WIDENING ACCESS TO EDUCATION
AS SOCIAL JUSTICE
Widening Access to Education as Social Justice
Essays in Honor of Michael Omolewa

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FOREWORD

Overcoming oppression and exclusion through measures of equity, resolving conflict without violence, and establishing the conditions for mutual recognition of our individuality and cultural diversity are fundamental ambitions of justice everywhere. The ultimate goal is the promotion of human dignity and freedom, social harmony, and respect for the environment.

To the extent that genuine empowerment, reconciliation, and tolerance rely on knowledge for making informed decisions and taking appropriate action, justice is an affair of education. Only through insight into the nature and causes of discrimination, strife, and prejudice can wrongs be overcome and the moral and legal structures necessary for fairness and right conduct be successfully developed. In this perspective, education is a primary means for achieving social justice and harmonious living. Indeed, one of the moving forces of the current decade, building on the great democratic and civil rights struggles of the preceding century, is the power of education to construct peace in the minds of men, women, and children. Education does this not merely through the learning of universally shared values and the basic principles of justice but also through everyday practice in classrooms, schools, colleges, and, indeed, all learning environments. The values of justice and fairness are not abstract but are concrete and immediate. Even with modest levels of resources at our disposal, much can be done.

The conviction guiding the present volume—Widening Access to Education as Social Justice: Essays in Honor of Michael Omolewa—is that increasing the availability of educational opportunities and ensuring the ability to take advantage of them is a fundamental component of any equitable community. Like the demand for justice itself, the demand for education is not a good that can be denied too long once it has entered people’s minds. It is an old adage that bestowing knowledge, like lighting one lamp from another, does not deplete its source but augments it. Lighting the lamp of education is a common duty of free human society.

Access to education preserves and promotes the cultural heritage of humankind by sustaining and developing cultural diversity and human creativity, for instance, by incorporating indigenous forms of knowledge, employing mother-tongue instruction, and taking account of local needs in education systems, whether formal, nonformal, or informal in character. Likewise, globalization, if it is to have a human face, must reflect the many facets of cultural diversity so that mutual respect and solidarity may be nurtured.
It has long been UNESCO’s role to promote and facilitate dialogue among Member States with a view to constructing an agenda of global peace and justice based on democratic ideals and sustained by consensus. UNESCO’s commitment to social justice is reflected in its subscription to the principles, goals, and targets of the Millennium Declaration. Effective access to basic education of good quality is central to combating poverty, hunger, and disease and working for gender equity, maternal health, and environmental sustainability. Education for All (EFA), in which UNESCO is playing a leading role, is grounded upon a vision of global equity in which the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults, male and female, are met. Education is a good in itself but also a means for achieving other goods.

By making the availability of educational opportunities and the ability to take advantage of them central to the concerns of social justice, the present volume aptly pays tribute to the work of Michael Omolewa, President of the 32nd UNESCO General Conference and Permanent Delegate of Nigeria to UNESCO. Professor Omolewa has had a distinguished career as a scholar, civil servant, and diplomat, working academically in the field of adult education for his native Nigeria and the African region, as well as on the international stage. His work attests to the fact that lifelong learning in all modes of education contributes substantially to empowerment, reconciliation, and tolerance and in this way fosters social justice. Literacy in particular, as he has repeatedly shown us, should not be construed merely as a tool for reading and writing, but represents a skill for both economic and social advancement. It is a means for unfolding one’s personality and improving one’s livelihood. It is the responsibility of a truly just society to open up as many routes of access to education as possible. As Michael Omolewa knows, education is an enduring asset that grows in value the more it is used.

Koichiro Matsuura
Director-General, UNESCO
Education as a human right was enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, a document that can rightfully be characterized as the Magna Carta of our times. In today’s world of knowledge-driven societies, the need to expand access to education goes beyond mere idealism. Education has become a necessary practical tool for ensuring economic well-being, political participation, and social justice for all nations and peoples. Expanding access to education has become an important component of social justice.

Over the years many nations have come to acknowledge that widening access to education is an irreducible minimum for individual, community, and national development. To date, UNESCO remains the most visible and internationally acknowledged global agency in this regard. It continues to play a leading role through advocacy programs that bring together member states to affirm the goal of widening access to education. In recent times, UNESCO has become more ardent in getting member states to endorse policies and actions aimed at widening such access. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, sensitized Ministers of Education to global shortcomings in widening access and succeeded in revitalizing all the national representatives in attendance. The conference itself concluded by asking every member state to embrace the initiative of EFA and to commit resources for implementing it on a national scale.

