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Positioning Education for National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is a spring board that trigger off development of any society; politically, economically, socio-culturally and technologically. It make it easy for people to be governed but difficult to control. Nevertheless, is potency to harmonize diverse ethnic nationalities like Nigeria cannot be underscored because of the pluralistic nature of Nigeria nation. This paper examined how education can be used as a veritable tool to foster national integration in Nigeria. The paper review the concept of education and the roles which functional education is playing to sustain national cohesiveness, stability, unity and integration. The paper adopted content analysis in analyzing the data collected through documentary research as the data were collated through Secondary sources. Moves and obstacles to national integration was extensively discussed. Conclusion and recommendations such as proper funding of the educational sector, recruitments and retentions of competent teachers with robust remuneration packages, review of school curriculum that capture civic education, peace education which are necessary and guarantee peaceful co-existence, and allows integration to fester was discussed. Thus an integrated society is progressive and the welfare of the populace is paramount in the formulation of government policies.

Keywords: Education, National Integration, Unity, Obstacles, Federal character

Introduction

Nigeria is a greatly divided country base on ethnic nationalities, religious differences and educational imbalance. These divisions is accompanied with serious suspicion, distrust, and antagonism among its diverse people. These problems have had grave consequences for the good health, orderly growth, development, stable democratic government, unity and survival of the nation. The different measures and approaches designed and employed by successive Nigerian governments to unite and preserve and generally keep the country afloat cannot be said to have been really effective as the polity is daily faced with increasingly monumental crisis of insecurity, sectarian violence, ethnic

strives, political instability and threats of disintegration.

A united country and people are in a better position to ably confront its crises of development, nationhood and stability. The desire and consciousness of the political leaders and the generality of the people to do this with the appropriate frame of mind and instrumentalities is crucial for a successful and lasting result, Olufemi (2005).

This paper examines the issues, nature, problems, factors and contexts of national integration or the national question in Nigeria. It identifies and discusses the mechanisms for achieving national integration. The study is empirical and

explain that there should be a fair and equal treatment of all Nigerians as well as deliberate development of a feeling of oneness among Nigerians towards the attainment of a successful democratization process and national stability.

Conceptual Clarification

Education according to Udom (2005) is not just the acquisition of knowledge but the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. This conceptualization means that education is the process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition, man attitudes action and achievement it is a process of developing the child's moral, physical emotional and intellectual power for his contribution in social change.

Reconstruction, integration and overall nation unity and development, education may construct or destroy a nation depending on the utilization and application of the acquired knowledge.

Education as a necessity of life that should be made available to all citizens. Thus, Obaji (2002) commenting on this approach holds the view that education is the consumer of goods which must be provided to every individual irrespective of ethnic , religious, political or physical disposition . In the present context that education must act as a means of national integration then it must be made available to all citizens' right from the primary school to the university level. The federal government has realized this and has introduced various policies that could make education available to everybody hence, National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though citizens belong to different castes, religions, regions and speak different languages, they still recognize themselves as one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. National integration can also be seen as the process

whereby several desperate groups within a given territorial are united together or cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2012 as cited in Aderonke, 2013). It implies unity in diversity. According to Elaigwu (1987) in Aderonke (2013), national integration is determined by the degree to which members and groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national existence while co-existing harmoniously.

On the practical note, national integration is a process, not an end in itself and it is usually affected by contending social forces. It is a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty toward a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. It is a process whereby political actors in distinct national setting are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institution possess or demand jurisdiction over preexisting nation-state (Ogunojemite, 1987; Oyeleye, 1987 in Aderonke, 2013). Shona (2003) in Okorie and Greg (2013) also notes that, National Integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. Nigeria is a country with about 250 ethnic nationalities distinctively isolated in terms of religion, languages. Asaju & Egberi 129 National integration implies that we should de-emphasize these differences and promote such policies that could unite Nigeria.

However, Odetomi (2013) believe that national integration is commonly used to refer to specific problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality, which eliminates parochial loyalties. In this sense, it is generally presumed that there exists an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own languages or other self-conscious cultural qualities. Thus, integration is used here as opined by

(Bamisaie, 2003) to refer to the tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating homogenous, progressive, reduction of cultural and regional territorial community.

It can be concluded from the foregoing that, the purpose of national integration is to build a united and strong nation. Also, national integration can be seen as a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments or loyalty toward central political institution. Hence, it means attempts at unifying all the forces in the country in order to give the idea of one nation.

