

EDUCATION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY OUT

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Introduction

Possibly, the greatest challenge facing Nigeria today is the threat to national unity, as centrifugal tensions, resource control and self-determination, ethnicity based identity politics and religious cleavages have enveloped national consciousness. Since independence in 1960, national integration has been a top priority of governments in Nigeria. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, and State Creation are examples of state policies intended to achieve this goal (Enegwea & Umoden, 1993; Alapiki, 2005; Ekeh & Osaghae, 1989). It is clear that the outcome of integration policies and programmes in Nigeria have fallen far below expectation, as primordial ethnic loyalties are still deep seated. Ethnic particularism is seen as the major cause of this failure (Naanen, 1995), and consequently, suggestions on policy options are targeted to deal with this issue. This paper explores the use of education as a strategy for integration. Integration is a process that is anchored on values, and this can better be achieved through education. The democratization of education and curriculum reforms to capture the true essence of national unity will enhance multiculturalism, the coexistence among different cultural entities (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000) the process is linked to respect for differences which relate to culture, religion, politics and values, that can be effectively harnessed and managed through education. Thus, the specific issue analyzed in this paper is, how can education enhance integration in Nigeria?

Concept of Education

The term education is difficult to pin down to a particular definition. This is because various scholars, authors and experts have defined the concept according to their views, perceptions and disciplines. However, Osokoya (1987) defined education as the leading out of the inborn powers and potentialities of an individual in the society and the acquisition of skills, aptitudes and competences necessary for self actualization. Fafunwa (1974) saw education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviors which are of positive values to the society in

which he lives. Lester Smith (1957) defined education as the process of cultural transmission and renewal. In his own submission, Muraina (2011) saw education as a continuous process which every society or nation establishes to assist its citizens to understand the heritage of the past and to participate productively in the future. It involves the development of man to enable him create and recreate himself, the pursuit of a wide-range of activities, planned and managed for the benefit of society and its members; the systematic influencing of people's knowledge, skills and attitudes, the transmission from one generation to another and the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the society. It is clear that education makes man moral and ethical; inducts the individual into the shared values of society; develops commitment to societal goals in the individual; prepares the young members of society for the future; defines behavioural patterns of individuals and society; and also enhances the productive capabilities of individuals and by extension the society. Education is the gateway to development. No wonder Ekin-Okut(1985)states thus:

Formal education has a vital role to play in the development and social change of human communities. For development and change to take place, education is a must. It creates the environment and conditions conducive for change to take place... education is the builder and molder of attitude and behaviour of members of the society which lend support to the process of development and change.

Whereas the above reference emphasize formal education, it is imperative to note that informal education also enhances the goals of development. Although the dominant expectation of education is development, it is also expected that it will enhance the integration of sub-populations that are divided by language, religion or ethnicity (Peshkin, 1967). Education is noted for three political roles– agent of political socialization into a nation's political culture; the training and selection of political elite; and the enhancement of political integration and national political consciousness (Fagerlind and Saha,1989) Indeed, education is a product and process that reforms society and induces desirable change in behavioural patterns of individuals.

National integration

The word integration suggests a process of structural linkage between two or more parts of a system or systems (Onwuka, 1982).Integration can be categorized as a three-phased activity – as a project, process and product. Integration as a project is the desire for unity

and the efforts directed towards it. The processes of integration are the practical actions that are taken to transform distinct nationality groups into a single nation. The product of integration deals with the outcome of integration process (Morgan, 2002). Enegwea and Umoden (1993) have noted two integration processes that can tackle the centrifugal forces associated with inter-ethnic diversity. First, is the use of state policy to prevent the dominance of one group at the expense of other groups. Examples are federal character and quota system. The second is the use of policies and programmes to de-emphasize differences among nationality groups, and the promotion of harmony and understanding among the ethnic groups. An example is the National Youth Service Corps Scheme in Nigeria. The success of such policies in enhancing national integration is largely predicated on education, in terms of its content and access.

