

Education as a Catalyst to National Integration in Nigeria

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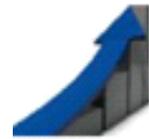
Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state and needs a potent national integrative mechanism for it to be conflict free. Based on this premise therefore, education is identified in this paper as a mechanism that can lead to national integration in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concept of national integration, the challenges of national integration in Nigeria and further x-rayed the role of education in national integration Nigeria. The constraints against national integration through education were also highlighted. Finally, the paper suggested among others, that Nigerian media should deemphasize its undue focus on disintegrative stories such as bomb blasts, corruption, kidnapping etc. without proffering solutions and should rather give more attention to developmental issues that are catalysts to our unity and national integration.

Keywords: Education, Catalyst, National Integration

Introduction

National integration is said to occur when different people, irrespective of their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, are unified into one indivisible nation and individuals are provided with equal opportunities in employment, education, voting rights, use of any public or private facility, ownership of property, etc. In such a society, individuals are neither denied opportunities because of their race,



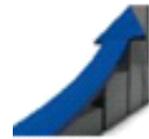
religion, gender or ethnic group. However, in recent years, the relative political unrest in Nigeria resulting in insecurity of lives and properties, inter-ethnic clashes and inter-religious misunderstanding are pointers to the fact that the unity of the country and the sense of belonging held by most Nigerians seems shaky. The Niger Delta militancy, the Biafran nation agitation, the Oduduwa republic agitation, the rising spade of banditry, kidnapping and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North seems helping to widen the gap between the different ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian nation. Order, stability, peaceful relationship, continuity, development and sustainability, which are all attributes of national integration and unity could be achieved through the cohesion of common values and mutual understanding which are essentially acquired through functional education.

Education is a process of inculcating values that equips the learner with a kind of life that is satisfying to the individual in accordance with the cherished values and ideals of the society. It is an important instrument of change as it is through it that the intellectual and social development of any society could be achieved (FRN, 2013). In other words, education is seen as a powerful instrument that add values to the life of the citizens. as it is believed that education prepares one for the needed behavioural change and abilities for sustainable national development. It is in this light that the Nigerian government believes that the provision of education that is relevant to the needs of the individual and society is necessary for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria (FRN, 2013). Hence, this paper attempts to synchronize the connection between education and the promotion of national integration in Nigeria.

National Integration

The concept of national integration is seen as a synthesis of two terms, “national” and “integration”. The word “national” is derived from the word “nation” which means a large group of people inhabiting a place deemed to be their territory, their common land (Vyas, cited in Temitayo, Audu, & Lukman, 2014). A nation is a cultural entity that binds people together on the basis of culturally homogenous ties common or related blood, a common language, a common historical tradition, common customs and habits (Posner, 2005).

On the other hand, the word “integration” means “an act or instance of combining into an integral whole” (Dictionary.com, 2020), a unification of varying perceptions from different people. Thus, the term “National Integration” means “a process as well as a goal by which all the people inhabiting a particular territory irrespective of their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, on the basis of certain shared traditions, experiences, common history and values strive to live together forever with honour and dignity” (Vyas, cited in Temitayo, Audu, & Lukman, 2014). This definition underscores the fact that in such a society, people strive to live together harmoniously by forging a common identity that is shared by all and by emphasizing the commonalities that they share, such as, the love for justice, for peace, for security, for prosperity, for values, worldviews, laws etc. In such a society, an individual's



attainment of education, access to any public or private facility, opportunity for employment, and ownership of property are neither denied nor limited by reason of race, religion, or language.

Theoretical Framework

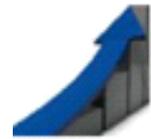
This write-up is premised on the primordial and mobilization theories of ethnicity. According to Balogun and Odewumi (2009), the primordial theory, which is derived from the ideas of Edward Shils (1968), claims that more often than not, most people have a primordial attachment to their territory of origin, to their religion and to their kin. This attachment involves strong feelings of loyalty and intense and comprehensive solidarity. This leads to a situation whereby people are always divided into groups of 'insiders and outsiders' 'us and them' with individuals having both emotional and intimate bond with those who belong to their own group. Such a bond, according to Edward Shils, develops either from socialization or from basic psycho-cultural need for belonging. Thus, it could be argued from the point of view of this theory that prior to colonization; different ethnic groups existed as autonomous nationalities of

unequal proportions and sizes, and by and large, this has exerted great influence on the effective integration of the Nigeria nation.