The emphasis placed on the principles of “Education for All” is a reminder that when nations restrict access to education, they are equally reinforcing social injustice, the common corollaries of which include inequality, marginalization, pauperization in most cases, and several other unintended outcomes. While problems of access to education still persist in developed countries and have been considerably aggravated by immigration, the problem is truly immense in developing countries. In both developed and developing countries, policy-makers and practitioners, researchers and scholars, have often shown great dedication in reflecting and acting on these issues. However, for reasons that are easy to surmise, voices from the South have not often been heard at the international level.

Nevertheless, by a happy historical chance, one Southern scholar, whose whole life has been one of intense advocacy of widening access to education, entered the limelight when he was elected President of the UNESCO General Conference on September 29, 2003, in Paris, France. That scholar is Professor Michael Abiola Omolewa, who has also been Nigeria’s Permanent Delegate to UNESCO since 1999. Upon his election, the Community and Adult Education Research Society of Nigeria (CARESON)
discussed the import of that international recognition and decided that Professor Omolewa should be honored with an international, research-based publication on widening access to education. CARESON committed resources to the achievement of that goal. When its resources were spent, however, it turned to several people and organizations for assistance. The necessary funding was provided by UNESCO and a friendly family, for which we are deeply grateful.

Previously, there was not a single book that attempted to bring together truly global perspectives on the widening of access. This volume aims to fill that gap. It presents reflections on international initiatives for expanding access to education, as well as on the achievements, failures, contradictions, and challenges that have accompanied these efforts.

The book is arranged in five parts. Part I joins biography with history by providing a sketch of the life and work of the man honored here and also offers discussions of foundational issues related to the widening of access to education. Part II presents overviews of potential ways of expanding access through institutional partnerships and new technologies, while also capturing the dark shadows cast by poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the future of access to education. Part III presents specific case studies in national contexts, as well as cases related to particular geographical regions or sectors of education. Part IV addresses issues of present research, particularly the contexts in, and conditions under, which it is carried out. And Part V considers the future prospects of widening access to education.

The experiences described in this book are challenging, insightful, and thought-provoking. The chapters are rich in lessons from which educational planners and policy-makers, politicians, scholars, students, and the general reader are certain to profit. This volume, taken as a whole, should provide a welcome companion to all who desire a global picture of widening access to education as social justice.

Of equal importance to the contributions of CARESON and UNESCO in the production of this volume was the readiness of several eminent scholars to serve as editorial advisors and reviewers or authors. Many of these scholars rendered invaluable services ensuring the quality of writing and thought in the present volume. Most of the editorial advisors have had to read several drafts of the manuscripts. Some read more than four chapters, and we realize how difficult that was given the fact that many of them were quite busy already. We are deeply indebted to these scholars for the services they have rendered. While space will not permit us to detail the help rendered by each and everyone of them, we cannot go without drawing special attention to the contributions of Professors Burch, Dibie, Fasokun, Onokerhoraye, Osborne, Osuala, Preece, and Storan, each of whom willingly took on extra assignments on very short notice. It is extremely
encouraging to know that there are so many eminent scholars in the North
and the South who are ready to work together in the spirit of global unity
and support for the development of scholarship in the area of widening
access.

The chapters have been written by eminent scholars carefully selected
from all regions of the world. We are certain that readers will find much
food for thought in these pages; we are confident that this book will long
be a valuable compendium for all who are interested in the global initiative
to promote social inclusionism and the widening of access to education.

