North-South Divide: The northern region of Nigeria has significantly lower literacy and enrollment rates compared to the southern region due to poverty, insecurity, and cultural resistance to formal education.
- Infrastructure Gaps: Schools in the north often lack adequate facilities, qualified teachers, and learning materials, exacerbating the educational gap.

#### **Socio-Economic Inequality**

- Poverty and Access: Families with low incomes often cannot afford tuition fees, school supplies, or transportation costs, leading to high dropout rates.

- Private vs. Public Education: Wealthier families opt for private schools with better resources and quality education, leaving public schools underfunded and overcrowded.
- Urban-Rural Divide: Urban areas have better access to quality schools and resources, while rural areas suffer from inadequate educational infrastructure and teacher shortages.

### **Ethnic and Linguistic Inequalities**

- Language of Instruction: The use of English as the primary language of instruction disadvantages students in rural areas who are more familiar with indigenous languages.
- Ethnic Tensions: Marginalization of minority ethnic groups in education policies and access to schools perpetuates inequality.

### **Disability and Inclusive Education**

- Lack of Accessibility: Students with disabilities face significant challenges due to a lack of inclusive infrastructure, teaching aids, and specialized teachers.
- Stigmatization: Cultural stigmas associated with disability often result in exclusion or neglect of children with special needs in schools.

### **Conflict and Insecurity**

- Impact of Boko Haram: Insurgent activities in northern Nigeria, particularly Boko Haram's attacks on schools, have led to the destruction of educational infrastructure and displacement of students and teachers.
- School Abductions: The kidnapping of students, especially girls (e.g., Chibok and Dapchi incidents), has created fear and reduced school attendance in affected areas.

### **Underfunding of Education**

- Low Government Spending: Nigeria's education sector consistently receives less than the UNESCO-recommended 15-20% of the national budget, resulting in poor infrastructure, low teacher salaries, and inadequate learning materials.
- Teacher Shortages: Underpaid and insufficiently trained teachers lead to poor quality education, particularly in rural and public schools.

### **Technological Divide**

Access to technology and internet connectivity is limited in many parts of Nigeria, leaving rural and low-income students behind, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the importance of digital learning.

### **Corruption in Education**

- Mismanagement of Funds: Corruption in the allocation and utilization of education budgets often leads to poor-quality infrastructure and insufficient learning materials.
- Examination Malpractice: Widespread cheating in exams undermines the credibility of the education system and limits opportunities for honest students.

### **Understanding the Public-Private School Gap in Nigeria**

The issues of inequality in Nigeria education sector are always problematic and sensitive. These issues then become more problematic when transferred to the area of application and distributive justice. Although a large private education market has buoyed almost all the states in Nigeria

growth towards near universal primary enrolment, this heterogeneous school sector appears to be providing socially stratifying paths towards educational attainment. In Nigeria, private schools are different from public schools in so many ways. Some differences are identified and analyzed below:

**Strikes:** private schools do not belong to any labour unions and therefore, do not participate in any strike action. This has helped them to maintain their academic calendar and full coverage of their syllabus. While public schools belong to various unions and often participate in strike actions to press home their demands. In 2020, public universities were paralyzed by strike for more than 12 months over demands for funding increases and better employment benefits for university staff.

**Teaching facilities:** for effective teaching and learning to take place, facilities such as books, teaching aids, libraries, laboratories, etc are very necessary. Private schools ensure that these facilities are adequately provided to facilitate and enhance teaching and learning. But these facilities are either not provided or are obsolete in most public schools

**Training:** refreshers courses, workshops, seminars and training are regularly given to teachers to improve their knowledge and skills by private schools owners while teachers in the public schools rarely get opportunities for training to improve their knowledge and skills.

**School fees:** exorbitant tuition fees and other sundry charges are peculiar with private schools. for instance, even cheapest of private schools is above the financial strength of so many poor families, hence the need for the three tiers of government to intensify efforts to improve the quality of education in the public schools.