On the other hand, the mobilizationist theory according to Balogun and Odewumi (2009), is premised on the assumption that ethnic identities are not inevitable or natural but they are actively created, maintained and reinforced by individuals and groups for the purpose of obtaining access to social, political and economic resources. Although the aforementioned theories appear to be divergent in their views, they however give a vivid picture of the present happenings in Nigeria today. As noted by Balogun and Odewumi (2009). primordial ethnic and religious sentiments have combined with the determination of each of the major or minor ethnic groups to control the polity and economy of the country through cut-throat manipulations and manoeuvres which consequently tend to undermine the corporate integration and unity of the Nigerian nation.

Challenges of National Integration in Nigeria

A number of policies have been embarked upon by the Federal Government of Nigeria to foster national integration in the country. According to Taiwo (2014) these policies include State creation, Federal Character Principle/Quota system and the National Youth Service Corp, among others. Despite these measures, however, the country is still far from being integrated and united. Rather, Nigeria is progressively moving towards disintegration, because the underlying cause for mistrust and disunity seems not to have being properly addressed. The challenges which impede the achievement of national integration in Nigeria are as follows:

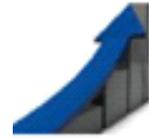


Challenges on the Formation of the Nigeria Nation

What is known today as Nigeria was largely a colonial creation. Prior to the advent of colonialism, the area known today as Nigeria was peopled by different ethnic nationalities such as Ibo, Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe, Tiv, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Jukun, etc. Each of these nationalities evolved socio-political systems consistent with their needs and environment. Through such systems, the various groups were not only able to maintain law and order, but also maintained symbolic coherence between the mini-state and society in a mutually reinforcing way (Taiwo, 2014). However, the incursion of colonial rule and the forceful amalgamation of these peoples by the British colonialists, however, disrupted the ongoing process of state building. There is no doubting the fact that the social setting and cultural background of a people to a great extent determines their willingness and capacity to enter into a geographical and social union with other people who have different social and cultural history. Unfortunately, however, not only did the colonial authorities forcefully merged these disparate peoples, who are ethnically, religiously, culturally, and idiosyncratically different, but also failed to make nation-building part of the foundation of the forceful amalgamation. Rather than achieving unity, the amalgamation of 1914 succeeded in creating the historical antagonistic centrifugal forces that have always consumed Nigerians as manifested in ethnicity, tribalism, elitism, greed, antagonism, civil strife, corruption, etc (Akanle, 2012; Deinye & Morrison, 2013; Falade & Falade, 2013). From the onset, the British Colonialists never intended to encourage the national integration of the forcefully merged disparate people of Nigeria. Rather, the administrative style of the Colonialists encouraged ethnic identity and ethnic division as a strategy for entrenching their foothold in Nigeria. For instance, the colonial policy of indirect rule of the British Colonial Government localised politics and prevented cross-cultural political interaction among the Nigerian groups, thus making suspicion the hallmark of inter-ethnic relations.

Challenges on the Foundation of Western Education in Nigeria

The foundation of western education in Nigeria as laid by Christian missionaries emphasized religion, character training, and academic subjects based on British syllabus. According to Fafunwa, as cited in Ekwire (2017), the aim of the colonial education as provided by the Christian missionaries was to produce literate Nigerians who were meant to be able to read and interpret the Bible. This was in line with their desire of converting the local people into Christianity. Thus, the Hausa-Fulani states that refused the religion as a result of the already established Islamic religion has little to benefit from the western education. From the foregoing, one can see the Nigerian nation existing as two separate entities based on religious affiliation and with western colonial education helping to widen the gap. No wonder, Okobiah (2002) noted that the conflicting educational imbalance between the Northern and Southern zones of the country has some historical antecedents in the “rejection-acceptance dichotomy” of the North-South geo-political zones of Nigeria. According to Musa (2014), this state of affairs has



persisted in the country especially at the basic level and has contributed immensely to the level of mistrust, disunity and inter-ethnic competition for wealth and power prevalent in Nigeria today.