Moves Toward National Integration

Nigeria is a multi- ethnic cultural, linguistic and religious entity and as a result of this, various integrative mechanisms have been adopted in Nigeria since 1914, of ensuring national integration and cohesion. Some of the policies aimed at achieving national integration according to Alapiki (2005) in Okorie and Greg (2013), (Ojo, 2009) include:

- a. The Amalgamation;
- b. Nigerianization Policy;
- c. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme;
- d. Introduction of Unity Schools;
- e. National Language Policy;
- f. Federalism, Party Politics;
- g. New Federal Capital Territory;
- h. States and Local Governments Creation;
- i. Quota system and federal character;
- j. National festivals, national sports competitions,

It seems that despite all these policy measures, achieving national integration and unity in among the various ethnic and religious groups has been a mirage. No wonder, Aderonke (2013) posits that the ability of the state to resolve or regulate the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and

love for their nation is enhanced would definitely affect the tempo of the national integration positively.

Obstacles to National Integration

There has been efforts to see to the unity of Nigeria and policies are always been put in place however the needed unity has not been achieved to a greater extent. According to Ojo (2009), "the most obvious of these reasons include ethnic cleavages, economic underdevelopment or dependence, and a weak sense of nationhood arising from a short period of independent statehood". The adoption of a federal system of government was supposed to address these serious conditions such as ethnic cleavages, but it does not seem to have worked well. A federal system is even a difficult system to manage. As it has been well-captured: although several explanations have been proffered for federal failure – domination by one or a few constituent units, authoritarianism, economic underdevelopment, lack of constitutionalism, etc – the point cannot be denied that by its very nature of delicate balancing and competing claims, federalism is an inherently difficult system to manage (Osaghae, 2006:1 cited in Ojo, 2009:31).

Furthermore, Odetomi (2013) reported that insecurity in the North Eastern Nigeria in the states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi and Gombe as a result of Boko Haram insurgency and insurgent activities paralyzes socio-economic activities such as education, health, infrastructural destructions, trade and peaceful relationship of the citizenry. Insurgent activities are manifested in rapping, armed robbery, abduction of secondary school students (Chibok girls), kidnapping, banditry, herdsmen killing, cattle rustling and massive destruction of human life and properties are factors that retard national integration. In the same vein issues of resource control and lopsided

distribution of oil money spark off tensions in the south south (Niger Delta Militant) in the North Central Nigeria, Benue state herdsmen killings and the struggle to control land by the Hausa/Fulani hegemony, Nasarawa state, Zamfara and Katsina are not peaceful as a result of criminal activities. (Bamisaie, 2003).

To compound the problem, a federal arrangement can be rendered unworkable if the elements of diversity are very strong, or if they predominate over those of unity. As it has been put, "integrative elements of a federal system must, if that system is to function at an optimum level of harmony, predominate over existing elements of diversity..." (Tarlton, 2006). Charles Tarlton's grave skepticism is acknowledged by other scholars such as Donald Rothchild who analyses how the application of the federal principle is made difficult in Africa by the lack of crucial support for the principle from the key leaders, by the centralizing imperative of the modernization process and by the threat that the forces of ethnic intransigence and separation have posed to the continuance of the federal ties (cited in Ojo, 2009:23).

As reported by Rotimi Suberu (2010), federal experiments in the Third World are not only endangered by deep sectional loyalties and largely unavoidable but politically explosive inter-segmental inequalities, but also by the intensely conflictual nature of Third World politics (cited in Ojo, 2009:23). This conflictual nature of the politics of developing countries is squarely caused by maladministration. This is no doubt why Richard Joseph (2006) has stressed that the most obvious problem of Nigeria's federalism or national integration is what has been described as "misgovernance" (cited in Ojo, 2009:23).

A key expression of this misgovernance is in the critical lack of fairness in

administration. As Ifidon (1996) rightly observed:

In Nigeria, competition for control of state power is as much a source as is a consequence of the failure of equitable government. At the root of the democratization, is not merely ethnic plurality but inequity. Inequity becomes a necessary feature of the relations among mobilized ethnic groups, and hence a multi-ethnic state is susceptible to democratic instability.

Another way misgovernance has been correctly recognized vis-à-vis the problem of national integration in the country is this: "perhaps the underlying problem inhibiting Nigeria's national cohesion is the absence of a self-sufficient political commitment to the primary concept or value of federalism itself" (Frank, 1986, pp.171-173 cited in Ojo, 2005, p.61). Thus, Nigeria's political practice seems to be antithetical to the principle of federalism. Ojo opined that "a federal arrangement that is unable to resolve the problem of finding an acceptable revenue allocation formula is not good enough".