### **Applying Judith Butler's Theories to Address the Public-Private School Gap**

Judith Butler's framework of performativity, precarity, and recognition can be applied to bridge the gap by reimagining and reconstructing the norms that perpetuate these disparities. (Butler, 2018). Challenging the normative perception of public schools' public schools are often seen as inferior and only for the poor. This perception reinforces the status quo. Butler's theory of performativity can help reframe this narrative. A seasonal campaign to showcase successful public-school graduates can challenge stereotypes and build pride in public education. Government policies should actively invest in public schools to demonstrate commitment to equality and quality. Redistributing resources to reduce precarity, Butler's emphasis on addressing precarity can guide policies to prioritize the needs of public schools. Equitable funding and allocating more resources to public schools, especially in underserved areas, to improve infrastructure, hire more teachers, and provide modern teaching aids. (Butler, 2018). Foster collaborations between private and public schools to share resources, expertise, and infrastructure. Performative acts of equality in policy implementation, Government actions, such as prioritizing public school reform, can serve as performative acts that create new norms of equality in education. Enforce regulations ensuring private schools contribute a percentage of their earnings to public school development through a "public-private partnership fund. Strengthen monitoring of public school spending to reduce corruption and ensure effective use of resources. Recognition of marginalized communities. Butler's call for the recognition of marginalized identities aligns with addressing the neglect of rural and low-income communities dependent on public schools. Introduce policies to prioritize rural public schools in teacher deployment, scholarships, and infrastructure upgrades. Create platforms for students and teachers in public schools to participate

in policy discussions, ensuring their voices are heard. Intersectional Solutions. Butler's framework supports an intersectional approach, addressing the compounded effects of poverty, gender, and geography in the public-private gap. Provide targeted support for girls and children with disabilities in public schools through scholarships, free uniforms, and transportation. Encourage private schools to reserve spots for low-income students under subsidized programs. Redefining Quality Education Norms. The perception that quality education is exclusive to private schools can be challenged by creating benchmarks for excellence in public schools. Introduce standardized quality assurance measures for public schools. Incentivize high-performing public schools and celebrate their achievements publicly. (Butler, 2018)

## Conclusion

Judith Butler's theory provides a lens for understanding and challenging the systemic norms and power structures that perpetuate educational inequality in Nigeria. By deconstructing harmful norms, fostering inclusivity, and recognizing the value of marginalized identities, Butler's ideas can inform transformative practices and policies in Nigeria's education sector. Through performative acts and redemptive equality, these efforts can lead to a more just and equitable education system.

Bridging the gap between public and private schools in Nigeria requires a combination of policy reforms, resource redistribution, and social reimaging. Judith Butler's emphasis on transforming societal norms, recognising marginalised groups, and resisting structures of exclusion provides a philosophical framework for addressing these disparities. Through deliberate performative acts and inclusive policies, the Nigerian education system can move toward a more equitable and unified structure.

## Recommendations

**Deconstructing Normative Gender Roles:** Advocacy campaigns and educational reforms can reframe gender roles, showing that girls and boys are equally capable of excelling academically. Implementing gender-sensitive curricula and teacher training can challenge biases and encourage girls' enrollment and retention.

**Challenging Cultural Norms that Perpetuate Inequality:** Community engagement programs rooted in local traditions but informed by inclusive values can challenge and transform harmful norms. Use of indigenous languages in teaching and culturally responsive pedagogies can bridge the gap between formal education and local communities.

**Addressing Structural Inequality and Precarity:** Policies can focus on equitable resource distribution, such as providing scholarships, building schools in underserved areas, and training teachers for inclusive education. Government and NGOs can prioritize programs for vulnerable groups, reducing their precarity through affirmative action.

**Performative Acts of Equality:** Encourage visible leadership roles for women, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities in education management and policy-making. Initiate programs that celebrate diversity, such as inclusive school festivals, which can redefine public perceptions of marginalized groups.

**Policy Reform Rooted in Redemptive Equality:** Policy reform can include participatory approaches where marginalized groups contribute to the design and implementation of education policies. Legislating inclusive practices, such as mandating accessibility for disabled students and enforcing anti-discrimination laws in schools.

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