Education and the challenges to integration in Nigeria

The literature on integration in Nigeria has noted some factors that negate the process: Perverted federalism and ethnicity based political domination, (Naanen, 1995); politics of ethnicity and political cleavages (Nnoli, 1978; Alapiki & Ibodje, 1996, Alapiki & Barikor, 2002); the backlash of colonization (Ademoyega, 1981, Coleman, 1986,, Enegwea & Umoden, 1993; Alapiki, 2005) and bland education (Peshkin, 1967). Whereas Nigerian education impedes integration, this has not been adequately highlighted. It is crucial to note that the integration process is anchored on the mobilization of the citizens of a country. Importantly, the mobilization of people to achieve target goals is enhanced by education. Education develops the mental capacity of the individual, and certainly, it is easier to mobilize a population where the average individual has an enhanced mental capacity than otherwise. Education also makes man moral and productive, and thus endows him with the capacity to enhance the achievement of collective interests (Okowa, 2003). Education enhances the development of values and also defines the level of development for individuals, groups, and societies. Thus, access to education promotes positive attitudes that enable progress. It is clear here that unequal access to education creates unequal opportunities and uneven development, which in turn undermines stability and development. The nature of British contact and colonization induced unequal access to education in Nigeria. A major consequence is unequal access to the opportunity structure of the country and development imbalance (Coleman, 1986;Naanen, 1995,). A significant outcome is the clear dominance of some ethnic groups over others, in the running of the state and management of the economy and bureaucracy. Ethnicity based politics partly resulted from

this objective reality created by unequal access to education, and created feeling of alienation and deprivation that impedes integration. It is clear therefore that suggestions that devolution of power, is an alternative to the centralized nation state) may be deficient in the promotion of integration (Naanen, 1995, Alapiki & Barikor, 2002) Similarly, unequal access to education pervades all the nationality groups, and thus domination and feelings of alienation and deprivation are not limited to a single ethnic group.

The education of a society is expected to induct its people into its values, culture, ideology, national interest, and common destiny. Nigerian education is deficient in this regard. The philosophy of Nigerian education, as contained in the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 1998 and 2004) editions center on: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united strong and self reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. The point of fact is that the curriculum content of and administration of education deviate from the philosophy of education. This party because of many factors. First is the lack of ideological orientation that should indoctrinate citizens. Second is the problem of inadequate Nigerian background, as shown by the gap in the teaching of Nigerian history and culture (Okoh, 1995). Separate ethnic identities are also strengthened and deepened by a number of other interrelated factors:

1. Religion based schools, as evidenced by Muslim and Christian Schools established all over the country;
2. Indigenship policy and practice on the appointment of heads of tertiary institutions (Vice-Chancellor, Provost Rector, Registrar), staff recruitment, and student admission;
3. Discriminatory school fees in tertiary institutions, based on indigenship;
4. The quota system of admission into tertiary institutions and unity schools (Federal Government Colleges) that tend to reward ethnicity and undermine merit or academic excellence. This constantly reminds Nigerians of their ethnic homeland, and throws up feelings of rejection and deprivation.
5. Politicalization and bastardization of the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, where prospective corps members are posted to different location based on their political or social affiliations and without high level of objectivity.
6. Poor value orientation of the teeming Nigerians
7. Racism, ethnicism and favourism
8. Fear of domination etc

The point to note from the above discourse is that the curriculum content and educational administration in Nigeria block the development of national consciousness, a fundamental requirement for national integration. Nigerian education is an obstacle to integration, not because education cannot enhance integration, but because Nigerian education has not been adequately focused to promote the integration of the distinct nationality groups in the country.

The way forward Nigerianising Education through curriculum reforms

Education is made of components that include the curriculum, the philosophy and the methods of teaching. The curriculum deals with what to teach and the philosophy – why it should be taught. (Joof & Mezieobi, 1995) It is deducible that the curriculum is based on the philosophy, and thus changes in the growth, development, and objective realities of societies must be captured by the curriculum in the form of reforms. This means that curriculum reforms are based on established philosophies (Alapini, 1984). The objective of Nigerian integration is “one nation, one destiny; thus, the curriculum reforms should capture this. Nigerianising the educational system means making Nigerian unity the focus of schooling, in order to place Nigeria in the minds of all citizens. Attempts should be made to use the curriculum to develop linguistic and cultural unity. The curriculum reforms should also introduce excursion and exchange programmes at the secondary school level. Students will be required to visit and study in states other than their states of origin, at the expense of the host state. The six geo-political zones can be paired in rotation to promote this goal. Essentially, the Nigerianising curriculum should be based on the following: An articulated political ideology; a clear definition of the ends or goals to be pursued as national interest; and a clear knowledge of the Nigerian history and destiny – that is who we are and what we want to be. Even though some of these values are stated in the National Policy on Education (2004), the values must be strictly followed and pursued in Nigerian school without compromising. This then will make our education to foster national integration and of course sustainable development.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that although education can serve as a vehicle for national integration, Nigeria has not adequately exploited education to promote integration. Nigerian education has rather undermined integration through unequal access and curriculum/administrative practices that have deepened ethnic identities. The paper noted that integration is predicated on the mobilization of citizens, just as it is enhanced by education

through the development of the mental capacities and morality of individuals and called for the Nigerianisation of education. This, it argued will help to erode ethnic prejudices, promote better understanding among the different nationality groups, develop national consciousness, reduce attachment to the ethnic group, and foster the development of national identity and national integration.

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