That the production of this book has been achieved within the specified
schedule is also the work of several individuals whose involvement in the
project has ensured the speedy completion of its various aspects. We are
especially grateful for the help of the UNESCO Institute for Education in
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Akpovire Oduaran and H.S. Bhola
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PART I

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES
Chapter 1

MICHAEL OMOLEWA’S ADVOCACY OF WIDENING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Gbolagade Adekanmbi, Rashid Aderinoye, and Abidoye Sarumi

1. INTRODUCTION

For us the thought of writing on Michael Omolewa’s advocacy of the widening of access to education is thrilling, and for obvious reasons. First, his notion of education has always revolved around a conception that goes beyond the much discussed proposals concerning lifelong learning. His position on this seems to stem from the final passage rites in Yoruba culture, where the dead person is told: *Majokunrun majekolo, ohun ti won ba nje lajule orun ni ki o maa ba won je* (meaning: The dead person is advised not to eat worms or millipedes, but only whatever people eat in the life beyond). The Yorubas believe strongly that there is a life beyond the present one for every dead person. Second, over the years Michael Omolewa’s theoretical and practical contributions to adult education and its component fields have focused on the possibility of everyone’s gaining access to some sort of “schooling.” Third, his sometimes unconventional approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating various forms of educational interventions, which for many has been a starting point for discussions about his achievements, is worthy of being documented and replicated. Fourth, borne by his linguistic abilities, Michael Omolewa’s initiatives within national and across international borders draw on strategies that can be applied elsewhere. Fifth, his impact on the lives of ordinary people, on whose behalf he consistently champions life-oriented mass education initiatives, is reflected in numerous anecdotes, which should be passed on to future generations.

Michael Abiola Omolewa was born in Ipoti Ekiti, in the former Western region of Nigeria. He grew up at a time when Nigerians were starting to agitate for “improved facilities for higher education and opportunities for employment in the colonial service” and subsequently for decolonization and independence (Ade-Ajayi, 2002). He later attended Ibadan Grammar School, and Ekiti Parapo College and Christ School,
Ado Ekiti, for his secondary education. He obtained distinctions in the Cambridge Higher School Certificate Examinations and the London University General Certificate of Education A-Level Examination. It was during this period that Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain and became a republic. In 1955 the country also witnessed Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s introduction of free primary education in what was still the country’s Western region and produced some of its first graduates during the same period. Omolewa’s attraction to history and historiography developed early, while he was attending Nigeria’s premier University of Ibadan and studying African history from 1964 to 1967, and later European history. Striving for excellence, he obtained the best final grade in the Department of History, and won both the departmental prize and the Faculty of Arts Sir James Robertson Prize. By 1973 he had obtained his Ph.D. in the history of administration. During his university studies he was an exchange scholar at the Queen Mary College of the University of London. He also spent time at the Institute of Historical Studies in London, where he sharpened his skills in historiography and historical research. He became quickly attracted to applying his keen interest in historiography to the field of education, and then specifically adult education, at a time when few scholars attempted to document historical events in the disciplines. His entry into the historiography of education and adult education was particularly fruitful in that it provided him with insights into scholarship and educational access. For brief periods between 1965 and 1968 he attended a range of language proficiency courses in French and German, in Dakar, Lyon, and at the Goethe Institute in Munich. These various experiences and achievements, as well as his own humble beginnings, were later to play a major role in shaping his thoughts, propelling his ideas, and invigorating his push for widening access in educational provision.

It should be noted that Michael Omolewa was the first African graduate of History to become a Professor of Adult Education, and he was the first recipient of the Roby Kidd Special Citation for distinguished service in adult education. In addition to being the first Nigerian professor to serve as Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, he was the first West African to be elected President of the General Conference of UNESCO.

Against this backdrop, our aim in what follows is to examine Michael Omolewa’s role in widening access to education. To give a clear picture of the man and his achievements, we have made use as much as possible of eyewitness accounts, investigations, and other historical records. Likewise, we attempt to provide eyewitness accounts of some of Omolewa’s advocacy roles. Reflection on what he has written, said, and done will also enable us to present these roles more systematically to the reader. We shall comment on his views on issues relating to access in education and adult education.
We shall also highlight the major initiatives of which he has been a part, in Nigeria and internationally, and comment on his strategies, including the use of partnership building and clientele participation. We shall direct the reader’s attention to specific ideas that hold great promise for replication in other climes and contexts even as we comment on the context from which his ideas grew. And, finally, we shall appraise some of his major ideas as reflected in a number of books and primers he has written personally or in collaboration with others.