Challenges of Leadership

It should be noted that the fortunes of any state are tied up to the quality of its leadership. When a patriotic person is on the throne, good things including unity happen. At independence, however, Nigeria had a chance to address the contradictions inherited from the colonial experience, but it failed largely because of leadership bankruptcy (Tangban, 2014). According to Ake, in Tangban (2014) the country's leaders at independence had every opportunity to undo the legacies of colonialism that were antithetical to sustainable democracy, development and unity but squandered them because of their perception of the state as an arena for serving their selfish interests.

Challenge of Ethno-religious Crisis

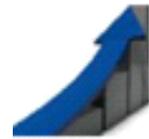
Ethno-religious division in itself ought not to be a serious threat to the unity of the country. However, ethno-religious division in Nigeria have been unduly manipulated by the political elite to furnish their selfish political and economic interests. The first manifestation of the manipulation of ethno-religious differences was the Nigerian Civil War which broke out in July 1967 and lasted till January 1970. Since then, Nigeria has been grappling with ethno-religious crises which are arguably the handiwork of the political class. Since 1980, to date, numerous ethno-religious crises - with the Boko haram insurgency, tribal banditry and

kidnapping been the latest – have great potential to tear the country apart. These happenings have occurred and are still occurring even during the period of this writ-up. As noted by Tangban

(2014), most often, the perpetrators of such heinous crimes are not punished and this culture of impunity tends to encourage potential trouble makers to take the law into their hands at the slightest opportunity. Also, the victims of these crises are hardly compensated. They, therefore, develop a sense of alienation both from the perpetrators and government with negative impact on national unity and integration.

Challenges from the Majority and Minority Ethnic Groupings in Nigeria

The emergence of regionalism in the country saw the creation of three regions with each dominated by the three major ethnic groups - Hausa/Fulani in the North, Igbo in the East and Yoruba in the West. The other minor ethnic groups were subsumed into the major three ethnic groups. The resultant effect of this situation is exposing the minority ethnic groups to the fear of the majority ethnic groups subjecting



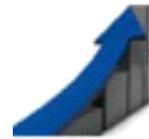
them to excessive domination, unfair treatment and social injustice (Dienye & Morrison, 2013). The fear of the minority ethnic groups manifests at two levels. The first is at the federal level where the minorities complain against the major ethnic groups in the country. The second is at the state level where new dominant ethnic groups emerged on account of state creation. However, its manifestation at the federal level portends more danger to unity in Nigeria as the minorities and the major ethnic groups do not see themselves as partners in progress and unity of the country. Rather, mutual distrust and suspicion between these groupings is common; this impacts negatively on national unity (Tangban, 2014).

The Role of Education in National Integration

In many parts of the world, education plays an important role in nation building and national integration. The importance of education to national development can explain why nations of the world have embarked on investing on it and exploring the world of knowledge in various aspects of human life like science, technology, industrialization, self-sufficiency in food, standards of living and well-being, the environment, healthcare system, good governance, and economics among others, hoping that the knowledge discovered will bring about corresponding human advancement and societal development (Dienye, 2011; Orji & Maekae, 2013).

There are various roles education performs in making national integration a reality. First, education creates an enlightened society. This means that education is an agent of socialization that helps in inculcating relevant societal virtues and values like sound human values, ideals of brotherhood, religious and moral beliefs into the citizens. It shapes both personal and collective identities that promote social participation. Through education, better citizenship is promoted in that, the citizens acquire those values, attitudes and behaviours which enable them to live together in a world characterized by cultural diversity and pluralism (Addo, 2010; UNESCO, 2012).