This ubiquitous and problematic issue of misgovernance and accompanying issues of inequitable government, poor commitment to the principles of federalism and the unresolved problem of revenue allocation have, not surprisingly, spurned many negative reactions with serious implications for national integration in the country. As a perceptive scholar puts it in relation to the Niger Delta, for example:

The feeling of deprivation and alienation runs deep in the region and this is responsible for the simmering and widespread insurgency in the area. In fact, the major youth's organizations had called for a boycott of the 1998-99 transition exercise, insisting on political restructuring through a Sovereign National Conference. From the standpoint of the ethnic nationality groups, federalism has not

worked in Nigeria as evidenced in the complains of over-centralization of power, ethnic domination, marginalization and repression (Olufemi, 2005).

The immediate cause of discontent has been the transformation of the government of Nigeria from a federally to a unitarily administered authority. With this transformation, control of the economy has shifted from regional governments to the central government. This change in the balance of power between the regions and the center has been institutionalized by the balkanization of the First Republic regions into states. Every military government since Gowon has concluded its tenure with further balkanization of the founding regions, the North, the West, the East and the Mid-West (Amoda, 2001).

Failure to restore the balance of power to the regions symbolized by their control of the economy forcibly taken away from them by the acquisitive central government has resulted in the trenchant complaints of those frenzily campaigning for the restructuring of the government, governance and society in Nigeria. This is why it has been reiterated that:

The political problems of Nigeria since independence have been caused by abuses of power leading to military intervention rather than ethno-sectional competition. Today our union is threatened by various sectional demands. Several states in the core north have implemented the Sharia as substitute for statutory law; in the southwest, Yoruba leaders have revived the idea of regional federalism; in the southeast, the Igbo governors have called for confederation; in the South-south, ethnic federalism is back on the agenda. I would like to think that the common intention that motivates all of these demands is the preference for popular government and political stability without tyranny (Onwudiwe, 2001).

Education and National Integration

The foregoing notwithstanding education has contributed and can still contribute immensely to national integration in Nigeria. Some of the contributions of education as highlighted by Richard (2006) include the following:

- a. The provision of standard textbooks on the culture of Nigerian peoples. These are necessary for the effective teaching of the norms and values of the various communities.
- b. Attempts should be made to balance the education structure between the north and the south in order to diffuse the already rising tension over the imbalances in educational opportunities between the north and south
- c. Admission into the Unity schools should be conducted to bring about exchange and transfer of students to different geo political regions of the country for them to learn and learn from the diversity of the country
- d. The humanity courses in the curriculum that seeks to teach students about their culture and also emphasise the factors of national unity and peaceful coexistence should be taught
- e. The norms and values of each cultural group can be the basis for building national loyalties
- f. Nigerian history should be taught and there should be emphasise on the heroes of the nation
- g. Schools should emphasise symbols of the nation such as national anthem, and the pledge

Conclusion

Functional Education is the greatest investment any country can engage in, it is through education that the necessary skills are acquired. Basic education scheme is clearly one of the tools for promoting national development and integration.

The formulation of ideas and strategies in bringing about national development and integration is entirely an educational process. Self-reliance better relationships, effective citizenship, national consciousness and national unity are fostered through education.

Nevertheless, education can serve as an instrument for the liberation of mankind from ignorance disease and squalor. It exposed an individual to external environment beyond his immediate locality and keep one abreast of varieties of cultures across the globe. The spirit of nationalism, cohesion and inclusive integration can be greatly enhanced through quality education which make an individual to adapt to threatening circumstances, tolerate secondary opinion and have respect for human sanctity at the same time forestall insecurity. It is therefore paramount for stakeholders to reposition education towards a productive ends which education is purported to achieve.

Recommendations

The paper recommend the following as steps to enhance national integration in Nigeria. These are:

- a. Proper funding of the educational sector.
- b. Address manpower needs of the nation and curtail youth unemployment through entrepreneurship education and soft loans from banks.
- c. Recruiting and retention of competent teaching personnel in all the educational institution.
- d. Review of school curriculum that promote peace education and civic education, civic responsibilities and voting rights of the electorates.
- e. Proper political education to arrest all tendencies of corruption by the political class in the helm of national affairs.

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