2. ON THE ISSUES OF ACCESS AND ADVOCACY

The terms “access,” “inclusive,” and “open learning” (UNESCO 2003) have always been used interchangeably. Among those who have been excluded from needed educational intervention are children living in difficult circumstances, children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, members of ethnic minorities, girls, children from remote areas, and people with special educational needs. Still others have been excluded on grounds of geographical separation or legal confinement or because they dropped out of the formal school system and later became out-of-school youth and adults. They also include adults who could not read, write, calculate, and acquire global knowledge, as well as those who could not improve their professional skills on the job. One major reason why they are often shut out of the formal system is that the formal system is restrictive. It is exclusive because classroom space is usually limited, teacher–pupil ratios are predetermined, and the age requirements make it impossible for children below or above the required age to gain entry; thus various children and adults miss out on participating in the formal system. Other factors responsible for exclusion include a lack of political will on the part of government, inappropriate curricula, lack of access by teachers, inappropriate training, inadequate educational infrastructure, parents’ low level or lack of literacy, the use of corporal punishment, and the pronouncement of failure—where this latter factor usually marks the end of the dream of a rich and productive career for many a learner. Access provision would thus be facilitated if these factors were removed or appropriately addressed. Since the issues of access, participation, and social justice are addressed in other chapters in the present volume, we shall now focus on the issue of advocacy.

“Advocacy” simply means advancement of a course, interest, or ideology. With its conceptual roots possibly in the United States, it is a method of convincing two parties: for the one, to accept, fund, and introduce a program for the good of the community; for the other, to be receptive to that program. In the past, advocacy was seen as an activity aimed at the recipient of social reform. Advocacy also has legal connotations, such as in making a case for someone in a court of law. Most individuals or organizations engaged in one
form of advocacy or the other may be so involved for ensuring parity, equality of access, and generally making a voice heard in what Paulo Freire has termed a “culture of silence” (Freire, 1970). It is generally agreed that governments, more often than not, tend to initiate social reforms only after human rights groups, civil societies, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have put pressure on them. It is only then that governments agree to establish policy frameworks in support of much needed reforms. During this presentation, the reader will see just how often and the ways in which Omolewa has played the role of advocate within the educational community. One such medium is the EFA initiative in whose context Omolewa’s gradual but progressive advocacy work for access to education has been systematically translated into action. His desire to widen access illustrates Gelpi’s position (1979) that work and education are holistic, inseparable activities.

2.1 An access problem in context

Most countries are fond of setting beautifully framed goals and objectives; yet translating such goals into action can often be problematic, and in some cases they even prove to be a mirage. Let us comment briefly on the context that has served as a springboard for Omolewa’s advocacy roles.

Like other countries, Nigeria is guided by specific national objectives. Specifically, it desires to be:

• a free and democratic society,
• a just and egalitarian society,
• a united, strong, and self-reliant nation,
• a strong and dynamic economy, and
• a land of bright and full opportunities for all its citizens.

With these objectives Nigeria’s philosophy of education has been to integrate individuals into a sound and effective citizenry with equal educational opportunities for all at all levels. In light of this philosophy, Nigeria’s policy on education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) comprised the following aims:

• the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity,
• the inculcation of the necessary values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society,
• the promotion of and training for a deeper understanding of the surrounding world, and
• the promotion of the individual’s acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities, and competencies (both mental and physical) as tools for living well in and contributing to the development of Nigerian society.

Although the objective of accelerating the planning and implementation of improving access to education had been formulated already in the 1970s,
it was only in 1977 that the National Policy on Education (NPE) was launched and then reviewed in 1981; in accordance with it, all educational policy documents in Nigeria assert the country’s commitment to ensuring that free and compulsory education, which is of satisfactory quality, is provided to all children up to the age of 14. Nevertheless, available statistics suggest that a large number of children continue to fall outside the ambit of primary education. It has also been found that while some states have made much progress towards achieving the goal of universal primary education, others have lagged behind. Specifically, while the number of primary schools has risen from 15,703 in 1960 to 40,055 in 1996—an increase of 255% over a period of 36 years—and enrollment figures have increased correspondingly from 2,912,618 in 1960 to 14,078,473 in 1996 (UNESCO, 2001), the adult literacy rate has remained at 57% since 1999, leaving about 60 million Nigerians illiterate. Access to basic education thus continues to elude millions of children, adults, and out-of-school youths. In addition, government has yet to make sufficient efforts to widen access to education. The recent unpleasant revelation by UNICEF studies, which estimates literacy rate in Nigeria to be 55% as a result of increases in population, further highlights this problem. The studies found that the adult literacy rate, among the population aged 15–24 years, was 71.2% at the national level, with Imo State having the highest rate of about 98% and Yobe State, the lowest rate of 23.4%. Kebbi and Sokoto were found to have literacy rates of 28.6% and 28.9%, respectively.