Second, national integration requires a democratic society that allows the contribution of all, irrespective of age, gender, tribe or class. In this regard education encourages democratic participation, addresses the challenges of social inequality and reduces social stratification in the society. Third, national integration demands that individuals interact and commune together irrespective of their ethnic and religious differences. Schools help to create unity and integration amongst citizens of a nation. In schools, learners, irrespective of their ethnic, socio-cultural, economic or religious differences come into contact with one another. Through this, not only do individuals learn to love and appreciate one another, they also learn to appreciate one another's' ways of life, like food, language, religion, etc. The Unity schools and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme are good examples of the cohesive nature of education, when properly harnessed. The unity schools help to bring students from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds to interact in schools, thereby inculcating in them significant degree of cooperation, understanding and integration. Also, the NYSC scheme was established by the



Federal Government to serve as a national integrative instrument. Through the scheme, graduates of tertiary education are posted to areas other than their areas of origin. This is done with the view to providing them the opportunity to learn and to respect and appreciate the different cultures that abound in Nigeria. Besides, the NYSC scheme, also inculcate a sense of citizenship, since corpsers are made to contribute to the communities where they are serving. By and large, they develop a sense of civic responsibility and commitment to the nation as a whole.

Fourthly, for there to be a viable and stable national integration in Nigeria, it is expedient for its human resources to become skilful and knowledgeable enough to contribute meaningfully to the day-to-day affairs of the country. According to Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, as cited in Sule (2018), education is highly instrumental and necessary in the production of any country's manpower, for an educated population is a productive and efficient population. Nations disintegrate because of low level of education and the inability of education to increase the productivity and efficiency of its human resources. Thus, Onah in Sule (2018), argued that any nation who refuses to develop her human resources will experience paralysis. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) understands the strategic role of education, and therefore, observed that investment in education of the country's human resources is the greatest force that can bring about integration and quick development of the country.

Constraints against National Integration

There are certain constraints against the role of education in effecting national integration in Nigeria. Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2004) noted that educational systems are not meant to serve the good of citizens, but are meant to facilitate social control. A situation whereby the Nigerian political class tightly controls the setting up of educational institutions, decides who heads them, what the curriculum should be, the number of people that should be admitted and the courses that they should study and the importance attached to different courses (Dienye & Morisson, 2013), is a constraint to genuine educational development of the country. This situation affects the role of education to national integration and nation building.

Governments at all levels have politicised the setting up of educational institutions. The massive opening and polarization of schools, particularly higher institutions are made to suit the political whims and caprices of leaders and not for the wellbeing of the citizenry. As such, a myriad of problems such as financial incapacitation, lack of learning facilities, amongst others, have become a common characteristic of the educational system in the country. This invariably, does not augur well with the role of education in nation building and national integration. The foregoing constraints can be summarised in Mahuta's (2012) statement that:



If education can integrate this nation, why should the appointments of chief executives into tertiary institutions be localised? Real unity and integration through education can be meaningful when we embrace national character at all levels. If federal institutions are headed by people from outside ethnic groups where those institutions are sited, then children/students will see the reality of integration (p.49).

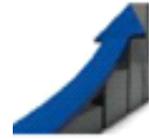
Conclusion

Nigeria has been grappling with the problem of unity and integration since its creation as a nation when diverse nationalities were forcefully merged. And since its independence, crisis has been a recurring decimal in the country. However, national integration can be attained where a group of people, irrespective of their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences believe strongly in their ability to live together in honour and dignity. In Nigeria, one of the five main cardinal national objectives as stated in the second national development plan (1970-74) and which has been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education is the building of a united, strong and self-reliant nation (FRN, 2013). Thus education is viewed as instrument for national unity and integration in a multi-cultural environment like ours. However, this can only be so if our leaders are willing to overcome all issues that may cause division and embrace the spirit of national character at all levels in all matters that concern education.

Suggestions

1. The Federal Government should incorporate the citizens of Nigeria when making decisions on key issues that affect the educational system of the country.
2. The Federal Government should give education its proper position in the scheme of things by ensuring that a meaningful percentage of the yearly country's budget is earmarked to the educational system.
3. The Federal Government should embrace the spirit of altruism and national character at all levels in its decision in matters that concern education.
4. The Federal Government, through its agencies such as the State Universal Basic Education Board, the Nigerian Universities Commission and the National Commission for Colleges of Education, should ensure that peace education is made a compulsory course/subject from primary to tertiary institution in order to inculcate into students the spirit of oneness and civic responsibilities.

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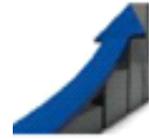
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