The scenario just sketched has served as the context and rationale for Omolewa’s advocacy activities. For him the access problems could not be wished away or solved by a wait-and-see attitude. In spite of the fact that individuals and/or groups would have to take the bull by the horns, he identified gaps in literacy and other educational provisions, started making proposals, initiated projects, and set up partnerships to address the problems. The following sections highlight various aspects of his involvement.

3. MICHAEL OMOLEWA’S INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES

In pursuance of his advocacy of educational access, Omolewa’s thoughts and actions have aimed at establishing relevant structures, identifying and evolving proposals and innovative strategies, and initiating an integrated intervention in the lives of rural citizens. His return to tradition through the application of various aspects of the indigenous African educational system has been quite significant.

Omolewa’s unconventional approach to tackling issues has also been striking. For the greater part of his career, he has regarded success in widening
access to education as hinging on a participatory approach. He has sought to engage all parties involved in the educational and developmental planning process. These include governments and agencies responsible for the planning and implementation of education, and also civil society. Of particular importance is the priority he has given to strengthening and improving the existing educational system, including its policies and structures. He has effectively used the professional forum of education and adult education to drive home his message while making significant progress on most issues of access. Likewise, he has pursued the gender discourse from a different angle, greatly emphasizing the need to educate girls and to focus on them in many existing programs. His involvement in UNICEF and UNDP programs has provided him with means of addressing this issue. To increase the efficacy of his attempts to reform policy and promote innovative methods and strategies, he has made extensive use of the language of his audience. He has given convincing reasons for developing the capacity of leaders so as to ultimately transform the communities they lead. He has stressed a more integrated approach to the promotion of literacy and developmental discourse, pointing to the holistic nature of the traditional African educational system in support of his chief arguments. At the same time, he has been just as concerned not to lose sight of the contributions made by international agencies and the private sector.

One major factor that has assisted Omolewa in fostering and advancing his philosophy of inclusive education is his recognition and acceptance of the principles of partnership. Having realized that reliance solely on governments and other national institutions has resulted in only limited success, he has reached out to numerous international organizations in the North and the South. The International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH) has played a major international role in this regard. Omolewa has won the support of such organizations with specific, measurable, and achievable proposals for clearly determinate periods of time and thereby made strides towards further opening the door of education to Nigerians and others, particularly the marginalized (Omolewa et al., 2000). In doing so, he has ensured that the underlying principles derived from national and educational objectives as spelled out in the National Policy on Education, as well as in the offshoots of international declarations, conventions, and treaties to which Nigeria is a party are adhered to. Similarly, he has identified national and state structures by which to realize his dream. Such national structures have included the Federal and State Ministries of Education, other federal institutions, and state agencies for adult and mass education. They have also included research institutions such as universities and colleges.

Regarding international agencies, he has been involved with numerous organizations, including IFESH, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, the British Council, LAUBACH (now Pro-literacy International), and Education and
Development. It was the mechanism of partnership and links, which informed his founding of the University Village Association (UNIVA)—a nonprofit, nonpartisan, and nongovernmental organization—as a driving force in the promotion of development. To operationalize the mission and vision of UNIVA, he identified and networked with experts in his areas of focus, including functional literacy, community development, life improvement programs, health, democracy, and governance. Occasionally, he has employed the strategies of policy dialogue in developing programs aimed at providing the un-reached with access to education. He has influenced the form and content of policy statements drawn up in seminars and workshops, as well as at conferences—particularly those involving colleagues, intellectual peers, and interested stakeholders. In this connection his work with the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) and with the Deans of Education of Nigerian Universities is significant.

In addressing the challenges posed by unfulfilled government policies, programs, and aspirations, Omolewa has often felt compelled to adopt an underdog approach to reaching the underserved. Given his view that literacy is a key aspect of freedom, a statement of one of his friends, Archer (2003), is revealing:

In all of the different situations in which people need to deal with those who have power, literacy is only a part of a larger equation. Those unable to read are likely to be more intimidated in these situations but their powerlessness is not just about the lack of a technical skill; it is clearly linked to social status, confidence and self-esteem, and the power dynamics are bound up with a wide range of other forms of communication.

Omolewa has tapped the power of information so as to counteract the lethargy of his colleagues, thus paving the way to greater openness. In 1986, as the Chairperson of Committee of Deans of Faculties of Education of Nigerian Universities, he used the occasion of the meeting at the University of Ilorin to solicit support for his colleagues. His aim thereby was to short-circuit an emerging negative government policy towards serving teachers who had embarked on educational programs on their own time in the interest of self-enrichment. Some states at the time were relieving such teachers of their jobs in an attempt to discourage them from seeking to augment their skills. Omolewa called on governments at the federal and state levels to allow serving teachers to use their own time for self-improvement through part-time programs, study leaves, and leaves of absence. He argued that denying them such educational avenues would be counterproductive and added that teachers undertaking self-improvement programs on their own time should be commended rather than have their appointment terminated. He called on the government to encourage
“education for many.” In this way he successfully negotiated strategies for improved teacher performance and university curriculum review (Omolewa et al., 1994).

He has also brought innovations into the teaching and learning process. In numerous presentations at seminars, public lectures, and workshops, he has argued for putting an end to the use of derogatory, oppressive, and exclusive practices in learning situations. For instance, he has encouraged the use of the expression “early leaver” instead of “dropout.” His support of female learners has also been evident, for instance, in his efforts to encourage them to participate more fully in adult literacy. Furthermore, he has introduced the use of another grading strategy. Rather than classifying people as having passed or failed, adult learners were to receive a grade of either “A” or “B” after their examinations. Candidates with an “A” are qualified to proceed to the postliteracy class, while candidates with a “B” will have to work harder until they earn an “A.” Thus the idea of failure, which is common within the formal educational system, has no place in his literacy lexicon.

Another major stride was his introduction of innovative approaches that encouraged more people and communities to participate in learning programs. His advocacy of the use of Real Literacy Materials (RLMs) or words generated by learners has had great impact. Rather than rely on traditional primers, learners are now able to make use of existing written or printed material within their immediate environments. Words or sentences found on billboards, posters, coins or currency notes, and those words usually written on community buildings and walls, become the adult learners’ primers. This has gradually reduced the cost of literacy skills acquisition while increasing the speed at which learners master those skills.

As a pioneer in the field of open learning for both basic and higher education, he experimented with a literacy shop as a way of drawing adult learners back to school. This he did by opening a literacy shop at a popular market in Ibadan, Oyo State. At the shop buyers and sellers were made to realize the importance of reading, writing, and calculation, even when their principal purpose in coming to the market was either to buy or to sell. Illiterate buyers and sellers were made aware of the need either to go back to school themselves or to find a literate person to assist them to learn to read, write, and keep records of their sales. This was an innovative way of opening access to basic education for adults and out-of-school youth. As noted above, on many occasions Omolewa served as catalyst in changing the thinking of colleagues on conceptual matters in the field. His influence was brought to bear in discussions of open learning and the promotion of educational opportunities for the marginalized, nomads, migrant fisherman, and pastoralists.

In his various articles and other contributions to learned journals and books, Omolewa (1976, 1978, 1982) has suggested ways by which Nigerians
could improve their performance on the Oxford, Cambridge, and London University examinations. He maintained that Nigerians could improve their performance through hard work and dedication, but it was also necessary that they have an adequate learning environment and the involvement of parents and the wider community in their education. For him, to widen access in such a way that education has the requisite relevance, quality, and impact, it has been imperative that education be a community enterprise in which everyone is involved.

Having realized that the quality of education depends on the quality of its facilitators, Omolewa has placed a high premium on capacity building. He has struggled not only for quantity but also for quality by advocating constant training programs for teachers, adult literacy facilitators, education managers, community leaders, and the leadership of NGOs, all of whom are crucial to the effective implementation of nonformal educational programs. While many tertiary institutions later went on to establish distance education programs, the National Open University has also been born. As an active participant in its founding, Omolewa strongly advocated EFA.

3.1 Impact on adult education

Omolewa was instrumental in the launching of the NNCAE in 1971. At the launching, the Council made a strong case for the advancement of an all-encompassing educational process in which educational opportunity would be given to children, adults, and practicing teachers. Resolution 6 of the Council, passed and adopted on the same date, states in Section (iii) that the Federal Government shall establish a National Non-Profit Correspondence Institution under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Education. This was to provide correspondence education at primary and secondary school levels. The Federal Government was also to establish, by correspondence, part-time degree studies in one or two federal universities. As an advocate of mass education, Omolewa went further in 1981 when he published a review of most of the results of the conference in his book, *Adult Education Practice in Nigeria* (Omolewa, 1981).

With his colleagues in the NNCAE he helped to mobilize stakeholders in education and succeeded in October 1978 in convening a National Conference of Heads of Adult Education. These were heads from State Ministries of Education and the universities. During the session, a critical review of the NPE was conducted. The conference participants later came up with 31 recommendations, all aimed at strengthening the educational system. They were also designed to alter the system so that it would cater to all, most especially adult illiterates. Some of the recommendations were:

- Local government councils should handle matters relating to the maintenance of adult education classes, centers, day-to-day administration of these centers, and regular payment of instructors’ salaries.
• There should be a separate section for adult and nonformal education at the Federal Ministry of Education, as well as an Adult Education Division in each State Ministry of Education as were already in place in some northern states.
• The National Commission for Adult Education, for which provision is made in the NPE, should be set up without further delay and with its specified functions.
• State commissions for adult education should likewise have functions ranging from coordination and working with the National Commission to providing advisory support and collaborating with other bodies to foster the development of adult education.
• A division of nonformal education should be established in Federal and State Ministries of Education.
• Agencies of adult and mass education should be established at state levels with structures in local governments.
• A National Mass Education Commission should be established.
• Institutions of adult and nonformal education should be strengthened in the country.

Other recommendations emphasized adequate financing, institution building, and training of education personnel. These and others are part of what Omolewa resolutely fought for as university professor, President of the NNCAE, and editor of its journal, *Adult Education in Nigeria*. The fact that most of the changes he advocated are now realities shows that Omolewa's labor was not in vain. Of the changes that have not been implemented, they are certainly receiving attention in Nigeria, but also internationally.

As Vice Chairman of the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) from 1987 to 1989, he carried out the urgent review of needs for training, especially for emerging Southern African countries, at seminars in Maseru and Harare. In this capacity, he also organized a course in spoken English for participants from French-speaking African countries that took them to various parts of Nigeria, especially the East.

Omolewa was Head of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria from August 1987 to July 1990, during which time the department, among other firsts, won the coveted 1989 International Reading Association (IRA) Literacy Prize. The award was presented by the then UNESCO Director-General, Federico Mayor, in Paris on September 8, 1989. In the words of the IRA, the Department of Adult Education was “recognized for its work in promoting literacy, functional literacy, and continuing education in Nigeria. Its special training programs have benefited nearly 1,500 students who have become adult educators and education extension workers in rural areas of the country” (Du Bois, 1989). Omolewa's desire for flexibility of access has led to the creation of educational
opportunities for many learners. For example, during his tenure as Head of Adult Education, he proposed and succeeded in widening the scope of activities of the Extramural Studies program, which led to the establishment of centers in additional areas of Ibadan.

As consultant to the USAID/CEPA Program from 1997 to 1999, Omolewa promoted civic education, democracy, and governance. With the UNDP he has engaged in grassroots training and community education. With UNICEF he has worked actively in promoting education for girls, youth, and women who are working in especially difficult circumstances.

In promoting greater access, Omolewa has served as an examiner at all levels of the educational system. He was an examiner for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) from 1985 to 1988. He later served as the Chairman of the Internationalization of the History Curriculum panel of WAEC from 1992 to 1999. He has also been an external examiner for undergraduate and graduate programs and for the examination of doctoral theses at the Universities of Botswana, Nigeria, Jos, Lagos, Ilorin, Benin, and Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), among others. Omolewa's advocacy of multiple examining bodies, which is captured succinctly in his inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan, has not gone unheeded. It is encouraging to note that the Nigerian Examinations Council (NECO) has since been established alongside the WAEC. NECO's mandate to conduct senior secondary examinations, in addition to those conducted by the WAEC, thus serves to reduce the WAEC's monopoly and creates greater avenues of access for numerous students.


As can be readily seen from the foregoing, Omolewa has continuously sought to place access-related initiatives and discourse within appropriate theoretical and historical contexts. His endeavors have further reduced the degree of neglect commonly associated with access provision in education. Indeed, by bridging the realms of theory and practice, Omolewa's advocacy has had a profound impact on both.